

The Foundations of Islamic Faith



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جمعية النجاة الخيرية

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The Essentials of Islamic Faith

Introduction

It was 610 A.D. when Arabia was to be blessed with the final message of God, The Qur'an. But a question many people ask and many others have never thought to ask is-What was the condition of Arabia before Islam? I would like to introduce this to you using a compare and contrast method so that you may see what many Muslim and non-Muslim scholars of Arab history say was the biggest miracle of Muhammad. The fact that he came simply reciting Arabic phrases which completely transformed the Arabian Peninsula in 23 years- not to mention about a third of the civilized world for centuries thereafter.

First of all Arabia was a well-known nomadic society in history. People were engulfed in tribal prejudice. They were also known for being a society enveloped in anarchy and lawlessness where crime ran rampant. Islam came and changed the whole of Arabia and the lands around it to an organized system of law with federal and local governments as well as a court system based upon legal scholarship. Islam instituted a very strict criminal justice system which brought harsh penalties for those who would corrupt the society especially when encroaching upon the rights of others. Regardless of what the modernists would like to speculate concerning this fact, the truth is that the system's application cut crime down by %90. All tribal and any other racism was erased and the scale by which people's greatness was weighed was replaced with piety and God-Consciousness regardless of tribe, gender, or skin color.

The Pre-Islamic Arabs were mostly pagan polytheists with a few Jewish tribes and some Christian converts from the Roman rule in Syria. In addition to them there were a few atheists and monotheists. All of these groups were engulfed in the famous Arab superstitions and myths. Within 23 years all of the Arab lands, with close to a million people, had converted to the purest monotheism of Islam. They left all superstition in exchange for the belief in God's omniscience and omnipotence and using His revelation as the criteria to judge any beliefs or actions.

Before Islam, the Arab society deteriorated due to drinking and gambling. This ruined the lives of many Arabs while only benefiting the rich class who ran these trades. The Qur'an wiped out the presence of these vices by categorically prohibiting them.

In the Days of Ignorance (before Islam), women were generally seen as sexual objects and a disgrace to the family. The only exception was in noble families where she was a prized possession because she was expected to marry another noble thereby being a means for their lineage to continue. Men married and divorced many women and prostitution was prevalent even in the noblest areas. Islam raised the status of women who are spiritually equal to men as servants of God. Women were allowed their rights to own property, to take part in the political arena, to be leaders and respected scholars and teachers of some of the greatest men in Islamic history. The woman was turned into a respected spiritual entity. Islam taught that the mother deserves more love and respect than the father and that to raise two righteous daughters is a way for parents to go to Heaven.

Many of the rights given to women in Islam preceded the West's feminist movement by 13 centuries. The spread of ignorance which has led to un-Islamic culture and secularism in Muslim lands has led to women losing some of this respected spiritual identity and they have become oppressed in many ways in the last few centuries.

These are just some examples of many. There have been multi-volume books written on this subject throughout history. In this book I hope to provide for you the key elements of faith which settled in the hearts of the Muslims and in turn changed the lives of billions of people throughout history. I will present to you the core beliefs of the prevailing religion of over 50 countries and the religion which hundreds of thousands of Westerners are turning to every year.

The Existence of God and His relationship to us

God exists, and one can use logic to prove the existence of the Creator. When one sees a building, one knows there is a builder and an architect, when one sees footprints in the sand or snow; then they can infer someone or something with feet has walked through even though they haven't seen them, when one sees planets and stars (creation) in a very organized universe built and functioning on intricate systems, then one must infer that there is an intelligent creator. Especially since Einstein's premise of relativity proves that matter is relative to time and space. Everything in the complex system of the Universe is a testimony to God's existence. To make it simple we may look at ourselves. How does your heart beat and how does your intricate body function on its own? A scientist will say electricity- it is electric impulses causing your whole body to function and **live**. So we ask our scientist friend- Where does the electricity come from

and why does it go away just because the heart or brain stops and why does the heart or brain stop??? The question is how science's chaotic beginning from nothing turned into deep intricate organized systems of life without an intelligent creator (designer). God is the creator and maintainer of all things (time and space) and His Knowledge and Mercy surrounds them while His eternal incomprehensible Holy Self is separate from them.

So now that we believe in the existence of God we must establish a relationship of love, gratitude, and loyalty with Him, since without Him we wouldn't exist either. Throughout history, God has sent Prophets with messages to guide mankind to His straight path. These Prophets were supported by miracles to prove the validity of their claim to being sent with divine revelation. Each time He sent a revelation, He would leave the responsibility of its preservation to the religious leaders of that society. The primary teaching of this message with which all Prophets were sent was that God is One and that nothing else should be worshipped besides Him. The basic principles of worship are purification of the heart from evil and submission to God's will through His revelation and the example set by His Prophets.

Of course many of these nations corrupted the message and fell into idol worship and unlegislated religious innovations, so God sent new Prophets and righteous scholars to clarify to them their deviations. God would take the responsibility of preserving the final message upon Himself since there will be no new revelation to come after that. The logical proof about the necessity of revelation to be sure about your beliefs and practices is in a computer for example. If you bought a computer and you didn't read the directions how easy would it be to program it and use it correctly and easily? What if you studied the instruction manual?

The Two Testimonies of Faith

Islam is the Religion of all the Prophets of God starting with the father of mankind, Adam and ending with Muhammad. In Arabic, Islam means "complete submission to the One God". I don't think anyone would argue that the Prophets taught any other than submission to the will of the One God. Today this belief is expressed by declaring and acting upon "the two testimonies" (Ash-Shahaadain):

- 1- “There is no deity except The One God” (Glory be to Him)
- 2- “Muhammad is the Messenger of God”.

When someone believes and declares these two testimonies then he/ she becomes a Muslim (follower of Islam). These two testimonies are the key to eternal bliss in the holy presence of God Almighty.

The first testimony (ash-Shahadah), i.e., “*I testify that there is no deity except The One God*” indicates that there is no divine entity besides Almighty God and therefore nothing deserves to be worshipped except Him. This testimony separates all things into two categories- 1-Creator, God, Master and 2-Creation, worshipper, subservient. There are two ways one may come to believe in God. The first is relying on our spiritual instinct which God created us with and that is why most people have believed in a Supreme God throughout history. That being said, no one can be %100 sure that their knowledge of God and that their relationship with Him is correct without an authentic revelation from Him. Most people went astray throughout history by not searching for the pure message of God in addition to blindly following others. We must not gamble with our eternity by relying on our own minds in order to understand God and our relationship with Him. Therefore, the first testimony requires complete ratification of the unadulterated final message of God (the Qur’an) as the %100 pure words of God. In today’s evolving world of science and technology the Qur’an produces its own proof as to its authenticity.

The Qur’an is a book of guidance, but is also a miracle in itself. One would already assume that God’s own words should be miraculous simply because it is His words. So it is miraculous in many ways, one of which is its being exactly preserved since the time of its revelation. This preservation is incumbent upon our Just God who has decreed that He will not send any new prophet or scripture until the Last Day. So after the death of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), the faith of the believers can thrive without doubt. A few examples of the miracles in the Qur’an are-

The Big bang and Expansion of the Universe

If anyone were to search in any library about the **recent scientific findings** as to the origin and development of the Universe, they will definitely come across the big bang theory and the expansion of the universe.

We know that these are correct because **the Qur'an told us 1400 years ago that-**

“Have not the disbelievers considered that the Heavens and the Earth were a joined entity and We separated them...”(21:30) “And the Heaven we created with great strength and indeed We are its expander.”(51:47)

The Atmosphere/Ozone Layer

Science has recently uncovered that there is a protective barrier between the Earth and the immediate sky. This protects us from burning and deadly U.V. rays, it protects us from small meteors, it protects our gases including oxygen which we need to breath etc... This reality was not even discussed by the scientists and philosophers in the time of **the Prophet Muhammad**. The Qur'an said it as clear as a scientist would today-

“And we made the sky a protective ceiling...” (21:32)

Orbit of the Sun, Moon, and all other Celestial bodies

In the time the Qur'an was revealed there were hundreds of ideas and theories as to the reality of the Sun and the Moon. It was recently discovered that the moon is in an orbit around the Earth and that the Earth is in orbit around the Sun. The latest advancement is that the Sun orbits our galaxy which also has its own orbit. **God cleared this issue in the Qur'an centuries before modern science and technology-**

“...the sun and the moon; all heavenly bodies are swimming in a circular motion (orbit).”(21:33)

The Lowest Point on Earth

If you look up “the lowest point on the earth” in any geography book or on the internet you will find from all sources a unanimous decision of the land surrounding the Dead Sea. All of the early commentators of the Qur'anic exegesis said that this battle took place after the Persians invaded deep into Byzantine Sham (modern day Syria, Jordan, Palestine) and these commentators as well as non-Muslim historians specified that the battle

took place in a land called Azriyat which was close to the northern tip of the Dead Sea. It is interesting to see that the commentators (of centuries ago) argued and disagreed as to why **God used the word** “the lowest” to refer to this place. Now science has informed us.

“The Byzantines have been defeated in the lowest of the Earth (Adnal-Ard)...”(30:2-3)

The Uniqueness of the Fingerprint

God Almighty tells us in the Qur’an that when resurrecting everyone from their graves that He can put man back together as he was years ago before dying. He then emphasizes by making a point out of even perfectly proportioning the finger tips. In the modern world it is well-known especially in the science of human identification that the finger print is the one unique factor in differentiating between people. So therefore to say we can put them back together is one thing, but down to the very fingerprint is a claim to perfection which only God can make. It was written 1400 years ago-

“Does man think that We will not assemble his bones? Yes. We are able to proportion him to his fingertips.”(75:3-4)

These and many more miracles of the Qur’an are uncovered each year in the ever-evolving world of science and technology. This is from the wisdom and prior knowledge of Almighty God that the world will move heavily towards liberalism and atheism with the age of advanced science and technology. So He placed facts in the Qur’an that would protect the believers’ faith and also open a door of confidence in Islam for people searching for the truth.

The Second Testimony of Faith

The statement-”I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of God”- signifies one’s belief that Muhammad was the final Prophet/Messenger commissioned by God to reveal His message to mankind. It also includes the complete acceptance that everything he taught was conveyed from the guidance of God and that he fully conveyed that

message to the best of his human ability as did all the Prophets before him. A ‘Prophet’ is a man who receives revelations from God and conveys it to his nation. A ‘Messenger’ is a Prophet who comes with some new laws or the abrogation of old laws. A Prophet who is not a messenger follows the laws of the messenger who came before him. A Muslim must believe in all the Prophets and Messengers. Every Messenger is a Prophet, but not every Prophet is a Messenger. Our Creator sent His message to Prophets and Messengers out of His all-encompassing Mercy in order to guide mankind to the straight path and eternal salvation. So it is without doubt that any Prophet would have come saying that they are the way, the truth, and the life or that there is no way to God except through them (by believing in their Prophethood and by following their example). I ask my Christian friends- In the time of Abraham, was there any way to God other than by following his teachings?

Any objective student of the life and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad would come to realize that he is just as he claimed, The Final Messenger of God and seal to the Prophethood. There is no other explanation for his extraordinary life filled with hundreds of miracles and a sublime moral example marked by love, mercy, truth, humility, kindness, patience, tolerance and justice.

The Prophet Muhammad is the most scrutinized person in recorded history. This is because of the many verses of the Qur’an that teach the believers that not only is he the ultimate practical example of how to follow Islam, but his words and actions are separate revelation from the Qur’an known as the Sunnah. For this reason our scholars were very meticulous in recording and preserving his sayings and actions through narrations of his companions known as “Hadiths”. This science of Hadith verification is highly respected among non-Muslim scientists as the top formula for historical verification ever contrived by man. Here are the verses which led the Muslims to be so concerned with preserving his life-

“There has certainly been an excellent example to be followed in the Messenger of God for whoever wishes to be with their Lord (succeed) on the Day of Judgment and for those who wish to remember God often.”(33: 21)

“...God has sent down to you the book (the Qur’an), and the wisdom (The Prophet’s Sunnah), and taught you that which you knew not.

And Ever Great is the Grace of God unto you.”(Qur’an 4:113).

“..And We have also sent down unto you the Dhikr (the Qur’an), that you may then explain clearly to them what is sent down to them and that they may be mindful of it”(16:44).

“...And whatsoever the Messenger gives you (commands you), take it; and whatsoever he forbids you, abstain (from it)....”(Qur’an 59:7)

“Obey God and Obey the messenger so that you may receive Mercy (Paradise in the Hereafter)” (3:132)

These two testimonies are the essential foundations as well as the sources of Islamic Faith and Practice. The analogy of constructing a building is useful in explaining the importance of the testimony of faith. There can be no building without a concrete foundation. Likewise, there will be no benefit or fruitful results in the Hereafter without a pure faith based upon an authentic revelation from God.

The Pillars of Faith

The analogy of erecting a building illustrates the need to start by firmly laying the foundation and then we can build upward. Before one can remain steadfast in his religion, one must be well-grounded with proper faith. The Qur’an and Sunnah describe for us the meaning of faith and its pillars:

In defining faith the scholars have summarized all of the texts to form a common terminological definition of faith. There is a consensus among scholars that faith is- “A belief rooted in the heart, spoken by one’s tongue, and expressed by one’s action. Faith increases with the performance of good deeds in accordance with the authentic texts and it decreases with sin and immorality.”

So in Islam, faith and action are directly related and that is why when mentioning the inheritors of the Eternal Paradise God always mentions “And those who believe and work righteousness...”

The pillars of Faith are six and are taken from the verses of the Qur’an and the authentic narrations (Sunnah) of the Prophet-

“O you who believe, adhere to your belief in the God and His Messenger and the Book that He sent down to His Messenger as well as the scripture which He sent before. And whoever disbelieves in God, His angels, His Books, His Messengers, or the Last Day has certainly gone far astray.”(4: 136)

In an authentic Hadith (recorded action, saying, or silent approval of the Prophet) the Prophet said-

“Faith is that you believe in God, His Angels, His Books, His Messengers, The Hereafter, and that everything is predestined by God, the good and the bad.” (Bukhari)

1- Almighty God

The basis of faith in pure monotheism is expressed in the belief in the One and only God of transcendent perfection. Aside from the inherent knowledge of God we are all born with, we can only know about God and our relationship to Him through the message He sent to His final Messenger Muhammad whose character and numerous miracles attest to the truth of his message. So we can only be sure about our faith through the knowledge attained from the book of God (The Qur’an) and the established tradition (The Sunnah) of His final Prophet. A Muslim uses his mind as a guide because sound logic and faith go hand-in-hand. Knowledge is essential since learning gives one a strong foundation and dispels doubt.

The Qur’an is the exact words of God Himself which he sent to be the final code of guidance for humanity. Throughout the Qur’an, God teaches us about himself. He teaches us that He is the One and only God who created everything and it is to Him that we will all be held accountable. Therefore, nothing should be worshipped besides Him. He is infinite and eternal with no faults or weaknesses. He is Exalted, Perfect and Flawless. His attributes are without flaw and are unchanging. He is not bound by time, space or matter as we know it. In relation to us, He is the Most High above His great throne which He created above the Heavens which encompasses the heavens and the universe, yet He is also closer to us than our jugular vein and is with us wherever we may be. God does not resemble any of His creations. He is without limitations. He does not resemble anything man sees in the universe or anything he can imagine since imagination

is part of the creation. He is inconceivable to man. He is as He says He is in a manner that suits His perfection and majesty only truly known by Him. These points are all clarified in the 114 chapters of the Qur'an: **“Say, He is the One God. God is the eternally depended upon while He is self-dependent. He does not beget nor is He begotten. And nothing in existence is similar to Him.”** (Qur'an 112)

“God- There is no deity except Him, The Ever-Living Sustainer of all existence. Neither does he tire nor does He sleep. Everything in the Heavens and the Earth belongs to Him. Who can intercede except by His permission? He knows what is presently before them and He knows what will come after them. They (all intelligent life forms) don't encompass one bit of His knowledge except for what He wills. The “Kursi” which is under His throne of majesty extends over the Heavens and the Universe. And preserving them doesn't tire Him in the least bit. He is the Most High and Most great. (2:255)

God's relationship to man:

An Exegesis of the first chapter of the Qur'an

The first and most important thing in describing God's relationship with man is His abundant Mercy. He begins His book of guidance (the Qur'an) and “the mother of supplications” which Muslims repeat at least 17 times daily-

1- “In the Name of the One God, The Source of Mercy to all, the especially Merciful (to his servants)”.

He also says “My Mercy encompasses everything” (Qur'an 7:156)

This Mercy and Compassion is clearly apparent to anyone. God has created existence with such perfection and beauty and then subjected it all to the service of man-

“Do you not see that God has subjected to you everything in the Heavens and the Earth.”(Qur'an 31:20)

The vegetation gives us oxygen, the precipitation cycle gives life to the land, the inland (where people are) water is sweet and good to drink while

the ocean water is salty, sweet refreshing fruits and healthy vegetables for vitamins and minerals, many animals are good for meat and their skins for many other uses, trees and metals for building materials, the day so that we may see while we carry out our work and the night which is cool and dark that we may get rest, and the list goes on and on.

So the first action a person should begin with after recognizing the countless blessings and mercy upon them is to show thanks and gratitude to Almighty God and serve him as well as trying to increase our love for Him and His love for us. This is illustrated in the second verse of the Qur'an and second part of the Supplication said by Muslims many times a day-

2- “(Say) All Praises and thanks go to Almighty God, Lord of the Universe.”

So in gratitude and awe of their Creator and His incomprehensible greatness, one must seek to know Him and His will for them. So God emphasizes His characteristic of Mercy in teaching us the most important part of His relation to us-

3- “The Source of Mercy to all, the especially Merciful (to his servants)”.

After clarifying that, God reminds us that life is a test and that we are all accountable to Him.

4- “Sovereign of the Day of Judgment”.

This verse signifies that there is an ultimate accountability for our choices in life and that God is the One to whom we are accountable. So we must take account of ourselves and do our best to learn what His will is for us, that we may implement it and earn his love and satisfaction with us.

5- “Only you do we worship and in only You do we seek help” is the natural reaction we should have after realizing that everything around us is a blessing provided to us by our Merciful Creator who has given us our own intelligent life as a test of loyalty. If we choose to have ultimate loyalty to other than Him, then we have made a clear treachery and strayed from our purpose in life which is to nurture our love for our Creator by humble submission to His will for us.

Now that we have directed our complete devotion and trust in God alone all that is left is to know exactly what He wants from us. He teaches us the most important question that anyone could ask of Him. We ask Him-

6- “Guide us to the straight path”

People can supplicate God as much as they want and for many different things, but if they do not know and therefore follow His divine will for them, then they will be lost. God teaches us to be clear in the most elementary form of the word-

7- “The path of those whom you have favored and not the path of those who have evoked your anger or of those who have gone astray.”

The Prophet taught us that the meaning of “those who God has favored” is those who worship Him alone and follow His guidance without innovation in matters of religion.

On the other hand, “those who have evoked His anger” are generally those who are ungrateful to Him by denying His existence, rejecting any of His Prophets, or not even seeking His guidance relying on themselves and basically worshipping themselves as they decide for themselves (by their own will) what is right and what is wrong and how should they live their life.

”Those who have gone astray” are generally those who believe in God who created them and they wish to be close to him, but they unknowingly associate others with him in divinity and worship. This could be because they were born into some religion and the pure message of God was not available. This group is only lacking the pure guidance of God Almighty and statistics show from this group millions of reverts are coming to Islam every year across the globe.

Two aspects of having a close relationship with anyone is love and a well ingrained desire to do what makes them happy.

The Love of God

The more you know someone and the more you like about what you know about them are the 2 factors which decide how much love you will have for him or her. When talking about God we have previously discussed all of the compassion He shows us without us having done one thing for Him. God refers to Himself by the word Al-Wadood which we can try to translate as the deeply loving and affectionate. **“And He is the Forgiving and the Loving (Al-Wadood).”(Qur’an 85:14)**

Secondly, He has sent Prophets with revelation that we may properly know Him and how to earn His love. For example God says-

“Say, If you really love God then follow me (Muhammad) and God will love you and forgive you your sins and God is Most Forgiving and Most Merciful.”(Qur’an 3: 31)

We can get an idea of how to earn the love of God in many other verses. Here are some of them-

“...And (sincerely) do good deeds. Indeed God loves those who do good deeds.” (Qur’an 2: 195)

“...Surely God loves those who repent as well as those who purify themselves.” (Qur’an 2:222)

“And of course, whoever fulfills his commitment and is conscious of God (and his responsibility to Him) then indeed, God loves the God-Conscious.”(Qur’an 3:76)

“...And God loves the patient and steadfast.”(3:146)

“And consult with your companions (in decision making). Then when you have made a decision rely upon God. Certainly, God loves those who rely upon Him.”(Qur’an 3:159)

“And if you judge, judge between them with justice. Indeed, God loves the just.”(Qur’an 5:42)

God Almighty also teaches us who He doesn’t love so that we will know how to avoid His anger and punishment in this life and the hereafter-

“Fight for the sake of God those who fight you. And do not transgress. Indeed God does not like the transgressors.”(Qur’an 2:190)

“...God does not like corruption.”(Qur’an 2:205)

“God calls for the abolishment of usury and interest and gives increase (in reward) to charities. Indeed, God doesn’t like all sinful disbelievers.”(Qur’an 2:276)

“Say, obey God and His Messenger and if they turn away then (know) God doesn’t like the ungrateful.”(Qur’an 3:32)

God Almighty makes it the key aspect of His relationship between Him and Us and He warns that those who would leave Islam are those who obviously don’t love Him. Their leaving His message will not affect him at all it is just them failing the test of life by giving into their ignorance and desires. Indeed God will bring another group whom He love and who love Him.

“O you who believe, whoever among you turns away from Islam, then know that God will bring forth in place of them a people He will love and they will love Him.” (Qur’an 5:54)

The Purpose of Life

God told us in the Qur’an that our relationship with Him and our purpose/test in life is based upon knowing Him and living a life of dedicated service to Him-

“And I did not create the Jinn and Mankind except that they would worship/serve Me.”(Qur’an 51:56)

The whole universe is in submission to the will of the Almighty. The trait that raises Mankind’s status above the rest is in the gift of intelligence. He will have to use that intelligence to submit to God by his own choice and reject his own personal (animalistic desires). If he does submit, then he has truly put God before himself and realized the ultimate reality and purpose in life. That is to come to know God and serve Him. Then we will begin to shine the light of God upon the earth so that the rest of mankind may realize it. In glorifying His remembrance and living a life of constant worship, we fulfill the purpose of life which will lead to a state of peace and tranquility.

2- Angels

Almighty God created angels from light to be the first independent living beings. Although Angels have their own minds, they cannot do anything against the will of God.

“...They do not disobey God in what He commands them and they do as they are told”(Qur’an 66:6)

They are Muslims (submitters to the will of God) with a free will restricted to what God commands and what pleases Him. So an Angel cannot disobey God nor do mischief or evil. Angels have been given many responsibilities across the Universe and they execute them by Almighty God’s will. Many are confused by this subject because the western media promotes Christian theology which says that Satan was a fallen angel (an angel who went against God’s command). This is against Islamic theology which clearly states that Satan was a Jinn (beings made of fire created after angels and before man)-

“And mentioned when we told the angels, ‘Prostrate to Adam’ and they prostrated except Iblees (Satan). He was from the Jinn and became rebellious toward the command of His Lord...” (Qur’an 18:50)

Generally Angels perform the duties God has given them all the while praising and glorifying Him. In regards to mankind there are a few Angels who have an effect on our faith and actions. Of course the first is Gabriel who the Almighty has designated as the Messenger of His revelation as well as being the Angel who supports His Prophets. Gabriel is also known as “the Holy Spirit” as mentioned in the Qur’an-

“Say, Whoever is an enemy to Gabriel- then know it is none other who brought the Qur’an down upon your heart...”(Qur’an 2:97)

“Say, It is the Holy Spirit who has brought the Qur’an down to you from your Lord in truth...”(Qur’an 16:102)

There are other Angels who a Muslim should be constantly aware of like the Noble Writers. They are two Angels who follow you around above your shoulders.

“Indeed, appointed over you are keepers (of your book of deeds) honorably recording. They know everything that you do.” (82:10-12)

They encourage you to all that is good and discourage you from evil and when you do something they write down your deeds in a book which will form your account. You will receive this book on the Day of Judgment in one of your hands. Your Judgment depends on this book and how God Almighty applies His Mercy and Justice to its contents.

There are two angels named Munkar and Nakeer who will visit you in your grave after you die. They will ask you about Your God, Your Faith and your Prophet. Those who sought the knowledge of these simple questions and applied their knowledge of them in life will answer these questions correctly and will be given the glad tidings of paradise. Those who don't will begin to taste the punishment of the hereafter.

3- God's Prophets and Messengers

It is in God's all-embracing knowledge that Satan would disobey His command to prostrate to Adam. He also knew that Adam and Eve would be deceived by Satan to disobey the command of God. These events would set the stage for the test of life. Satan became an enemy to Adam and his progeny for two reasons. First he was arrogant and thought that he was better than Adam and that he should be preferred by God over Adam. Secondly, Satan envied the position of Adam with God and refused to prostrate, thus being the first to disobey God and choosing his own will instead of submitting to the will of Almighty God. Satan then promised-

“Since you have put me into error, I will certainly sit in wait for them (mankind) on Your straight path. Then I will come before them and from behind, from on their right and on their left and You will find most of them ungrateful.”(Qur'an 7: 16-17)

“...I will surely entice them with evil and disbelief in world and I will misguide them all. Except your sincere servants among them.”(15:39-40)

Because of this, the Almighty decreed that He will bring forth from mankind Messengers and Prophets to convey to them his guidance. Whoever would follow those messengers and the guidance with which

they were brought will attain the pleasure of God and will live in happiness under His infinite mercy. On the other hand those who rejected or denied the message sent to any Prophet will be doomed for eternity as this will lead them to be a follower of Satan in one way or another. God tells us-

“O children of Adam, if there come to you messengers from among yourselves relating to you my signs and verses (scriptures), then whoever (follows them and) becomes God-Fearing and reforms then they will have nothing to fear or will they grieve. Those who rejected our verses and were arrogant toward them will be the eternal companions of Hell-fire.” (Qur’an 7: 35-36)

These Messengers came with miracles proving their claim so that the people will not have an excuse for not following them. Their goal is to convey the message of God and establish justice by the law of God. The Almighty tells us-

“Indeed, We have sent Our Messengers with clear evidences. We sent them with scripture and the balance that the people may maintain their affairs with justice” (57:27)

Our Merciful Creator has sent a Messenger or Prophet to every nation in the history of mankind at one time or another. He says-

“And for every nation (we have sent) a guide.”(13:7)

God has decreed that He would reveal His guidance to mankind through the medium of prophets and messengers whom He chose from among mankind. These Prophets are noble human beings who God sends angels to protect and purify them. All Prophets were sent to a certain nation of people and the message with which they were sent would be corrupted within centuries and sometimes decades. Only the final messenger will be sent to all of mankind with his message preserved by absolute divine power. This is simply because God Almighty has sent many new Prophets to some nations to renew the message and repair any confusion. It is well known that God chose the Children of Israel above other nations to have a multitude of Prophets-

“O Children of Israel (Jacob), my favor which I bestowed upon you and how I favored you over (all nations of) the Universe.”(2: 47)

But of course, this favor and preference ended with their rejection of their Messiah Jesus (Peace be upon him) who was sent as their last chance to avoid the punishment of God in this life and the hereafter for their many infractions of arrogance and corruption.

It is a well-established article of faith that the primary message of all Prophets was Islam which is the pure monotheistic message that God is one and that there is no God except Him and that it is only God who deserves to be worshipped. In other words, the message of the Prophets is that we should do our utmost to seek the pleasure of God according to His message to us by purifying our hearts from any absolute love, respect, or awe for other than God.

“...(Islam) is the religion of your father Abraham and He (God) named you Muslims before (in all previous revelations)...”(22:78)

It is by the example set by the Prophets that the people know the best way to practice Islam. God Almighty, The Wise, did not send us scripture without a practical example of application. So it is in the example (Sunnah) of the Prophets that all nations knew the correct way to practice Islam. Each Prophet is sent with the way and the truth and eternal life and no one who realized their message can go to Heaven except by following their Prophet. Contrary to what some have written, no Prophet ever sinned. Although they may have made simple human mistakes which aren't in contradiction to the message to which they called. They are the greatest among mankind in living out the message of God. The Almighty tells us-

“They (the Prophets) are the ones to whom We gave the scripture, the wisdom, and the Prophethood...Those are the ones whom Almighty God has guided, so from their guidance take an example...” (Qur'an 6: 89-90)

The final Messenger of God who was sent to the whole world was Muhammad (May God's Peace and Blessings be Upon him) God tells us that-

“Muhammad is not the father of any man among you, but he is the messenger of God and seal of the Prophets. And God is ever-Omniscient.” (Qur'an 33:40)

”We have indeed sent you to all of mankind collectively as a giver of glad tidings and as warner, yet most people don’t know.”

Muhammad is the most meticulously recorded person in history without doubt. It is from learning the authentically related narrations of Muhammad that anyone may learn the way to eternal happiness with their creator. We have volumes of authentic narrations from the life of the Prophet (PBUH) God informs us about the great blessing and benefit derived from the example of the Prophet-

“Definitely God bestowed a great favor on the believers when He sent among them a messenger from themselves reciting to them His verses, purifying them, and teaching them the book and the wisdom. Although before that, they were clearly misguided.” (Qur’an 3:164)

4- God’s Scriptures

One of the greatest blessings conferred upon us by Almighty God is that He did not just leave us to figure out our own purpose in life and on top of that to form our own system of guidance while, as humans, we tend to lean towards our own desires even if it is harmful to ourselves or others. Thankfully, He sent guidance according to His perfect knowledge and wisdom. The Almighty teaches us-

“Does man think that he will be left neglected (without a purpose or that he won’t be judged for his actions)?” (Qur’an 75:36)

Each scripture confirmed the main theological teachings of its predecessors (Monotheism/worship/self-accountability). Generally, each new scripture also established some new laws for the believers. For every generation of believers the scripture was to be the constitution or main reference for law by which they should govern themselves. The Almighty tells us-

“And whoever doesn’t rule by what God has revealed are disbelievers.” (Qur’an 5:44)

In the same context of this verse those who judge by other than God’s revelation are called the unjust and rebellious. Who is more qualified to

make law God or man? Anyone who believes in God would say “God” without hesitation. It is a fact that God sent books to mankind and gave them the responsibility of protecting it and conveying it. God says-

“...The Prophets who submitted to God judged the Jews by it (the Torah) as did the rabbis and scholars by that which they were entrusted of the Scripture of God and they were witnesses thereof...”(5:44)

As a result of their arrogance and lack of sincerity they not only didn't judge by it, they changed the word of God according to their desires. God says-

“... while a party among them (Jews) used to hear the word of God and then change it” (Qur'an 2: 75)

This reality is not just a Muslim claim, it is held by many past and modern Christian and Jewish biblical scholars. That is why they call it the inspired word of God written by men and not the literal word of God dictated by God for thousands of years preserved until this day. This opinion of the Bible being the literal word of God is only held by orthodox Jews and the recent evangelical Christian movement. But this is simply their belief because science and analysis show that there have been many changes in the revelations since their being revealed and that most of the bible is not the actual revelation sent by God, but a historical account of events related to the Prophet's lives which is subject to the errors of historians pens and the evil of arrogant men.

The Qur'an

God has sent many scriptures to many nations across the earth, but the Qur'an is the only one which can be accepted as the pure word of God. The Qur'an came to confirm the truth of all previous scripture and to correct the corruption of God's message acting as a preserved criterion for God's message. God Almighty poses a question-

“Don't they reflect upon the Qur'an? If it had been from other than God, they would have found within it much contradiction.”(4: 82)

“We have revealed to you the book in truth, confirming that which

preceded it of the Scripture acting as a criterion over it (previous scripture)...”(Qur’an 5:48)

“Indeed We have revealed the Qur’an and its is We who will preserve it.”(Qur’an 15:9)

For centuries critics have brought forth their claims as to there being contradictions or corruption in the Qur’an. All of these attempts have been refuted and proven unfounded and none of them stuck. These attempts were conniving to try to deter the followers of their own religion from becoming Muslims, while any Muslim could easily refute them with simple knowledge of Islamic theology and/or common sense. If any of these attempts were found to be established as clear irrefutable evidence, then Islam would no longer exist as a religion. This is because, as in the verses of the Qur’an mentioned above, the Qur’an claims its infallibility and if it were proven otherwise then obviously it wouldn’t be God’s word (Since everyone agrees that God cannot err).

As we mentioned in the beginning, the Qur’an doesn’t simply demand blind faith. Instead there are numerous proofs of its miraculous nature. This started when it was first being revealed. The Arabs are the most well known society in history for the depth of their language and the eloquence of its usage. There were master poets and orator’s daily mesmerizing the general public in the markets and wherever else people gathered. When the Qur’an began to be revealed it challenged these Arabs-

“And if you were in doubt about what We have sent down upon our servant (Muhammad), then produce a chapter like thereof and call upon your witnesses other than God if you are truthful.” (2:23)

This miracle is of a literary nature because God is simply asking those who disbelieve in the Qur’an to try to make something which Arabs, believers and disbelievers alike, would be impressed by its eloquence and power to move the masses. Many came with their attempts, but all have failed.

The Qur’an also made many predictions which all came true without exception. Some of these predictions sounded unrealistic when first heard. For example the Qur’an predicted that the Muslims will take over Makkah soon. This verse was revealed just after the Muslims were expelled from

Makkah and migrated to Madinah after years of oppression and torture and they had just been badly defeated in a battle just outside of Madinah when the Pagan Makkans came to attack them. God told the believers-

“Certainly God has shown the Messenger a vision (of the Makkan conquest) in truth. You will surely enter the Sacred Mosque (in Makkah) and fulfill your rites of Pilgrimage without fear. He (God) knew what you did not know and has arranged a conquest soon.”(Qur’an 8:43)

The legislation of the Qur’an is another miracle considering the man who brought it was an illiterate shepherd/merchant who lived in the lawless desert of Arabia for his whole life only traveling a couple times to a further part of Arabia (modern day Syria). The Qur’an not only completely about-faced Arabia in 23 years it greatly impacted world history for 12 centuries after that.

And now in the modern age of science and technological advancement every year many Muslim scholars and scientists are uncovering facts stated in the Qur’an 14 centuries ago which weren’t established scientifically until the last century.

5- The Hereafter

All of mankind was created by Almighty God. Before giving us worldly life he took a covenant from each of us. The implication of this pledge is that all human beings are born inherently aware that the One God is their Lord, Creator, and Master and that to deny that by either denying God or setting up other God’s beside Him will be the ultimate treachery. This covenant is as follows:

“And when your Lord took from the children of Adam and their descendants a covenant and made them testify, saying to them ‘Am I not your Lord’? They (mankind) replied, ‘Yes. We testify’. (This testimony) is lest you would say on the Day of Judgment ‘Surely we were unaware of this’. Or lest you should say, ‘It was our forefathers who associated with You in worship (or didn’t believe in you) and we were just their descendants. So would you destroy us for the lies they (our forefathers) spread’.”(Qur’an 7:172)

Not only does this covenant explain the natural faith in a supreme creator that we are all born with, it also rejects allowing one's family's religion to be adopted and followed as a culture in most cases corrupting that inherent nature of pure monotheism. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) expounds upon this meaning-

“Every child is born upon Islam (natural monotheism). After that, the child's parents either make him a Jew, Christian, or some other religion.”(Albani 4559)

The reality is that we will all inevitably die. So what is the purpose of life? As I just told you the first part is recognizing and nurturing the pure monotheism. In the previous sections we learned that life is a test of our loyalty to God. The test can be explained in two verses-

“Everyone will taste death. We will test you with the bad and the good as a trial upon your patience and to us you will be returned for judgment.”(Qur'an 21:35)

One part of the test is to be patient when afflicted with difficulties and thankful when blessed with the good things in life like health, beauty and wealth etc. The other part of the test is to seek God's guidance and apply it. The more one applies the guidance of the Almighty, the more he/she becomes a good person performing good works for the well being of his or her self and society. The Qur'an illustrates this for us-

“He is the One who created death and life to test you as to which of you is best in deed.”(Qur'an 67:2)

This guidance is generally known by our inherent nature, but only clearly and comprehensively known through the message sent with a Prophet of God as previously mentioned. The question may arise; Muslims believe that all of the previous Prophets' messages were corrupted by the priests and rabbis, so what about the people who lived an honest decent life, but throughout their life they didn't have access to the correct message of Islam as taught by the Prophet who was sent to their nation. The Prophet Muhammad answered this for us-

“There are 4 people who will come forth on the Day of Judgment put forth their argument as to their excuse for not following God's

guidance. They are a deaf person, a retarded or mentally challenged person, an old man who was called to Islam and was senile so couldn't comprehend, and someone who lived their whole life in a time and place that didn't receive the pure message. All of their excuses will be deemed valid and God will send them an angel and tell these groups that this angel is His messenger and to follow him. The angel will kindle a blazing fire and command the people to enter. Whoever enters it will go to heaven and whoever doesn't then they will have brought upon themselves the punishment of Hell. (Albani kitabus-Sunnah 404)

The Hereafter has different phases. We will summarize the main points of the Hereafter according to the book of God and the Sunnah of His final Messenger.

The Hereafter begins when we die. When anyone dies, they will remain in their grave (or final resting point) and experience visions of their final abode whether it be heaven or hell. They are waiting for the appointed day when God will call for the destruction of the Universe and beginning of the Day of Judgment. After the Universe is destroyed, only God and what He exempts will remain. God will then recreate the earth and some other celestial bodies. He will then resurrect all people from their graves in the physical form they died in. Then God will send everyone's book of deeds from the heaven. Everyone will now await their judgment which depends upon the weight of their good deeds against their bad deeds. In the end all of the people in history will either go to Heaven or Hell. Heaven is the land of Peace where the believers will live eternally indulging in their desires as they wish and other delights and pleasures which they never imagined. The most blessed thing they will have is the sight of their Maker. The Almighty says-

(It will be said to them) "Enter it in peace. This is the day of Eternity." They will have whatever they desire therein and We have more for them (or something extra special - as the authentic texts tell us we will see God). (Qur'an 50:34-35)

"Those are the companions of Paradise. They will abide therein eternally. And we will remove from their hearts any jealousy or resentments."(Qur'an 7:43)

The Authentic Hadith gives us detail- **(Upon entering Paradise) A caller calls “You are to be healthy never to get sick again, you are to live never to die again, you are to be young never to be old again, you are to feel happiness living in pleasure and you will never feel miserable or sad again.” (Bukhari)**

The one guaranteeing factor which will lead one to paradise is that they believe in the oneness of God and followed the message sent with a given Prophet and repented after having sinned. The one factor which guarantees one a place in Hell is to deny God or to worship other than God after being called to the pure monotheism. The Almighty says-

“Indeed God does not forgive that you associate with him in divinity or worship, but He forgives all other sins to whom He wills. And He who associates others with God has indeed fabricated a tremendous sin.”(Qur’an 4:48)

Those who die while rejecting God or while worshipping other than God are doomed to Hell for eternity. This is for indulging in the greatest treachery to the one who not only created us, but provided us with innumerable blessings throughout life. There are also many believers in the oneness of God who worshipped him exclusively but will go to Hell for a time to pay for the evil they committed. They will go to Hell because their bad deeds, innovations, insincerity and neglect to follow God’s guidance exceeded their good deeds.

Hell is the worst thing that could happen to anyone. The Almighty warns us about straying from the straight path that He made for us- **“Those who reject Our guidance, We shall soon cast into the Fire; as often as their skins are roasted, We will replace them with fresh skins, that they may feel the Punishment: for God is Exalted in Power, All-Wise.” (Qur’an 4:56)**

“If they implore relief they will be granted molten brass that will scald their faces: What a dreadful drink! What a horrible abode!” (Qur’an 18:29)

“(In their immense thirst) they will be given water from a boiling spring. (In their hunger) There will be nothing put poisonous thorny plants.”(88: 5-6)

The Prophet described the extent of the horrors of the Hell-Fire-

“The least tormented man in hell on the Day of Judgment is a man who has coals put under the sole of his feet which are so hot that the blood in his brain begins to boil”.(Bukhari)

Although, before our death, the door of repentance is wide open even for atheists and polytheists-

“Say, ‘O My servants who have transgressed against themselves by sinning, do not despair of the Mercy of God. Certainly, He forgives all sins. Indeed it is Him who is The Forgiving and The Merciful.”(39:53)

God Almighty commands us-

“O you who believe, protect yourselves and your families from the Hell-Fire...(66:6)

The way to protect ourselves is through seeking the knowledge of divine guidance and purifying our hearts by pondering on it's wisdoms and applying it in our daily lives. This will create a change in us and we will truly become spiritual beings and not just claim to be believers in God based upon our own assumption without weighing that against the example laid out by the noble Prophets of God and their devout followers.

6- Predestination and Divine Will

Many people have a hard time understanding this very simple subject. Their problem is in trying to apply human logic to understanding the Creator of the Universe. First of all God Almighty says-

“...And His command descends among the Heavens, that you may know that, absolutely, He is competent over all things and that His knowledge encompasses everything.” (Qur’an 65:12)

“Indeed, all things we have created with predestination” (Qur’an 54:49)

So from these two decisive verses and many others we understand that everything exists and takes place according to the will and knowledge of

Almighty God. So naturally a critical thinker will jump to the conclusion that this negates the concept of free-will. So what about all of this talk about our life being a test and that will be judged by our actions? You see it is a reality that mankind has complete freedom to do things by his own intentions, actions, and words.

”And say, ‘The truth is from your Lord, so whoever wills- let him believe; and whoever wills- let him disbelieve.’ Indeed, We have prepared for the iniquitous a fire whose walls will surround them.” (Qur’an 18:29)

“So do you believe in part of the Scripture and disbelieve in another part? So what is the reward for those who do that among you except disgrace in worldly life and on the Day of Resurrection they will put to the severest of punishment.”(Qur’an 2:85)

“And whoever does a bad deed or wrongs himself but then seeks the forgiveness of God, then he will find God Forgiving and Merciful. Whoever earns a sin does sit against himself..”(Qur’an 4:10-11)

“And fear a Day (Judgment) when you will all be returned to God. Then everyone will be compensated for what it had earned. And no one will be treated unjustly” (Qur’an 2:281)

The best logical explanation I have heard is that God (who is separate from time and space) has dealt with our whole universe at once i.e. especially when we watch a new Hollywood film as the movie progresses we try to figure out what might happen next or in the end, but many times we are way off. That is because we have to wait through the 2 hours to be sure even if our guess was right. On the other hand God views the whole universe, and everything that goes on within it has already been created and he is its creator. To Him past, present and future are all the same. We lived and made our choices and He already knows what they are.

So of course it is an Islamic principle of faith that God sends the Guidance to all, but He makes it much easier for others based upon his infinite knowledge and wisdom. This is the meaning of the common verse *“He guides whom He wills”*. On the other hand, He will also make open a road for misguidance to someone who does not take the guidance which came to them or doesn’t think of seeking it. This is because He knows what is in their hearts. So for someone who God knows is arrogant and will not

accept the guidance, God will put a seal on their hearts as a result of their disbelief. For example- in the beginning of chapter 2 of the Qur'an, God describes those who choose to believe and their characteristics and after that He says that He is guiding them and that they have succeeded because of their belief. Then He says-

“Indeed, as for those who have disbelieved, it is the same whether you warn them or not. They will not believe. (Because of their disbelief) God has set a seal upon their hearts, their hearing, and over their eyes is a veil (they can't realize the truth and the beauty of His guidance) and there is a great punishment for them.”(Qur'an 2:6-7)

I will conclude the section of Divine Will as well as the pillars of faith with three very valuable verses of the Book of God-

“But those who avoided following Satan and all forms of Polytheism and turned back to God (repented)- for them are the glad tidings. So give good tidings to My servants who listen to some speech (this Qur'an or anyone who preaches to righteousness) then (humbly) follows the guidance in it. Those are the ones God has guided and those are the people of understanding.”(Qur'an 39:17-18)

How each of these pillars affects true believers-

- 1- The belief in God is the key to one's faith and development as a true believer. Through this article of faith one becomes certain about their creator; His greatness, perfection, mercy and grace upon us. After one realizes these things, they want to establish a strong relationship with God. This relationship will be deeply rooted in gratitude, love, and loyalty. This gratitude is a natural response to the realization of all of the blessings that God has bestowed upon us. Then naturally, we come to deeply love and adore Him in a state of awe for His greatness and perfection. In realizing that He is the source of everything around us and our only true master we desire to be truly loyal and devout to Him alone. This loyalty secures us from the fear we have of His displeasure. So now the foundation is built for accepting and applying his message to us and beginning a true relationship with the Almighty in a life filled with His remembrance.

- 2- The belief in angels, contrary to what some might think, has much to do with our daily lives. You see it is by angels that God has communicated with all men except a couple of Prophets. It was by the angel Gabriel that God sent His revelation to mankind. It is the angels who God has commissioned with many responsibilities across the universe including maintaining the Earth, Heaven, and even Hell. A believer is particularly concerned with the four angels who are appointed to him or her. Two are protecting them from anything that God has not decreed for them. The other two are encouraging us to stay away from evil and to accept/follow the guidance of our Merciful Creator. These two are also bearing our book/account of deeds which one of them will write in it everything which we intend and do. So being aware of these angels makes us extra careful before committing sins, especially when in secret when most people think that **no one** sees them.
- 3- The belief in God's Prophets and the revelations with which they were sent is central to a believer's life. Knowing that God has sent us a message brings peace to our hearts. He hasn't just left us alone to contrive our own morals and code of life. The confusion and conflict due to the ever changing morals and accepted norms of today's secular/liberal movement is getting out of hand and anyone can see that. In truth, God sent many prophet's with many revelations to all nations and all eras across the earth.

The finality of this message was revealed to Muhammad, the son of Abdullah, in the heart of Arabia. That message was the only message of submission to the will of God which retained its real name (Islam) without corruption at the hands of man. It didn't become Arabism or Muhammadism. This message consisted of the word of God which he will preserve and it will serve as the constitution or hand book for the believers to refer to for pure knowledge as to correct beliefs and guidance. The second part of this revelation is contained in the preservation of the daily actions and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad which is commonly known as the Sunnah. So a believer can rest assured that he/she has the complete guidance to thrive as a servant of God and that the only thing in the way of being well equipped to properly worship God and avoiding the evil influence of Satan is spending time seeking the knowledge found in the words of God and the example of His final Prophet.

- 4- The belief in the Hereafter is essentially the acceptance of responsibility for our individual handling of the previous three articles of faith. Did we seek our creator and a true relationship with him? As believers in Him did we blindly accept the teachings of our environment? Did we verify its validity? Once we found the message, did we make God and His guidance the center of our lives? Did we do our best to follow the Prophet's ethical example? Did we follow our own desires or submit to God's will?

A believer is certain that, at any day, he/she could die and that will be the end of our chance to make things right with our Creator and give Him His due rights upon us which are complete loyalty and submission.

- 5- The belief in Destiny and Predestination builds the gratitude and patience that the believer may endure the test of life. This is because one realizes that all good things; health, wealth, long life, intelligence and guidance come from God and so they are thankful and attribute it to Him and not themselves or anyone else. On the other hand, if someone is tested with a lack of these blessings then they are patient and rely upon God realizing that this is the will of God. A believer should always be pleased with the will of God knowing that dying in such a state will guarantee him/her a place of eternal grace and mercy with no worries, pain, sadness, or difficulty.

Conclusion

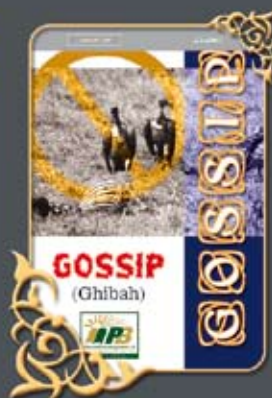
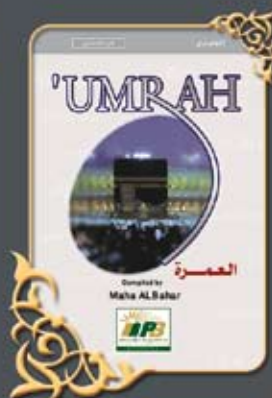
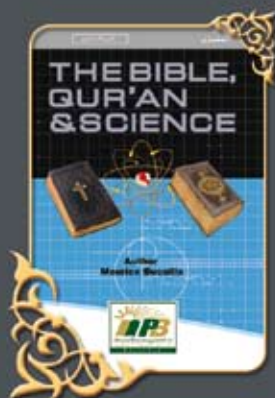
It is true that many Muslims themselves are weak in faith and many of them commit many sins small and large. It is also true that most Muslim countries live under many types of oppression and injustice and they have no leadership or guidance as to break free from it. We should also realize that every land and every religion has many evil people doing evil acts and it is completely wrong to label that land or religion as this or that because of the acts of a few ignorant misguided individuals. When practiced in one's daily life, the Islamic Faith will change people into humble tolerant God-Conscious people who seek knowledge and live justice taking account of their actions and words and living in peace with God, themselves and the rest of humanity.

I invoke Our Lord and pray that people will be blessed with His guidance through this book. That humankind will come to know their Merciful Creator, His Sublime Prophet and His Message of Truth, Wisdom, Love, Justice, and Patience. That people will learn to live together as human beings respecting that the source of every divine message is the One God and that if we can't agree on that then to know that we are all part of one human race!!! Amen

In order to live in peace and harmony we must tolerate and respect one another.

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