

Demystifying Islam

*Your Guide to the Most
Misunderstood
Religion of the 21st. Century*

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Author's Introduction
Fear

Granted, it's an unusual way to introduce a book about religion, but it is in fact one of the main factors that motivated me to put this book together. It is a well known fact that people fear that which they don't understand. This fear can then lead to a host of negative responses that can be extremely destructive and lead, in some cases, to permanent hostility. This is the kind of fear that seems to be gripping many people now in the West as they try to come to terms with the appalling acts of terror committed against their nations by people who claim Islam as their religion, and who go even further to claim that Islam encourages their evil actions. Nothing could be further from the truth. And it is for this reason why this book is so important.

There are those people in the world today who would love to see even more hatred created between Muslims and the West, driving them towards a confrontation where no one could come out a winner. You can recognize them through their speech and writings as they relentlessly work to give their listeners and readers reasons to be afraid and reasons to hate. You can find such hate-mongers everywhere—in Muslim countries as well as in Western countries. They are an equal opportunity group where you will find all languages, all ethnicities and all nationalities; the educated and uneducated, maled and female, young and old. Their ideology of hate is what unites them as they work towards their nightmarish objective of permanent war and division in this world.

The only weapon the world has against such a poison is knowledge. It is only true knowledge that can lead to understanding and tolerance between our worlds and cultures, until we reach a state of mutual appreciation—knowing that what unites us is far more than what separates us. This book is written to help you understand more about Islam from its core texts—the Quran and the statements, or Hadith, of the Prophet Muhammad—from what Muslims believe is the written and

recorded words of God and His Messenger. This book is written with the certainty that we can, through coming to know each other, overcome the forces of hate and fear to realize a beautiful world of peace and friendship.

World Peace
No, it's not just an empty slogan
World Peace is our struggle
A struggle to overcome our fear and prejudice of others
By reaching out to learn, understand and appreciate
To discover new friendships and ancient ways
Only then can we change ...
Terror into Security
Hate into Love
And War into Peace

Why This Book?

Scanning through the shelves at your local library or bookstore, you will find a number of books on Islam filled with every perspective and opinion throughout the spectrum of Islamic ideas. Yet, the vast majority of these books share a number of flaws for the person who seeks to understand the world of Islam and Muslims. Many are authored by non-Muslims or non-practicing Muslims, espousing or representing minority views that are not representative of mainstream Islam, and more often than not, arguing points from the author's point of view, rather than from the religious texts of Islam. Any Muslim or non-Muslim who claims to be a "scholar" should back up their statements and explanations of Islamic principles through clear references to authentic Islamic revelations, yet in many other books such references are often lacking or sparse. So this has presented a dilemma to many a new Muslim who seeks to understand Islam better—"What do I read?" This dilemma has been solved partially by some Mosques that offer a collection of books, each covering a specific subject, to the one seeking to understand Islam better. Of course, this idea is great if you own a bookstore, but it is overwhelming to the person who just wants to understand some of the core beliefs of Islam.

Furthermore, many converts to Islam have often complained that the books they find on basic Islamic issues and beliefs are often written by immigrants or by those living outside the West. Thus, the Western practitioner of Islam is at times confused or unable to understand how certain principles may apply to them in the West. This is unfortunate due to the very large number of Muslims who currently live in the West and where Islam currently represents the second largest religion in most of Europe¹, with a considerable number of adherents in other nations like the United States² and the United Kingdom. Muslims in these countries are a very heterogeneous group and comprise large numbers of converts, particularly in the US and Europe, as well as immigrants and the growing number of first generation Muslim citizens of such Western nations.

Truly, Islam offers much to the world, but do not think that this book is intended to “covert you”. In Islam, the choice of religion belongs to the individual and no one can compel another to take one religion over another; for guidance comes only from God. Rather, this book is made available to help you understand more about this religion from its holiest texts and written from the perspective of those who not only have lived their whole lives in the West, but who also profess and practice Islam. Every attempt has been made to support any claim with the relevant and authentic reference, as opposed to the giving of personal opinions. It is this combination of features that make this book different than the vast majority of other books on Islam that you may come across in your search for understanding. May God guide us all to the truth and help us to come together in His Mercy and Grace, in peace and security – Amen.

Dr. Ali Shehata — Central Florida 4/2007

¹ <https://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/essays/demographics-of-islam>

² Willingham, AJ. (2018, Jan 11). *By 2040, Islam could be the second-largest religion in the US*. Retrieved from: <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/01/10/politics/muslim-population-growth-second-religious-group-trnd/index.html>

Important Terminology Used in this Book

In order to best understand the way of life known as Islam, it is helpful to understand some of the language of Islam. Throughout this book, a select number of essential terms will be used to facilitate a better understanding of the subjects discussed. Below you find these terms defined briefly, and later in the book some of them will be explained further.

Allah – the Arabic word for One True God, found in both the Arabic Bible and in the Quran. The word Allah is unique for not being gender specific and not having any plural. It is fully interchangeable with the word “God” both in this book, and in general.

Quran – the divine Book and revelation from Allah that was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad and represents, word for word, the speech of Allah in the Arabic language in which it was revealed without additions; also spelled Koran. When quoting the Quran in this book, the translation of the meanings will be presented in the English language followed by their location in the original book in the following format **{chapter: verse}**.

Hadith – the second form of divine revelation from Allah revealed to the Prophet Muhammad that represents the sayings, approvals and actions of the Prophet Muhammad. When quoted in this book, the translation of their meanings will be followed by their location in the original collection in the following format **[scholar who compiled particular Hadith collection]**. Some of the commonly quoted compilers in this book are: Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawood, Ibn Majah, Abu Dawood, Nasaa’ee, Tirmithi and Ahmad.

Sunnah – often interchangeable with the word Hadith; it generally means the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad and his teachings.

Islam – the name of the religion. Its name shares the same root as the Arabic word peace (salam), and it literally means submission to God’s will by obeying Him and living life according to His commandments.

Muslim – a follower of the religion of Islam, similar to how a follower of Christianity is a Christian, or a follower of Judaism a Jew, and so forth.

Caliph – the name of the leader of the Muslim Empire or Muslim Caliphate. The term caliph stems from the Arabic word, khalafa, which means succession, thus the Caliphs were leaders who succeeded the Prophet Muhammad in caring for and administering the affairs of the Muslims worldwide. There has been no Caliph for the last 100 years.

Companion – used to describe the disciples of the Prophet Muhammad who learned from him and many of whom later went on to carry his teachings to other nations and peoples.

Hijab – generally used to mean the head scarf worn by Muslim women, but it actually refers to the complete modest outer wear of a Muslim woman that hides her form.

Evidences of God

Undoubtedly, the proof of the existence of God is one the great questions that arise in religious discussion. Furthermore, some who profess to believe in the existence of God as a Higher Power who created the Universe conversely maintain that He has no involvement in His creation—only that He created it and then left it to its own destiny. In this chapter, I will provide some of the evidence for both the existence and the involvement of God, as He plainly and clearly illustrates in His Message to humanity, the Qur'an.

Some people today hold the belief that this world is the product of chance, that random selection has led us to this point in existence. The truly sad part of this whole argument is that it isn't the belief of some poor, blind, uneducated cave-dwellers who know no better and cannot comprehend the greatness of the universe. No, instead it is the belief of some of the otherwise gifted minds of current day science who reject the grandeur and intelligent purpose of that very element which they study—straying, only here, from the logic they otherwise use in their daily work.

Let us take, for example, a page from the field of archaeology. When archaeologists are digging through the soil and they discover an artifact, for example, a piece of pottery or the tip of an ancient weapon, it is amazing how they can often come to very detailed conclusions, not only about the original dimensions and characteristics of the artifact, but also about the people who used it: their era, their culture, their beliefs, and their society. All this understanding from a fragment of clay or faded metal!

The same logic applies to God as well – how can you deny Him when the “artifacts” of His work lay everywhere around you – the stars and cosmos, the oceans, the plants, the animals, and the diversity as well as the beauty of the different races that make up humankind.

Indeed, God mentions this in the Quran:

And among His signs is this that He created for you mates from among yourselves that you may dwell in tranquility with them, and He has put love and mercy between your (hearts). Verily, in that are signs for those who reflect.

And among His signs is the creation of the Heavens and the earth, and the variations in your languages and your colors. Verily, in that are signs for those who know.

And among His signs is the sleep that you take by night and by day, and the quest that you (make for livelihood) out of His Bounty.

And among His signs, He shows you the lightning, by way of both fear and of hope, and He sends down rain from the sky and with it gives life to the earth after it is dead. Verily, in that are signs for those who are wise. {30:21-24}

In these verses, God has instructed those who possess wisdom and intelligence to reflect upon all of the creation – the ultimate proof of His existence.

Furthermore, man has been invited to consider his own creation.

Were they created of nothing, or were they themselves the creators? Or did they create the heavens and the earth? No, they have no certainty.
{52:35}

In other words, is the complexity of structure and function that defines the human body and intellect all the result of chance or an accident, as some people want us to believe? Is this idea really consistent with intelligence or reason?

Not at all! But, those who believe such a thing should conduct a simple experiment. Take a cup of paint and spatter it over a piece of paper or canvas. The paint on the paper will haphazardly form a certain shape. If we spill another cup of paint on another overlying paper, the new shape will be altogether different. Even if we repeat this experiment a thousand times, no two shapes will be identical. This is because these shapes developed accidentally and cannot be identical. A similar thing happens when we consider snowflakes, and how each one is unique and different.

In the same manner, if each human being had come into existence accidentally, no two people would have any similarity in shape or features. Everyone would be totally different—some with three eyes, others with one; some with noses like cows and others with trunks like elephants; some who slither on their bellies like snakes and others who fly with wings. But instead, what we see is an overwhelming resemblance between the vast majorities of all humans. And yet, amidst all this resemblance, the Creator has made our features different enough from each

other so that we could recognize each other and appreciate one another as unique.

Indeed, if man's creation had been just an accident, there would not have been male and female genders, but instead all humans would have had the same gender or be incompatible genders. But, God made two compatible and complementary genders, and furthermore, He programmed love between the two, without which the human race would not have flourished.

Those who believe that life is no more than an accident can never explain the natural instinct of a newborn baby as it starts to suckle at its mother's breast. How is it that all infants know how to suckle and reflexively turn to the breast for food? Or, is it also chance that the mother's breast starts producing milk soon after the child's birth? These examples are just a small sampling of the many clear proofs that naturally lead people who observe and possess wisdom and intellect to the conclusion that the entire creation did not come into being accidentally. Instead, the universe has a Creator, who not only created it for them to see His signs, but who actively participates in its maintenance.

Then, we observe how the entire creation is flawless from start to finish. No matter where we look, we are overwhelmed by the beauty and majesty of the whole spectrum of creation. But, on the other hand, the inventions made by humans are based on research, and are subject to continuous phases of improvement and are sometimes redesigned altogether. Due to this, no invention made by human beings can ever be referred to as perfect.

Concerning the perfection and completeness of His creation, God has said:

He it was who created the seven heavens, one above another, no want of proportion will you see in the Creation of God, Most Gracious. So turn your vision to them, do you see any flaw? Again turn your vision a second time, and your vision will come back to you dulled and fatigued from the examination of the heavens. {67:3-4}

In other words, we cannot see any defect in God's creation.

Indeed, throughout the Qur'an, God invites the skeptics to consider His signs for them in the Universe. In the following verse, He states:

Do not the Unbelievers see that the heavens and the earth were once joined together (as one unit of creation), then We split them? And then We made from water every living thing. Will they not then submit? {21:30}

This profoundly meaningful and beautiful verse from the Qur'an is sometimes referred to as the "Big Bang" verse, because it appears to clearly describe the modern theory of the Big Bang. This theory states that before the universe came into existence as we know it today, it was a large mass of matter that was caused to explode. From this explosion, the planets, stars, and everything in the Universe came into existence. Here, we notice how the Creator of the Universe calls the attention of the doubtful atheists to reflect on this event, and hence return to belief

in both the existence of God, and His involvement in the creation around us.

Consider and ponder over these simple questions – firstly, who created the large mass of matter that existed before the Big Bang? Secondly, who was the one who caused it to explode and give rise to beautifully ordered galaxies and solar systems? Lastly, how would an illiterate man in the Arabian desert who lived over 1400 years ago (the Prophet Muhammad) describe such a thing that only modern scientists with the most advanced technologic instruments and mathematical formulas have the capability to explain?

The plain and simple answer to these intriguing questions is that the One who created them is also the One who split them and thus formed the Universe. And indeed, He is also the One who revealed His creative design to His Messenger Muhammad in the Qur'an as a sign and a proof of the existence of God – the Creator and Master of the Universe – as well as a clear confirmation of His involvement in His creation.

From His Mercy, God doesn't leave you to wonder or guess. The Qur'an tells you directly the fact that it is God that has done all this, and then revealed the details of it to His Messenger. And then He concludes with the most relevant and direct question: *"Will they not then submit?"*

So, one of the unique and defining features of Islam in comparison to other religions, is that it is through reason that the existence of God is comprehended. There is no such call in the Qur'an to have blind faith in matters of theology [existence of God, Messengers and revelations, etc.], but instead, it is through the rational evidences that

God leads all humanity to arrive at the conclusion of His existence and His concern for His creation. As such, Islam distinguishes itself as the religion of reason and intellect that leads to faith, based on evidences.

Another compelling evidence is the sending of Prophets with guidance for all of humanity. God repeatedly states in the Quran that He will not judge any community until they have been sent a Messenger.

The final evidence to be discussed is the innate feeling of helplessness and turning to a Creator that all humans do in times of severe distress, such as in natural disasters or when lost at sea. This fact led Winston Churchill to once say, "There are no atheists on the battlefield."

God describes this feeling in the following verse from the Quran:

When trouble strikes man, He cries unto Us in all postures- lying down on his side, or sitting, or standing. But when We have solved his trouble, he passes on his way as if he had never cried to Us regarding his troubles! Thus do the deeds of the transgressors seem fair in their eyes. {10: 12}

I conclude this chapter with an interesting story depicting an all too common encounter between an atheist who bases his denial of God on "scientific" grounds, and a believing student who gives his professor some much needed perspective on faith in God.

An atheist professor of philosophy speaks to his class on the problem science has with God.

He asks one of his Muslim students to stand.

Professor: *"You are a Muslim, aren't you, young man?"*

Student: *"Yes, sir."*

Professor: *"So you believe in God, or as you call him, Allah?"*

Student: *"Absolutely, sir."*

Professor: *"Is God good?"*

Student: *"Sure."*

Professor: *"Is God all-powerful?"*

Student: *"Yes."*

Professor: *"Well, I should tell you that my mother died of cancer even though she prayed to God to heal her. Most of us would attempt to help others who are sick or in need. But God didn't. How is this God good then? Hmm?"*

(Student is silent.)

Professor: *"You can't answer, can you? Let's start again, young man. Is God good?"*

Student: *"Yes."*

Professor: *"Is Satan good?"*

Student: *"No."*

Professor: *"Where does Satan come from?"*

Student: *"From...God?"*

Professor: *"That's right. Tell me, son, is there evil in this world?"*

Student: *"Yes."*

Professor: *"Evil is everywhere, isn't it? And God did make everything. Correct?"*

Student: *"Yes."*

Professor: *"So who created evil?"*

(Student does not answer.)

Professor: *"Is there sickness? Immorality? Hatred? Ugliness? All these terrible things exist in the world, don't they?"*

Student: *"Yes, sir."*

Professor: *"So, who created them?"*

(Student has no answer.)

Professor: *"Science says you have 5 senses you use to identify and observe the world around you. Tell me ... have you ever seen your God?"*

Student: *"No, sir."*

Professor: *"Tell us if you have ever heard your God?"*

Student: *"No, sir."*

Professor: *"Have you ever felt your God, tasted your God, smelled your God? Have you ever had any sensory perception of God for that matter?"*

Student: *"No, sir. I'm afraid I haven't."*

Professor: *"Yes, I'm afraid no one has. Yet you still believe in Him?"*

Student: *"Yes."*

Professor: *"According to empirical, testable, demonstrable methodology, science says your GOD doesn't exist. What do you say to that?"*

Student: *"Nothing. I only have my faith."*

Professor: *"Yes. Faith. And that is the problem science has. Why don't you sit down then, as I think you've said enough."*

Upon this exchange, another student stands up unexpectedly and courageously addresses the Professor.

Student #2: *"Professor, is there such a thing as heat?"*

Professor: *"Why yes, of course."*

Student #2" *"And is there such a thing as cold?"*

Professor: *"Yes ..."*

Student #2: *"No sir. There isn't".*

(The lecture hall becomes very quiet with this turn of events.)

Student #2: *"Sir, you can have lots of heat, more heat, superheat, white heat, a little heat or no heat. But we don't*

have anything called cold. We can hit 458 degrees below zero which is no heat, but we can't go any further after that. There is no such thing as cold. Cold is only a word we use to describe the absence of heat. We cannot measure cold. Heat is energy. Cold is not the opposite of heat, sir, just the absence of it."

(There is pin-drop silence in the lecture hall.)

Student #2: "What about darkness, Professor? Is there such a thing as darkness?"

Professor, cautiously: "Yes. What is night if there isn't darkness?"

Student #2: "That isn't correct, sir. Darkness is the absence of something. You can have low light, normal light, and bright light ... but if you have no light constantly, it's called darkness, isn't it? In reality, darkness isn't something distinct. If it were, then you would be able to make darkness darker, wouldn't you?"

Professor: "So what is the point you are making, young man?"

Student #2: "Sir, my point is that your philosophical premise is flawed."

Professor: "Flawed! Would you like to explain to me just how that is?"

Student #2: "Yes. You are working on the premise of duality. You argue that there is life and then there is death, a good god and a bad god. You are viewing the concept of God as something finite, something that can be measured. Sir, science can't even explain a thought or an idea. It uses electricity and magnetism, but has never seen, much less fully understood either one. To view death as the opposite of life is to be

ignorant of the fact that death cannot exist as a separate entity. Death is not the opposite of life, just the absence of it. Now tell me, Professor. Do you teach your students that they evolved from a monkey?"

Professor: "If you are referring to the natural evolutionary process, yes, of course, I do."

Student #2: "Have you ever observed evolution with your own eyes, sir?"

(The Professor shakes his head with a sly smile, beginning to see where the argument is heading.)

Student #2: "Since no one has ever observed the process of evolution at work and cannot even prove that it is an ongoing process, are you not teaching your opinion, sir? Are you not then a scientist, but a preacher?"

(The class is in uproar.)

Student #2: "Is there anyone in the class who has ever seen the Professor's brain?"

(The class breaks out into laughter.)

Student #2: "Is there anyone here who has ever heard the Professor's brain, felt it, touched it, or smelled it? No one appears to have done so. So, according to the established rules of empirical, demonstrable methodology, science says that your brain doesn't exist, sir. With all due respect, sir, how do we then trust your lectures?"

(The room is silent. The Professor coldly stares at Student #2, his face expressionless.)

Professor: "I guess you'll have to take them on faith, son."

Allah – His Very Name Means Love

A quick internet search for the origins of the name Allah will yield the most interesting results. There are individuals that would have you believe that Allah is the name of the pagan Moon-god worshipped by prehistoric Arabians—and they even have a nice comic style presentation of the material to teach young children how “Mozlems” worship this moon idol. Christian Arabs though, would be most insulted by this false depiction since the word *Allah* is used for *God* in the Arabic Bible—which, in fact, precedes the English language Bible by several centuries. Yet, to understand the name Allah better requires us to delve a little into Arabic grammar and linguistics to arrive at the most precise meaning.

The word *Allah* is an Arabic word which joins together the two Arabic words: *Al* and *Ilaah*, which mean, “The God,” respectively. The “Al” in Arabic grammar serves as the *definite article* which means:

A member of the class of determiners that restricts or particularizes a noun. In English, *the* is the definite article.

So when used as above it not only means, “The God,” but it further means: the One and Only God. Breaking it down further, one needs to then understand the meaning of *Ilaah* which is most often loosely and generally translated as God/god. In Arabic though, all nouns are derived from three letter verb roots which help to elucidate their core meaning. Thus, the noun *Ilaah* is derived from the three letter Arabic verb *Aliha*. Searching for these two terms in *Lane’s Lexicon of the Arabic Language*—the premier lexicon for understanding the Arabic language, especially as spoken during the era of the birth of Islam—we find the following meanings:

Aliha – [that which is] served, worshipped and adored
Ilaah – an object of worship or adoration

So when combining this deep and core definition of *Ilaah* with the definite article, which in effect limits it and restricts it to one entity, we arrive at the meaning of Allah as is understood by Muslims; **The One and Only object of worship, He who is served with full submission and He who is adored above all else.** And this comprehensive definition also summarizes the Islamic approach to worship.

In Islam, worship is not simply a once in a week obligation or chore, but it is a continuous expression of adoration, or immense love, for Our Creator and Sustainer. It is to worship Him, not only by bowing our faces down to Him in honor and reverence, but also by obeying His commands. In other religions, such commands are often viewed as a burdensome and rigid set of rules, but they are not at all seen in this manner by devout Muslims! Instead, they are seen more as loving guidelines given to us by the One whom we love, and in fact the One who loves us, in order that we may be guided to success, honor and happiness, and to not fall into despair, disaster or misguidance. It is the same with parents who lay down careful rules and limitations for their children, not for the purpose of oppressing them or causing them difficulty, but for the exact opposite reason—to protect them, secure them and lead them to success.

Furthermore, this impacts a Muslim's communication with their Lord when they stretch out their hands in prayer. They are conversing, not with a God who is distant and obscure, but with a God who cares for them and listens to them tenderly. When the Companions (disciples) of the Prophet Muhammad asked him about Allah, Allah Himself answered them with the following beautiful words immortalized in the Quran:

And when My servants ask you concerning Me, then surely I am very near; I answer the prayer of the suppliant when he calls upon Me, so let them too answer My call and believe in Me that they may be led to the right way.
{2:186}

A Muslim knows that they are dealing with a God who loves them and loves what is good for them. In fact, the highest expression of love is mercy and forgiveness, which God has promised to those who believe in Him and act righteously. It is certainly strange that Muslims would be accused of following a God of vengeance and anger when Allah Himself has stated about Himself:

When Allah decreed the Creation He pledged Himself by writing in His book which is laid down with Him: *My Mercy prevails over My wrath.* [Muslim]

Not only has He promised His devotees and worshippers His expansive forgiveness, but He has promised to fill their hearts with love, as in the following words of the Quran:

Indeed, upon those who believe and work deeds of righteousness, will Allah, the Most Merciful, bestow love.
{19:96}

Amazingly, a Quran search for the phrase, “**Allah loves,**” yields seventeen results, separate from the two times that Allah refers to Himself by the name, “**al-Wadood,**” which means, *the Loving One*. Additionally, there are about four or five other mentions of Allah’s love for His servants beyond that, bringing the total to about twenty-five specific references to His love in the Quran alone. Furthermore, there a number of Hadith (statements of the Prophet Muhammad) which also mention and discuss Allah’s love for the believers. Amongst these hadith, there are the following, especially captivating, two:

Abu Huraira reported that the Messenger of Allah said, “*When Allah loves a servant, he calls Gabriel and he says, ‘Verily, I love this person so you should love him too.’ Then Gabriel loves him and makes an announcement in the heavens, saying, ‘Allah loves this person and you should love him too.’ Thus, the dwellers of the heavens*

love him and he is honored on the earth.” [Bukhari, Muslim]

Also ...

Aishah reported that the Messenger of Allah once appointed a man in charge of an expedition who led the other members in prayer. Soon they noticed that he had the habit of always concluded his prayer recital with one particular “chapter” of the Quran, describing the nature of Allah (Surah 112), as follows:

Say, “He is Allah, the One and Only [God].

Allah, the Self-Sufficient.

He begets not [children], nor was He begotten.

And there is nothing equal or even comparable to Him.” {112:1-4}

Upon their return to Medina, they mentioned this to Messenger of Allah, who replied, "Ask him why he does so?" He was asked and the man replied, "This surah contains the qualities and attributes of Allah, the Gracious, and for that reason I love to recite it often. The Messenger of Allah then told them, "*Due to that man’s love for that surah from the Quran, tell him that Allah loves him in return.*" [Bukhari and Muslim]

Thus, love is a commonly mentioned word and concept, both in the Quran and the statements of the Prophet Muhammad (Hadith), illustrating how keen Allah is to guide His servants to that which will bring about their success and happiness, as well lead to His loving them even more. One last example of the mention of Allah’s love for His servants comes in the following Hadith, wherein Allah is quoted by the Prophet Muhammad as follows:

The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, “Allah Almighty has said, ‘*Whoever shows hostility*

to a friend of mine, then I have declared war upon him. My servant does not grow closer to me with anything more beloved to me than the duties I have obligated upon him. My servant continues to grow closer to me with extra good works until I love him. When I love him, I am his hearing with which he hears, his seeing with which he sees, his hand with which he grasps, and his foot with which he walks. Were he to ask something from me, I would surely give it to him. Were he to ask me for refuge, I would surely grant it to him. I do not hesitate to do anything as I hesitate to take the soul of the believer, for he hates death and I hate to displease him.” [Bukhari]

Love is a great and comprehensive emotion that is expressed in many different ways, and through different words. Indeed, one of the greatest manifestations of love is mercy, as also expressed in the Bible, “... and show mercy to me according to your great love.” [Nehemiah 13:22] Also, when one considers the greatest bond of love that exists between humans, most will agree that it is the bond which exists between a mother and her children. The Prophet Muhammad once commented on this by illustrating to his Companions the greatness of Allah’s Mercy to those who submit to Him and worship Him:

“Some prisoners were brought to the Messenger of Allah, and there was a woman among them who was searching for her child. When she found her child, she embraced him and put him to her breast. The Messenger of Allah said to us, ‘Do you think that this woman would throw her child in the fire?’ We said, ‘No, by Allah, not if she can resist it.’ The Messenger of Allah said, ‘Allah is more merciful to His servants than this woman is to her child.’” [Bukhari and Muslim]

Thus, in Islam Allah calls Himself by ninety-nine different names according to His different qualities

and attributes. It is interesting to see that the two names Allah most often likes to be remembered by, after the name Allah, are His two names, *al-Rahmaan* and *al-Raheem*. Hence, the first verse of the Quran—the opening line to the Quran—is: “In the Name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Graciously Merciful”. Scholars have discussed these two names much, yet what the majority have agreed upon is that there is no difference between these two names, as they both entail mercy. What is special though, is that Allah generally never uses more than one name to describe His attributes—except here. It is not only an emphasis on His Mercy, but a way of showing that His Mercy to all of His creation is so expansive that one name just doesn’t do it justice.

Hence, the Mercy of Allah should be frequently mentioned in the Quran, and indeed it is. The number of times where Allah refers to Himself as the Most Merciful (*al-Rahmaan*) is well over fifty times, and the number of times He mentions His Mercy is another forty times. The number of instances where He refers to Himself as the Most Graciously Merciful (*al-Raheem*) is also significant, at about fifty-five times. Thus, the matter of Allah’s Mercy is reported in *over 150* places in the Quran!

Compare this with the only *nineteen times* where Allah mentions His wrath or anger in the Quran, and the fact that Allah never calls Himself with any name containing any attribute of wrath or anger. What’s more, Allah also refers to Himself as the Most Forgiving almost one hundred times in the Quran as well!

Compare this with a search through the entire Bible¹ for mention of God’s love for His followers which all-together *only* yields about sixty results (interestingly most are in the Old Testament). Often

¹ New International Version (NIV Bible) is used for all quotes in this book.

times, especially in the New Testament, mention of God's love is not a new statement, but instead, either a repetition, or quote, of another verse, most often originating in the Old Testament (understood as a way of fulfilling prophecy). Searching for references to God's Mercy in the Bible generates only another forty-five results, again with several being either repetitions or quotes of other material found elsewhere in the Bible. Thus, the total number of times that God's love and mercy are mentioned in the Bible, minus the repetitions, is less than one hundred times.

Conversely, a basic search for the phrases "**wrath of God**", "**God's wrath**", "**wrath of the Lord**", "**Lord's wrath**," and similar phrases, substituting **anger** for wrath, results in about *seventy* results alone, in addition to mentions of God's wrath and anger found in other forms and combinations throughout the Bible.

In closing, Muslims began all their actions with the statement, "In the Name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Graciously Merciful," as a reminder of how Allah's Mercy, Love and Grace encompass and infuse all things. It is also said in order to sanctify and bless their actions, and as an indication of the sincerity of the deed for the sake of God alone. Muslims are commanded to reciprocate this love and mercy in all their dealings, not only with their fellow men, but also towards animals and the environment. Love and mercy are, as illustrated above, common themes in both of the Holy Scriptures in Islam: the Quran and the teachings of the Prophet (Hadith). Thus, in conclusion, it is not fair to characterize Islam as the religion of hate, nor to characterize Allah as the God of vengeance and wrath, when even in His words, His Mercy and Love effortlessly and clearly prevail over His wrath—both in number and in practice.

Monotheism - the Bedrock of Islamic Belief

Building upon the evidences and arguments presented in the previous chapter, we shall now move unto the ultimate foundation of the Islamic faith, and that is monotheism. The best definition of monotheism from the Islamic perspective is the practice of devoting all of your worship to the One and Only God, Allah. It is to know that God is One, without partner in His dominion and His decisions; One who has no comparison in regards to His essence and traits; and One without equal in His divinity and in worship. Abraham summarized these points the best when he said (as God recorded in the Quran):

"Truly my prayer and my sacrifice, my life and my death, are all for God, the Master and Sustainer of the Universe." {6:162}

Although many people may think of themselves as followers of monotheism, the worship of God as One has many dimensions that most non-Muslims have never considered in their daily lives. The primary source of this problem is that although most people truly believe that God is the Creator, they still direct their worship, either partly or entirely, to other created beings. A careful study of the Quran though, clearly explains and calls the reader's attention to many of these dimensions.

The first fundamental concept in regards to His Oneness is that He is the Master and Sustainer of all of the creation. God alone caused all things to come into existence. He maintains and provides for His creation although He has no need from them, or for them. He is the Master of the Universe and everything in it, and no one is able to contend with Him in His authority and supremacy. Nothing can happen except what He permits. When confronted by difficulty, many Muslims (in following the practice of the beloved Messenger of God) frequently remember this reality by saying, "*La hawla wa laa quwwata ilaa billaah*," which means: "there is neither ability, nor power, except by the will of God". The following verses from the Quran bear out this dimension of God's Oneness:

"God created all things and He is the One upon which all things depend." {39:62}

"And no calamity strikes except by God's permission."
{64:11}

In the hadith of the Prophet, we also see a basis for this concept. For example, the Prophet taught his followers, "Know for sure that if the whole world came together in order to do something to help you, they would only be able to help you with that which God had already determined for you. Likewise, if the whole world came together to harm you, they would only be able to harm you with that which God had already determined would happen to you." [recorded by Tirmithi and Ahmad]

Translating these points into practical understanding, we begin to see that our ability to direct our own lives or the lives of others around us is limited, since all we can do is make the most of *what we are given*. Even in that attempt, the results are still dependent upon the will and permission of God to either allow our efforts to succeed, or to prevent them from attaining their intended effect. What may otherwise seem like "good luck" and "bad luck" is in fact the will of God and is not at all influenced by supposed "good-luck charms" such as horseshoes, rabbit's feet, four-leaf clovers, or lucky numbers. In the same way, bad luck superstitions like breaking a mirror, seeing a black cat, or walking under a ladder are equally ineffective. Indeed in Islam, the belief that charms or omens have any power in and of themselves is considered to be a way of associating partners with God in His dominion, and this is the only unforgivable sin in Islam, since it implies a denial of the Oneness of God.

Also, the Oneness of God can be seen in His traits and names as mentioned in the Quran and Hadith. Amongst the numerous verses of the Quran concerning His attributes, we read the following:

"The Most Beautiful names belong to God, so call on Him by them." {7:180}

"God; there is none worthy of worship except Him! And to Him belong the Most Beautiful Names." {20:8}

Yet in regards to His names and attributes, there exist rules and parameters that the worshipper must take care not to exceed.

Firstly, we can only know of God that which He and His Prophet have described to us concerning His names and attributes, and furthermore we cannot take any license in explaining those traits, except by that which He and His Messenger have stated concerning them. For example, when God states in the Quran:

"And truly, your only Master and Sustainer is God who created the heavens and the earth in six days, and then He exalted (or established) Himself over the Throne."
{7:54}

Many of the noble scholars of the past have commented on this statement of God, but all made sure to avoid trying to explain the meaning of His statement that He “exalted (or established) Himself over the Throne,” since God did not explain it further Himself.

When asked to interpret the meaning of this phrase, one of the great scholars of Islam, Imam Malik inclined his head and was silent until sweat covered his brow, upon which he looked up and said, "*Al-Istiwa'* (the concept of establishing or exalting oneself over something) is linguistically understood, the ‘how’ of it is inconceivable in the mind, but the belief in it is obligatory, and inquiring about it is a heretical innovation.” And thus we stop at where God and His Messenger stop when it comes to interpreting the attributes of the All-Mighty.

Now, in other parts of the Quran, God describes Himself with qualities that are known and seen in His creation like: Love, Mercy, Generosity, Anger, and Strength. Although these traits are indeed found in His creation, the similarity stops there. The rule is that any perceived similarity between God’s attributes and those of mankind is only in name and not in degree or perfection. When God refers to Himself with these attributes, they are to be taken in the absolute sense, free from human shortcomings.

Additionally, there are certain attributes of the creation that cannot be applied to God because of the imperfection, weakness and deficiency they entail. For example, it is claimed in the Bible and Torah that God spent six days creating the universe

then rested on the seventh. For this reason, Jews and Christians take Saturday or Sunday, respectively, as a day of rest in which work is viewed as sinful. Such a claim assigns to God the attributes of His creation. Yet, it is man who tires after heavy work and needs sleep to recuperate, not God. And furthermore, in our current modern societies many people regularly work two, three and sometimes four weeks straight without taking a day off. Are these people then superior to the Lord and Creator of the Universe? Exalted is He above all the imperfection they seek to attribute to Him!

In general, the key formula that is used Islamically when dealing with God's attributes is the Quranic verse,

"There is nothing like Him and He is Hearer and Seer of all." {42:11}

From this verse, we gather that man can only know about the Creator what He has revealed to him through His Prophets and revealed books. Therefore, we must stay within these limits, for if we don't we are liable to fall into misguidance and even possibly disbelief and heresy by assigning to God the limited attributes of His creation.

Although the dimensions of monotheism mentioned above are essential to the belief of a Muslim, they in and of themselves are incomplete and useless without the final dimension of Islamic monotheism – submission to the Oneness of God in worship and deed. God clearly states this point when He records the responses of the Arabian idol worshippers during the time of the Prophet Muhammad when they were asked a series of questions:

"Say, 'Who is it that gives you sustenance from the sky and earth, governs sight and hearing, brings forth life from dead (matter) and death from the living, and plans the affairs of man?' They will all say, 'God.'" {10:31}

The pagan Arabs all knew that God was their Creator, Provider, their Lord and Master, yet that knowledge was not enough to qualify them as believers according to God. In fact, God said:

"Most of them do not believe in God, except while joining partners to Him." {12:106}

So, the idol worshippers and pagans of that era knew and acknowledged that it is God who created them, provides for them, and responds to them in their time of distress. But that knowledge did not stop them from giving elements of their worship to others or from calling upon others for their needs. Indeed, they even tried to cover up their associating of partners with God, the worst sin, by saying:

"We only worship them so that they may bring us closer to God." {39:3}

Thus, the most important element of Islamic monotheism is that of directing all of your worship to God alone. He alone is deserving of worship, and it is only God that can ever benefit you as a result of your humility and devotion to Him. Indeed, this is the purpose for which He created mankind:

"I did not create the Jinn and Mankind, except to worship Me." {51:56}

Moreover, every Muslim recites in their daily prayer, several times a day, the following verse to remind them of this elemental understanding and practice of the Oneness of the All-Mighty:

"You alone we worship, and from You alone we seek help." {1:4}

This simple, yet profound, verse plainly demonstrates that all forms of worship should only be directed to God, the only One capable of responding. And God also reminds His beloved worshippers that He is not a distant God who is unconcerned about their needs and worries, but instead, that He is close to them and pleased when they turn to Him:

"And when My servants ask you (O Muhammad) about Me, tell them that I am near to them. I hear the prayer of every one who calls upon Me. So let them respond to Me, and believe in Me properly, in order that they may be guided aright." {2:186}

“Who listens to the distressed soul when it cries out to Him, and Who relieves its suffering, and makes you the inheritors of the earth? Can there be another god besides God? Little do they reflect.” {27:62}

The Prophet Muhammad further established this understanding of Islamic monotheism when he taught his Companions, "If you ask in prayer, ask only from God, and if you seek help, seek it only from God." [Tirmithi] And the Prophet was also reported to have said, "Nothing is nobler to your Lord than calling upon Him for your needs." [Tirmithi]

Turning now to the subject of worship, we observe that in the Islamic view, this word is very comprehensive and includes more than just fasting, paying charity, and praying. It includes emotions like love, trust, and fear; all of which should only be directed to God at that level. God mentioned these emotions and warned against excesses in them, or misdirection of them, when He stated:

"There are among men those who take for worship others besides God as equals to Him. They love them as they should only love God. But those who believe have a much greater love of God..." {2:165}

"So put your trust in God if you are truly believers." {5:23}

And lastly, the concept of worship in Islam also involves total obedience to God's commands and considers God to be the ultimate Legislator. Thus, the rejection of His divinely revealed laws and the implementation of secular (man-made) legal systems – especially if one believes that such secular laws are superior to God's law – can be viewed as an act of disbelief. It can also be one of the forms of associating partners with God. God said in the Quran:

"Those who do not rule by what God has revealed are disbelievers (deniers of the Supremacy and Authority of God)." {5:44}

On one occasion, the Prophet's companion 'Adee ibn Haatim, who was a convert from Christianity, heard the Prophet recite the Qur'anic verse,

"They have taken their rabbis and monks as lords besides God." {9:31}

So he said, "Surely we did not worship them," The Prophet then turned to him and said "Did they not make forbidden what God had made permissible, and as such you obeyed them and made those actions forbidden? And did they not make permissible what God made forbidden and you again obeyed them and declared those actions to be permissible?" He replied, "We certainly did." The Prophet then said, "That was how you worshipped them." [Tirmithi] So we understand from the above-mentioned Quranic verses and hadith that obeying the creation in disobedience to the Creator is equal to worshipping them and taking them as gods besides the true God.

These multidimensional concepts should cause many of us to stop and re-examine our actions, beliefs and emotions in the light of Islamic revelation. Does it truly make sense to say that we love and worship God alone when we turn to others as intermediates? Or when we set aside His divine injunctions for constitutions and laws which represent the opinions and desires of men who themselves are subject to misguidance, temptation and corruption?

So in summary, we need only turn back to the glorious words of God in His book, the Quran, to best understand Him and the concept of Islamic monotheism through His own description of Himself:

"Say, 'He is God; the One, Indivisible. God, the Self-Sufficient. He gives birth to none, nor was He begotten; and nothing is comparable to Him.'" {112:1-4}

The Quran - the Spoken Word of God

When we come to accept the existence of God, the next most important question to arise in the minds of many people is, what is our place in His grand plan? Is there a message that He wants to convey to us? Does He care about us or the world He created for us? What is the point of life and the tragedies and misfortunes we see and experience?

The good news though, is that God has indeed revealed a message to all of humanity to answer these questions, and other questions besides them; and that message is the Quran. God, addressing His Prophet, states in the Quran:

We have revealed to you, as We revealed to Noah and the prophets after him. And we revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, the Tribes (of Israel), Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, and Solomon, and to David We gave the book of Psalms. And We sent messengers about whom We have related their stories to you before and messengers about whom We have not related to you. And God spoke to Moses with [direct] speech. We sent messengers as bringers of good tidings and warners so that mankind will have no argument against God after the messengers. And ever is God Exalted in Might and Wise. {4:163-165}

But what is the Quran?

The Quran is the most widely, and most frequently, read book in the world both today¹, and over the last millennium. Its slow, rhythmic recitation, with simultaneous reflection upon its profound meanings, is considered an act of worship in Islam. It is a book that has from its very inception changed the hearts and minds of many who have heard its magnificent verses as it forces you to think, forces you to choose. It is a book that is so miraculous, so venerated, that thousands of men, women, and children learn the entire book by heart—word by word, vowel by vowel. Each line is called “a sign” (ayah), instead of a verse, for every line is a miracle and filled with guidance and wonder.

¹ McAteer, O. (2015, July 15). *The most popular book of all time isn't Harry Potter, it's the Koran*. Retrieved from: <https://metro.co.uk/2015/07/15/the-most-popular-book-of-all-time-isnt-harry-potter-5297319>

Additionally, the Quran holds the distinction of being the most authenticated book in the world².

Yet, the Quran is also among the most attacked books in history. Since its initial revelation to the Prophet Muhammad, many have sought to prevent others from hearing it or reading it. Some governments have even attempted to ban it from circulation in more recent times³⁴. Why though has it invoked such a response, such vehement opposition?

Although a complete or in-depth study of the Quran is well beyond the scope of this introductory work, adequate answers to these questions will be provided to give the reader a good understanding from where they can then pursue further study.

The word Quran, or more properly, *al-Quran*, is an Arabic word which means, “the Recitation”. It is God’s message and His prescribed code of life to all of humanity from the time of Muhammad, till the end of the world. Its most distinguishing feature is its purity; every word of it is the word of God, the Exalted.

Although many people think that it was written by Muhammad, this couldn’t be further from the truth. The Quran is not a book written by Muhammad, or any other human being. No, it is a collection of divine revelations—the spoken word of God exactly as it was revealed to Muhammad by the Archangel Gabriel. Indeed, God has described His Messenger Muhammad as being neither able to read or write, in the following passage:

And you did not recite before it any scripture, nor did you inscribe one with your right hand. Otherwise the falsifiers would have had [cause for] doubt. {29:48}

And

² Kamsin, Amirrudin, et al. (2015). Developing the novel Quran and Hadith authentication system. 10.1109/ICT4M.2014.7020640.

³ Parfitt, T. (2016, Aug 27). Favourite to be next Dutch PM vows to BAN the Koran and CLOSE all mosques. Retrieved from: <https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/704172/Geert-Wilders-Islam-religion-Muslim-Koran-PVV-Dutch-Freedom-Party>

⁴ Heffron, C. (2017, Sept 28). Chinese police order Muslims to hand in all copies of the Koran and prayer mats or face 'harsh punishment'. Retrieved from: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/china/article-4929064/Chinese-police-ask-Muslims-hand-copies-Koran.html>

Those who follow the Messenger, the unlettered prophet... {7:157}

As such, this was one of the first miracles of the Quran, moreover a miracle given to the Prophet, that although he was known to be unable to read or write, that he brought forth verses from a Book whose eloquence and majesty were immediately acknowledged. Had he been a poet, or a scribe, prior to the revelation, then people could wonder if he wrote it himself.

The Prophet Muhammad's role, similar to that of the other prophets of God before him, was to be the "medium" through which the words were passed on to mankind. He also served as a role model to illustrate their meanings and to demonstrate their applications—all through the divine inspiration.

As such, the Quran is known to be the miracle given to Muhammad; a miracle that was not only meant for the people of his era, but for all the generations to come. Indeed, it is well known to the Jews and Christians that whenever God sent a Messenger to the world in the past, He would aid that Messenger with various miracles to further validate that the message they carried was indeed from God, the Master of the Universe. For example, during the time of Moses, the people of Pharaoh were steeped in magic and felt they had reached the pinnacle of this dark art. Hence, the miracles of Moses—changing his wooden staff into a real snake, turning the river Nile to blood and parting the Red Sea (amongst other signs)—were meant to humble the people and to remind them that the power, control and might of God are true and not just sleight of hand tricks or optical illusions.

Similarly, Jesus was sent at a time when the Children of Israel and the Romans felt that they had uncovered all there was to know of medicine. Yet, when confronted with conditions like leprosy and blindness, their “knowledge” was truly powerless in comparison with the power and ability of God. It was God who not only provided Jesus the ability to heal the leper and give sight to the blind, but to even raise the dead! And again, all of these miracles were performed only by God's permission. And so it became clear to those with perceptive minds and humble

hearts that truly, God is the All-Powerful and the All-Mighty; anything and everything else only has power and ability by His permission and not in of itself.

So with this understanding, the coming of Muhammad confronted people with a similar situation. By the beginning of the seventh century of the Common Era (CE), the Arabs of the Arabian Peninsula had believed themselves to have reached the peak of eloquence in their linguistic ability, exemplified mainly in their poetry. A study of Arabic poetry from this time yields a treasure of magnificent poetry demonstrating a profound understanding and skillful manipulation of Arabic grammar and linguistics. And then the Quran was revealed.

Countless men and women, even children, upon hearing its powerful and grand verses became Muslims immediately. They realized that these were not the words of any human. It was different. Stronger, more magnificent, more profound, and it made an enormous impact on their minds, as well as their hearts. It spoke to their very souls, appealing to them, challenging them, and transforming them. But the miracle didn't stop there.

As Islam spread from the Arabian Peninsula into non-Arab territories, a different miracle soon impressed itself upon these new towns and societies. The effect of those words upon those who accepted Islam was unique. It produced a loyalty and level of adherence that people had not observed in other religions or ideologies. It also offered proofs and challenges that were absent in other books alleging to be from the One God. It reasoned with their hearts, answering their questions, as opposed to simply demanding "blind faith". For example, after a long passage about the true nature of Jesus (specifically that he is among the noble and honored Messengers of God and that he is not in any way part of the essence of God), God states:

This is indeed the truth from your Lord, so be not of those who doubt. And whoever disputes with you in this matter after what has come to you of sure knowledge, then say to them, “Come let us call our sons and your sons, and our women and your women, and ourselves and yourselves, then let us sincerely pray, and invoke the curse of God upon those who lie!” {3:60-61}

This very challenge was indeed put forth to a delegation of Christians from the north Yemeni town of Najran by the Prophet Muhammad himself, as commanded by God, and they declined after a long night wrought with consideration. Once again, this is a challenge—a proof of sorts—as to who is in doubt concerning their belief. If someone truly believes that Jesus is either God, or the begotten son of God, then surely they would accept this challenge and call the curse of God down upon themselves and their family or people if they are wrong. Such challenges are indeed unique in books of religion, and a number of other challenges and ultimatums can also be found in the Quran. But the miracle didn't stop there.

Modern Science and the Quran

The faith of Islam continued to grow century after century, until it eventually reached the age of modern science, namely the 20th century. It was in this era that a new miracle of the Quran began to shine forth when scientific discoveries began to confirm many of the scientific passages of the Quran.

Although the Quran has most recently distinguished itself in the arena of scientific knowledge, it must be still remembered that it is not a book of science—it is a book of guidance. So the unique way in which God, through His revealed verses in the Quran, uses scientific facts and concepts to call the reader to the worship of the One and Only God is quite interesting. For example, in illustrating the guarantee of the resurrection of humanity on the Day of Judgment, God states:

O people! If you are in doubt about the Resurrection, then surely We created you from dust, then from a small seed,

then from a clot, then from a lump of flesh, partly formed and partly unformed, that We may make it clear to you.

And We cause what We please to stay in the wombs till an appointed time, then We bring you forth as babies, that you may then attain maturity and full strength. Then, some of you are called to die, and some are sent back to the feeblest old age, so that they know nothing after having known much.

And you see the earth barren and lifeless, but when We send down rain to it, it is stirred to life, it swells, and it puts forth every kind of beautiful growth in pairs.

This is so, because God is the Reality and it is He Who gives life to the dead, and it is He Who has power over all things. And verily the Hour will come—there can be no doubt about it, or about the fact that God will indeed raise up all who are in the graves. {22:5-7}

So in these verses, God uses the current scientific understanding of embryology⁵ in detailed and descriptive terms that were only discovered in the late twentieth century with the advent of electron and high amplification microscopy. God relates these stages to us, not for us to build scientific knowledge, but to instead confirm for us that the promise of the Day of Judgment is indeed a reality.

The only One who could say this with surety is none other than the Creator Himself. He is the only One who could detail to us the stages of human development over one thousand years before we could even imagine these stages ourselves with modern scientific instrumentation. God does indicate to us the spiritual value of these scientifically laden passages when He says:

⁵ The study of the development of the human from embryo to fetus in the womb of the mother

We will show them Our signs in the horizons, and within themselves, until it becomes clear to them that it is the truth. But is it not sufficient, concerning your Lord, that He is, over all things, a Witness? {41:53}

Hence, it is clear how this Book repeatedly appeals to you to think, reason, and understand why we believe what we believe. Furthermore, it forbids you to believe blindly without reflection and reasoning.

In fact, the word for faith in the Arabic language is *emaan*, which comes from the root *amn*, which means safety, security and trust—those very things that can only be established in a heart after something has proven itself worthy. For example, if you met a stranger on the street and he asks you to get into his car, would you trust him? Of course not, because he hasn't proven himself trustworthy. But if your best friend saw you and asked you if you wanted a ride, that would be a totally different story because you know that person and you trust them.

Thus, God provides these and other examples in the Quran so that you can get a glimpse into His infinite knowledge and power, thereby giving you a good and solid reason to trust Him and to trust His Message to you. And when you realize how all these things are true, then the unseen things, like: Heaven, Hell, the Day of Judgment, etc. must also be true. Now, let us take a look at some more examples of the amazing science found in the Quran, and see how God uses these verses to call people to His worship.

The Dynamic Expansion of the Universe

Up until the early twentieth century, the field of astronomy held the belief that the universe was something static, or fixed in place. Scientists theorized that when the universe came into existence that it didn't significantly change its dimensions afterwards. This theory though, was effectively proven false in the early 1900's.

In 1925, Edwin Hubble (after whom the Hubble Space telescope is named) provided the first observational evidence for the expansion of the universe. This means that since its coming into existence, the universe's boundaries have been expanding. The late Stephen Hawking (one of the top astrophysicists of recent times and author

of the book, *A Brief History of Time*) states, “The universe is not static, as had previously been thought. It is expanding.”⁶

So, what did God say in the Quran, almost 1300 years before this discovery and almost 1400 years before the Hubble telescope?

And the heavens We constructed with strength, and indeed, We are expanding them. {51:47}

Mountains are Like Stakes in the Earth

Geology is the study of the Earth—its properties, formation and behavior as seen through earthquakes, geysers, and tectonic plate movement, amongst other things. Among the more recent discoveries of modern geology, there is a phenomenon called ***isostasy***, which essentially states that mountains have deep roots under the earth’s crust into the mantle.

Sir George Biddell Airy, the British Astronomer Royal, in 1855, was the first to propose the theory of isostasy, that mountain ranges must have root structures of lower density, proportional to their height, in order to maintain isostatic equilibrium. This existence of these root structures has since been confirmed by seismic and gravitational data⁷.

The Quran contains exactly such a description in the following verses, as God reminds humanity of His great favors to them and how they should be thankful to Him and worship Him alone as opposed to the worship of the false gods they invent:

Have We not made the earth as a wide expanse, and the mountains as stakes? {78:6-7}

Once again, the Qur'anic descriptions are in complete agreement with modern geological data and observation, with the exception that the Quran contained these statements over a millennium before today’s geologists were even able to theorize what they

⁶ Hawking, S.W. (1988). *Origin of the Universe*. Retrieved from: <http://www.ralenz.com/old/astro/hawking-1.html>

⁷ Tarbuck, E.J. and Lutgens, F.K. (1982). *Earth Science. 3rd ed.* Columbus: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company.

currently describe. Will you then still disbelieve in this powerful and miraculous message?

Levels of Darkness in the Oceans

One of the truly fascinating verses in the Quran describes the layers of darkness in the oceans, comparing them to different levels of disbelief in God and Islam.

Or they are like layers of darkness within an unfathomable sea which is covered by waves, upon which are waves, over which are clouds—layer upon layer of darkness. When one puts out his hand therein, he can hardly see it. And he to whom God has not granted light, for him there is no light. {24:40}

The darkness in deep seas and oceans is now known to come in layers. Between the water's surface and a depth of about 100-200 meters (300-600 feet) gradual separation of the light spectrum occurs, one color at a time until near darkness is attained⁸. To explain further, at a certain depth, the red wavelength is completely blocked (absorbed)—below that depth, the color red can no longer be appreciated. At another depth, the green wavelength is completely blocked, and the same phenomenon happens to all the other seven color wavelengths in the visible light spectrum.

Furthermore, after 200 meters (600 ft), depending on the location of the body of water in question, there is almost no light because almost all the color wavelengths, with the exception of blue, have been fully blocked at this point. Complete and absolute darkness though, occurs only after exceeding a depth of 1000 meters (over half a mile down!), as reported by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)⁹. Though records continue to be broken, human beings are not thought to be able to dive more than about 250 meters¹⁰ (750 feet) without the aid of

⁸ <https://manoa.hawaii.edu/exploringourfluidearth/physical/ocean-depths/light-ocean>

⁹ https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/light_travel.html

¹⁰ On June 6, 2012, Herbert Nitsch, a free diver, descended 253 meters in Greece.

submarines or special SCUBA equipment¹¹ due to the enormous incremental increases in pressure that work to compress the lungs¹² and the available air supply.

Yet, the development of special diving gear and submarines in the last century has finally allowed oceanologists and other scientists to be able to dive to depths never before experienced by man. And only then, were they able to describe this light absorption and gradual darkness phenomenon after having experienced it firsthand! Therefore, the Quranic description of "*layer upon layer of darkness*" is once again perfectly in tune with the above mentioned observable facts of gradual light separation to the point where almost no light exists (the 200m depth), where as God mentioned, "*When one puts out his hand therein, he can hardly see it;*" and then on to absolute darkness where God mentions, "*And he to whom God has not granted light, for him there is no light*".

Internal Waves in the Oceans

Another recently discovered phenomenon in the study of oceans is that of internal ocean, or deep sea, waves. In the middle portion of the above mentioned passage from the Quran, "*Covered by waves, upon which are waves, over which are clouds,*" the deep waters of seas and oceans possess waves, and above these waves are other waves. It appears that the second set of waves mentioned are the surface waves that are commonly observed by the human eye, because the passage mentions that above the second waves, there are clouds. So what then are the first set of waves?

Interestingly, recent studies of oceans have shown the presence of internal waves which "occur on density interfaces between layers of different densities"¹³. In English, this means that these internal

¹¹ In 2014, expert diver and scientist, Ahmed Gabr, set the deep dive record of 1082 feet (332 meters)

¹² At a depth of 330 meters, the pressure on the human body is estimated at 485 pounds/square inch (PSI)

¹³ Massel, S.R. (2015). *Internal Gravity Waves in the Shallow Seas*.

Retrieved from:

https://www.springer.com/cda/content/document/cda_downloaddocument/9783319189079-c2.pdf?SGWID=0-0-45-1516574-p177380738

waves can be found between different temperature and salt concentration zones of the ocean. Most of us who have gone swimming in the ocean before have discovered certain areas where the water feels nice and warm, but surprisingly going just a little deeper the water suddenly becomes much colder. This is one of the interfaces mentioned above which has its own set of scientifically observed waves. Internal waves cannot be seen by the human eye, but they can be detected by studying temperature or salt concentration changes at different depths of water.

Of course, the above mentioned scientific principles are no doubt intriguing, but as was mentioned before, this Message to humanity isn't meant to be a science lesson. It is meant to be a means of guiding the souls of mankind to the worship of the One God alone. And in these verses, the message can be no clearer.

The darkness of the ocean is likened to the condition of the souls of those who deny and reject this Quran. Of course, some people are further astray than others and hence the different layers, or depths, of darkness. It gets to the point where some souls are so deep into the darkness of denial, as if they are blind; not with their eyes, but with their souls. They can no longer distinguish between right and wrong, truth and falsehood. And it concludes by making it clear that light, meaning guidance that clarifies the difference between right and wrong, is not only singular (as opposed to the levels of darkness which are many), but also, comes only from God. You will never be guided aright if you don't turn humbly to Him and seek that guidance.

As evidence, there are well known authors in science who have declared publically that this Quran could have come only from God, but they have refused to submit to Him. They know that anyone who thinks that Muhammad wrote the Quran is only proving his own ignorance and foolishness. Such an idea means that Muhammad would have had to travel back in time to witness the Big Bang and describe it for us, then observe the expansion of the universe from his intergalactic vantage point and tell us about it and then travel deep into the earth's molten core to describe the "roots" of the mountains.

Not finished, this Super-Prophet would then be off to the deep oceans where he would dive where no human could survive

unaided and observe the light and wave principles described above, and still have some time left over to describe for us in amazing detail the formative stages of human development in the womb with eyes more powerful than a modern day electron microscope. Who would believe such tales and ignore the power and ability of the Creator who *is* able to tell us all this information, and more besides it? As foolish as that may sound, there are many among mankind who have deceived their own souls in this manner. Thus, once again we are reminded, “*And he to whom God has not granted light, for him there is no light.*”

Numerical Miracles in the Quran

Another fascinating miracle of the Quran involves its numerical code or structure. This area of Quranic study is one of the most recent, as it depends greatly on computer analysis of the verses to detect patterns. Accordingly, there are many interesting findings, Glory be to God.

Similar to the scientific verses discussion above, there are far too many mathematical miracles to discuss in this short chapter, so I will be forced to limit the discussion to only one amazing point. Before I begin detailing it, I want to caution the reader, because there are a number of people who have been led astray as a result of their belief that everything comes down to numbers or some code.

One such group which has been led astray follow a man who popularized the idea of the number nineteen being the key to some patterns in the Quran. Afterwards though, he unfortunately declared himself a prophet of God, and then began trying to change Islam and the Quran to match his ideas. God being the ultimate Protector of His religion, this man and others like him in the past have failed, and indeed any others who attempt such foolhardy tactics in the future will no doubt meet the same result.

Once again, the miracle of the Quran is not in scientific facts, numbers, eloquence or history—but the miracle of the Quran is how it raises up righteous people who worship God as He should be worshipped, standing strong for justice and morality. The side

points are beneficial to consider, but don't make the mistake of taking them as the primary message or goal of the Quran.

With this in mind, the mathematical miracle of the Quran herein presented relates to Jesus. As the scientific miracles were not revealed for science, but for the guidance of humanity, these mathematical findings in the Quran present the same goal—guidance. God has stated:

With Allah, the example of Jesus is like that of Adam. He created Him from dust, then He said to him, "Be," and he was. {3:59}

So, looking at this interesting passage in mathematical terms, one could state that Jesus = Adam, as far as God is concerned, because both of them were the result of the Creative word of God. Adam was created from dust, without father or mother, when God said to him, "Be," and similarly Jesus was immaculately conceived from a woman without any involvement of a man when God said "Be," and Jesus came into existence.

If some argue that Jesus is God, or the son of God, because of the Immaculate Conception, then God reminds them that Adam was also born miraculously. In fact, Adam was born without either a father or mother. As far as our physical bodies are concerned, they are all merely dust. In God's sight then, Jesus was dust, just as Adam was. These are the main religious lessons that comes from this passage. So where then is the miracle?

First Mathematical Point

If one was to go through the whole Quran, he would discover that the name "Jesus" is found in twenty-five places. Similarly, he would also find that the name "Adam" is also found in twenty-five places. Hence, the similarity of Adam and Jesus is not only in their nature, but also mathematically in the number of their times each is mentioned.

Second Mathematical Point

Taking it a step further, the above mentioned passage (3:59) is the only place where the two names are mentioned together. Counting the number of times **each** Prophet's name has been

mentioned from the start of the Quran, amazingly we discover that this is the 7th time each one is mentioned, and counting from the back of the Quran, this verse also represents the 19th time each Prophet is mentioned. Once again, they are equal in more ways than one.

Third Mathematical Point

The 19th time "Adam" is mentioned, and the 19th time that "Jesus" is mentioned, also both occur in the 19th Chapter (Surah Mariam). In comparison with the second mathematical point mentioned above, we can note that it is also the 7th occasion of their mention counting from the end of the Quran.

Fourth Mathematical Point

The 19th time that the name "Jesus" is mentioned is found in chapter 19, verse 34. Whereas the 19th time that the name "Adam" is mentioned is found in chapter 19, verse 58. And from verse 34 to verse 58, there are 25 verses (counting verse 34 as the 1st verse of the 25), and as we know the number 25 is the number of times both are mentioned in the Quran.

This is just one example of the mind-boggling mathematics found in the Quran, and this is only concerning one passage! But again, God shows us through the Quran that not only are Jesus and Adam similar in their miraculous origins of creation by God's creative word, but that this similarity also holds true throughout the Quran in mathematical terms.

The Preservation of the Quran

This last point of our introduction to the Quran leads us to one of the most practically important characteristics of the Quran, and that is its preservation. Logically, if God wished to send down a Message for all of humanity from the time of the Prophet Muhammad till the Day of Judgment, it would reasonably have to be protected from any changes, be they additions or subtractions.

Interestingly, one of the strongest arguments against Christianity being the final message for mankind is this very point. As it is well documented, the language which Jesus used to preach

during his lifetime was primarily Aramaic¹⁴. So naturally we would want to have in our possession one Aramaic copy of the Gospel, with no other variant copies being in existence. But the problem is, there is no original Aramaic Gospel or Bible—only translations of the original Greek manuscripts into Aramaic.

The oldest manuscripts of the New Testament of the Bible are either in Greek or Hebrew, but none in the original language of Jesus. Furthermore, there is an extensive gap between the actual events and when they were written, a gap often over a generation! In fact, the earliest copy of New Testament text discovered to date is called Papyrus 52 (P⁵²), which contains a small fragment of John's gospel, (18.31-33, 37-38). It was discovered in 1934 by C. H. Roberts, and is believed to have been copied from its (now extant 96 CE) original no later than 150 CE, but no earlier than 100 CE¹⁵. So, current day Bibles rely on a translation (actually many different versions of the same story) to try to piece together what Jesus really said and did during his brief life. Hence, any English Bible is actually a translation of a translation! How then could this be the final message to mankind when the original wasn't even preserved, and in fact not even written, in many cases, for decades after Jesus left the earth? Surely God would preserve it if it were meant for the rest of time.

But, this is in fact one of the characteristics of the Quran. It has been preserved not only in writing from the time of the Prophet, but also in the hearts of thousands, even millions, of devoted worshippers ever since the time of its revelation. Surely, this is something for rational people to reflect on.

¹⁴ Tharoor, I. (2014, May 27). *What language did Jesus speak? The pope and Israel's prime minister disagree*. Retrieved from:

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2014/05/27/what-language-did-jesus-speak-the-pope-and-israels-prime-minister-disagree>

¹⁵ "Recent research points to a date nearer to 200 AD, but there is as yet no convincing evidence that any earlier fragments from the New Testament survive. Carbon-dating is a destructive method and has not been used on the Fragment." (Retrieved from: <http://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/search-resources/special-collections/guide-to-special-collections/st-john-fragment/what-is-the-significance/>)

In fact, God has taken it upon Himself to protect this Quran from corruption and changes, or even loss, when He said:

We have without doubt sent down the Revelation and We will assuredly guard it. {15:9}

How the Quran Was Preserved: Memorization and Print

The Quran as it was revealed by God has reached us today unchanged and pure through two ways that both provide a check and balance system to one another, and there is no other system of religion which has continued till this day that possesses such a secure form of transmission.

The Prophet Muhammad himself was the first to begin memorizing the revelation after the Angel Gabriel had brought it to him, as is evidenced by the following passage:

Move not your tongue with it, [O Muhammad], to hasten with recitation of the Qur'an. Indeed, upon Us is its collection [in your heart] and [to make possible] its recitation. So when We have recited it, then follow its recitation. Then upon Us is its clarification [to you]. {75:16-19}

And

A Messenger from Allah, reciting purified scriptures. {98: 2}

The Prophet also instructed his Companions to memorise it. One prominent example is that of the Companion of the Prophet, Abdullah ibn Mas'ud, who was the first man to recite the Qur'an publicly in Mecca. This shows that even early on in the spread of Islam, the recitation of the Quran from memory was practised by the Companions. The later Caliph¹⁶ Abu Bakr was also known to recite the Quran from memory in front of his house in Mecca. In fact, the Islamic scholar Al-Suyuti records that over twenty of the famous Companions, in addition to the hundreds of less well known Companions, had committed the entire

¹⁶ Term used for the leader of the Muslim Empire.

Quran to memory and had been approved to teach it to others due to their great proficiency in it.

It is thus well established in Islamic history that the Qur'an was memorized during the lifetime of the Prophet by his Companions, and furthermore that this tradition has continued among the subsequent Muslim generations till today. Today, it is estimated that there are millions of Muslims who have memorized the entire Quran, with the vast majority of Muslims having memorized at least some parts of it.

Commenting on the importance of the memorization of the Quran to the preservation of the Quran, author John Burton writes in his book *An Introduction to the Hadith*, "The method of transmitting the Quran from one generation to the next by having the young memorize the oral recitation of their elders had mitigated somewhat from the beginning the worst perils of relying solely on written records...."¹⁷

Secondly, the Quran was also, of course, written down and compiled into a book, or *mus-haf*¹⁸, as it is known in Arabic.

This process though was done in two phases:

1. Writing down of the Quranic revelation on different parchments, and other materials, as it descended upon the Prophet.
2. The Gathering of all these parchments and segments into one book within two years of the death of the Prophet Muhammad.

We shall now take a more in-depth look at these stages to better understand the process of collecting the Quran.

The reports and evidences of the Quran having been written from the very beginning are numerous and I will only give one famous example here to substantiate this point. When the Message first came down upon the Prophet, he was in Mecca, his birthplace. After the people began to hear of the news of the revelation, they began to oppose him fiercely and the early converts to Islam were very few and very weak. There was

¹⁷ Burton, John. (2001). *An Introduction to the Ḥadīth*. Edinburgh University Press,

¹⁸ Literally means a manuscript that is bound between two covers as a single volume

much fear and the majority didn't declare their faith in public. One such person who initially opposed the Prophet greatly was Umar ibn Al-Khattab; a man who would later become a close and beloved Companion of the Prophet Muhammad and the second leader, or Caliph, of the Muslim empire.

One day, Umar awoke and decided that he had heard enough about this man Muhammad and decided that he would kill him and end the matter once and for all. On his way to kill Muhammad, someone came and told him that Umar's own sister had accepted Islam in secret. Enraged he went off to his sister's home to investigate the matter.

Upon arriving and finding his sister and her husband reading a portion of the Quran, he aggressively shoved his brother-in-law to the side and struck his sister causing her to bleed. After they admitted their conversion, Umar, feeling remorse over hitting his sister so hard, requested to read the portion of the Quran in their possession and promised he wouldn't damage the parchment on which it was written. After ritually washing himself, as his sister requested him to do, he read the page in which a portion of sura 20 was written. Upon reading just a few passages, his eyes became moist with tears, and he remarked, "How fine and noble is this speech..." He then immediately went to the house of one of the Companions named al-Arqam, the place where the Prophet would meet in secret with the early converts, and declared the testimony of faith before the Prophet Muhammad. Thus, this well known historical event illustrates how, even in the earliest days of the spread of Islam, large passages of the Quran had already been written down.

Concerning the collection of the Quran into one volume, many people ask, "Why wasn't the Quran collected into one written volume during the life of the Prophet?" There are at least four clear reasons why this didn't happen, as follows:

1. The Quran itself was not revealed in one time, but rather sequentially over 23 years. In fact, scholars believe that the last verses to be revealed of the Quran came down just nine days before the death of the Prophet.¹⁹
2. Some verses were abrogated, or replaced by God, in the course of the revelation, and thus it was not always

¹⁹ Fatoohi, L. (2014). *The First and Last Revelations of the Qur'an*. Birmingham: Luna Plena Publishing.

- known when something was revealed whether another verse later would be revealed to replace a previous one.
3. The verses and suras (chapters) were not revealed in the order in which they would be later recorded, but were arranged at a later time, before the death of the Prophet, under the guidance of the Archangel Gabriel. This means, that sometimes a segment of verses would be revealed and later another verse might come down and God would command for it to be inserted into the middle of the segment received previously.
 4. The Prophet was severely ill before his death and during the descent of the last revelations.

Yet, nonetheless there are many evidences that support the presence of written volumes of the Quran in a gathered form *during* the life of the Prophet. One such evidence is the early historical report that states, “When people came to Madinah to learn about Islam, they were provided with copies of some of the chapters of the Qur’an to read and memorize them.”²⁰ Another powerful evidence comes from the Quran itself which states:

This is indeed a Qur’an most honourable, in a book well guarded, which none shall touch except those who are pure. A revelation from the Lord of the Universe. {56:77-80}

From the hadith, we also read the following from Abdullah ibn ‘Umar, who states:

The Messenger of God said: “Do not take the Qur’an on a journey with you, for I am afraid that it might fall into the hands of the enemy.”²¹ [Bukhari]

Another well known report gathered in the books of *Seerah* (biography and study of the life of the Prophet Muhammad) states that during the Final Pilgrimage of the Prophet that he gave a sermon to the large gathering of Muslims there, and that in it he said: “*I have left with you something which if you will*

²⁰ Hamidullah, M. (1955). *As Sahifa tul Sahiha - Sahifa Hammam Ibn Munnabbih*. Hyderabad.

²¹ The reason for this prohibition appears to be two-fold: 1) due to the risk, early on in Islam and prior to the standardization of the Quran, that enemies of the Muslims would seek to corrupt the text, and 2) due to the fear of the enemies of Islam belittling or abusing the words of God.

hold fast to it you will not go astray—the book of God (Quran) and the practice of his Prophet (Sunnah).” [Muwatta]

This advice from the Prophet also indicates that the Quran was available as a book, or in one volume, before his death, or otherwise he would have described it in other terms.

Concerning the positioning of verses in the suras, the Companion, and later caliph, Uthman states that in the latter days of the Prophet, whenever a verse was revealed, that he used to call someone from the scribes (who used to write for him) and tell them: “Place these verses in such and such sura.”²² This passage demonstrates clearly how the Prophet gave instructions for the arrangement of the material.

Furthermore, there are three hadith in the famous collection of Bukhari (recognized as the most authentic book in Islam after the Quran), stating that the Archangel Gabriel used to recite the Qur’an with the Prophet once a year in the fasting month of Ramadan, but that he recited it with him twice in the year which he died²³.

Lastly, the position and arrangement of the verses was obviously well known to the Companions, as they needed this knowledge in order to perform their daily prayers, which involves the recitation of parts of the Qur’an in the prayers.

In summary then, the following factors provide for significant evidence to establish the collection of the Quran in writing during the lifetime of the Prophet:

1. Quranic revelation was written down very early in the days of the Prophet’s call.
2. The Prophet had many dedicated scribes, over twenty, who wrote down scripture when it was revealed.
3. The Prophet himself instructed his scribes as to where the verses should be placed upon their revelation, and thus established their position and arrangement.
4. This position and arrangement was well known to the Companions and strictly maintained by them in their daily prayers and other acts of worship.

²² al-Baghawi, Muhammad Husain b. Masud. (1997). *Sharh as-Sunna*, edited by Zuhair ash-Shawish, al-Maktab al-Islami, 2nd ed. volume 4. Beirut.

²³ “Gabriel used to repeat the recitation of the Qur’an with the Prophet (ﷺ) once a year, but he repeated it twice with him in the year he died.” [Bukhari]

5. The Archangel Gabriel reviewed the entire Quran with the Prophet annually in Ramadan, and went through it twice in the year the Prophet died.
6. There are several established reports about the existence of the written Quran, in the form of a book, during the lifetime of the Prophet.

So, upon his death, the Messenger had left the Muslims of that era, and those to come, hundreds of Companions who had memorized the entire Quran, as well as written copies of the chapters with verses arranged and ordered, some in volumes and others loosely separated.

So, the writing and collection of the Quran, both being done in the lifetime of the Prophet, comes in sharp contrast to the collection of the religious scriptures of other faiths. It is an undeniable fact that the Old and New Testament scriptures, were written, compiled and edited over much longer periods of time, sometimes centuries; and even today are subject to criticism and re-evaluation as was done with the King James Bible when it was revised into the English Revised Version of the Bible²⁴ in the late nineteenth century. This, of course, also is beside the fact that the entire Gospel of Jesus, as mentioned previously, has been either lost or destroyed.

The Final Preparation of the Quran

The Quran that remains in the hands of billions of Muslims today was prepared in two main stages by the two Companions Abu Bakr and Uthman during their respective periods of leading the Muslim empire after the death of the Prophet.

In the year 633 CE (about six months after the death of the Prophet), the noble Companion Abu Bakr was the caliph of the Muslims and led them in the Battle of Yamama. It was in this crucial battle that a large number of Muslims who had memorised the Qur'an, approximately seventy, were killed. Thus, some of the Companions feared that unless a standard

²⁴ Revisers of the King James Bible were tasked with making changes only if they were deemed necessary to be more accurate and faithful to the Original Greek and Hebrew texts. In the New Testament alone more than 30,000 changes were made, over 5,000 on the basis of what were considered better Greek manuscripts.

written copy of the Qur'an were prepared that portions of the revelation might be lost.

It was decided after some deliberation that the main scribe of the Prophet during his lifetime, Zaid ibn Thabit, would lead the task of gathering all the written portions of the Quran. Using the memory of multiple persons as a check and balance, he compiled one volume of the Quran. His committee in this momentous task was composed of some of the most devout, God-fearing and trustworthy Companions of the Prophet, and also included those who had memorized the entire Quran. Zaid himself was also one of the main Companions certified by the Prophet during his lifetime to teach the Quran.

The committee, in examining the written material submitted to them, insisted on very stringent criteria as a safeguard against any errors²⁵.

1. The material must have been originally written down in the presence of the Prophet. Nothing written down later on the basis of memory alone was to be accepted.

2. The material must be confirmed by two witnesses, that is to say, by two trustworthy persons testifying that they themselves had heard the Prophet recite the passage in question.²⁶

²⁵ Al-Asqalani, Ahmad ibn Hajar. (1997). *Fath al-bari Sharh Sahih al-Bukhari*. Riyadh: Dar al-Salam.

²⁶ Umar said, "Whoever received anything of the Quran from the Prophet, then let him bring it." And they used to write it on the parchments and bones and date-palm leaves. He said that nothing would be accepted from anyone until two witnesses testify to it. And this demonstrates that Zayd was not satisfied solely with finding it written down, until someone testified that he heard it, even though Zayd himself had memorized it. Hence, they used to take this extra step in order to be more cautious. And Abu Dawud records a narration on the authority of Hisham ibn 'Urwa that his father said that Abu Bakr said to Umar and Zayd, "Sit down at the door of the Mosque and whoever of two witnesses come to you regarding the Quran, then write it down." The men of this narration are trustworthy despite the chain being broken, and the intended meaning regarding two witnesses was memorization and writing, or it meant that they both testify that what was written down was actually written down under the authority of the Messenger, or it meant that they both testify that it was sent down as Quranic revelation. And thus, it was their methodology that nothing was written down, until they receive what was written down during the time of the Prophet him, and not just from memorization. (Al-Asqalani, Ahmad ibn Hajar. *Fath al-bari Sharh Sahih al-*

This official manuscript on which the Qur'an was collected, remained with Abu Bakr till his death, and then with the next caliph, Umar ibn Al-Khattab till his death, and finally it remained with Hafsa, Umar's daughter²⁷. It should be further noted that other personal manuscripts of the Quran did exist with some of the well known Companions at this time as well. Some modern day critics have tried to use the presence of these copies to indicate some sort of jealous quarreling between the Companions, whereas no such thing has ever been documented in any authentic sources.

Bukhari. Kitab: Fadaa'il Al Qur'aan, Baab: Jami' Al Qur'aan, Commentary on Hadith no. 4603)

²⁷ Zaid bin Thabit Al-Ansari, who was one of those who used to write the Divine Revelation, narrates: "Abu Bakr sent for me after the (heavy) casualties among the warriors of the battle of Yamama. Umar was present with Abu Bakr who said, 'Umar has come to me and said, 'The people have suffered heavy casualties on the day of the battle of Yamama, and I am afraid that there will be more casualties among the those who have memorized the Qur'an on other battle-fields, whereby a large part of the Qur'an may be lost, unless you collect it. And I am of the opinion that you should collect the Qur'an.' ... Then Abu Bakr said to me, 'You are a wise young man and we do not suspect you of telling lies or of forgetfulness, and you used to write the Divine Inspiration for God's Messenger (ﷺ). Therefore, look for the Qur'an and collect it in one manuscript.' By God, if [Abu Bakr] had ordered me to move one of the mountains, it would not have been harder for me than what he had ordered me concerning the collection of the Qur'an. ... So I started locating the various passages of the Qur'anic and collecting it from parchments, bones, leaf-stalks of date palms and from the memories of men (who knew it by heart). I found with Abi Khuzaymah two Verses of Surat-at-Tauba which I had not found with anybody else, 'There has certainly come to you a Messenger from among yourselves. Grievous to him is what you suffer, [he is] concerned over you and to the believers is kind and merciful. But if they turn away, [O Muhammad], say, 'Sufficient for me is Allah, there is no deity except Him. On Him I have relied, and He is the Lord of the Great Throne'. (9.128-129) The manuscript on which the Qur'an was collected, remained with Abu Bakr till God took him, and then with Umar till God took him, and finally it remained with Hafsa, Umar's daughter.'" [Bukhari] **Note:** "And when Zayd found [these two verses] with Abi Khuzaymah, [the committee] remembered it just as how Zayd remembered it (and hence it was accepted)." (Al-Asqalani, Ahmad ibn Hajar. *Fath al-bari Sharh Sahih al-Bukhari. Kitab: Fadaa'il Al Qur'aan, Baab: Jami' Al Qur'aan, Commentary on Hadith no. 4603)*

In fact, a careful study of these other manuscripts indicates that they differed from the official copy of Abu Bakr by sometimes no more than twelve or fifteen verses, and that none of these Companions with the deficient copies ever held their copy to be more correct or complete than the official manuscript collected by Zaid ibn Thabit and his team.²⁸

Indeed, the copy of the Quran prepared by Zaid ibn Thabit's team was unanimously approved by all of the Companions at that time, without exception. Concerning the *ijmaa'*, or unanimous consensus of the Muslim community, the Prophet had said,

My community will never agree upon error. [Ibn Majaah]

Had Zaid ibn Thabit even have made one mistake, even of a single letter in transcribing the Quran, the memorizers of the Quran, (which totalled in the tens of hundreds at that time) would have caught it right away and corrected it publically. This is exactly where the check and balance system of preservation of the Quran comes into play; a system which is not found for any other scripture besides the Quran.

The Mus-haf of Uthman

The Quran was originally revealed in the dialect of Arabic most common to the tribe of Quraish that inhabited Mecca. But to facilitate the understanding of the text for people who spoke other dialects, God revealed the Quran in seven dialects of Arabic. It is essential, though, to understand that though the dialect was different, the meaning was unchanged. To understand better, it would be like having a book written in both the dialect of the American South and in British English—both of these English dialects are notably different in pronunciation

²⁸ Some Companions used to write their own manuscripts and add comments or explanations to verses. At that time, writing did not include brackets or using a different color or font to distinguish the addition from the original text. Therefore, the comment/explanation was part of the original sentence, i.e. verse, leading some who examined them years and decades to think that it was part of the Quran, when in reality it was not. Needless to say the writer (Companion) knew the difference and could tell them apart. Thus, the Companions did not have a different Quran, they had the same one with their comments added.

and even in vocabulary, though they can convey the same meaning in their own manner. Thus, were the varying Arabic dialects at the time.

During the period of the third Muslim Caliph, Uthman ibn ‘Affaan, as the Muslim Empire was growing rapidly, differences in the reading of the Quran among the various tribes became excessive. As each region had learned the Quran from a different Companion, according to the seven dialects in which the Quran was revealed, the various dialectical recitations began to clash. Disputes were happening, with each town calling its recitation the correct one. Hence, the Quran entered into its second, and final stage, of preparation and dissemination, known as the manuscript of Uthman. We read the following historical account in the hadith of Bukhari,

Anas bin Malik narrates, “Hudhaifa ibnul-Yamaan came to Uthman at the time when the people of Syria and the people of Iraq were waging war to conquer Armenia and Azerbaijan. Hudhaifa was afraid of the differences between the people of Syria and Iraq in their recitation of the Quran, so he said to Uthman, ‘O Chief of the Believers! Save this nation before they differ about the Book (Quran), as the Jews and the Christians did before.’ So Uthman sent a message to Hafsa saying, ‘Send us the manuscript of the Quran collected by Abu Bakr so that we may compile the Quranic verses in perfect copies and return the manuscript to you.’ Hafsa sent it to Uthman. Uthman then ordered Zaid ibn Thabit, Abdullah ibn Az-Zubair, Sa’eed ibn Al-‘Aas and Abdur Rahman ibn al-Harith ibn Hisham to rewrite the manuscript in perfect copies. Uthman said to the three Quraishi men, ‘In case you disagree with Zaid bin Thabit on any point in the Quran, [concerning pronunciation or dialect only] then write it in the dialect of Quraish as the Quran was revealed in their tongue.’ They did so, and when they had written many copies, Uthman returned the original manuscript to Hafsa. Uthman then sent to every Muslim province one copy of what they had copied, and ordered that all the other Quranic materials, whether written in fragmentary manuscripts or whole copies, be burnt.” [Bukhari]

So, the Quran that Uthman had mass produced and sent off to the Muslim provinces to be the standard or official Quran

contained no differences (deficiency or addition) from the manuscript (*mus-haf*) that Abu Bakr had collected only six months after the death of the Prophet. This version of the text, also known as “*Mus-haf Uthman*,” constitutes the consensus of the Companions, whom all agreed that it contained what Muhammad had brought as revelation from God, and it was in one uniform dialect to remove dispute. Indeed, upon this collection, Naysaburi records that Zaid ibn Thabit said, “I saw the Companions of Muhammad going about saying, ‘By God, Uthman has done well! By God, Uthman has done well!’”²⁹

The last and most powerful statement that can henceforth be mentioned is that of the copies made by Uthman, two still exist till this very day. One is in the city of Tashkent, Uzbekistan, and the second one is in Istanbul, Turkey. As a matter of fact, their text and the order of their verses and surahs can be compared with any other copy of the Quran from any place or period of time, and they will be found to be nothing less than identical.

It is this amazing feat of preservation that prompted British author Sir Williams Muir, author of *Life of Mohammad*, to write, “There is otherwise every security, internal and external, that we possess the text which Muhammad himself gave forth and used ... There is probably no other book in the world which has remained twelve centuries with so pure a text.”³⁰ Of course, since the time that these words were written, another two hundred years have also passed still without any change in the Quran, and why should there be any change when the Master of the Universe Himself has undertaken the protection of this book.

Concluding Remarks

The noted German Muslim writer Ahmad von Denfer has written an excellent book on the sciences of the Quran, called *Ulum al-Quran*³¹. I include here some of his well written comments on the Quran as a conclusion to this chapter.

Those who embark upon a study of the Quran often proceed with the assumption that this Book is, as it is commonly believed to be, a detailed code of guidance.

²⁹ Naysaburi, al-Nizam al-Din al-Hasan ibn Muhammad. (1962). *Ghara'ib al-Quran wa-ragha'ib al-furqan*. 4 vols. Cairo.

³⁰ Muir, W. and Weir, T. (1975). *The Life of Mohammad*. New York: AMS Press.

³¹ Von Denffer, A. (2015). *Ulum al Qur'an*. New York: Kube Publishing Ltd.

However, when they actually read it, they fail to find detailed regulations regarding social, political and economic matters. In fact, they notice that the Quran has not laid down detailed regulations even in respect of such oft-repeated subjects as Prayers and [Charity]. The reader finds this somewhat disconcerting and wonders in what sense the Qur'an can be considered a code of guidance.

The uneasiness some people feel about this arises because they forget that God did not merely reveal a Book, but that he also designated a Prophet. Suppose some laymen were to be provided with the bare outlines of a construction plan on the understanding that they would carry out the construction as they wished. In such a case, it would be reasonable to expect that they should have very elaborate directives as to how the construction should be carried out. Suppose, however, that along with the broad outline of the plan of construction, they were also provided with a competent engineer to supervise the task. In that case, it would be quite unjustifiable to disregard the work of the engineer, on the expectation that detailed directives would form an integral part of the construction plan, and then to complain of imperfection in the plan itself.

The Quran, to put it succinctly, is a Book of broad general principles rather than of legal minutiae. The Book's main aim is to expound, clearly and adequately, the intellectual and moral foundations of the Islamic programme for life. It seeks to consolidate these by appealing to both the person's mind and to his/her heart. Its method of guidance for practical Islamic life does not consist of laying down minutely detailed laws and regulations. It prefers to outline the basic framework for each aspect of human activity, and to lay down certain guidelines within which man can order his life in keeping with the Will of God. The mission of the Prophet was to give practical shape to the Islamic vision of the good life, by offering the world a model of an individual character and of a human state and society, as living embodiments of the principles of the Qur'an.

With this being said, we shall now move on to the other source of Islamic revelation, the Hadith—or traditions—of the Prophet Muhammad, where will see more of the precise details that the author described above.

Hadith and the Sunnah of Muhammad – The Second Divine Revelation

After the Quran, the second most important body of sacred literature in Islam is the Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad, also known as the Sunnah (tradition or way).

The Meaning of the terms Sunnah and Hadith

The term ***Sunnah*** means tradition or way, and thus the Sunnah of Muhammad collectively represent the statements, actions and tacit approvals of the Prophet Muhammad. The term ***Hadith***, on the other hand, refers more specifically to the verbal and written reports collected that actually *describe* the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad. Thus, the hadith are narrations that, when looked at as a whole, can be described as the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad.

The Difference between the Quran and Hadith

Whereas the Quran is literally the spoken word of God, the hadith literature represents divine revelation expressed in the actions, statements, and tacit approvals of the Messenger of God. The distinction between these two types of divine revelation has been explained by the famous Islamic scholar al-Suyuti in the following way:

The revealed speech of God is of two types:

As to the first type, God says to Gabriel, “Tell the Prophet to whom I have sent you that God tells him to do such and such,” and He then orders something. So Gabriel understands what His Lord has told him, then he descends with this command to the Prophet and tells him what His Lord has told him. But the expression is not worded exactly the same way, just as a king may say to his officer, “Go and tell so-and-so, ‘The king says to you: make every effort in his service and gather your army for fighting’” And when this messenger goes and says, “The king says to you, ‘do not fail in my service, and do not let the army

break up, and send out the call for fighting,' then he has not lied, nor shortened, the message.

And in regards to the other type, God says to His angel Gabriel, "Read to the Prophet this document," and Gabriel descends with it from God, without altering it in the least, just as if the king writes a written command and hands it over to his trusted officer and says to him, "Read it to such-and-such person." And so he reads it to him exactly as it is written without changing the wording in the least fashion.

The first example is that of the Hadith, or Sunnah; whereas the Qur'an is represented by the second parable. From this understanding, Muslims consider the reporting of the Hadith to be according to the meaning of the message, unlike the Qur'an which is always transmitted verbatim without even a change in one letter.

Another important point that will benefit the reader is the concept in Islamic literature of "technical" (*shari'i*) meanings of words that sometimes differ from the linguistic definition of the same word. The word "hadith" provides a good basis for understanding this concept.

Generally in the Arabic language, the word hadith means: news, report or narration; and it also can mean: new or recent. For example, someone could say that he has a good "hadith," and this would be understood as good news. It is in this general linguistic sense that the word is used in the Qur'an. On the other hand, the word hadith also has a "technical" understanding, or a meaning more specific to Islam, that indicates specifically the reports concerning the Prophet Muhammad. Some people, neglecting the above understanding, will look into the Quran at a verse where God states, what is understood to mean:

And We have sent down to you the best hadith. {39:23}

They will then say, “Well, here God clearly states that the best hadith is the Quran itself, so why then do we need the reports of the Prophet to understand our religion?” This lack of understanding of terminology has led to a small group of people today neglecting the hadith of the Prophet entirely. So, is there any basis from the Quran for collecting and adhering to the Prophet’s Sunnah? The answer to this important question is the topic of the next section.

The Necessity of Following the Prophet’s Sunnah from the Quran and Hadith

The Quran is actually replete with verses commanding all Muslims to obey the Prophet, as he is commanding them with nothing more than the instructions of their Lord. A few examples from the Quran will be referenced here:

Whoever obeys the Messenger has indeed obeyed God.
{4:80}

No, by your Lord they do not really believe until they submit to your (the Prophet’s) decision in all their disputes between them, and then do not find in themselves any opposition to your judgments, and that they completely submit to them. {4:65}

When a matter has been decided by God and His Messenger, it does not behoove a believer, man or woman, to have any further opinion in such a matter. And whoever disobeys God and His Messenger, he is indeed on a clearly wrong Path. {33:36}

What the Messenger gives you, take it; and what he forbids you from doing, avoid doing it. {59:7}

So, reading through these selected verses, it becomes hard to understand how one could reject the Prophet’s Sunnah and try to “go it alone” with the Quran. The matter becomes even more irrational when you understand that the Quran provides more of

a general outline to the religion, and only in limited areas does it include specifics.

For example, God commands the believers to establish their prayers in numerous parts of the Quran. Taken as a sum, one could reasonably understand from the verses of the Quran that there are five daily prayers, and that amongst other things, prayer includes standing, bowing, and prostrating the face to the ground. But how do all these elements come together, and in what order? These details are not expanded upon in the Quran, but they are expounded upon heavily in the Sunnah where the Prophet instructs people in a step-by-step fashion, through hundreds of hadith, on how to pray.

So the hadith in numerous cases expounds upon the general guidelines provided in the Quran as the Prophet would always sit with his Companions (disciples) and explain to them how to understand the verses of the Quran. In fact, the Prophet had stated clearly in his final sermon to his followers:

“I leave behind me two things. You will never go astray if you hold fast to them: the Quran and my Sunnah.”

No doubt, the Messenger Muhammad even predicted that such a group would someday emerge, as can be seen from the following authentic hadith recorded by the famous hadith scholar Tirmithi, and others, wherein the Prophet said,

“A time will soon come when of you (Muslims) will recline on his bed, and an order will come to him on an issue which I (the Prophet) commanded him to do, or not to do. To this, the man will reply, ‘I don't know what you're talking about; what is found in the Book of God (Quran) is the only matter that we follow.’ To this the Prophet stated, ‘Surely, I am given the Qur'an and its example with it (the Sunnah).’” [Tirmithi]

So, here the Prophet clearly states that the Sunnah is something equivalent to the Quran, in that it also is a source of guidance

and understanding for people who seek the Truth. Neither one stands alone, but they each complement one another.

Can Hadith be Trusted as Authentic?

In very recent times, criticism by some has been directed at the integrity and authenticity of the process of collecting hadith. Many false allegations have become widespread, including the baseless idea that hadith were not physically recorded for one or two centuries after the death of the Prophet. This section will provide some of the factual details concerning the collection of hadith and the veracity of its related science in Islam.

In reality, the memorization of the Sunnah began *during* the lifetime of the Prophet by his own command. One authentic hadith that clearly illustrates this command is the following hadith:

Ibn Mas'ud narrated that he heard the Messenger of God say, "May God bless the one who has heard my words and then memorized them until he conveyed them to another person. Perhaps the one that he conveys it to will understand it better than he does." [Tirmithi, Ibn Maajah]

Other than from Ibn Mas'ud, this hadith has been narrated by twenty-three other Companions, and has been recorded in forty-five different collections of hadith. In fact, in his famous farewell sermon, the Prophet is recorded to have said, "Those who are present here should convey this message to those who are absent." [Bukhari] Furthermore, there are other hadith which include the command to spread the words of the Prophet, and warned of the severe punishment for those who intentionally twist his words. For example:

Abdullah ibn 'Umar narrated that the Messenger of God said, "Convey to others my words, even it be just one verse ... but whoever falsely attributes something to me which I never said should expect his own seat in the Hellfire." [Bukhari]

Hence, with the above mentioned explicit order of the Prophet, many of the Companions were known to both memorize and write down his statements or hadith. In fact, it was common among the Prophet's Companions to memorize verbatim the Prophet's statements to not only benefit from them, but also to inform those who were absent about the Prophet's sayings and actions. Also, there are a number of authentic narrations demonstrating how some Companions ('Ali ibn Abu Talib, Ibn Mas'ud, and Abu Sa'id al-Khudri amongst others) advised the Muslims who came after them (the Successors) to memorize hadith, which they would then do, either individually or in groups.

Close examination of hadith literature also shows how the Prophet used to teach his Companions through different educational styles and techniques such as: repetition, questioning, dictation, and practical demonstration. After teaching them, he would have them tell him what they had understood, thus ensuring that the message was transferred clearly to them. Along with his Companions, deputations from outside were also educated in both the Quran and the Sunnah, as was the Christian delegation of Najran, and the Prophet even had copies of his sermons sent to certain groups.

Additionally, the Prophet dictated letters that were sent out to the surrounding empires and peoples, some of which were very detailed and dealt with a wide range of legal matters. It can be safely said that there was a great deal of written instruction coming from the Prophet since it has been recorded that he had at least sixty-five¹ scribes during the twenty-three years that he was a Prophet.

Furthermore, some of the Companions were well known for their recording of every statement that they heard from the Prophet. Some of the more famous compilations were those of the Companions Ali ibn Abi Talib, Abdullah ibn 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, Sa'd ibn 'Ubâdah, Anas ibn Maalik and 'Abdullah ibn 'Amr ibn al-'Aas whose book of hadith is known as "*al-Sahîfah al-Sâdiqah*" (the Trustworthy Record). A large number of

¹ al-A'zami, M.M. (2016) *The Scribes of the Prophet*. London: Turath

Companions, including the greatest narrator among them, Abu Hurairah, thus had libraries of books which contained the statements of the Prophet.

In fact, it is authentically established that the Prophet gave some of his Companions the express permission to write down everything that he said. `Abdullah ibn `Amr ibn al-`Aas relates that he used to write down everything that he heard the Prophet say. Some members of the local Arab tribes censured him by saying, "Do you write down everything that you hear from God's Messenger while he is a man who speaks in happiness and in anger?" `Abdullah ibn `Amr ibn al-`Aas then reported that he stopped writing the hadith and went to mention this matter to God's Messenger, upon which the Prophet told him, "Write. For I swear by Him in whose Hand is my soul, nothing comes out from this except the truth." And he pointed to his mouth. [Related by al-Haakim and others]

Another authentic hadith that supports the above statement is from the narration of Anas ibn Maalik wherein he states that he heard the Prophet say, "Secure knowledge by writing it down." [Haakim]

Indeed, God summarizes this very point in the Quran when He says about the Prophet Muhammad: "***He does not speak of his own desire. It is only revelation that is revealed to him.***" {68:5}

The generation that came after the Companions, known as the Successors (*Tabi'een*), followed in footsteps of the Companions who were their direct teachers. They relied upon memorization and narration, in addition to taking from the written works, and some of them also recorded portions of the Sunnah in writing. They initiated the process of seeking out those Companions who had memorized hadith from the Prophet in order to write them down.

Some of the more well known records from amongst the Successors includes those of Sa`eed ibn Jubayr and Mujahid bin Jabr (both students of the great Companion Ibn `Abbâs); Bashir bin Nuhayk, who collected hadith from the hadith master of the Companions, Abu Hurayra; Abu al-Zubayr Muhammad ibn

Muslim ibn Tadrīs al-Makki, the student of Jabir ibn `Abdullah; and Hisham bin `Urwah ibn al-Zubayr. In fact, one such compilation is still available today, and that is *Sahifa Hamaam* (the Record of Hamaam), wherein the Successor Hamaam bin Munabbih transcribed directly from his teacher Abu Hurairah. In fact, researchers have proven that at least forty nine of the first generation Successors documented hadith in book form². These are the second source, after the records of the Companions themselves, for what was gathered afterwards.

It was not until the beginning of the second century of the Islamic Era though that the comprehensive gathering of Hadith was started on a large scale. This was done in part out of fear that the Sunnah could be lost as the Companions had spread throughout the rapidly expanding Muslim Empire, and their knowledge was being decentralized in contrast to when the majority of them lived nearer to the city of Madinah. The first people to do this were the famous Hadith scholars Abu Bakr ibn Muhammad ibn Hazm (died 120 AH) and Muhammad Ibn Shihab al-Zuhri (died 124 AH). These scholars then inspired others, like the great scholar Malik ibn Anas who is famous for his hadith collection, *the Muwatta* (which is still used and read today), to also thoroughly collect all of the Sunnah of the Prophet.

These early scholars worked diligently to create a system whereby no fabricated or flawed hadith would enter into the body of literature they were preserving. Amongst the earliest and most precise methods of preservation was the practice of a teacher reading to their students from the student's book, which was either a complete or partial copy of the teacher's book. Students and scholars would test their teacher's knowledge by inserting hadith throughout the book before giving it to their teacher for reading. Teachers who didn't recognize the additions were "denounced and declared untrustworthy"³.

² Azami, M.M. (1978) *Studies in Hadith Methodology and Literature*. Oak Brook, IL: American Trust

³ Azami, M.M. (1978) *Studies in Hadith Methodology and Literature*. Oak Brook, IL: American Trust

As time went on, students would read back what they had learned to their teachers, in the presence of other students with the same information, thus allowing for anyone with mistakes to fix them, and also so that the students present could also correct another student as necessary. Moreover, after a hadith book had been read in its entirety before a hadith scholar, the scholar would certify the student's copy by signing it, and the student was then allowed only to transmit the hadith reports recorded in that certified copy.

On the other hand, proof of direct verbal transmission was also absolutely necessary to guarantee that the student had learned the hadith correctly, as merely writing a hadith did not guarantee its exact transmission (due to the complexity of vowelization in the Arabic language which could have an effect on the meaning if not pronounced correctly). In many (but not all) cases, the student would have to memorize the hadith before it would be accepted from him by his teacher. Thus, students would most commonly hear the Hadith from their teacher (*Sheikh*), and then would later read the Hadith before their Sheikh, who in return either approves their reading or requires them to study it more.

This process of hadith collection and verification continued with increased strength and success until it reached its pinnacle approximately one hundred years later in the work of the hadith master Muhammad ibn Isma`il al-Bukhari, who died in 256 AH. His collection of hadith, officially entitled *Al-Jaami`u al-Saheeh Al-Musnad min Hadith Al-Rasool Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam wa Sunanihi wa Ayyaamihi*, but more commonly known since simply as *Saheeh al-Bukhari* (the Authentic Collection of Bukhari), would soon become the most famous collection of hadith in all of Islamic history, being regarded ever since its publication as second only to the Quran in authenticity and integrity. It took him sixteen years to compile this book, which Muslim scholars unanimously agreed is authentic and without any errors.

Many people falsely think that Bukhari went about and collected many of these narrations himself without relying on any other research, whereas in reality he depended upon the precise efforts of the multitude of eminent scholars before him as source work

for his collection. It is known that he examined over 300,000 hadith reports and gathered from them approximately 3500 for his collection which met only the most stringent requirements. This is not to say that the rest were not trustworthy. The reality is that Bukhari had a juridical, or legal-minded, theme in mind for his collection, and some hadith he reviewed, although authentic, did not have a place in his chapters. Of those that he did include, Bukhari only accepted narrations from the most trustworthy Muslim scholars who had attained the highest degrees of memorization, precision, excellence of character and trustworthiness, and who in turn had narrated from equally reliable scholars, all the way back to the Companions themselves who narrated directly from the Messenger of God. Bukhari himself underwent very stringent testing before his book was accepted by other scholars and students of Islamic knowledge around the Muslim Empire.

Those who have studied recent systems used in the West for recording history will find that there are a great many parallels with the methods used for collecting and validating hadith. In fact, the process of hadith collection has many exclusive factors that unbiased researchers would agree gives it a clear edge over other more modern methods of information preservation. Recent archaeological findings of some of the earliest hadith collections, including some from the first Islamic century, have furthermore demonstrated the total accuracy and integrity of this process⁴, for when these early texts were compared with modern collections, they showed no differences.

A Sampling of the Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad ...

On God's Immense Mercy and Forgiveness

1. Anas reported: The Messenger of God said, "**God, the Exalted, has said, `O son of Adam, no matter what sins you have committed, I will forgive you as long as you pray to Me and hope for My forgiveness. O son of Adam,**

⁴ Bonner, M. (2008) *Jihad in Islamic History*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University

I do not care if your sins are so many that they reach the sky, for if you would then ask for My forgiveness, I would surely forgive you. O son of Adam, if you come to Me with an earth-load of sins and meet Me associating no partners with Me, I would match your sins with an equal amount of forgiveness." [Tirmidhi]

2. Abu Hurairah reported: I heard the Messenger of God saying, "*When God completed the creation, he wrote in His book with him upon His Throne: `Verily, My Mercy prevails over My Wrath.`"* [Bukhari and Muslim]
3. Abu Hurairah reported: I heard the Messenger of God say, "*God has one hundred portions of mercy, of which He sent down one between the jinn, mankind, the animals and the insects, by means of which they are compassionate and merciful to one another, and by means of which wild animals are kind to their offspring. And God has kept back ninety-nine portions of mercy with which to be merciful to His slaves of the Day of Resurrection.*" [Bukhari and Muslim]
4. Ibn `Umar reported: I heard the Messenger of God saying, "*A believer will be brought close to his Lord on the Day of Resurrection and enveloping him in His Mercy, He will make him confess his sins by saying, `Do you remember (doing) this sin and that sin?` He will reply, `My Lord, I remember.` Then He will say, `I covered it up for you in the life of world, and I forgive it for you today.` Then the record of his good deeds will be handed to him.*" [Bukhari and Muslim]
5. Ibn `Abbas said: The Messenger of God said, "*By the One in Whose Hand is my soul, if you do not commit sins, God would replace you with a people who would commit sins and seek forgiveness from God; and God will certainly forgive them.*" [Muslim]

On the Relationship between Faith and Brotherhood

6. Anas ibn Malik reports that the Prophet said, "*No one amongst you truly believes until he loves for his brother that which he loves for himself.*" [Muslim]

On the Prohibition against Oppression

7. Jabir bin `Abdullah reported: Messenger of God said, "*Beware of injustice, for oppression will be layers of darkness on the Day of Resurrection, and beware of stinginess because it doomed those who were before you. It incited them to shed blood and treat the unlawful as lawful.*" [Muslim]

On Kindness, Love and Obedience to Parents

8. Abu Hurairah reported: The Prophet said, "*May he be disgraced! May he be disgraced! May he be disgraced, the one whose parents, one or both, attain old age during his lifetime and he does not enter Paradise (by being dutiful to them).*" [Muslim]

On Having Good Expectations from God

9. Jabir bin `Abdullah reported: I heard the Prophet saying three days before his death, "*Let none of you die unless he has good expectations from God.*" [Muslim]

On the Excellence of Setting Slaves Free

10. Abu Hurairah reported: The Messenger of God said, "*Whoever sets free a believing slave, God will deliver from the fire of Hell every limb of his body in return for every limb of the slave's body*" [Bukhari and Muslim]

On the Excellence of Knowledge

11. Abu Hurairah reported: The Messenger of God said, "*God makes the way to Paradise easy for the one who treads a path in search of knowledge.*" [Muslim]

On the Different Forms of Jihad

12. The Prophet Muhammad said, *“The most excellent type of Jihad is speaking the truth in the presence of a tyrannical ruler.”* [Abu Dawud, Tirmithi and Ibn Majah]
13. The Prophet Muhammad said, *“The most excellent type of Jihad is for someone to battle against their own self and its desires.”* [Saheeh al-Jaam’i]

On those who will be Shaded in the Shade of God

14. It was reported from Abu Hurayrah that the Prophet said, *“There are seven whom God will shade with His shade on the day when there will be no shade except His (on the Day of Judgment): 1) the just ruler; 2) a young person who grew up worshipping their Lord; 3) a person whose heart is attached to the mosque; 4) two people who love one another for the sake of God and meet and part on that basis; 5) a man who is called by a woman of high status and beauty and yet resists her seductions while saying, ‘I fear God’; 6) the one who gives in charity and conceals it to such an extent that his left hand does not know what his right hand gives; 7) and those who remember God when alone to such an extent that their eyes well up with tears.”* [Bukhari and Muslim and others]

On the Reward of those who Lose a Child

15. Abu Sinan said, *“I buried my son Sinan and Abu Talhah al-Khawlaani was sitting at the graveside. When I wanted to leave, he took my hand and said, ‘Shall I not give you some glad tidings, O Abu Sinan?’ I said, ‘Yes.’ He said, ‘Al-Dahhaak ibn ‘Abd al-Rahmaan ibn ‘Arzab narrated to me from Abu Moosa al-Ash’ari that the Messenger of God said, ‘When someone’s child dies, God says to His angels, ‘You have taken the child of My slave.’ They say, ‘Yes.’ He says, ‘You have taken the*

apple of his eye.’ They say, ‘Yes.’ He says, ‘What did My slave say?’ They say, ‘He praised you and said ‘Innaa lillaahi wa inna ilayhi raaji’oon (To God we belong and unto Him is our return).’ God says, ‘Then build for My slave a house in Paradise and call it the house of praise.’” [Tirmidhi]

On Bearing Trials with Patience

16. The Messenger of God said, *“The greatest reward comes with the greatest trial. When God loves a people He tests them. Whoever accepts that wins His pleasure, but whoever is discontent with that earns His wrath.”* [Tirmidhi and Ibn Maajah]

On Lenience in Judgment

17. Narrated ‘Aisha, The Messenger of God said, *“Indeed, it is better for the leader to make a mistake forgiving the criminal than it is for him to make a mistake punishing the innocent.”* [Tirmithi]

On Kindness to Animals

18. Abu Hurairah reported, Messenger of God said, *"While a man was walking on his way, he became extremely thirsty. He found a well and went down into it to drink water. Upon leaving it, he saw a dog which was panting out of thirst. His tongue was lolling out and he was licking moist earth due to his extreme thirst. The man thought to himself, 'This dog is extremely thirsty as I was.' So he descended back into the well, filled up his leather sock with water, and holding it in his teeth, climbed up and quenched the thirst of the dog. God was pleased by this man's action and forgave him his sins."* The Companions then asked the Prophet, "Shall we be rewarded for showing kindness to the animals also?" He said, *"A reward is given in connection with kindness to every living thing."* [Bukhari and Muslim]

19. Narrated 'Abdullah bin 'Umar: God's Messenger said, "A woman entered the Hell Fire because of a cat which she had [locked in her home], neither giving it food, nor setting it free to eat from the vermin of the earth." [Bukhari]

As a brief commentary to these last two hadith narrations that are concerned with kindness to animals, God has said about the Prophet in the Quran:

And we have only sent you [Muhammad] as a Mercy to the Universe {22:107}

This verse should be remembered when examining the multitude of hadith wherein the Prophet commands respect and kindness to humans (both Muslim and non-Muslim), animals, and even the environment, for undoubtedly where it not for the sending of Muhammad, much of the world would have suffered greatly from the greed and carelessness sometimes inherent in humanity.

Muhammad – The Messenger of God

That night, the air was crisp near the mouth of the cave where he worshipped. He used to go there for long retreats to better worship what his heart knew was the One. Muhammad had rejected his people's idol worship – their raucous singing, clapping and dancing at the Sacred House, often times while drunk. Something within him recognized the error of their ways, but they never really seemed to notice his sojourns to the mountain of Hira where he worshipped alone.

That night though, something was different. A certain electricity filled the air. It felt charged, but at the same time, peaceful. As he worshipped quietly that night, he suddenly realized that he wasn't alone. Terrified, he tried to back away from the swiftly approaching figure, but fear seemed to paralyze his whole body. Before he knew it, the imposing being had grabbed Muhammad by the shirt and pressed his trembling body firmly against the cold, uneven walls of the cave.

“Read,” he said to him in a thunderous tone!

“I cannot read,” Muhammad said with difficulty and fear in his voice.

The figure momentarily released his pressure, but just as quickly pressed him once again to the wall, repeating the same command, “Read!”

Muhammad quivered before him, but could only manage to say the same thing, “I cannot read.”

Unaffected by the response, the mysterious visitor pressed him further and said to him,

**“Read! In the Name of your Lord who Created All.
Created mankind from something resembling a clot.
Read! And your Lord is the Most Generous.
The One who taught by the Pen,
Taught mankind what he knew not before.”** {96:1-5}

And thus began the revelation. These were the first five verses of the Quran to be revealed to Muhammad from God, through

the Angel Gabriel. Although their first encounter was one that terrified Muhammad, the coming of Gabriel thereafter was more pleasant and comforting to the Prophet, and indeed they came to love one another as two brothers love and care for one another.

Muhammad was forty years old at the time of the initial revelation, and from that point on his life would never be the same. Before the descent of the revelation, Muhammad used to be known amongst his people, in the city of Makkah, as “*al-Saadiq al-Ameen*” – the Truthful, the Trustworthy. His people respected him greatly and he maintained a noble status among them before the trust of prophethood was given to him. But soon, his own people would turn against him and try to kill him.

The Mission of the Prophets and Messengers

As previously mentioned, when God revealed a scripture to a people, he sent with that scripture a Messenger. These men were sent with the heavy burden of declaring the word of truth to their people, and of informing them of God’s plan and command. They were to exemplify the Message, serving as role models for their people, to show them in the most practical sense how to apply the word of God to their own lives. Each one was aided by the Angel of Revelation, the special envoy to the Prophets and Messengers, the Angel Gabriel. Yet, no matter what the condition, no matter what the town, these men were always viciously opposed and sometimes even murdered.

These Prophets and Messengers provided their people with the correct interpretations of the words of God so that they wouldn’t go astray with incorrect and misleading interpretations of their own. They demonstrated to them how to perform the acts of worship prescribed for them like prayer, pilgrimage, charity, and purification, to name a few. They were oppressed and attacked, as were their followers, and so they were also beacons of light to show their people how to be patient, how to persevere, how to be forgiving and yet also, how to also properly resist in certain circumstances. Without them, God would be distant and unreachable; His words open to the interpretation of those with impure intentions. But they provided that direct link to God, and hence, life on this planet has always been shaped by the lives of these noble men.

Muhammad was indeed no different than his predecessors in many of these ways. He followed the honorable heritage of those before him like: Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Ishmael, Jacob, Moses and Aaron, David, Solomon, Job, Zachariah, John the Baptist, and Jesus, the son of Mary, to name only a few – a heritage of calling people to the worship of God alone. Yet, just as each of them had some special features, no doubt, Muhammad too was unique in his own ways.

The Character and Teachings of the Prophet Muhammad

In keeping with the summary nature of this book, only a few hadith will be mentioned here in order to effectively describe the mission and character of the Prophet Muhammad. The first hadith chosen actually describes the Prophet Muhammad in the words of his then enemy, Abu Sufyan. During the Prophet's time, he would send out letters to all of the leaders and nations inviting them to accept Islam, and one such letter was sent to Heraclius, the Byzantine (Eastern Roman Empire) Caesar. When Heraclius receives Muhammad's letter, he searches his city of Constantinople for any Arabs that may have been there from Makkah so that he could inquire about this man Muhammad and his message.

He discovers Abu Sufyan and a group of his men there on a trade caravan and brings them before him to ask them about Muhammad. What is most interesting about this recorded conversation is that at this point in time, Abu Sufyan was engaged in major hostilities against the Prophet and the Muslims. Yet, this is what he had to say in response to the questioning of the Emperor Heraclius:

Narrated 'Abdullah bin 'Abbas: Abu Sufyan bin Harb informed me that Heraclius had sent a messenger to him while he was in the company of a caravan from Quraish. They were merchants doing business in Greater Syria (present day Syria, Palestine, Lebanon and Jordan) at the time when God's Prophet had a truce with Abu Sufyan and the Quraishi disbelievers. So Abu Sufyan and his companions went to Heraclius at Ilya (Jerusalem).

Heraclius called them into the court and he had all the senior Roman dignitaries around him. He called for his translator who, translating Heraclius's question said to them, "Who amongst you is closely related to that man who claims to be a Prophet?" Abu Sufyan replied, "I am the nearest relative to him (amongst the group)."

Heraclius said, "Bring him (Abu Sufyan) close to me and make his companions stand behind him." Abu Sufyan added, Heraclius told his translator to tell my companions that he wanted to put some questions to me regarding that man (the Prophet) and that if I told a lie they (my companions) should contradict me." Abu Sufyan added, "By God! Had I not been afraid of my companions labeling me a liar, I would not have spoken the truth about the Prophet. The first question he asked me about him was:

'What is his family status amongst you?'

I replied, 'He belongs to a good and noble family amongst us.'

Heraclius further asked, 'Has anybody amongst you ever claimed the same (i.e. to be a Prophet) before him?'

I replied, 'No.'

He said, 'Was anyone amongst his ancestors a king?'

I replied, 'No.'

Heraclius asked, 'Do the nobles or the poor follow him?'

I replied, 'It is the poor who follow him.'

He said, 'Are his followers increasing or decreasing?'

I replied, 'They are increasing.'

He then asked, 'Does anybody amongst those who embrace his religion become displeased and renounce the religion afterwards?'

I replied, 'No.'

Heraclius said, 'Have you ever accused him of telling lies before his claim (to be a Prophet)?'

I replied, 'No.'

Heraclius said, 'Does he break his promises?'

I replied, 'No. We are presently in a truce with him, but we do not know what he will do in it.' I could not find opportunity to say anything against him except that.

Heraclius asked, 'Have you ever fought with him?'

I replied, 'Yes.'

Then he said, 'What was the outcome of these battles?'

I replied, 'Sometimes he was victorious, and sometimes we.'

Heraclius said, 'What does he order you to do?'

I said, 'He tells us to worship God and God alone and not to worship anything along with Him, and to renounce all that our ancestors had said. He orders us to pray, to speak the truth, to be chaste and to keep good relations with our family and relatives.'

Heraclius asked the translator to convey to me the following, 'I asked you about his family and your reply was that he belonged to a very noble family. In fact all the Prophets come from noble families amongst their respective peoples.'

'I next questioned you whether anyone else amongst you claimed such a thing, and your reply was in the negative. If the answer had been in the affirmative, I would have thought that this man was following the previous man's statement.'

'Then I asked you whether anyone of his ancestors was a king. Your reply was in the negative, and if it had been in the affirmative, I would have thought that this man wanted to take back his ancestral kingdom.'

'I further asked whether he was ever accused of telling lies before he said what he said, and your reply was in the negative. So I wondered how a person who does not tell a lie about others could ever tell a lie about God.'

'I then asked you whether the rich people followed him, or the poor. You replied that it was the poor who followed him. And in fact, all the Prophets have been followed by this very class of people.'

'Then I asked you whether his followers were increasing or decreasing. You replied that they were increasing, and in fact this is the way of true faith, till it is complete in all respects.'

'I further asked you whether there was anyone, who, after embracing his religion, became displeased and discarded his religion. Your reply was in the negative, and in fact this is (the sign of) true faith, when its delight enters the hearts and mixes with them completely.'

'I next asked you whether he had ever betrayed you. You replied in the negative, and likewise the Prophets never betray.'

'Then I asked you what he ordered you to do. You replied that he ordered you to worship God and God alone, and not to worship anything along with Him. And the he forbade you to worship idols and ordered you to pray, to speak the truth and to be chaste.'

'If what you have said is true, he will very soon occupy this place underneath my feet, and I knew it (from the scriptures) that he was going to appear, but I did not know that he would be from among you (the Arabs). And if I could reach him definitely, I would go immediately to meet him, and if I were with him, I would certainly wash his feet.'" [Bukhari and Muslim]

Looking further into the Islamic scriptures, one will discover that God describes Muhammad in the Quran thus:

"And We have not sent you forth except as a mercy to the universe." {21:107}

Muhammad's father died while he was but an infant, and his mother died of illness when he was only five or six years old. Yet, despite being orphaned at such a young age, he still grew up to be "a mercy to the universe" when he received that first revelation from God at the age of forty. The Prophet Muhammad is the Prophet of Mercy, sent by God as a mercy to all mankind; believers, non-believers, and hypocrites. His mercy sheltered all of humanity: men, women and children. As a family man, he raised four daughters, loving them and providing for them, and he cherished the memory of Khadijah, their mother and his wife of 25 years, till the end of his life. Muhammad was also merciful to all creatures, including animals and plants. He taught that feeding an animal can take one to Heaven, whereas mistreating it could take one to Hell.

When he began calling his townspeople in Makkah to worship God alone, as opposed to their many idols, he faced immediate resistance from many sectors of his society, including some of his own relatives. When people began submitting themselves to the worship of God alone, his townspeople – the people of Quraish as they were called – only escalated their resistance to him and began actively persecuting Muhammad and his followers. There are many stories from Islamic history that tell of the torture, humiliation and abuse faced by the first believers, and even by Muhammad himself.

One such heartrending story from the Prophet's life describes how one day he went out to pray in public while some of the pagan idol worshippers looked on. When the Prophet had prostrated his face down to the ground in prayer, one of the idol worshippers came and poured a large bucket of bloody animal intestines over Muhammad's head. Witnessing this tremendous abuse, his young daughter Fatimah ran over to her father and wiped away the filth from over his head with tears running down her young cheeks. Later, the pagans tried to kill Muhammad and his followers, both secretly and openly, to stop the spread of Islam. In fact, the first person ever killed simply because of their belief in Islam was an elderly woman named Sumayyah, who was killed in the first decade of the spread of Islam, after she refused to return to the worship of idols.

The seriousness of the torture to the early Muslims, and the threat of death to Muhammad and his followers, led to their eventual migration from their home town of Makkah, to the city of Madinah, about 13 years after the Prophet first received revelation from Almighty God. It was there that Muhammad established a city-state, and it was there that Islam took a strong foothold from where it would later grow to cover almost half of the world.

Almost ten years after leaving Makkah, the Prophet Muhammad returned with a force of 10,000 Muslims to conquer it and rid it of the worship of idols. Knowing that they could never fight or resist such a force, those people who had abused and tortured the Prophet and his followers wondered what would be their fate. Would he punish them, or even execute them, for their serious crimes? Yet, the Prophet's response to their crimes was to set his enemies free on that day, declaring Makkah to be a city of peace; a sanctuary and refuge for all. It was on that same day that one of his Companions erroneously called out, "Today is the day of the battle. Today God will humiliate the people who drove us out." Yet the Prophet objected to this and corrected him by saying, "No. Today is the day of mercy. Today God honors the Quraish." [*Raheeq Makhtum* and *Zaad al-Ma'aad*]

That is just one of so many examples illustrating how this man, whom God describes as a "mercy to the universe," dealt with those who opposed him. It is just one of many examples in the life of a person who faced constant death threats, assassination attempts, as well as abuse and humiliation at the hands of those threatened by his simple, yet profound, message; there is nothing worthy of worship except for God alone, and Muhammad is His Messenger.

Yet, the people of Quraish were not the only ones who tasted this mercy. It was his habit to pray for his enemies much of the time. Two of his most bitter enemies, Abu Jahl and Umar ibnul Khattab, were also the objects of his prayers. God later accepted his prayers for Umar by guiding his heart to Islam, allowing him to thereafter become the second Caliph, as well as one of the greatest and most righteous personalities in all of Islamic history.

The Prophet made similar prayers for his own people on a regular basis. "O God! Guide my people, for they know not," he

would pray, as he and his followers were beaten, humiliated, scorned and ridiculed. When the people of Makkah made things difficult for him, persecuted him and his companions, he could still be heard saying while wiping blood from his face, "O God! Forgive my people for they know not what they are doing."

There are also numerous examples that show us the love of his Companions for him:

Anas said, "I did not touch any brocade, nor silk, softer than the palm of the Messenger of God, may God praise him and grant him peace. I did not smell any scent sweeter than the scent of the Messenger of God. I served the Messenger of God for ten years, and in that time, he never said to me a word of annoyance, nor did he say about anything that I had done, 'Why did you do that?' or about anything I had not done, 'Why did you not do that?'" [Bukhari and Muslim]

Sa'd ibn Mu'aath said, in reply to the Prophet's shyness about asking his new hosts from Madinah to embark on a dangerous military mission to help other Muslims, "O Messenger of God, we have believed in you, affirmed your Prophethood, and pledged obedience to you. By God, who has sent you as a Messenger, if you were to command us to jump into the ocean we will do that. Not one soul among us will remain behind." [*Sealed Nectar*]

Yet, it was not only his close Companions who loved him so much, as was demonstrated by a simple and unnamed Companion who was seen by the Prophet to be wearing a gold ring. In Islam, it is prohibited for a man to wear gold, and so the Prophet took the man's ring and threw it to the ground, telling him it was like wearing a burning coal from the Hell-fire. Later on, some people suggested to that man that he pick up the ring as it could be sold or used for other legitimate purposes. But he refused saying: "No, by God, I will never take it, when it has been thrown away by the Messenger of God." [Muslim]

Indeed, the Prophet was true to his own advice when he would say, "God will show mercy to those who show mercy to others.

Show mercy to those on earth, and the One Who is in Heaven will show mercy to you.” [Tirmithi]

Looking further into the life of this noble man, we see how he used to also defend and stand up for his brothers amongst the Prophets and Messengers who were sent by God before him. While some of the ignorant people amongst the Children of Israel were describing Jesus with the ugliest and most demeaning words imaginable, Muhammad was teaching humanity:

“And Remember when the angels said, ‘O Mary! Truly God gives you glad tidings of a Word from Himself whose name will be the Christ, Jesus the son of Mary, held in honor in this world and in the Hereafter and of those nearest to God.’” {3:45}

While these same people were accusing the Virgin Mary of adultery, Muhammad was teaching:

“And Mary, the daughter of Imran, who guarded her chastity. And We breathed into her of our spirit and she testified to the truth of the words and scriptures of her Lord, and she was one of the devout servants.” {66:12}

And even now, we still find people bent on attacking the Prophets, yet now they focus their insults on the persona of the Prophet Muhammad by calling him a murderer and butcher. Yet it was this same man, Muhammad, who taught his followers the following words of God:

“Whoever kills another soul for any reason, except as a punishment for murder or for spreading corruption in the land, it is as if he has killed all of humanity.” {5:32}

Though he came at a time when the world was steeped in barbarism, he taught humanity mercy and justice, even during war. There were no treaties, accords, or international laws back then to regulate battle. He was sent by God with laws of justice that were to be applied during all times, both in peace and in war. He prohibited abuse during war as well as mutilation, and he forbade the killing of women, children and innocent people, as well as the destruction of property and trees in times of war.

But before moving on to other topics, a few more important questions need to be answered; questions that many of the readers of this work will likely feel need to be explored at this point in time. Amongst these questions are the following:

- Was Muhammad prophesied in other scriptures as the others, like Jesus, were?
- What prophecies, if any, did Muhammad make to show he was really a prophet?
- Is the Prophet Muhammad relevant today, and if so, how?

These are, without doubt, very important issues that deserve an in-depth review before proceeding further, and to make things easier, they all flow together as you shall now see.

Was Muhammad Prophesied In Other Scriptures?

This question doesn't require too much research, as the answer is clearly found in the Quran. God, in mentioning the characteristics of the true believers, states what can be translated to mean:

*Those who follow the Messenger,
the Prophet who can neither read nor write,
whom they will find described in the Torah and the
Gospel.
He will enjoin on them that which is right and
forbid them that which is wrong.
He will make lawful for them all good things
and prohibit for them only the foul;
and he will relieve them of their burden
and the iron chains that they used to wear.
Those who believe in him, and honor him, and help him,
and follow the light which is sent down with him,
Indeed, they are the successful. {7:157}*

So here, the Quran states what many Jewish and Christian readers may find difficult to believe. God is telling us that Muhammad, the Prophet who can neither read nor write, has been already mentioned in both the Jewish and Christian scriptures.

“But, I've been reading the Bible all my life, and I never read anything about Muhammad,” some of you might be thinking.

But, God doesn't lie, and the *description* of Muhammad is there, but many readers of the Bible have unfortunately failed to notice this because their interpretation of the Bible is so heavily influenced by others.

The Nature of Prophecy in the Bible

The famous author and Biblical scholar, Ahmad Deedat, reminded his readers of a very important aspect concerning Biblical prophecy when he asked the following question, "Where is Jesus mentioned in the Old Testament?"

Most Christians would now say that Jesus is mentioned in countless parts of the Old Testament. But, oddly enough, if you tried to find the name Jesus in the Old Testament you would be looking for a really long time – because it's not there. What is there though, is the *description* of Jesus.

Looking through Isaiah and Jeremiah, you can find many descriptions which only the Messiah could fit. And this is how we can conclude that he was prophesied, and thus accept him as one of the Messengers of God. So, why then should we accept anything different concerning Muhammad? What we should be looking for instead of his name, is his description – a description that only Muhammad could fit.

Once again, it needs to be made clear that a number of the subjects that are being presented in this book are the subject of entire books elsewhere. This issue is no different. There are several books discussing the issue of Muhammad in the Bible, and here, I will only give a summary of the strongest and most comprehensive arguments.

The Prophet of Deuteronomy

One of the strongest, and most compelling, arguments revolves around the words of Deuteronomy 18:15-22. Traditionally, these verses have been used as a reference to Jesus, but the following analysis will provide clear evidence that this prophecy refers only to Muhammad. The other notable aspect of this Biblical verse is the conclusion it draws concerning the believers' responsibility concerning this Prophet, and the dire consequences of rejecting or denying him.

Deuteronomy Chapter 18:

15 The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.

16 For this is what you asked of the LORD your God at Horeb, on the day of the assembly when you said, "Let us not hear the voice of the LORD our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die."

17 The LORD said to me, "What they say is good.

18 I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him.

19 If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account.

20 But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death."

21 You may say to yourselves, "How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the LORD?"

22 If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him.

So from the above verses, we can conclude the following about this promised Prophet.

1. He is like Moses.
2. He will emerge from the brethren of the Israelites.
3. God will put His words into this Prophet's mouth.
4. This Prophet will tell them everything which God commands.
5. Whoever rejects this Prophet will be taken to account by God, meaning such a person will be punished.

A review of all current day commentaries on the Bible (from the Christian perspective) state that this prophesied prophet is a reference to Jesus Christ. This, though, is absolutely incompatible with the some of the aforementioned characteristics, as well as other verses from the New Testament, as will now be documented.

1. Much has been written in other books concerning the similarity of Muhammad and Moses. A summary of these points will be given here and the reader will be left to research further if they are interested.

Both Moses and Muhammad had normal human births, normal human deaths, received their first revelations from God while atop a mountain, led their respective communities on a migratory journey, received a legal as well as spiritual revelation, fought their enemies in war, and returned to their birthplaces victorious over their enemies. Moreover, both Moses and Muhammad were separated from their parents in infancy, both were married, both had children, and both became prophets in their middle age.

Jesus Christ, on the other hand, cannot be said to be like anyone, as he was entirely unlike any other prophet. In fact, the correct translation of John 3:16 (see the Chapter on Jesus for a more detailed discussion) calls Jesus “unique”. Jesus’ birth was immaculate and unique in history, comparable only to that of Adam who was born without mother or father. He is the only prophet to have been lifted up into heaven without death, so as to return in the distant future; often known as the “second coming”. Furthermore, he was a young man as he lectured to the Children of Israel, and was a prophet of God before ever reaching middle age, which he will only attain in his second coming. He never married, never fought wars, never received legal revelations (only spiritual), and never achieved victory over his enemies in his life. So not only is Jesus very unlike Moses, but Jesus is very unlike anyone from amongst the prophets of God!

2. Another potential problem, depending much on interpretation, with declaring Jesus to be the prophet in question comes from the next characteristic of “the Prophet”; that he shall be from the brethren of the Israelites. In trying to formulate an understanding of who exactly are the brethren of the Jews, we look back into Genesis. The Bible refers to the Israelites as the brethren of the Ishmaelites:

“... and he [Ishmael] will live to the east of all his brethren.” [NIV, Genesis 16:12]

And this of course is rather logical when you consider it. Abraham had two sons, Ishmael and Isaac. Thus they were brothers and furthermore, their children would be considered like brethren to one another. Had the Prophet being prophesied been from the descendants of Isaac, as Jesus was, then it would have been stated, "I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among themselves". Thus, the brethren in question here are the children of Ishmael, from which Muhammad was directly descended.

3. Next, concerning the phrase, that the words of God were "put into his mouth," we find an interesting parallel in the Quran. In the Quran, God states what may be translated to mean:

***He (Muhammad) does not speak of his own desire,
it is no less than a revelation sent down to him. {53:3-4}***

Moreover, even a cursory review of the Quran will reveal many verses which command Muhammad in such terms as *Qul* (say), *Thakkir* (remind), *Nabbi'* (inform), etc. In other cases, someone would come to the Prophet Muhammad and ask a question, and often a verse would be revealed with a pattern similar to the following verse (They ask you ... say to them):

***They ask you about intoxicants and games of chance
(gambling).
Say to them, "In both of them there is a great sin and
some benefit for men,
but their sin is far greater than any benefit."
And they ask you as to what they should spend.
Say to them, "Whatever you can spare."
Thus, does God make clear to you His verses so that you
may ponder. {2:219}***

Yet, other passages in the Quran start with such expressions as "*wa qala Rabbukum*" (and your Lord has said ...). All in all, numerous verses from the Quran are thus "scripted" to a degree for the Prophet Muhammad so that He commands and transmits God's exact words, hence God quite literally put His words "into the mouth" of His Prophet.

4. It is interesting to note that 113 out of the 114 surahs (chapters) of the Qur'an start with the opening statement, "In the

name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Gracious”. In fact, the very first revelation to the Prophet Muhammad reads:

Read in the name of your Lord who created ... {96:1}

Following the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, there is no other religious community who starts almost every action in their daily lives with this formula, “In the Name of God”.

It should be reiterated here that the Arabic term “Allah” is the Arabic equivalent of “God”. To say, “In the Name of God,” before all religious, and even non-religious, acts is a great fulfillment of the prophecy found in Deuteronomy 18:19, “... he shall speak in My name.” [NIV]

Before moving onwards to the last point though, a few comments should be made. In all fairness and honesty, it is possible to interpret some of the statements from the verse in Deuteronomy as applying to Jesus which led to some confusion regarding his identity, both during his lifetime and afterwards. The following section from John, chapter 7, highlights this confusion as to Jesus’ identity amongst the lay people of his time (emphasis mine):

40. Some in the crowd who heard these words said, "This is truly **the Prophet.**"
41. Others said, "This is **the Messiah.**" But others said, "The Messiah will not come from Galilee, will he?"
42. Does not scripture say that the Messiah will be of David's family and come from Bethlehem, the village where David lived?"
43. So a division occurred in the crowd because of him.

Why were they confused? One reason is because the passage from Deuteronomy at first glance could potentially apply to Jesus. “Like unto Moses,” has been interpreted by Christians to mean that Jesus was like Moses in his preaching to the Children of Israel and his powerful miracles. Being amongst the brethren of the Israelites also could mean from amongst the Israelites since they were twelve tribes and the lineage of Jesus and Moses comes from two separate tribes who were “brethren” to one another. And of course, all prophets of God shall speak in His name and say what He commands to them to say, in one way or another.

So how then can we know the identity the Prophet? There are three pieces of information taken directly from the Bible that can make us certain. Firstly and most logically, the people were waiting for two separate people to come; one was the Messiah and one was the Prophet. Notice how no one said to Jesus at any point that he was both the Messiah and *the* Prophet. Even the above quoted lines from John show that the people were unsure as to whether Jesus was either the Prophet or the Messiah. No one indicated or thought that they could be the same person. Jesus was of course a prophet, but *the* Prophet was a separate person. This same point can be understood from the questioning of John the Baptist by the Jewish priests (Saducees and Pharisees) that shall be mentioned below.

Secondly, there are numerous instances where Jesus declares himself to be the Messiah (the word Christ being the Greek word for Messiah). In fact, he even directly asks the disciples who they think he is, and Peter correctly replies that Jesus is the Messiah. Yet no where does Jesus claim to be *the* Prophet.

The last evidence, though, lays aside all doubt for those who are sincere, and that comes from John 7:52 wherein Nicodemus, who would later become a disciple, is reminded clearly by the other Jewish priests (as is recorded in the oldest Bible manuscripts):

... Look into it, you will find that **the Prophet does not come out of Galilee.**

Undoubtedly, some people will continue to try to come up with false arguments to throw doubt into this otherwise clear matter, and for this reason other evidences will be presented below. But, a serious question here has to be considered, and that is the final point from Deuteronomy.

5. Each reader must now carefully consider the serious matter of how the threat of God's punishment is attached to the denial of this prophet! Those who deny him shall be taken to account by God as mentioned in Deuteronomy. And indeed the Prophet Muhammad himself stated,

Whoever hears about me from amongst the Jews and Christians and then denies me shall take his place in the Hell-fire. [Muslim]

Other Evidences from the Bible – the Questioning of John the Baptist

For those Christian readers who wish to understand this matter better, there is further compelling evidence. The additional evidence from the New Testament, which clearly demonstrates that Muhammad is the fulfillment of this very prophecy, is also taken from the gospel according to John.

John 1:

19 The Jews of Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask John who he was. John gave witness to them.

20 He did not try to hide the truth. He spoke to them openly. He said, "I am not the Christ."

21 They asked him, "Then who are you? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet we've been expecting?" they asked. "No," he answered.

To understand these statements, the reader must know that when John the Baptist began baptizing people, the Jewish priests and scholars came to inquire as to his identity. The Jewish scholars have always been known for their strong knowledge of the revelations and the prophecies, and so they were expecting three separate people: Elijah (his return), the Messiah, and the Prophet (the one mentioned in Deuteronomy and examined above). They summarize this when they say:

Some Pharisees who had been sent asked him, "If you are not the Christ, why are you baptizing people? Why are you doing that if you aren't Elijah or the Prophet we've been expecting?" [NIV, John 1:24, 25]

So before moving on to the central issue, who then was the Elijah that these priests were asking about? This question is later answered when Jesus, speaking to his disciples, said:

If you are willing to accept it, John is the Elijah who was supposed to come. [NIV, Matthew 11:14]

So, if John the Baptist represents Elijah. The next question would be, who is the Messiah? And this can easily be answered, without a second thought, as no one challenges that Jesus was the Messiah. So the only issue that remains then is, who was the awaited Prophet whom the Pharisees ask about? Modern day Christian theologians will say that this too is for Jesus, but how can that be so?

The Jewish scholars and priests were clearly asking about the three distinct people, as they had understood the prophecies to indicate that only three prophetic figures remained. Had Jesus been both the Messiah and the Prophet, then the priests would have asked something like, "Then who are you? Are you the Messiah and the awaited Prophet?" But instead, they clearly asked about two different people. Hence, Muhammad is *the Prophet* whom the Israelite priests were awaiting, and this fact should now be evidently clear to those who are truthful and sincere.

The Covenant of Circumcision

The next point of discussion also concerns the prophethood of Muhammad from Biblical grounds. One of the commonly quoted, albeit entirely incorrect, arguments made against the progeny of Ishmael becoming prophets, or part of the covenant between God and Abraham, is the following verse from Genesis 17:19-21

Then God said, "I will bless Ishmael. But your wife Sarah will have a son by you. And you will name him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him. It will be a covenant that lasts forever. It will be for Isaac and for his family after him. As for Ishmael, I have heard you. You can be sure that I will bless him. I will give him children. I will greatly increase his numbers. He will be the father of 12 rulers. And I will make him into a great nation. But I will establish my covenant with Isaac. By this time next year, Sarah will have a son by you."

So one could then conclude that the covenant, or agreement, between Abraham and God which amounts to the lineage of prophets and guidance, will be only for Isaac. The poor son Ishmael, on the other hand, would be made into a great nation, but had no share in the inheritance of prophethood it seems.

Or so many would have you think. The reality is that the above mentioned verses are so entirely in contradiction with the remainder of Genesis 17, that it is hard not to notice. Were verses 19-21 later additions or corrupted text? No one can say for sure, but let us look at the context of Genesis 17 to see for ourselves below (emphasis mine).

Genesis 17

1 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless.

2 I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers."

3 Abram fell face down, and God said to him,

4 "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations.

5 No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations.

6 I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you.

7 *I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.*

8 The ***whole land of Canaan***, where you are now an alien, ***I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.***"

9 Then God said to Abraham, "As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come.

10 ***This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised.***

11 ***And you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin, and it shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you.***

12 For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner—those who are not your offspring.

13 Whether born in your household or bought with your money, they must be circumcised. My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant.

14 *Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant."*

So let us now begin our examination of these verses.

In verse 7, it states that God said to Abraham: "I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you, for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you."

This verse states that *all* of Abraham's descendants, **without making any exception for whom their mother is**, shall be part of the covenant. Another very significant point made in this verse is that the God of Abraham is also the God of those that become part of the covenant. Once it is proven beyond the shadow of a doubt that the community of Muhammad (the Muslims) is also part of this great covenant, then there shall be no room left for those who try to say that the God of Islam is different than the God of the Jews or the God of the Christians.

The first evidence that the people of Islam are indeed included, by virtue of Ishmael, in this covenant comes in the next verse where God promises to Abraham that the land of Canaan shall belong to the people of this covenant. It is further interesting to note that this is a promise that was unconditional, and confirmed by God in the Bible at least 55 times with an oath, and at least 12 times with a statement, to be everlasting. Hence, in order to best understand this promise, one must know exactly where is Canaan? Two different definitions exist today¹, with a) the first definition representing all the land between the Nile River in Egypt and the Euphrates River in present day Iraq, and b) the second representing what is today the borders of the Israeli and Palestinian territories. No matter what definition is used though, it is important to know that Canaan was always centred on Palestine.

¹ The lack of clarity as regards the exact boundaries of Canaan is secondary to difficulty in identifying some of the geographical reference points mentioned in the Old Testament of the Bible.

Either way you look at it, since the coming of Muhammad which is now approximately 1400 years ago, these lands – whether you use definition (a) or (b) – have been under the control of the Muslims for over 1200 of those 1400 years, or about 85% of the time. So any unbiased reader would have to admit that possessing the Holy Land, as it is often called, for over 1200 years is a point that cannot be ignored. It is true that other disbelieving nations did possess this land, but no nation has kept it so long as have the Muslims, and they have imbued the whole territory with prayer, fasting, charity, righteousness and contemplation of God’s words unlike any before them.

The next evidence is represented in verse 10 and 11: “This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. And you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin, and it shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you.” So this means that the sign of God’s people, or the people of the covenant, is that their men are circumcised. So, was Ishmael circumcised?

In Genesis 17:23 we read: “On that very day Abraham circumcised his son Ishmael”. And later in verse 26 it reiterates the same point by saying, “Abraham and his son Ishmael were both circumcised on that same day”. Furthermore, the Prophet Muhammad carried out this tradition and instructed all Muslim boys to be circumcised. So once again, the Muslims are found to possess an attribute of the covenant, whereas the very people who claim to be inheritors of this covenant, the Christians, have left the command of circumcision! How could any reject, or try to get around, this command when God had so clearly stated in verses 11 and 13 that this covenant would be “in the flesh” and “forever to come”? As if to put an exclamation point on the idea, there is also verse 14 which says:

Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised *in the flesh*, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.

So in summary, there is no sound argument to be made for Ishmael, or the people of Muhammad, not being part of this covenant since:

1) Ishmael is a descendant of Abraham, and Muhammad is in turn a descendant of Ishmael,

2) The Muslims have been in possession of the land of Canaan for the overwhelming majority of their history, and

3) Both Ishmael and all the Muslims are circumcised according to the terms of the covenant.

Prophet or Liar? Looking Into the Matter of Prophecy

The last point to be mentioned about the authenticity of the Prophet Muhammad using the Bible involves the proof of prophethood discussed in Deuteronomy, where it states in verses 21-22:

You may say to yourselves, "How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the Lord?" If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord does not take place or come true, that is a message the Lord has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him.

So here we are presented with a litmus test for prophecy—if someone who claims to be a prophet says something that doesn't come to pass or come true, then he is a liar. But if he prophesies, and that matter comes true consistently and without fail, then this means he has spoken the word of God. So, the next major question would be to see if the Prophet Muhammad ever made any predictions, and then see if these came true or not.

First, we shall take some examples from the Quran of prophecies found in its text, and then we will look into the Hadith literature to review instances of prophecy there.

Prophecies of the Qur'an

There are numerous instances of prophecy found in the text of the Quran, but once again due to the introductory nature of this work, I will only select a few examples from both the Quran, and in the next section, from the Hadith.

1. The first prophecy to be discussed will focus on an event that was fulfilled during the life of the Prophet, namely the defeat of the Imperial Army of Persia by the Byzantine Roman army,

after their initial defeat. God says in the *surah* entitled “The Romans” (surah 30), what is translated to mean:

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Gracious

2. *The Romans have been defeated*
3. *In a land close by, and they, after their defeat will be victorious -*
4. *In less than ten years. With God is the Decision, in the past and in the Future. On that Day shall the Believers rejoice,*
5. *With the help of God. He helps whom He pleases, and He is the Mighty, the Merciful.*
6. *(This is) God's promise! God will not fail His promise, but most people do not know.*
7. *Most of them only consider the superficial dimensions of the present life, but of the hereafter they are absolutely heedless.*
8. *Do they not reflect within themselves? Indeed, God did not create the heavens and the earth and all that is between them except with truth, and for an appointed term. Yet truly many amongst mankind are disbelievers in the meeting with their Lord.*
9. *Do they not travel through the earth, and see what was the end of those before them? They were superior to them in strength. They tilled the soil and built upon it more than these have built. Their Messengers came to them with Clear Signs which they rejected to their own destruction. Indeed, it was not God Who was unjust to them, but they were the ones who wronged their own souls.*
10. *Then evil was the end of those who did evil, because they denied the Signs and revelations of God and used to mock them.*
11. *It is God Who begins the process of creation, then to Him you shall be brought back.*
12. *On the Day that the Hour will be established, the guilty will be struck dumb with despair.*
13. *There will be none to intercede for them from amongst those whom they (illegitimately) made equal with God. And they will reject their partners (whom they ascribed unto Him).*

- 14. *On the Day that the Hour will be established—that Day shall all humanity be sorted out.***
- 15. *Then as to those who believed and did righteous deeds, such shall be honored and made to enjoy a luxurious life in a Garden of Delight.***
- 16. *And as to those who disbelieved and rejected Our Signs and revelations, and rejected the meeting of the Hereafter; such will be brought to the ultimate doom.***
- 17. *Therefore give glory to God at the break of evening and in the early morning.***
- 18. *And to Him belongs praise in the heavens and the earth, and at nightfall and when you are at mid-day. {30:1-18}***

These verses were revealed concerning the victory of Persia over the Byzantine Roman Imperial territories of Greater Syria, and most importantly the city of Jerusalem which was its capital at that time. Heraclius, the emperor of the Byzantine Roman Empire, was forced to flee to Constantinople (current day Istanbul) where he was besieged by the Persians for a lengthy period.

The pagans amongst the Arabs who opposed the Prophet Muhammad were pleased with the Persian victory over the Romans, because the Persians were pagans like them as well. On the other hand, the Muslims had hoped for a Roman victory, because the Romans were People of the Book (Christians).

When the results of the battle were made known to the Prophet, he said, “They will certainly prevail,” and when asked to specify a time period he replied, “In less than ten years,” as the verse states. Seven years later, the Romans were able to push back the Persians after this heavy loss, regaining what they had previously lost in the years before.

Why so special you might wonder? What’s the big deal, nations battle back and forth all the time. The unusual nature of this prophecy comes not only in its specification of a time period, but also due to the deplorable state of the Byzantine Empire at that time.

Heraclius became Caesar of the Byzantine, or eastern Roman, Empire in 610, inheriting an empire left in ruins by Justinian. At that time, the empire had been overrun by the Slavs and Avars in the Balkans, and by the Persians in Asia Minor. In

611, the Persians invaded Syria, taking Damascus in 613, and in 614 they captured Jerusalem. They pillaged the city, destroyed churches, including the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, and took the relic of the cross back to their lands.

Also in 614, the Slavs destroyed the administrative city of Salona. Only Constantinople, Thessalonica, and a few other cities on the Adriatic Sea remained under Byzantine control during this Slavic invasion. The Persians approached Constantinople from the east as the Avars and Slavs pushed down from the north. Heraclius himself was nearly killed by the Avars in 617. The Persians also continued their absolute domination of the Romans by assaulting Egypt, capturing Alexandria in 619.

In 619, the Emperor Heraclius countered this near destruction of his empire by forging a treaty with the Avars, offering them a sizeable tribute (essentially paying them off), so that he could strike the Persians. With the financial backing of the influential and wealthy Byzantine church, Heraclius marched east to gather his troops in the spring of 622. He at last succeeded in driving the Persian forces out of the former Roman territories of Asia Minor and Armenia.

This represents his first series of victories against the Persians, putting an end to their streak of triumphs against the Romans. It is also this string of Roman victories that was prophesied in the Quran, as it was the beginning of the end for Persian domination in the former Roman territories, and it occurred approximately seven to eight years after the loss of Jerusalem. Heraclius' impressive final victory over the Persians, driving them totally out of Greater Syria and Jerusalem, came only five years later in 627 during the great battle of Ninevah.

2. Another amazing prediction was when the Prophet told his followers that they would be victorious over the people of Makkah, who at that time were their chief enemies. He saw himself making the minor pilgrimage in a vision and told his Companions about it. Knowing that the visions of a Prophet are like revelation and would come true, the believers prepared to go for the minor pilgrimage.

However, upon reaching the outskirts of Makkah, the Makkans stopped him at a place called Hudaibiya, and a peace treaty was concluded there after negotiations. Some articles of the Treaty were strongly objected to by the believers, and many wondered why they should return to Madinah without having performed the minor pilgrimage as they were upon the Truth and the pagans of Makkah were upon disbelief. Yet, the verses which were revealed following the conclusion of the Treaty described it as a clear victory, and gave the believers the decisive glad tidings of victory over the pagans of Makkah in the near future, which is as follows:

Certainly has God showed to His Messenger the vision in truth. You will surely enter the Sacred Mosque, if God wills, in safety, with your heads shaved, and [hair] shortened, not fearing [anyone]. He knew what you did not know and has arranged before that a conquest near [at hand]. He knew what you knew not, and He granted, besides this, a near victory. It is He who sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth, to manifest it over all religion. And sufficient is God as Witness. {48:27-28}

One year later the Muslims were able to perform the minor pilgrimage fulfilling the vision of the Prophet, and the year after, that they conquered Makkah. Indeed, although there were only about fifteen hundred Muslim men at the time of the treaty of Hudaibiyah, two years later the Prophet was able to peacefully conquer Makkah with an army of ten thousand Muslim men, as the two years of peace allowed the Message to spread far and wide in the Arabian Peninsula.

3. Another interesting prediction comes concerning the Pharaoh of Egypt, who oppressed the Children of Israel. God sent Moses to him with the mission of inviting him to believe in the One God, and to permit the Israelites to leave Egypt with Moses. Pharaoh refused and the struggle between them continued for several years. However, one night Moses succeeded in marching towards the Red Sea with his people, but Pharaoh, becoming aware of his attempt and resolving to annihilate the Children of Israel once and for all, set out in hot pursuit.

When Moses reached the Red Sea, he touched it with his staff upon guidance from God, and a miraculous path opened through the sea allowing the Children of Israel to pass into safety. Pharaoh attempted to follow him, but was drowned with his legions. This story, thus far, is very familiar to both Jews and Christians as it is also reported in the Bible, yet what follows is an ending (and amazing prophecy) found only in the Quran:

And We took the Children of Israel across the sea, and Pharaoh and his soldiers pursued them in tyranny and enmity until, when drowning overtook him, he said, "I believe that there is no deity except that in whom the Children of Israel believe, and I am of those who submit." Now? And you had disobeyed [Him] before and were of the corrupters? So today We will save you in body that you may be to those who succeed you a sign. And indeed, many among the people, of Our signs, are heedless. {10:90-92}

In the mid twentieth century, scientists examined the bodies of the dead Pharaohs and Kings of Ancient Egypt that had been excavated and put out for display in the Cairo Museum. They were able to narrow down the body of the Pharaoh of Moses with certainty to two bodies housed in the Museum, one of which happened to have multiple fractures of the bones of the skull seen by x-ray and evidence of drowning from a detailed examination of his thoracic cavity, as might happen if a mountain of water crashed down upon him². So once again the Quran comes forth with a prediction only realized in the past one hundred years!

Before moving on to the next point, these days, many people sadly repeat the lie that any stories of ancient peoples found in the Quran were simply copied by Muhammad from the Bible. What makes this particular prophecy so interesting is the fact that it is nowhere to be found in today's Bible, leaving us with one of two conclusions: a) either the Bible has been corrupted and this information used to be there in the past, but has now

² La Bible, le Coran et la Science: Les Écritures Saintes examinées à la lumière des connaissances modernes, Seghers 1976, (ISBN 978-2221501535), Pocket 2003, (ISBN 978-2266131032)

been lost, or b) that Muhammad is indeed the Prophet and Messenger of the One God who received revelation from Him, including details not revealed previously. You be the judge.

4. On the same note, the Qur'an describes the ruler of Egypt as "King" in the time of Joseph, whilst Moses addresses the ruler as "Pharaoh". This is a small, but telling, accuracy, for in the time of Joseph the rulers were from the Hykos Dynasty, and were Semites. They did not refer to themselves as "Pharaohs". This term was only used later by the native Egyptian dynasties that supplanted the Hykos Dynasty in the time of Moses. The Bible again proves inaccurate on this point referring to both as "Pharaoh". The Qur'an also correctly describes aspects of the ancient Egyptian religion, in particular the worship of Pharaoh as a god. These facts have only been realized in the twentieth century after extensive archaeological research, and hence, could only be known to Muhammad through revelation from the All-Knowing.

5. Another prophecy which has come to pass only in the past one hundred years is the re-establishment of the state of Israel. In the Quran, God states:

And We said unto the Children of Israel after him, "Disperse throughout the land, but when the promise of the Hereafter comes to pass We shall bring you together as a crowd gathered out of various nations." {17:104}

Here it clearly mentions that after the splitting up of the Children of Israel, that God would gather them together from different nations, which accurately describes the continued migration of Jews from countries around the world to the state of Israel even till this day. Furthermore, in the beginning of surah 17, from which this prophecy is taken, there is also the prophecy that God will destroy the Children of Israel as a punishment for their continued disobedience and flaunting of His law. Thus whenever God gives the Children of Israel power in the land, they should be careful to live up to the laws and codes which He has given them and avoid violating them.

6. The last prophecy from the Quran that shall be discussed is that of the hostility among the different Christian sects that was prophesied to continue until the Day of Resurrection. God said:

And from those who call themselves Christians, We took their covenant, but they have abandoned a good part of the Message that was sent to them. So We planted amongst them enmity and hatred till the Day of Resurrection, and God will certainly inform them of what they used to do. {5:14}

The famous commentator and Quranic scholar Ibn Katheer said about this verse:

“So We planted amongst them enmity and hatred till the Day of Resurrection” means, “We sowed amongst them enmity and hatred of one another, and they will remain like that until the Hour begins.” Hence the Christian groups, no matter what their types, will continue to hate one another and denounce one another as disbelievers and curse one another. So each group forbids the others to come to its place of worship, and the Byzantines denounced the Jacobites as disbelievers, and the Nestorians denounced the Arians, and so on. Each group denounces the others as disbelievers in this world and will do so on the Day of Judgement.

And this is their reality till this day, as many Christians themselves have witnessed. This kind of prophecy in the Quran is a type that had the people involved wished, they could have changed their ways, and thus disprove the Quran. Yet, they do not and cannot change as a result of their abandonment of their covenant with God, and this is another sign of the truth and miraculous nature of the Quran.

Prophecies from the Hadith of Muhammad

Keeping in line with the “litmus test” from the Bible which states that a true Prophet is one whose prophecies would come true without ever being wrong, the Sunnah is rich with prophecies. There are so many predictions that it would literally be impossible to mention them here as they are the subject of entire books and even encyclopedias. But an effort will herein be made to give the reader a good understanding of the detailed nature of the Prophet Muhammad’s prophecies whereupon more information can later be

sought. In all cases below, the hadith will be written and then followed by a brief commentary to aid in understanding.

1. Nafi' ibn Utbah narrates that the Messenger of God said: *“You will attack Arabia and God will enable you to conquer it, then you will attack Persia and He will cause you to conquer it. Then you will attack Rome and God will enable you to conquer it, then you will attack the Anti-Christ and God will enable you to conquer him.”* [Muslim]

And in a supporting hadith, Abu Qabeel narrates that once they were sitting with Abdullah ibn ‘Amr ibn al ‘Aas, and they inquired of him as to which of the two cities, Constantinople or Rome, would be conquered first by the Muslims. He then ordered that a container be brought out and from it he took out a book in which had written some of the narrations (hadith) that he had recorded directly from the Prophet. He then narrated to us the following:

Once while we were sitting around the Messenger of God, someone asked him, “Which city will be conquered for Islam first, Constantinople or Rome?” The Messenger of God then replied, “You shall first conquer the city of Heraclius.” [Ahmad, Daarimi and many others]

The Prophet Muhammad’s statement, “the city of Heraclius,” means Constantinople, which was the capitol of the Eastern or Byzantine Roman Empire where Heraclius was enthroned as Caesar. This prophecy indeed came to pass in the fifteenth century, eight hundred years after the Prophet made this prediction, when Muhammad al-Fatih, the Turkish Caliph, conquered Constantinople (the city is now known as Istanbul).

Both of these prophecies, of course, came true as history can easily attest, and furthermore, they came true in the exact order in which they were prophesied. The second hadith also provides evidence that the hadith of the Prophet were, in fact, written during his lifetime.

The Prophet also predicted the conquering of Egypt, and told his companions to treat its people well. Furthermore, during one of the sieges of his city of Madinah by a coalition of disbelievers

from different parts of the Arabian peninsula, the Prophet predicted that the Muslims would be given the lands of Yemen and the white palaces of Persia with all the treasures of the Persian Emperor (Chosroes). Some of the hypocrites laughed when they heard this and said, "Here we are afraid to even go out to answer the call of nature (due to the severity of the siege), and he deludes us with promises of conquering Rome, Persia and Yemen." Yet, all of these prophecies were soon accomplished within a few decades of the Messenger's noble words.

2. 'Auf bin Malik narrates that the Prophet said, *"Expect six incidents before the coming of the final Hour: The first, my death; the second, the conquest of Jerusalem; third, a plague among the Muslims that will kill them in large numbers; fourth, the abundance of wealth such that a man would not be impressed if he was given one hundred gold coins (because it wouldn't have as much value); fifth, a trial that would involve all Arab families without exception; sixth, a peace treaty with the Romans, which the Romans would violate and come to attack you (the Muslims) under eighty flags, with twelve thousand soldiers behind every flag."* [Bukhari and others]

Another instance of where the Prophet gave, not only exact details of incidents, but where they also occurred, and in what exact order. Jerusalem was captured in the first decade after the death of the Prophet, and only a few years later there occurred the epidemic plague outbreak in the 'Umwat region of Greater Syria resulting in the death of approximately seventy thousand Muslims. Also, wealth soon became plentiful with the conquering of Persia and several of the Byzantine Roman territories. Wealth, in fact, continued to increase amongst the traditionally impoverished Muslims to the extent that, in the time of the righteous ruler 'Umar ibn AbdulAzziz, the government could find no poor people to distribute charity to because everyone was so well-off. As regards the trial that will affect the Arabs, and the violation of the peace treaty with the Romans, neither have yet occurred, and they are understood to be the precursor for some of the greater signs that will come immediately before the Day of Judgment.

3. Abu Hurairah narrates: *The Prophet said, "The Hour will not be established till you fight with the Khudh and the Kirman from among the non-Arabs. They will be of reddish faces, flat noses and small eyes; their faces will look like flat shields, and their shoes will be made from hair."* [Bukhari]

In this hadith, the Prophet describes to the Companions how the Muslims of the future would fight the Mongol invaders (Ghenghis Khan, etc.) who can be described in a similar manner as how he described them above. In another hadith, he also advises his followers to "leave them where they leave you," in reference to their great ferocity and the horror they would later visit upon the Muslims when they would meet them in battle. The Muslims first encountered these epic warriors about seven hundred years after the time of the Prophet, and they were on the brink of annihilation in Greater Syria before these very invaders were won over to the religion of Islam themselves.

Moreover, the Prophet mentioned that there would be signs forewarning the approach of the last day (Day of Judgment). Among those that have clearly come to pass are:

4. 'Umar ibnul Khattab narrated that the Prophet Muhammad said, "... and from its signs (those of the Day of Judgment) you shall see the barefooted and nearly naked shepherds competing with one another in the building of tall buildings" [Muslim]

Today, we find the Arabs of the Arabian Peninsula, who less than fifty years ago (just before the discovery of oil in many parts of the Arabian Peninsula) used to be impoverished herders of camels and sheep, are now competing in building the tallest and most lavish skyscrapers on the planet. I myself was shown a video by a friend from UAE showing how that country has gone from open deserts with scattered tents and roaming nomadic shepherds to a veritable garden of luxury and technology with the advent of the discovery of oil in their land!

What is also unusual about this hadith is the fact that these tall buildings are being built in the desert. Usually, sky scrapers are built because there is not enough land to build outwards, and so the

only direction that you can build is up. Yet in the desert, there is plenty of land in all directions, but they compete in building skyscrapers out of extravagance and a desire to show-off, other characteristics that would become common before the last day.

5. Anas ibn Malik narrated that the Prophet said, *“The Last Hour will not come until people show-off and boast in regard to the mosques.”* [Abu Dawud]

In the past few hundred years, mosques have become more and more lavish, with tiled domes inscribed with ornate calligraphy, marble floors, and thick carpets overhung by expensive chandeliers; even though the Prophet ordered simplicity in the houses of worship and warned against extravagance.

6. Narrated Ma'qal ibn Yasaar that the Messenger of God said, *“By God, this world will not pass away until there comes a time of random killing in which the one who kills does not know why he is killing, and the one who is killed does not know why he was killed”* [Bukhari and Muslim]

Only in the last fifty years has this prediction come to pass in certain ways with an eerie kind of accuracy. In America today (a phenomenon which is sadly spreading into many other countries), gangs frequently require that new members kill a person randomly as part of their “initiation”. As such the killer has no idea why he is killing his victim, nor does the victim know why he is being targeted for death.

Furthermore, this has also spread into the arena of warfare where, all too often, soldiers are openly asking why they are being sent to distant lands and remaining there for no clear reason. The people who they are killing in the meantime are asking the same question as they are being killed in the thousands by “smart bombs” and the automatic assault rifles of terrified teenage soldiers.

7. 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar said, *“The Prophet came to us and said, ‘O Emigrants, you may be afflicted by five things, God forbid that you should live to see them. If fornication should become widespread, you should realize that this*

has never happened without new diseases befalling the people which their ancestors never suffered. If people should begin to cheat in business, you should realize that this has never happened without drought and famine befalling the people, and their rulers oppressing them. If people should withhold the required alms (zakat), you should realize that this has never happened without the rain being withheld, and were it not for the sake of the animals, it would never rain again. If people should break their covenant with God and His Messenger, you should realize that this has never happened without God sending an enemy against them to take some of their possessions by force. If the leaders do not govern according to the Book of God, you should realize that this has never happened without God causing them to divide into groups and then to fight one another." [Ibn Majah]

This tremendous prophecy from the Prophet Muhammad contains a great wealth of predictions, many (if not all) of which we see around us today. The first cause and effect relationship that is mentioned is tied to the increase in sexual promiscuity, and that new diseases that people had never heard of before would then spread amongst them as a consequence of that. This has clearly been fulfilled with the introduction of AIDS in our times.

Also, Muslims today are living for the first time in an era without a unified Muslim leader (Caliph). In the past, there were times where no Caliph was agreed upon, but never have the Muslims lived for so many decades without any central Islamic leadership. This problem can be traced back to the early twentieth century, when, for the first time, Muslim nations began using man-made laws and constitutions instead of the laws of the Quran and Sunnah. Shortly thereafter, they begin to have wars amongst themselves and then divided up into the many nations that are seen today, when before they used to be one large empire without borders. Once again, exactly as the Prophet predicted would happen.

8. Abdullah ibn Mas'ud narrated from the Prophet: *"Before the Hour comes, there will be a special greeting for the people of distinction, trade will become so widespread that a woman will help her*

husband in business, family ties will be cut, the giving of false witness will be common, while truthful witness will be rare, and writing will be widespread.”
[Ahmad]

Many predictions are found in this hadith of traditions that were not commonly found in the societies of the past. Women going out into the workplace, the increase in literacy, the increase in dysfunctional families or families that are separated; all these occurrences are recent, yet were predicted by the Prophet Muhammad over a thousand years before.

9. Abu Hurayrah said, *“The Prophet said, ‘There are two types of people among the people of Hell whom I have not yet seen. The first are people who have whips like the tails of oxen, with which they beat people, and the second are women who are naked, in spite of being dressed. They will be led astray and will lead others astray, and their heads will look like camels' humps. These women will not enter Paradise. They will not even experience the faintest scent of it, even though the fragrance of Paradise can be perceived from such a great distance.’”* [Muslim]

This interesting prophecy is another which has only recently been fulfilled with the introduction of new clothing materials and styles. Some of these new, synthetic materials are absolutely transparent such that the skin of a woman wearing these clothes can totally be seen through the clothes. This is in addition to the spandex and lycra stretch materials that essentially appear “painted-on” to a woman’s body, such that all the details of her body can be seen, even though she is covering her body. The description of the camel’s humps on the head can also be noticed from the different hairstyles seen today.

10. Abu Nadrah reported: *“We were sitting in the company of Jabir ibn Abdullah when he said, ‘Soon the people of Iraq will neither receive any food, nor any money.’ We asked, ‘Why would such a thing happen?’ He replied, ‘Because of the non-Arabs.’ He then said, ‘Soon the people of Shaam (Syria) will neither receive any money, nor grain.’ We asked as to*

why this would happen. He replied, 'Because of the Romans' [Muslim]

In this very interesting prophecy, the narrator (Jabir) tells the people about future details which he learned from the Prophet Muhammad. In this prophecy, he mentions that the people of Iraq will be effectively sanctioned to the extent that they cannot import food to feed their population, nor be able to bring money into the country, through the sale of their goods, like oil as it happened. Furthermore, their currency was so devalued as to become virtually useless in trade. Those responsible for these sanctions would be the non-Arabs in general.

The reader here is encouraged to closely examine the UN Sanctions against the then government of Saddam Hussein which have been described by even UN administrators as “choking” in regards to their mercilessness against the Iraqi people. A majority of UN nations participated in these sanctions from Europe, Asia and even the Middle East, though the only nations to allow violations to any degree were some neighboring Arab countries, like Jordan, which allowed people to go into Iraq, in order to help the impoverished Iraqis in violation of the stated sanctions.

As regards to the sanctions placed on Syria which are next described, these have also come to pass in the past few years, but have been driven mainly by the United States, in association with a number of European nations and their extensions, without participation from as many other countries in the manner that happened before with Iraq. The term “Romans” mentioned in the translation of this hadith is a reference to what is now known as the European nations and those countries that developed through European expansion, like the United States, for example. The literal translation of the Arabic term is “blonde haired people,” again making it clear that it refers to the European nations.

What is noteworthy about these statements of the Prophet is that they were made at a time when no one could imagine that a small city state, permanently under siege by the pagan Arabs, would reach such heights of power and strength that it would not only be victorious against the pagan Arab tribes surrounding it, but that it would also conquer the two superpowers of the time – the Empires

of Byzantine Rome and Persia. Furthermore, these prophecies are not couched in some vague terminology open to various interpretations often seen in other books which describe monsters and other fantastic elements that are later interpreted however they are wished by their followers, or even the hazy and elusive statements of those like Nostradamus. In sharp contrast, the prophecies of the Prophet Muhammad use clear language, provide direct assertions, and even sometimes specify names and times.

So these are just some of the numerous prophecies of Muhammad, that have clearly come true, and some of which have been fulfilled only in this present era, all adding weight to the evidence in favor of his claim of prophecy.

Relevance of the Prophet Muhammad Today

In today's modern and secular society, we see many advances that demonstrate the advancement of civilization. More efficient cars, faster airplanes, taller buildings, the genetic engineering of everything from foods to babies ... indeed one could legitimately wonder what a man living in the desert fourteen hundred years ago could contribute to such a society. Yet, beneath the advanced technology and neon lit streets of today's world teems a world which seems only to be going backwards in regards to moral integrity, societal equality, environmental protection and general kindness and respect to one another.

Our world today experiences more and more corruption and vice, where the strong devour the weak. Advancement was supposed to bring an end to racism, murder, theft, rape and all such evils, yet sadly, the secular experiment hasn't been able to do much of that. This is not to say that many of our advances as a civilization are without benefit. On the contrary, they are great tools by which we can serve one another and by which we can make our world a better place to live. Yet, there is one critical ingredient that continuously seems to be missing, and that is the spiritual dimension. The world today is in dire need of mercy, love and peace – all of which stem from God alone.

The Prophet Muhammad was, is and will always be an embodiment of these excellent values, amongst many others. When his mission began, the world around him was struggling

with many of the same vices of injustice, oppression, poverty, petty wars, infanticide, and racism amongst others. In twenty-three years, the Prophet Muhammad sparked a revolution that would alter world history and spread the message of peace, justice and mercy throughout many nations.

The message of the God, as delivered and lived by the Prophet Muhammad, continues today to guide millions upon millions of people to improve not only their own lives, but the lives of those around them. It encourages one to remember that this life is a life of testing and not the ultimate goal which we should be seeking. That there will be a day when true and complete justice will be meted out, and where one will find the fruit of their labor.

There is a distinct difference in the life of one who follows in the footsteps of the great men and women of faith before them, as opposed to the one who denies any reason or purpose to life. As you read through this book and see the impact of the teachings of Muhammad on entire societies and nations, as well as his specific instructions to individuals, you will gain the best appreciation for the true relevance of this man in today's world. Muslims already know this relevance because they know that Muhammad is relevant to the human race, and so long as we continue to be members of that race, his teachings will always be valid and practical.

Jesus Christ - the Revered Son of Mary in the Islamic Scriptures

Many people, especially Christians, are surprised when they learn that Muslims also believe in Jesus. In the Quran, Jesus is called the Word of God and the Messiah. Muslims also believe that God sent Jesus to the Children of Israel and that he preached to them until God raised him up to Heaven *before* the disbelievers among a group of the Jews killed him. Yet, although there exists a shared belief in the man, Muslims see him as a great and honorable Prophet and Messenger of God, and not as God or the son of God.

Why Don't Muslims Believe that Jesus is God?

As mentioned previously, the Quran speaks in detail about the absolute Oneness of God. To say that Jesus is God violates this rule, as it means that God has a partner in His Kingdom and Rule. Also, this idea is described in the Quran as being inconsistent with the Greatness and Majesty of the Almighty.

Sometimes Muslims try to explain to Christians why Jesus is not God by referring to certain verses from the Bible. This approach will only be used briefly in this book, because this is not the approach used by God in the Quran to answer this question. Some of the Biblical verses that are sometimes mentioned include:

God specifically states in the Bible that He is not a Man

God is not a man, that He should lie. Nor a son of man that He should repent. [NIV, Numbers 23:19]

The Knowledge of Jesus and God is not the same

No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. [NIV, Mark 13:32]

God is All-Knowing, but Jesus was not

The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. [NIV, Mark 11:12-13]

No One has ever seen God, but many saw Jesus

No one has ever seen God [NIV, John 1:18]

Jesus himself has a God, the God of us all

I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God. [NIV, John 20:17]

There are many other examples in both the Old and New Testament that indicate with clarity the difference between the God and Jesus, but it is not the purpose of this book to be a commentary on the Bible or to attack it. What then does God say in the Quran about why He is not Jesus?

Jesus called upon his people to worship his God and their God

They do indeed blaspheme, those who say, "God is the Messiah the son of Mary." But the Messiah said, "O Children of Israel! Worship God, my Lord and your Lord." Whoever joins others in worship with God, God will then forbid him entry into Heaven ... {5:72}

Jesus never told people to worship him or his mother

And behold! God will say, "O Jesus the son of Mary! Did you say unto men, 'worship me and my mother as gods besides the true God?'" He will say, "Glory to You! Never could I say that which I had no right to say. Had I said such a thing, you would indeed have known it. You know what is in my heart, though I know not what is in Yours. For You know in full all that is hidden."

"Never did I say to them except what You did command me to say, 'worship God, my Lord and your Lord,' and I was a witness over them while I lived amongst them. When You did take me up, You then were the Watcher over them, and You are a witness to all things."

"If You decide to punish them, they are Your servants, and if You decide to forgive them, then indeed You are the Exalted in Power, the Wise." {5:116-118}

Jesus used to eat food while God does not eat

The Messiah, son of Mary, was not more than a Messenger, like Messengers who had passed away before him. And his mother was a saintly woman. And they both used to eat (earthly) food. See how We make the revelations clear for them, and yet see how they are turned away? {5:75}

God is independent of any need. He does not eat, or drink, or sleep. These are all human characteristics, attributes of neediness and weakness, and the Almighty is free from such deficiencies. The entire Universe depends upon Him, and from Him do all receive their sustenance. This is why He is deserving of worship. If he were to be like us, a human who eats and drinks, having desires and lusts, who forgets and makes mistakes, or depends upon others – how then could He be God, and what should lead us to worship Him in such a case? God is, by definition, exalted above such attributes.

God does not sire children, nor was He born

***Say, “He is God, the One and Only.
God, the Eternal and Absolute.
He begets not, nor is He begotten,
And there is none comparable to Him.” {112:1-4}***

We are His creation, yet nothing is comparable to Him. He was not born, nor does He have children to carry on His work or to share in His Kingdom. Continuing with the theme presented above, it is important to consider if mankind should worship someone that was hidden within the womb, being sustained only by his mother's blood, only to be born through her privates amidst blood and bodily waste, then onwards to years of crying for food and needing someone to clean him from urine and stool. In Islam, such a being is not deserving of worship. Instead, the One who creates all, and has no need or weakness, is truly the only entity deserving of worship.

Why Don't Muslims believe that Jesus is the Son of God?

Similar to the reasoning presented above, Muslims adhere to the belief in God as One without partner, without associate. As above, I will try to make the bulk of this presentation a discussion of the logic presented in the Quran. Yet, as before, let

me share a few Biblical verses that are often cited to show that Jesus is most certainly not the Son of God, in the sense that the Lord of the Universe actually sired him.

Some of the Sons of God found in the Bible

Israel is my son even my first born. [NIV, Exodus 4:22]

Adam, which was the son of God. [NIV, Luke 3:38]

Blessed are the peace-makers for they shall be called sons of God. [NIV, Matthew 5:9]

Seeing such verses often confuses a number of readers. How can so many people be called His “sons”? The answer comes in understanding what this term actually means. A “son of God,” in the Bible, is traditionally understood to mean someone close to God or one of his servants.

Was Jesus different than these other “sons”? Some Christians state that he is different because he was *begotten* by God. The word “begotten” implies originating from or being produced by someone else; to procreate or sire. We will discuss the implications of this statement momentarily, but first let us examine the validity of the idea that Jesus was begotten of God by taking a closer look at John 3:16:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Reading this verse, it appears that this premise might have some validity since the verse does say, "only begotten son". Yet it must be remembered that the English Bible that many people read today is actually the translation of various Greek and Hebrew Bible manuscripts. Thus, the central question must be—do these manuscripts also state that Jesus was begotten. ***The answer to that question is no, they do not.***

The Reality behind the term “Begotten Son”

Deacon Bob Williams and Professor Paul Duff, both prominent day Christian teachers and Bible scholars, have commented on this whole issue in a very lengthy and scholarly treatise that I

recommend those who are interested in this matter to review. I will reproduce herein their conclusions so that the reader may understand from their research that the word “begotten” is a clear addition to the text of the Bible as it stands today. The following quote concerns the origin of the word “begotten” and why it is found in so many versions of the English Bible (any emphasis is mine).

First, the term came about because of translation errors. Most modern translators have correctly identified the original language and its intent, and thus have something similar to "one and only Son" (the NASB¹ retains "only begotten" in the text, but some NASB publishers include a footnote which states the literal translation is "unique, only one of His kind"). But some ancient translators apparently erroneously thought that the root of the second part of monogenes was gennao, instead of genos. Remember genos means, "of the same kind," but gennao does indeed mean "to beget," from which comes "begotten."

However, if gennao was indeed the true root, an additional "n" would apparently have to be added to read monogenNes. Hugo McCord used to advocate the "only begotten" translation, but then he wrote, "I, too, was in the same error. I did not realize I had to add to the Greek to get 'only begotten' into the New Testament. ***One added letter in a word lowers Jesus from being the only Son of God to being only a son of God.***" (Gospel Advocate, 3/30/86). ***Instead of being begotten, being truly unique relegates Him to merely being a created being like everyone else!***

Second, it appears that the term came about because of doctrinal reasons. Somewhere in the 3rd century, Origen promoted the doctrine of eternal generation (that Christ eternally came from the Father; not sure what all was meant by such, but the phrase and doctrine evidently caught on). This idea was furthered in the 4th century by Jerome and others to battle against the growing Arian heresy (Arius taught that Jesus was indeed begotten² or created by God).

¹ New American Standard Bible

² Arius taught that there is an essential difference between God the Father and Christ the son, which makes the son secondary, or lesser, than the Father.

Later in the same article they also state:

Notice that these translators were not consistent in the way they translated monogenes. Look at Luke 7:12, 8:42, and 9:38. In all these verses, the [King James Version] translators left out "begotten" and just put "only." In all these places, they were faithful to translating the original language as it really ought to be done. So why here and not the other passages? Because none of these are referring to Christ. *It is obvious that the KJV translators inserted their theology into their work.*³

Pagan beliefs or the Truth from the One God?

Now we have to address the entire question of God begetting children in of itself. In Islamic thought, such a statement is deemed to be very insulting to God because it implies that he would take to himself a woman from Earth and have a child with her—outside of marriage moreover! Such an idea is reminiscent of the pagan stories of Greek mythology where Zeus becomes infatuated with an earthly woman and decides to have a child with her, as was the case with the Greek hero Hercules. So to ascribe to the Lord of the Universe such behavior is likened to the beliefs of the pagans, and thus, is a grave blasphemy in Islamic theology.

With this understanding, one can then see the meaning in the following hadith of the Prophet Muhammad wherein he reports the words of the All-Mighty in saying:

The son of Adam has insulted Me, and he has no right to do so ... As for his insulting Me, he says, "God has begotten a son," while I Am the One and Only, the Sustainer of All. [Bukhari & Muslim]

Thus it is deemed a great insult to God in His Majesty to say that He would take for Himself a son, for this means He must

Arius believed that since Christ was begotten, he must have had a beginning, and thus could not be co-eternal with the Father.

³ Williams, B. (1995) *Jesus: Born, but Not Begotten*. Retrieved from <http://www.biblelessons.com/begotten.html>

also have taken a woman to have this son. Furthermore, there comes another pertinent question of why does God need a son?

Of course in Christian theology, God's taking of a son is for the purpose of saving humanity by sacrificing him. So, the answer from that perspective is that God needed to have a son to forgive mankind their sins and to admit them to Heaven; his blood washing away their sins.

Yet, the Quran comes with a most beautiful reply to this critical question:

*And they say, "**The Most Gracious** has begotten a son!"
Indeed you have put forth a terrible lie!
At it, the skies are ready to burst, the earth to split asunder,
And the mountains to crumble in utter ruin,
That they should claim a son for **the Most Gracious**.
For it is not consistent with the majesty of
The Most Gracious that He should beget a son.
Not one of the beings in the heavens and the earth
Except that they must come to **the Most Gracious** as a
servant.
He does take an account of them (all), and has numbered
them (all) exactly.
And every one of them will come to Him singly on the Day
of Judgment.
So as for those who believe and work deeds of
righteousness,
Upon them will **the Most Gracious** bestow love. {19:88-96}*

Now in this passage I have highlighted in bold one of the names of God, *the Most Gracious*, because there is a reason why God continues to call Himself by this title throughout this section of the Quran. Why? Through this attribute, He responds to the above statements by saying that He does not need a son in order to forgive His creation. Why? Simply, because He is already the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful, the Most Forgiving! He is capable, and ready, to forgive His servants simply when they ask Him for forgiveness!

Christian readers should ask themselves if they would presume to be able to do something that God is incapable of doing. Of course no Christian, or Muslim for that matter, would dare say

that they could do something that God could not do – yet we forgive people everyday with no strings attached. Sometimes our spouses say things that they don't mean, or our kids misbehave, or our friends forget to keep their promises—but in all these cases, and many more, we forgive them. We don't require a blood sacrifice in order to forgive others. We just want people to sincerely say they are sorry for their actions, and for them to regret any harm that was done—the very essence of repentance. Consider that and remember then how God is more perfect than all of us combined. How perfect and all-encompassing then is His Forgiveness and Mercy?

How do Muslims view Salvation?

As has been mentioned throughout this book, Islam is the religion that all the Prophets preached since it is submission to the One God. It would make sense then that the matter of salvation should be consistent throughout all the scriptures that God has revealed. This system of salvation can be summarized throughout all scriptures in one word—repentance.

This is what the Sovereign LORD, the Holy One of Israel, says “In repentance and rest is your salvation...” [NIV, Isaiah 30:15]

I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. [NIV, Luke 5:32]

From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” [NIV, Matthew 4:17]

Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out [NIV, Acts 3:19]

Salvation in the Quran and Hadith

And turn to Allah in repentance, all of you, O believers, that you might succeed. {24:31}

Say: “O My Servants, those of you who have sinned against their souls. Despair not of the Mercy of God, for God forgives all sins! Indeed, He is the Most Forgiving, the Most Merciful.” {39:53}

The Prophet Muhammad also advised the believers thus,

O people! Turn to God in repentance and seek His forgiveness, for surely I make repentance to Him a hundred times every day. [Muslim]

Due to this great emphasis on repentance and righteousness in Islam, some people have the false notion that in Islam salvation lies *only* in doing righteous deeds. While certainly, the performance of good deeds is a sign of someone's faith and brings one closer to God and His Mercy, but salvation itself lies in the Grace and Mercy of God as is clear from the following statement of the Prophet Muhammad:

Do good deeds properly, sincerely and moderately; and rejoice, but know that no one's good deeds will alone earn him Paradise. The Companions asked, "Not even you O' Messenger of God?" He replied, "Not even me, unless and until God covers me in His Grace and Mercy." [Bukhari]

Blind Faith?

One of the most common obstacles to understanding the above mentioned principles is the concept of blind faith, wherein people say, "You just have to believe," or, "It's a mystery." And with such statements, some people close their minds and throw away the key, having convinced themselves that religion doesn't have to make sense in order to be true. Could this be the case then? Is there any possible evidence against such a notion? Yes, there are a number of both scriptural and logical evidences that people neglect when retreating to blind faith. For example, in the New Testament it states:

For God is not a God of confusion, but of peace. [NIV, 1 Corinthians 14:33]

Everywhere around us we look and see order and organization. Everyday people study natural sciences like those of chemistry, physics and geology—sciences which are founded entirely upon order, and the constant laws that the Creator has built the Universe upon. Does it make sense then that we should find reason, logic and order in everything but religion? Absolutely not! And once again, this idea is not supported anywhere.

Consider the following words also from the New Testament:

Since what may be known about God is *plain* to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God, nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for *images* made to look like *mortal man* and birds and animals and reptiles.

Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served *created things* rather than the **Creator**—who is forever praised. [NIV, Romans 1:19-25]

So also in the Bible it states that the nature of God is clear and plain, yet people still seek to worship created beings and images as opposed to the Creator. Why? Because they have been misled by the very concept of blind faith.

The verses of the Quran reason with the reader to consider God's perfection, and direct the hearts to reflect upon the order and majestic clarity of His words when He asks mankind the simple question:

Do they not consider the Quran with care? Had it been from other than God, they would surely have found in it much discrepancy and contradiction. {4:82}

Yet, God does not author confusion and He has blessed humanity with minds by which to reason and to reflect. He has made His signs clear, plain and abundant for anyone who truly desires to understand. Consider also these clear and logical verses from the Quran:

Do they associate with God as partners those who created nothing and who are themselves created? {7:191}

If there were in the heavens and the earth gods besides God, then there would be absolute chaos. {21:22}

Jesus in Islam

Another unfortunate misconception prevalent especially among Christians is the idea that Islam is in some way equivalent to "turning your back on Jesus," or "denying him," causing them ultimately to turn away from learning more about Islam. Such people have regrettably not realized that only in Islam, Jesus has been given his due respect, honor and praise, without exaggeration or falsehood.

In Islam, Muslims know Jesus as the Word of God, which means that he was created by the Word of God, "be". Whenever God wishes to create something, He simply says, "Be," and it then comes into existence by His will. This can be seen in the beginning of the Biblical chapter Genesis where God says, "Let there **be** light". Thus, when He created Jesus, He commanded him to "Be" in the womb of Mary and he was then willed into existence. Muslims also believe in an immaculate conception and they honor the Virgin Mary for her piety, righteousness and purity. Indeed, great words of praise and honor are found in the Quran and Hadith for both the Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ.

Among these verses, the Quran clearly states that the first miracle of Jesus was his speech as an infant. The first time he spoke was to calm his mother during her birth pangs, and the second time was when he spoke in her defense, when her people questioned how she could have a son without marriage (inferring evil about her).

Muslims also believe that Jesus was the Messiah or Christ. Many Christians falsely think that the word Christ or Messiah somehow indicates that Jesus was God or His son, but the word Messiah is simply the Hebrew form of the Greek word Christ – both meaning, "anointed or chosen one". In fact, there are many things in the Bible that are called Christ (in Greek), indicating again that this word means that something is chosen for a specific purpose or anointed, but in no way does it refer to divinity.

Furthermore, Muslims believe that Jesus lived a noble and pious life, preaching to people and performing miracles through the permission of God alone. He had many righteous followers from among the Jewish people of his time. Among these followers were the Disciples, whom Muslims consider to be very virtuous and loyal to both God and His Messenger Jesus. Furthermore,

Jesus' pure message caused a great deal of grief and annoyance to a corrupted group of scholars among the Jews of that time⁴ to the point that they conspired to kill him.

In both the Quran and the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad, it states clearly that although the corrupted Jews sought to kill Jesus, they did not succeed in their evil plan and that God rescued him and took him up to Heaven without him having to die. The corrupt group of Jews then crucified someone who willingly took the physical image of Jesus before his ascension to Heaven, leaving the aforementioned Jewish group thinking that they had actually killed the Messiah.

Muslims further believe that Jesus will return near the end of time to kill the Anti-Christ. He will then remain on Earth as a righteous ruler, where he will marry and have children before his death, whereupon he shall be buried next to the Prophet Muhammad. In fact, there still exists, till this day, a reserved place for him beside the grave of the Prophet Muhammad in the city of Madinah.

In summary, a passage from chapter 19 of the Quran, a chapter entitled Mary, which discusses many of the points outlined above, will here be reproduced for the reader:

And mention to them the story of Mary in the Book, when she drew aside from her family to an eastern place [for solitary worship]. So she took a veil to screen herself from them, and at this time We sent to her Our spirit [the Angel Gabriel], and he appeared to her as a man in all respects.

She said, "Surely I seek the protection of the Most Merciful from you, come not near if you are one who does fear God!" He said, "I am only a messenger of your Lord coming to you with the announcement that you shall be given a pure son."

She said, "How shall I have a boy when no man has ever touched me, nor have I been unchaste?" He said, "Even so. Your Lord says, 'It is easy for Me, and that I

⁴ Not all Jews, since as mentioned elsewhere, there were many Jews who believed in Jesus and accepted him as a Messenger and Prophet of God. They followed his teachings and repented to God for the distortions in religious practice and scripture that they had falsely introduced.

may make him a sign to men and a mercy from Me,' and it is a matter which has already been decreed."

So then she conceived him, and withdrew herself to a remote place. And when the pangs of childbirth drove her to the trunk of a palm tree. She cried out in anguish, "Oh, would that I had died before this, and had been a thing quite forgotten!" But he called her from below her, "Do not grieve, your Lord has provided beneath you a stream. And shake towards you the trunk of the palm-tree, it will drop on you fresh, ripe dates. So eat and drink and rest. And if you see any man, then say to him, 'Surely I have vowed a fast to the Most Merciful, and as such I shall not speak to any man today.'"

Then she brought him to her people, carrying him. They said, "O Mary, you have certainly done a thing unprecedented. O sister of Aaron! Your father was not a man given to evil, nor was your mother an unchaste woman!" But she only pointed to the baby. They said, "How should we speak to one who is yet but a babe in the cradle?"

[Upon this, Jesus] spoke to them saying, "Indeed, I am the servant of God. He has taught me the Book and made me a Prophet. And He has made me blessed wherever I may be, and He has commanded me with prayer and charity, so long as I shall live. And also to be dutiful and loving to my mother, and He has not made me arrogant or disobedient. And may peace be upon me on the day I was born, and on the day I die, and on the day I am raised to life [in the Hereafter]."

That is Jesus, the son of Mary—the word of truth about which they are in dispute. It befits not the Majesty of God that He should take to Himself a son; exalted is He above all that they ascribe to Him. When He has decreed a matter, He only needs to say to it "Be," and it is! Indeed, Jesus did say, "Surely, God is my Lord and your Lord, therefore serve Him. This alone is the right path." Then the factions differed [concerning Jesus] from among them, so woe to those who disbelieved - from the scene of a tremendous Day. How [clearly] they will hear and see the Day they come to Us, but the wrongdoers today are in clear error. {19:16-38}

The Shariah of Islam – An Often Misunderstood, Complete Way of Life

Chopping off hands, stoning adulterers, whipping fornicators, beheading murderers—headlines from the grocery aisle shock tabloids or ancient forms of criminal punishment? Actually, these are some of the words that come to mind when the Islamic legal code, or *Shari'ah*, is mentioned these days. In this chapter, the *Shari'ah* will be examined and understood in the light of not only the pertinent evidences from the Quran and Sunnah, but also comparatively, from the standpoint of modern crime statistics.

Firstly, *Shari'ah* is the Islamic term that represents the complete and comprehensive system for regulating both public and private activities in an Islamic territory. It is based entirely upon the laws and rulings found in both the Quran and Sunnah, in one way or another. It is designed to govern the person's relations and duties towards God, his fellow man, his environment and even himself. It thus directs every sphere of human activity including the spiritual, moral, social, economic and political aspects of life.

The issues dealt with by the *Shari'ah*, in specific, can be broken into three categories: theology, ethics and law (*fiqh*). *Fiqh*, or Islamic law, is the branch which relates to the regulation of the outward behavior of people. This includes the rulings pertaining to the conduct of the human being with respect to his Creator (verdicts concerned with prayer, fasting, charity, pilgrimage, etc.). It includes those rulings concerned with the interactions between people, such as those pertaining to the penal system, business transactions, marriage, and divorce. Likewise, it also includes the rulings pertaining to the individual and the state, in both war and peace, such as military obligations, wills and property laws, amongst other things.

The ultimate aim of the *Shari'ah*, though, is the common good of mankind as a whole—Muslim and non-Muslim. As such, the *Shari'ah* is responsible for protecting or preserving five universal rights in the human being; the right to life, intellect, lineage, religion and property. One might ask though, why is the right to freedom not included?

Freedom in Islam

Islam considers freedom to be a natural right of every human. Without freedom, life loses all of its meaning. Islam elevates freedom to such a high level that it has made free thought the primary way of realizing God's existence, His existence being a fact that needs no external proofs or miracles to be known. God says in the Quran:

There is no compulsion in religion. Guidance is clear from error. {2:256}

This verse states that you cannot force someone to believe anything if they themselves are not convinced, even if you were to put a gun to their head or sword to their neck. A person must be convinced through their own free thought. If compulsion is forbidden in the matter of the worship of God, the most vital and essential concern in the life of a human (as seen in Islam), then how can it be tolerated in any other matter? This Islamic emphasis on free will and free choice can further be noted in the words of the great Companion and Caliph Umar ibnul Khattab, who is recorded to have said to one of his governors, "Have you enslaved the people after God had created them free?"

The Definition of Freedom

Freedom is a person's choice to do something, or not to do it, based upon their own free will and without interference from anything. It establishes the fact that every human is in control of their own affairs and that they are not owned by anyone, neither on the individual or state level.

But, does "freedom" mean we should be left entirely without any rules or regulation?

Islam's recognition of everyone's individual freedom does not mean that it leaves the person free of all rules and restrictions, because that kind of "freedom" is more aptly characterized as anarchy, and actually infringes upon the rights and security of others. No one's freedom should come at the expense of another's. For this reason, Islam sets down certain guidelines that guarantee balanced freedom for all. These guidelines are:

1. The freedom of individuals or communities should never jeopardize the general order of society or destroy its foundations.
2. The freedom of the individual should not lead to the loss of more general societal rights (e.g., one's personal right of free speech should not jeopardize the general security of another group of people).
3. The freedom of an individual should infringe upon the freedom of another individual.

It should also be remembered that one of the primary goals of the message of Islam is to release people from the constraints of the worship of their desires and the created beings, and to free them to the openness of the worship of the Creator.

Distinctive Features of Islamic Law

Anyone who studies Islamic Law will find that it is distinguished by certain unique features that are not found in other legal systems. These characteristics have been responsible for its stability, growth, and relevance for over fourteen centuries. Indeed, the *Shari'ah* has a lasting and global appeal, because it is the final, divinely revealed law for all of humanity, as it is connected with the last of the divinely revealed religions—Islam. Thus, it is a must for the *Shari'ah* to have unique characteristics so as to provide it with the durability and stability necessary to deal with the ever-changing needs presented by humanity—throughout the globe and across time.

Islamic Law is the broadest, most comprehensive system of legislation in the world, far more complete than any man-made legal system today or at any point in history. It was applied, through various schools of thought, from one end of the Muslim World to the other for the past fourteen hundred years. Only in recent times, with the impact of the colonization of the Muslim lands, has it temporarily ceased to operate except in limited fashion in a few places.

It also had a great impact on other nations and cultures throughout its history.¹ Many civilizations of the world

¹ Watanabe L. (2012) The Possible Contribution of Islamic Legal Institutions to the Emergence of a Rule of Law and the Modern State in Europe. In: Al-

borrowed their own legal systems from Islamic Law by way of contact with Islamic Spain, Sicily, West Asia, and the Balkans.²

Some of the unique features of Islamic Law are the following:

1. Nobility of purpose. Every system of law has an objective that it seeks to fulfill. This objective varies from culture to culture. It also varies due to the changing aims and objectives of those in power. For this reason, changes and amendments are commonplace, as nations employ law as a means of directing their citizenry to certain objectives.

Islamic Law, on the other hand, is not shaped by society. Quite the contrary, society is shaped by it. This is because man did not create it, but in fact, he must recreate himself in conformity to it. In short, Islamic Law aims at a great objective: that of realizing the benefits and best interests of both the individual and society, warding off whatever is to their detriment and giving preference neither to the needs of the individual, nor to those of society as a whole.

2. Islamic Law is divine revelation. All the injunctions of Islamic Law are revelation from God, so the one who is legislating for mankind is their Creator, Who knows best what will be of benefit to his creation in both this world and the next. He knows the psychological, as well as physical, makeup of the human being, what will be in harmony with it, and what will clash with it. Regarding this, God says:

Does the One who created not know? And he is the Gentle, the All-Aware. {67:13}

Man-made law, on the other hand, is the product of the human intellect that has limited insight and is continually learning and readjusting. For this reason, man-made law is often subject to deficiency and error. Therefore, the legislations that come from human effort are not always suitable for human nature.

Rodhan N.R.F. (eds) *The Role of the Arab-Islamic World in the Rise of the West*. Palgrave Macmillan, London

² Boisard, M. (1980). On the Probable Influence of Islam on Western Public and International Law. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. Vol. 11, No. 4, pp. 429-450. Retrieved from: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/163176>

3. Applying the rulings of Islamic Law constitutes obedience to God. Following Islamic Law is a way of worshipping God and earning His reward. Similarly, disobeying it equals disobedience to God and is deserving of His punishment. Some types of crime have prescribed punishments that are supposed to be carried out in this world. Others hold the threat of punishment in the Hereafter. Hence, the individual Muslim is always policing himself, not only out of fear of God (as opposed to only fearing the state), but also in hope of His Mercy and His eternal reward in the Hereafter—which for many people is a far stronger incentive to obey God.

As for man-made laws, the primary incentive to obey them is tied to the fear of criminal prosecution and civil liability, not the hope of attaining blessings and rewards from God. Likewise, disobedience to such laws does not result in as much a feeling of guilt, as long as it goes unnoticed by the authorities.

4. Islamic Law holds the distinction of being complete in all senses. It requires no amendments, no additions or subtractions. It comes to regulate four different facets of human interaction: the relationship between the individual and his Creator, the relationship between the individual and himself, the relationship between the individual and other members of society, and the relationship between the individual and the state.

If we compare Islamic Law in this respect to any of the man-made legal systems, we will find that the latter primarily deal with the relationship between the person and others, and the person and the government. As regards the individual's relationship with himself, who can often be his own worst enemy, it offers no guidance. It is also silent about his relationship with his Creator, who brought the person into existence and submitted the rest of Creation to his needs. In this area though, secular man-made law has conceived the idea of “separation of Church and State,” where God is kept out the law.

This notion of “separation of Church and State” is rejected by the *Shari'ah*, since God is the only Legislator in that He sends down the Law. Even though ethics is an integral component in both Islamic and secular legal systems, Islamic Law differs slightly since it is also concerned with the future of the human

being, not only in this worldly life, but also in the eternal life to come, by enjoining acts of worship that must be carried out by every believer in this faith.

5. Permanence in principles and flexibility in application. Islamic Law is built upon a set of fixed, unchanging principles derived from the Quran and Sunnah which have been accurately recorded and preserved. Many of these texts contain general rules for legislation, without going into all the precise details relating to application. This allows the judge the discretion to take changing circumstances into consideration.

For example, in formulating the Islamic political system, the religious texts give a general outline which includes such things as justice between the citizenry, obedience to political authority, consultation between Muslims, and cooperation in righteous conduct. At the same time, the texts leave the application of this general outline to practical circumstances that require a measure of flexibility. If the outlined objectives of Islamic government are implemented, the manner in which they are carried out or the different forms that this might take are not at issue, so long as the rulings imposed by the sacred texts and the principles of the *Shari'ah* are not violated.

Modern legal systems on the other hand have very limited collections of permanent principles, often in the form of constitutions that are successively altered by amendments, to go by with the result that change and reform often lead to the downfall of their basic national goals and fundamentals over time. The foundations and principles of most of these legal systems, although sometimes based on the concept of precedent, as in the US, are exposed to change and substitution so often that they become the targets of sport and corruption for a number of lawyers and legislators looking for their own gain.

6. The absence of difficulty. Islamic Law does not impose any obligations of great severity or difficulty.

Whoever closely examines the rulings of Islamic Law will find within them an obvious pattern of making things easier for the person. Moreover, all obligations that have been imposed, from

the onset, have had leniency and ease taken into consideration for the ones who must carry them out.

God has decreed that every legally accountable person must perform five prayers a day, no individual prayer requiring more than a few minutes. The one who is unable to stand is permitted to sit. Additionally, the traveler is given the license to shorten their prayer. Additionally, fasting is obligatory for one month out of the year. In spite of this requirement, breaking the fast is permitted for the one who is traveling or ill; and so on.

The obligations imposed by Islamic Law are few. They can all be learned in a short period of time. They do not have many particulars and secondary factors to consider, making it easy to know them. This is attested to by God's words:

God does not intend to make difficulty for you, but He intends to purify you and complete His favor upon you, that you may be grateful. {5:6}

The Islamic Criminal Punishment System

Understanding the foundations and basic principles of the Islamic *Shari'ah* are certainly important, but the attention of the world these days is focused mostly on only one aspect of the *Shari'ah*—the criminal punishment system. It has been called barbaric, backward and cruel, yet most people, even a significant percentage of Muslims, know precious little about this system and its rulings.

The primary goal of every criminal punishment system is the security and stability of the general populace. Certainly, security is a basic human need, no less important than food and shelter. Without security, society will quickly disintegrate into anarchy.

The Islamic criminal justice system is no different in this regards. As mentioned earlier, it is aimed at preserving the five universal pursuits: life, intellect, religion, lineage and property. For example, to protect life it sets down the law of retribution, to protect intelligence it imposes punishment for drinking alcohol, and to protect property it established punishment for theft, and

so on. Consequently, the Islamic penal system is based upon a number of principles, some of which are:

1. Nothing is prohibited with the exception of that specified in the Revelation. Deeds can only be prohibited if their prohibition is clearly stated in the Quran or Sunnah. This principle is stated in many verses of the Quran, like: “***We punish no one until after we send a Messenger.***” {17:15} Thus, all actions are assumed to be permissible, unless there is clear proof indicating otherwise.
2. No one can be held responsible for the crimes of another. Thus in Islamic Law, the individual is solely accountable for his or her crime. The Qur’an has established this principle in many verses such as: “***And every soul earns not [blame] except against itself, and no bearer of burdens will bear the burden of another.***” {6:164}
3. The Islamic criminal system, like other Islamic institutions, is equally applicable to everyone, and no one is above the law in Islam. Everyone is equal before it, no matter what his or her standing in society might be. The Quran has established this principle of universal equality before the law in the following verse: “***O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may come to know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of God is the most righteous of you. Indeed, God is All-Knowing and Acquainted.***” {49:13}

The Prophet Muhammad also clearly demonstrated this principle of equality before the law when a woman from the Makhzum family—a very wealthy and powerful family—committed theft. The local people tried to have her acquitted because of her family’s standing, but the Prophet said: “O people, those who came before you were destroyed because they used to pardon their nobles when they stole, but would apply the punishment on the weak. By God, if Fatimah, the daughter of Muhammad, committed theft, I would amputate her hand.” [Muslim]

4. Punishments are never to be carried out if there is doubt as to whether or not the crime has been committed, or whether or not there was a legal justification for making it excusable (like necessity, reasonable ignorance, incompetence, etc.). The Prophet established this

principle through his gentle behavior with people who sought to admit their crimes as will be detailed below.

Furthermore, in addition to retribution, Islamic Law recognizes two other categories of criminal punishments. The first are punishments that are detailed in the Quran and Sunnah for specific crimes. These punishments cannot be waived or modified when a conviction is pronounced.

The other category of punishments is of a flexible nature. These are to be applied in cases where the divine texts establish the prohibition of certain actions without setting down a specific punishment. In such cases, the political authority can then take the particular circumstances of the criminal into consideration and determine the most effective way to protect society from harm as well as reform the offender. Thus, punishments in *Shari'ah* Law are of three kinds:

1. Retribution
2. Prescribed punishments, known as *Hudood*
3. Discretionary punishments

The Prescribed Punishments – Hudood Laws

Crimes that fall under this category are defined as legally prohibited acts for which God has commanded a specific, predetermined punishment. These punishments have certain distinguishing features that set them apart from others. Among them are the following:

1. These punishments can neither be increased, nor decreased.
2. These punishments cannot be pardoned or waived by the judge, the political establishment or the victim after their related crimes have been brought to the attention of the judiciary. It is possible for the victim to pardon the criminal if the crime was only personal in nature (only affected the victim and without societal ramifications, like theft from the victim's store for example), and only before it is brought before the court. The Prophet Muhammad stated, "Forgive one another in matters of prescribed punishment for if the matter reaches me [and

is confirmed] then the punishment must then be carried out.” [Abu Dawood and Nasaa’ee]

3. These punishments are the “right of God,” meaning that the legal right involved is of a general nature where the greater welfare of society is considered.

The crimes that fall under the jurisdiction of the fixed punishments are: theft, false witness, fornication/adultery, apostasy, the use of intoxicants (drugs or alcohol), highway robbery and terrorism (which includes rape). A detailed discussion of all of these crimes and their fixed punishments is well beyond the scope of this introductory book. Yet, due to the frequent questions, and misconceptions, that have often surrounded the prescribed punishments for theft, adultery and rape; these three topics will be discussed below.

Theft

Theft is defined in *Shari’ah* as secretly taking the wealth of another party from its secure location with the intention of assuming possession of it. Thus it is a predatory act, well premeditated, and hence, must be distinguished from petty theft.

There are conditions that must be met before an act of theft mandates carrying out the specified Islamic punishment, which is to have the hand amputated. These conditions are:

1. The stolen property must be completely taken into the thief’s possession after being removed from a **secured** location from the premises of the victim.
2. The stolen property must be movable.
3. The stolen property must be something that people generally ascribe value to and should not be something that people customarily overlook. This particular requirement is one which is commonly abused by overzealous so-called “*Shari’ah*” councils in certain rural and uneducated parts of the world who will wrongly punish someone for stealing something with a nominal value.

If these conditions are met in the absence of any doubt, or necessity due to extreme poverty (which would then prevent carrying out the punishment), it becomes mandatory to amputate

the hand of the thief from the wrist joint if the crime is brought to the attention of the judiciary³. This is based on God's words:

The thieves, male and female, amputate their hand.
{5:38}

Discussion of the Severity of Punishment for Theft

The common reaction in westernized societies today is that the cutting off of the hand is "cruel and unusual" or "barbaric". Consider the following perspective though. In western culture, the thief's hand is not cut off, but instead the thief is "cut off" from society itself. This occurs initially with the thief being sentenced to prison, perhaps for a long time, where they often struggle with multiple fears—rape, solitary confinement, beatings and so forth. Afterwards, they are also cut off by social stigma and the loss of civil liberties. The western punishment may in fact be more "cruel and unusual," since the thief will have a criminal record that will follow him throughout his lifetime endeavors be they jobs, marriage, the loss of the right to vote in certain states or even restricted travel in other cases—despite having served their time for the crime.

In contrast, the *Shari'ah* punishment instantly clears the thief of his sin, both before God and before society. The Prophet instructed his followers to accept back into society, in all respects, those people who had received their punishment and to allow them to continue to play a positive role in the community. A person's record shouldn't follow him around and people should not condemn him afterwards, upon the order of the Prophet who forbade condemnation of the criminal. In fact, they are in some cases praised for their courage to purify themselves of their sin in this world despite the difficulty of the ordeal.

'Umar bin Al-Khattab narrated: "During the lifetime of the Prophet, there was a man called Abdullah and he used to make God's Messenger laugh. The Prophet lashed him

³ Forgiveness is a major theme permeating all aspects of Islam, so should the victim of a robbery or theft choose to forgive the thief before any charges are pressed (before the crime is brought to the attention of the judiciary), then the punishment would not be carried out.

because of drinking alcohol. And one-day he was brought to the Prophet on the same charge and was lashed again. On that, a man among the people said, ‘May God curse him! How frequently he has been brought to the Prophet on such a charge!’ Upon hearing this, the Prophet said, ‘Do not curse him, for by God, I know that he loves God and His Messenger.’” [Bukhari]

Abu Huraira narrated: “A drunk was brought to the Prophet and he ordered him to be lashed. When that drunk had left, a man said, ‘What is wrong with him? May God disgrace him!’ God’s Messenger then said, ‘Do not help Satan against your Muslim brother (with such words).’” [Bukhari]

Ubada ibn as-Saamit narrated: “I gave the pledge of allegiance to the Prophet with a group of people, and he said to us, ‘I take your pledge that you will not worship anything besides God, you will not steal, you will not kill your children, you will not slander others, or spread false statements about them, and you will not disobey me in anything good. Whoever among you fulfills the obligations of this pledge, his reward is with God. And whosoever commits any of the above crimes and receives his legal punishment in this world, that will be his expiation and purification. But if God screens his sin, it will be up to God to either punish or forgive him according to His wish.’ Abu Abdullah then added, ‘If a thief, or any person upon whom any legal punishment has been carried out, repents after his hand has been cut off, then his legal testimony will be accepted.’” [Bukhari]

Zina - Fornication and Adultery

Zina is defined as any case where a man has sexual intercourse with a woman who is not his wife. Any other relationship between a man and a woman that falls short of true intercourse⁴ is not in this category and does not mandate the specified punishment.

The prescribed punishment, though, is different depending on the marital status of the involved parties. A single person who

⁴ Defined as the penis penetrating the vagina.

has never been previously married receives one hundred lashes as stated by God:

The [unmarried] woman or [unmarried] man found guilty of sexual intercourse, lash each one of them with a hundred lashes. {24:2}

If the person is married, or has previously been married, then the punishment is stoning until death. This punishment has been established by a number of hadith of the Prophet, as will be mentioned below.

There are specific conditions, though, that must be strictly met before either of these two punishments can be carried out, and they are as follows:

1. Four trustworthy witnesses must give legal testimony that they have witnessed the act of penetration take place with absolute certainty. They must be in complete agreement about all the details of the act (its place, time, circumstances, etc.). If their stories do not match, their testimony will be considered false. In this case, instead of punishment being carried out on the accused, the prescribed punishment for bearing false witness, another *Hudood* crime, will be carried out against the witnesses. God says:

Why did they not produce four witnesses? Since they did not produce witnesses, then, in the sight of God, they are the liars. {24:13}

Those who accuse chaste women, then do not come with four witnesses, flog them eighty lashes and never accept their testimony. They are the defiantly disobedient. {24:4}

It should be obvious that anyone who commits fornication in the plain sight of four people who can see every detail of his crime is a person who is brazen and shameless. Such a wicked person has little regard for religion, or for social values, and if they are married, has no regard for the sanctity of their marriage.

This person is thus deserving of a severe punishment. At the same time, it must be known that there is no documented case in Muslim history where the prescribed punishment for fornication was carried out on the testimony of witnesses. In most cases, this punishment has historically been carried out at the request of the one who committed the fornication themselves in order that they may purify themselves of the sin and as a means of repentance.

2. There must be no cause for doubt that can defer the punishment. If any doubt is present, or any way out is found for the accused, the punishment is not to be carried out.

Some things should be made clear at this point. The first is that if a person becomes weak and falls into this sin, it is preferable for him to conceal it from others and not speak about it or admit to it. Instead, he should repent, seek God's forgiveness, and try to make up for it by doing righteous deeds. He should not despair of God's mercy.

Say, "O My servants who have transgressed against themselves [by sinning], do not despair of the mercy of God. Truly, God forgives all sins. Indeed, it is He who is the Forgiving, the Merciful." {39:53}

It should also be noted that if someone sees another Muslim commit this act, then he should conceal it from the public. God's Messenger has said, "Whoever conceals the fault of a Muslim, God will conceal his faults." [Muslim]

The idea that we should conceal our own sins and those of others is the exact opposite of what many value in Western nations. So many famous people are respected when they publicly admit their sins and seek forgiveness. We tend to be taught that people who conceal their sins are hypocrites, if they say or act otherwise. Yet in Islam, one should conceal their personal sins—with the exception of those sins that involve transgression against the rights of others—as this is seen as preserving to society. But, sometimes admitting sins in public can have the opposite effect of leading others to fall into the same sin. Hypocrisy is defined when someone persists in doing a particular sin while at the same time commanding others to

avoid it. On this subject, the great scholar and Islamic jurist, *al-Shaafi'ee*, stated:

If a person commits a sin and God conceals it for him, I prefer for him to keep it concealed and to repent, keeping the matter between himself and God. Something similar was narrated from Abu Bakr and 'Umar (the two closest and most righteous Companions of the Prophet, and later leaders of the Muslims), that they commanded a man to conceal his sin. [Tirmithi] So there is no need for the person who commits a punishable sin to go to the judge and confess and ask for the prescribed punishment to be carried out on him. Rather, he is encouraged to keep it to himself and to repent, keeping the matter between himself and God, may He be glorified, and to do lots of righteous deeds, for good deeds cancel out sins, and the one who repents from sin is like one who did not sin at all.

Additionally, Islam has made the home absolutely sacred. It is not allowed to enter someone else's home, except with the permission of its people. Spying on others without just cause is likewise prohibited in the Quran.

Also, if a person confesses to this sin of his own free will, it is necessary to determine if he is of sound mind and in possession of all of his faculties. It must also be certain that he is under no compulsion or coercion.

Furthermore, he has the opportunity to retract his confession and he is encouraged to do so. If he retracts his statement, the punishment will not be carried out. This is what the Prophet did with the companion Ma'iz when he confessed to committing adultery. God's Messenger turned away from him four times, but Ma'iz, overwhelmed by his guilt and feelings of regret, insisted ...

Sulaiman ibn Buraida reported on the authority of his father that Ma'iz ibn Malik came to God's Messenger and said to him, "Messenger of God, purify me," whereupon the Prophet said, "Woe to you, go back, ask forgiveness of God and turn to Him in repentance." He went back a small distance, then he returned and said, "God's Messenger, purify me," whereupon God's Messenger said, "Woe to

you, go back and ask forgiveness of God and turn to Him in repentance.” He went back a small distance again, then he returned yet again and said, “God's Messenger, purify me.” God's Messenger said as he had said before.

When it was the fourth time, God's Messenger said, “From what am I to purify you?” He replied, “From adultery.” God's Messenger asked the others if he was mad. He was informed that he was not mad. He inquired, “Is he intoxicated?” A person stood up and smelt his breath, but noticed no smell of wine. Thereupon God's Messenger said, “Have you committed adultery?” He said, “Yes.” He then made judgment over him and he was stoned to death.

The people then became divided into two groups about this man Ma'iz. One group said, “He has been destroyed, for his sins had encompassed him,” whereas the other group said, “There is no repentance more excellent than the repentance of Ma'iz, for he came to God's Messenger and placing his hand in [the Prophet's] hand said, ‘Kill me with stones.’”

This controversy about Ma'iz continued for two or three days. Then God's Messenger came to his Companions as they were sitting. He greeted them with the salutation of peace and then sat down and said, “Ask forgiveness for Ma'iz ibn Malik.” They said, “May God forgive Ma'iz ibn Malik.” Thereupon God's Messenger said, “[Ma'iz] has made such a great repentance that if it were to be divided among an entire community of people, it would have been enough for all of them (to be forgiven).”

Then a woman from a tribe called Ghamid came to the Prophet and said, “Messenger of God, purify me,” whereupon he said, “Woe to you! Go back and beg forgiveness from God and turn to Him in repentance.”

She then said, “I think that you intend to send me back as you sent back Ma'iz ibn Malik.” The Prophet then said, “What has happened to you?” She said that she had become pregnant as a result of adultery. Upon this, the Prophet said, “Have you really committed this sin?” She said, “Yes.”

The Prophet then said to her, "You will not be punished until you deliver your child." One of the Muslims then became responsible for her care until she delivered her child. Her guardian then came to God's Messenger and said that the woman from Ghamid had given birth to her child. The Prophet then instructed, "In that case, we shall leave her infant with her to suckle him." One of the Muslims then got up and said, "God's Messenger, let the responsibility of his suckling be upon me." She was then stoned to death. [Muslim]

This woman went on to become very famous for her righteousness and her tremendous repentance as is illustrated in the following authentic narration:

Abu Nujayd 'Imran ibn al-Husayn reported that a woman came to the Messenger of God who was pregnant as a result of fornication. She said, "O Messenger of God, I have committed a forbidden act, so carry out the punishment on me." The Prophet of God summoned her guardian and said, "***Treat her well.*** When she gives birth, bring her back to me." He did that and the Prophet of God commanded that she be stoned. Then the Prophet led the other Muslims in funeral prayer over her. Upon this, Umar said to him, "Do you pray over her, Messenger of God, when she committed adultery?" He replied, "She repented with such a sincere repentance that if it were to be divided out among seventy of the people of the city of Madinah, it would suffice them all. Can you think of anything better than her offering herself to God, the Mighty and Majestic?" [Muslim]

The Wisdom behind the Prescribed Punishment for Fornication and Adultery

If we review all the punishments in the *Shari'ah*, we see that they all have two qualities:

1. Several requirements that must be met before a punishment can be carried out, thus preventing miscarriage of justice, or the conviction and punishment of a person for a crime they did not commit. This safeguards the life of the accused and guarantees them

that no punishment will be carried out until every excuse is exhausted and every reason for discarding the punishment is considered.

2. They are intense and harsh in nature which indicates how much God disapproves of the associated crime. Matters like fornication may seem to a number of people to be trivial in nature, or “no big deal,” yet in the eyes of the Almighty who sees the big picture and the impact such activities have on society as a whole, they are detrimental to both the individual and society.

This “harshness” of the prescribed punishments guarantees two things. First, it preserves the general security of society and reduces crime. The potential murderer who knows that he will be killed, the potential thief who knows that he will lose his hand, and the potential adulterer who knows that he will be stoned, or given a hundred lashes, will think twice before going out and committing the crime.

If, on the other hand, a criminal knows that punishment and imprisonment is not consistent, nor is it swift, then it can not serve as an effective deterrent. In such a case, he is far less likely to respect the punishment, and will not be discouraged from committing the crime. The general rule that can be deduced from this is—*the more the benefits of the crime outweigh the costs of punishment, the less effective the law will be.*

When examining the sins of fornication and adultery closer, we see that they uphold the principles mentioned above. The condition for establishing it—four reliable witnesses—is a very strict one, and the punishment is decisive.

If we look at the application of this punishment, we find many aspects of the wisdom:

- a) It preserves general peace and security in the society, because one of the most common motives for murder in many societies today is the rage associated with a finding

your spouse in bed with another⁵—legally classified as a crime of passion.⁶ Applying the punishment against fornication causes a decrease in murders related to crimes of passion, which in turn, reduces the frequency of murder, thus having a direct, positive effect on public safety.

- b) It protects the family. The family enjoys a special status in Islam. Extramarital sex is proven to be destructive to the family⁷ and undermines its integrity.⁸ The severe punishment for *zina* (fornication/adultery) has the effect of reducing its occurrence, which has a direct and positive effect on the healthy continuation of marriages, the security and stability of children, and effectively discourages the idea of “looking for adventure” through adulterous liaisons.

Rape

In Islam, rape is not classified as a distinct crime category in the *Shari'ah* law, which has led to some confusion concerning the punishment for it as will soon be discussed. Some poorly educated Muslims have falsely understood that rape needs to be evaluated under the heading of *zina* (fornication/adultery), whereas in actuality, rape falls under the category of *Hiraabah*, or terrorism crimes.

⁵ US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice publication, *Homicide Trends in the United States, 1980-2008*, reports that intimate homicides of white women between 1980 and 2008 averaged 44% of all white female homicides. Intimate homicides of black women averaged 43% of all homicides of black females.

⁶ Khazan, O. (2017, Jul 20). *Nearly Half of All Murdered Women Are Killed by Romantic Partners*. Retrieved from: <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2017/07/homicides-women/534306/>

⁷ Brooks, A. (1989, Mar 9). *Experts Find Extramarital Affairs Have a Profound Impact on Children*. Retrieved from: <https://www.nytimes.com/1989/03/09/us/health-psychology-experts-find-extramarital-affairs-have-profound-impact.html>

⁸ Charny, IW and Parnass, S. (1995). The Impact of Extramarital Relationships on the Continuation of Marriages. *J Sex Marital Therapy*. Retrieved from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/7643421>

Hiraabah is an Arabic word which means ambushing people and frightening them with weapons or with the threat of force, killing them, terrorizing them and seizing their property by force and openly. Wealth is mentioned specifically because typically *Hiraabah* is associated with robbery, but the ruling applies equally to people who terrorize others for the purposes of rape. In Islam, *Hiraabah* is one of the most serious of the major sins, and it is forbidden according to the Quran and the Sunnah. In fact, God describes the punishment for terrorism in the Quran as follows:

Indeed, the penalty for those who wage war against God and His Messenger, and who strive to cause corruption upon earth, is that they be killed, or crucified, or that their hands and feet be cut off from opposite sides, or that they be exiled from the land. That is for them a disgrace in this world, and for them in the Hereafter is a great punishment. {5:33}

The Difference in Islamic Law between Adultery and Rape

The early Islamic scholars, most notably al-*Dasuqi* and Abu Bakr ibn al-*‘Arabi*, explained the reason why rape is to be considered a crime of *Hiraaba* as opposed to a crime of *zina* (fornication or adultery). Ibn al-*‘Arabi* relates a story in which a group of travelers was attacked and a woman in their party was raped. Responding to the argument that the crime did not constitute *Hiraabah* because no money was taken and no weapons were used, Ibn al-*‘Arabi* replied that "*Hiraabah* with the private parts" is much worse than *Hiraabah* involving robbery, and that anyone would prefer to be robbed than to be raped.⁹ This classification is logical, as the "taking" involved in such a case is that of the victim's property (the rape victim's dignity and sense of security) by force.

Thus, rape as *Hiraabah* is a violent crime that uses sexual intercourse as a weapon. The focus then in a *Hiraabah* prosecution is the accused rapist—specifically his intent and physical actions—and not second-guessing the consent of the rape victim. *Hiraabah* does not require four witnesses to prove the offense as has sometimes mistakenly been believed by some

⁹ Sabiq, A.-S. (1972). *Fiqh al-Sunnah*. al-Qāhira: Dār al-Kitāb al-Islāmī

of the pseudo-*Shari'ah* councils making headlines today in rural Pakistan and Nigeria. Instead, the prosecution is based on circumstantial evidence, medical data and testimony.

Consequently, establishing that a criminal case is that of rape is extremely critical because in an Islamic court, it could mean the difference between life and death to the perpetrator. Hence, a thorough evaluation is performed to determine if the person accused actually committed the crime. If evidence shows that the intercourse was consensual and the alleged rapist was unjustly accused, both of them would be determined to have committed *zina* (fornication or adultery), and both of them would be punished for it.

The Western Secular Punishment for Rape

Reviewing the current criminal punishment trends in the West in general, and the US in specific, one begins to understand the great frustration that doctors, police officers, families and rape victims feel when it comes to rape. Reports have shown that nearly **seventy percent** of rapes are not reported to law enforcement in the US.¹⁰ What are the reasons behind these staggering statistics? First, it is important to get a grasp on the actual prevalence of the problem.

- In 2002, there were 247,730 victims of rape, attempted rape or sexual assault. Of these victims, about 87,000 were victims of completed rape, 70,000 were victims of attempted rape, and 91,000 were victims of sexual assault.¹¹
- According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, there are over 60 million survivors of childhood sexual abuse in America today—that's approximately 20% of the US population.¹²
- Every 2 minutes, somewhere in America, someone is sexually assaulted.¹³

¹⁰ Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, 2010-2014 (2015)

¹¹ 2002 National Crime Victimization Survey, U.S. Department of Justice

¹² Central MN Sexual Assault Center: <https://cmsac.org/facts-and-statistics/>

¹³ 2002 National Crime Victimization Survey, U.S. Department of Justice

- Up to 4,065 pregnancies may have resulted from such attacks.¹⁴
- Factoring in unreported rapes, about 6% of rapists will ever spend a day in jail.¹⁵
- In the UK, approximately 50,000 rapes are estimated to occur each year, but only 600 rapists are sent to jail. In 1985, there was a 24% conviction rate in rape trials, yet by 2003, it had fallen to just 5%.¹⁶

Why is rape so common in an open society like America? While there are several contributing factors, if the punishment for a particular crime carries little or no risk relative to the possible benefits of the crime, then the criminal is more likely to do the crime. Unfortunately, as economist W. Kip Viscusi noted, “the risks posed by the criminal enforcement system [in the West] are notoriously low and data show that youthful criminals know it.”¹⁷

Indeed, the data on the criminal prosecution of rape in America are appalling. Of course, the nearly 70% of rape/assaults that are not reported to law enforcement never end in any jail time or punishment for the perpetrator. But what of those that are reported? Is there any connection between reporting rape and receiving any justice for victim? Unfortunately, the numbers are not encouraging. Reviewing the data that RAINN (Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network) has compiled¹⁸ we see that out of every 1000 rapes:

- 310 are reported to police.
- 57 reports (18% of those reported) lead to an arrest.
- 7 cases (2.25% of those reported) will lead to a felony conviction.

¹⁴ Rape and Incest National Network (RAINN) estimate, based on 2002 National Crime Victimization Survey, U.S. Department of Justice.

¹⁵ Central MN Sexual Assault Center: <https://cmsac.org/facts-and-statistics/>

¹⁶ Sawyer, M. (2003, Jul 31). 50,000 rapes each year, but only 600 rapists sent to jail. Retrieved from:

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2005/jul/31/ukcrime.immigrationpolicy>

¹⁷ Viscusi, W. (1986). The Risks and Rewards of Criminal Activity: A Comprehensive Test of Criminal Deterrence. *Journal of Labor Economics*, 4(3), 317-340. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2535056>

¹⁸ <https://www.rainn.org/statistics/criminal-justice-system>

- 6 rapists (1.9% of those reported) will be incarcerated.

Furthermore, RAINN reports that perpetrators of sexual violence are less likely to go to jail or prison than other criminals.

So considering the very real risk of potential reprisal by the rapist, or the social stigma, compared with the exceedingly small record of convictions, most women in the West will choose to never report rape.

The Issue of “Honor Killings”

We now turn our attention to the issue of so-called “honor” killings, one of the true crimes of oppression in the world today. It must immediately be made clear that in no way does Islam condone, validate or support this oppressive and backward practice. Yet, most often when these heinous crimes are reported in the media, they often seem to occur in “Muslim countries”. This has unfortunately created an association in many people’s minds between these dreadful crimes and the religion of Islam. Is this justified though?

“Honor” killings are crimes that target women who have usually been victims of rape. Since these women have tarnished the “honor” of their families by being raped, they are then killed, almost always by a family member, in order to remove the dishonor from the family. Of course, in any civilized society this is quite inconceivable as these women should rather be receiving counseling and emotional support from their families after enduring the horror of rape.

As has been clearly explained above though, in the *Shari’ah* of Islam, a woman who has been raped is entitled to criminal court proceedings, not against her, but against her attacker. She should be protected by the Islamic governmental authority and given the emotional support that she needs, for she has done nothing wrong. Indeed, the Islamic punishment of her assailant should strike fear into the heart of any man who would even consider victimizing a woman.

The current reality though is that men *all over the world* are twisting the teachings of religion, not only Islam, but also

Christianity¹⁹, to justify abusing their wives, sisters and daughters, leading to thousands of these "honor" killings a year in which *secular courts* provide virtual immunity for the perpetrator. In those countries where honor killings are known to occur, one would in fact be hard pressed to find any convictions of the family member who takes it upon himself to kill the raped woman.

Horror stories of women, and even girls as young as seven, being beheaded, burned to death, maimed, beaten, raped, forced into suicide or mentally abused, underscore that patriarchal violence against women *pays no heed to religion*. In reality, almost all cases are rooted in cultural and tribal beliefs, rather than anything resembling religion.

When asked what role Islam has to play in honor killings Mrs. Nilofar Bakhtiar, adviser to Pakistan's prime minister on Women's Development replied, "Islam as a reason for the honor killings is rubbish".²⁰ She blamed such violence in Pakistan on "the feudal tradition, the culture and the tribal system." She also said that such men found it "very convenient to say that what they don't want to do is against Islam and what they want to do is in the name of Islam."²¹

In line with her statements, reports clearly show that "honor" violence also occurs among Christian families. "After we got married, Hell started," a Christian woman from the Middle East said during a taped interview. Beaten and raped for questioning her husband's business practices, she fled to Sweden when he threatened to sell her into prostitution.²²

Such a horrific practice can only be uprooted by education and strict legal enforcement. It is a shame that such people have neglected or become ignorant of every advice of the Prophet to men regarding the treatment of women. He encouraged kindness and patience, and reminded men that God would indeed

¹⁹ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/india-christian-honour-killing-kerala-kevin-p-joseph-southern-dalit-a8375891.html>

²⁰ Strupczewski, J. (2004, Dec 8). *Experts: Men Distort Religion to Justify 'Honour' Killings*. Reuters. Retrieved from: <https://wwrn.org/articles/14661/>

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

question them on the Day of Judgment concerning how they treated the women in their care.

Islamic State or Muslim Country—Is there a Difference?

Amongst the major misconceptions that exist today amongst people in the West is the belief that "Muslim countries" are places where Islam is the rule of law from both a personal and governmental perspective. This leads many in the West to then equate whatever is going on in such "Muslim" countries with the practice of Islam—something which, in most cases, couldn't be further from the truth! It also leads many people in the West to wonder why so many Muslims are seeking to live in the West if they have Islam in their own homelands? The answer lies in the fact that "Muslim countries" are, for the most part, *nations where only the population is predominantly Muslim, and not places where Islam is the primary law of the land.*

In fact, the vast majority of these "Muslim" countries are run by severely tyrannical, oppressive dictatorships similar to, and in many cases worse than, governments like that of the World War II era dictators. A brief look into the policies and practices of countries like Egypt, Algeria, Syria, Jordan and Pakistan, just to name a few, will reveal severe and routine human rights violations and curtailed civil liberties²³. The dictators in these countries regularly rig elections, jail or murder any opposition party leaders and/or their followers, arrest entire families and keep them indefinitely in jail, without due process, and regularly practice acts of physical and emotional torture on prisoners, among other grave injustices and human rights violations.

For that reason, like the immigrants who came before them from Europe, many Muslims have fled these countries to come to the West seeking freedom and rights. But don't make the mistake of thinking that Islam has anything to do with the oppressive conditions that caused these people to flee from their homelands. A basic understanding of Islamic law would show that Islam is the absolute opposite of what is being practiced in these countries.

²³ See [<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2018>] where 6 Muslim majority countries are listed among the 12 countries ranking worst in scores of civil liberties and freedom.

The Islamic Stance on Terrorism and War - Direct from the Sources

Having understood from the previous chapters that Islam is a total way of life, it then doesn't seem the least bit unusual that Islam possesses a code of regulations concerning war. How many societies, from the beginning of civilization until now, have constitutions that have no provision for war? Few, if any, have left out this important matter, for people of wisdom understand that war is unfortunately an inevitable reality in this life.

There will always be corrupt and ruthless individuals in this world, and rogue, tyrannical governments that will take advantage of their strength in order to rob, raid and oppress weaker peoples and nations. Orderly civilizations must have an answer to deal with such groups, or else such corruption would take over the world. After mentioning how He aided David over the oppressive forces of Goliath, God says in the Quran:

By God's will, they routed them, and David slew Goliath, and God gave [David] power and wisdom and taught him whatever else he willed. And had not God checked one set of people by means of another, the earth would indeed be full of corruption, but God is full of Bounty to the Universe. {2:251}

Yet, ever since the spread of Islam into Christian territories in the seventh century, the religion of Islam has been falsely branded as a religion of violence and war.¹ With the more recent violence in the Middle East and the events of 9/11, Islam has further been accused of being a religion of terrorism and intolerance. Is this true, or are there some important pieces missing from the puzzle?

¹ Kaegi, W.E. (1969, June). Initial Byzantine Reactions to the Arab Conquest. *Church History*, Vol. 38, No. 2 p. 139–149, p. 139–142, quoting from *Doctrina Jacobi nuper baptizati* 86–87

What are the Verses from the Quran that Mention Violence and War?

As is often unfortunately the case, there are those who intend to deceive the general public about what the Quran says concerning violence. They even use the statements of religious extremists to strengthen their arguments, but never really mention the importance of context.

For example, when a person sees the following verse from the Quran, they may be shocked and begin to believe much of the rhetoric:

And kill them wherever you catch them. {2:191}

This fragment of a verse is often cited by those who seek to stir up hatred and misunderstandings between Muslims and non-Muslims. And to make matters worse, some of the uneducated poor in some Muslim countries have declared this to be their evidence for killing non-Muslims. So what to believe then?

As always, looking at the context of any statement will allow us to best understand what is intended. Let's review the context of these words then to see if the picture gets clearer.

Fight in the cause of God those who fight you, but do not be the aggressors, for God does not love those who transgress. And kill them wherever you catch them, and turn them out from where they have turned you out, for persecution and oppression are worse than killing. But, don't fight them at the Sacred Mosque, unless they first fight you there. So, if they attack you, then kill them. Such is the reward of those who deny faith. But if they cease their aggressions, then indeed is God Forgiving, Most Merciful. And fight them until there is no more persecution or oppression, and justice and Faith in God prevail. But, if they cease, let there be no hostility except to those who practice oppression. {2:190-193}

So it becomes clear, that in this verse, God is guiding the believers on how to deal with oppression and persecution; how to deal with those that attack you!

So the valid question then becomes, should God have instead said, “Hug them wherever you find them, and kiss them in return for them evicting you from your homes and trying to murder you”? There is no law on Earth, nor logic, which would support this! This is quite clear in today’s world where some nations attack others based on the *possibility* that they will be attacked, termed pre-emptive war, not even waiting for hostilities to start.

Islam and Tolerance of Other Faiths

To get a clearer picture of how Muslims *should* deal with people who don’t share their faith, let us review the following passage from the Quran. They clearly illustrate how God teaches His followers that they must maintain peace with ordinary and peaceful non-Muslims, and that they should only fight a hostile enemy:

But if the enemy inclines towards peace, you also must incline towards peace, and trust in God, for He is One that Hears and Knows all things. {8:61}

Permission to fight is given to those who are being attacked, because they have been wronged. And surely God measures out help for them. {22:39}

God does not forbid you from showing kindness and dealing justly with those who have not fought you concerning your religion and have not driven you out of your homes. Indeed, God loves those who are just. God only forbids your friendship with those who fight you in the religion and drive you out from your homes and support those who drive you out. And whoever befriends them, such are the wrongdoers. {60:8}

And why should you not fight in the cause of God, and of those who, because they are weak, are persecuted and oppressed? Those whose cry is, “O’ Lord! Rescue us from this town, whose people are oppressors, and raise for us from Yourself one who will protect us, and raise for us from Yourself one who will help us.” {4:75}

Let there be no compulsion in religion. Truth stands out clear from error. Whoever rejects evil and believes in God has grasped the most trustworthy handhold that never breaks. And God Hears and Knows all things. {2:256}

After seeing these verses, it should be clear that the religion of Islam does not support the killing of those who don’t agree with them. It commands a careful, thoughtful approach to prevent persecution and oppression of both Muslims and non-Muslims, and to try to find peaceful solutions to such issues, if at all possible, before resorting to combat. Also, a review of history will demonstrate how Muslim armies were sometimes dispatched to protect non-Muslims, as this is the command of God; justice and freedom for *all* people.

Is Islam the Only Religion that Sanctions War and Fighting?

Unfortunately, many people incorrectly believe that Islam is the only religion that sanctions war. They point to the Jesus of the Bible and say that religions like Christianity are commanded with peace, and even loving the enemy. Is this true?

Undoubtedly, we see the Christian nations and kingdoms throughout history leading the forefront in regards to warfare and killing, as evidenced throughout the numerous Crusades, the Spanish Inquisition, the forceful take over and forced conversion of the Native Americans of both North and South America, clear into the blood baths of the two World Wars. In his online blog, Professor Juan Cole, the present Richard P. Mitchell Collegiate Professor of History at the University of Michigan, writes:

Contrary to what is alleged by bigots like Bill Maher, Muslims are not more violent than people of other religions. Murder rates in most of the Muslim world are very low compared to the United States.

As for political violence, people of Christian heritage in the twentieth century polished off tens of millions of people in the two world wars and colonial repression. This massive carnage did not occur because European Christians are worse than, or different, from other human beings, but because they were the first to industrialize war and pursue a national model. Sometimes it is argued that they did not act in the name of religion, but of nationalism. But, really, how naive. Religion and nationalism are closely intertwined. The British monarch is the head of the Church of England, and that still meant something in the first half of the twentieth century, at least. The Swedish church is a national church. Spain? Was it really unconnected to Catholicism? Did the Church and Francisco Franco's feelings toward it play no role in the Civil War? And what's sauce for the goose: much Muslim violence is driven by forms of modern nationalism, too.

I don't figure that Muslims killed more than 2 million people or so in political violence in the entire twentieth century, and that mainly in the Iran-Iraq War 1980-1988, and the Soviet and post-Soviet wars in Afghanistan, for which Europeans bear some blame.

Compare that to the Christian European tally of, oh, let's say 100 million (16 million in WW I, 60 million in WW II—though some of those were attributable to Buddhists in Asia—and millions more in colonial wars.)

Belgium—yes, the Belgium of strawberry beer and quaint Gravensteen castle—conquered the Congo and is estimated to have killed off half of its inhabitants over time, some 8 million people at least...

I could go on and on. Everywhere you dig in European colonialism in Afro-Asia, there are bodies. Lots of bodies.

Now that I think of it, maybe 100 million people killed by people of European Christian heritage in the twentieth century is an underestimate.

As for religious terrorism, that too is universal. Admittedly, some groups deploy terrorism as a tactic more at some times than others. Zionists in British Mandate Palestine were active terrorists in the 1940's, from a British point of view, and in the period 1965-1980, the FBI considered the Jewish Defense League among the most active US terrorist groups...

Even more recently, it is difficult for me to see much of a difference between Tamerlan Tsarnaev and Baruch Goldstein, perpetrator of the Hebron massacre.

Or, there was the cold-blooded bombing of the Ajmer shrine in India by Bhavesh Patel and a gang of Hindu nationalists. Chillingly, they were disturbed when a second bomb they had set did not go off, so that they did not wreak as much havoc as they would have liked. Ajmer is an ecumenical Sufi shrine also visited by Hindus, and these bigots wanted to stop such open-minded sharing of spiritual spaces because they hate Muslims.

Buddhists have committed a lot of terrorism and other violence as well. Many in the Zen orders in Japan supported militarism in the first half of the twentieth century, for which their leaders later apologized. And, you had Inoue Shiro's assassination campaign in 1930's Japan. Nowadays militant Buddhist monks in Burma/Myanmar are urging on an ethnic cleansing campaign against the Rohingya.

As for Christianity, the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda initiated hostilities that displaced two million people. Although it is an African cult, it is Christian in origin and the result of Western Christian missionaries preaching in Africa. If Saudi Wahhabi preachers can be in

part blamed for the Taliban, why do Christian missionaries skate when we consider the blowback from their pupils?

Despite the very large number of European Muslims, in 2007-2009 less than 1 percent of terrorist acts in that continent were committed by people from that community.

Terrorism is a tactic of extremists within each religion, and within secular religions of Marxism or nationalism. No religion, including Islam, preaches indiscriminate violence against innocents.

It takes a peculiar sort of blindness to see Christians of European heritage as “nice,” and Muslims as inherently violent, given the twentieth century death toll I mentioned above. Human beings are human beings and the species is too young and too interconnected to have differentiated much from group to group. People resort to violence out of ambition or grievance, and the more powerful they are, the more violence they seem to commit. The good news is that the number of wars is declining over time, and World War II, the biggest charnel house in history, hasn’t been repeated.²

But, to be fair, let’s look at the hard facts as written in the words of the Bible to see if there is evidence of Holy War in the Old, or New, Testament, and whether Jesus himself ever spoke of war or fighting.

Most Christians are very familiar with the following verses:

You have heard that it was said, “Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. [NIV Bible, Matthew 5:43-44]

² Cole, J. (2013, April 23). *Terrorism and the other Religions*. Retrieved from: <https://www.juancole.com/2013/04/terrorism-other-religions.html>

But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. [NIV Bible, Luke 6:35]

Thus, most people have come to think that the above is the Biblical guidance to those who would attack you, even though, as just mentioned, this is definitely not what the followers of the Bible have *practiced* throughout history. Maybe the earlier Christians were implementing the following verses:

[Jesus] replied, “I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing, even what he has will be taken away. But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them—bring them here and kill them in front of me.” After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. [NIV Bible, Luke 19:26-28]

Do not suppose that I [Jesus] have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. [NIV Bible, Matthew 10:34]

So [Jesus] made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves he said, “Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market?” [NIV Bible, John 2:15]

If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. [NIV Bible Luke 14:26]

These verses are mentioned here only to bring fairness to the attack of those who claim that Christianity has no basis of

violence or hate within its folds, only love and forgiveness.³ These same people then take hold of a portion of one of the verses of the Quran and leave off the context, in order to convince innocent people that Islam came with nothing but hate and violence.

Looking into the Old Testament, we find more verses commanding killing, pillaging and even rape—all apparently in the name of God.

Now kill all the boys. And kill every woman who has slept with a man, but save for yourselves every girl who has never slept with a man. [Numbers 31:17-18]

This was allegedly God's command to Moses in regards to the disbelieving Philistines who occupied the Holy Land promised to the Children of Israel. Also,

All who would not seek the LORD, the God of Israel, were to be put to death, whether small or great, man or woman. [2 Chronicles 15:13]

In contrast others, as Muslims, we encourage people go back and look into the context of these verses and study them to understand. Why would the God, who is so often mentioned as Loving and full of Grace, command innocent women and boys to be mercilessly killed?

A careful review of the first five books of the Old Testament will reveal even more commands of war, killing, enslaving of people and confiscation of property. The point of this book is not to analyze these circumstances, or the theological questions they pose, or to attack Jewish and Christian scriptures. Instead, the objective of this review is to demonstrate the truth to honest people seeking to understand the reality of religion. The unbiased reader is invited to compare such orders as found in the

³ Ladd, C. (2014, Dec 31). Which religion is the most violent? *Washington Times*. Retrieved from: <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2014/dec/31/which-religion-most-violent/>

Old Testament, as well as the words mentioned above from Jesus, with the verses from the Quran that permit people to defend themselves when persecuted and to help oppressed nations.

Why does Islam Always Seem to be Associated with Violence?

Here we come to the issue of the media, and its ability to effectively focus the attention of people. Moreover, this question raises the issue of how should one judge a religion?

In regards to how well the media can focus people's attention both onto and away from something, consider the following facts:

- Latin American and Caribbean countries have lead the world in terms of crime and violence for much of the past two decades. The five countries reporting the highest homicide rates internationally in 2017 were El Salvador, Honduras, Jamaica, St Kitts and Venezuela. In 2016, 43 of the 50 most violent cities in the world were found in Latin America and the Caribbean.⁴
- Most people polled think that the problem of child molestation and sexual abuse is confined primarily to the Catholic diocese, whereas in reality, it is a problem involving every denomination of Christianity in America, as well as other religions.⁵
- The US has by far the highest number of privately owned guns in the world.⁶ Estimated for 2017, the number of civilian-owned firearms in the US was 120.5 guns per 100 residents, meaning there were more

⁴ Muggah, R. et al. (2018, Mar 14). *Latin America is the World's Most Dangerous Region. But there are Signs it is turning a Corner*. Retrieved from: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/03/latin-america-is-the-worlds-most-dangerous-region-but-there-are-signs-its-turning-a-corner/>

⁵ N.A. (n.d.). *Soul Betrayal. It's not just priests who abuse youngsters. Clergy of all faiths are guilty of sexual misconduct with children and adults*.

Retrieved from: http://www.beliefnet.com/story/101/story_10199.html

⁶ Americans make up less than 5% of the world's population, yet they own approximately 45% of all the world's privately held firearms.

firearms than people. The world's second-ranked country was Yemen, a Muslim majority quasi-failed state torn by civil war, where there were 52.8 guns per 100 residents, or less than half that of the US!⁷ In fact, there are only two Muslim majority countries in the top twenty civilian fire-arms per resident nations.⁸

- For every one American killed by an act of terror in the United States or abroad in 2014, more than 1,049 died because of guns.⁹
- According to a report by the US National Counterterrorism Center¹⁰, in cases in which religious affiliation of terrorism casualties can be determined, Muslims suffered between 82 and 97% of fatalities over the past five years and Muslims are seven times more likely than non-Muslims to be the *victims* of terror.
- The Global Terrorism Index reports that between 2001 and 2015, 75% of the fatalities from terrorist attacks occurred in Muslim majority countries. Almost all of the attacks, 98%, occurred outside the US and Western Europe—despite these dominating the news cycle.¹¹

Although one can easily ascertain the truth of what was just mentioned, people have held the other, often opposing, opinions because of the attention given to certain issues on the media over others.

From another aspect, the question of how a religion is judged needs to be asked. Are we to judge a religion or idea based upon the actions of a small, extreme minority of its followers, or

⁷ <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/weapons-and-markets/tools/global-firearms-holdings.html>

⁸ Lopez, G. (2018, Aug 29). *America is one of 6 countries that make up more than half of gun deaths worldwide*. Retrieved from: <https://www.vox.com/2018/8/29/17792776/us-gun-deaths-global>

⁹ Bower, E. (2016, Oct 3). *American deaths in terrorism vs. gun violence in one graph*. Retrieved from: <https://edition.cnn.com/2016/10/03/us/terrorism-gun-violence/index.html>

¹⁰ <https://fas.org/irp/threat/nctc2011.pdf>

¹¹ <http://economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Global-Terrorism-Index-2015.pdf>

based upon its primary scriptures? Consider the following questions:

- Should Baptist Christians be branded terrorists because some members of the Baptist denomination twisted their scriptures to support and carry out numerous abortion clinic bombings wherein many innocent people were killed?
- Should Christianity be branded a racist ideology since the Ku Klux Klan would burn crosses and use the Bible to support their racially motivated violence and murders?
- Since hundreds of thousands of innocent children had their youth forever shattered through the rape, sexual abuse and exploitation that they experienced at the hands of clergy; should we then say that Christians are mostly child molesters?
- Hitler was known to be a devout Christian acting out on what he believed was God's plan, as when he said, "I believe that I am acting in accordance with the will of the Almighty Creator. By defending myself against the Jew, I am fighting for the work of the Lord."¹² Should we then blame the religion of Christianity for the countless deaths and war crimes he ordered?
- From a more secular standpoint, are all Americans responsible for the death of the 200,000 innocent women, children and men who were annihilated by the nuclear bombs dropped upon Hiroshima and Nagasaki? As Americans, we repeatedly say that war should be between armies and that innocent civilians should never be targeted. Yet, in this very notable case, some people decided that killing such a large number of people might break the Japanese will and cause them to submit.¹³

¹² Hitler, A. (1998). *Mein Kampf* (R. Manheim, Trans.). Houghton Mifflin Company.

¹³ Kuan, E.K.P. (2010, Aug 10). *Was the dropping of the atomic bombs necessary?* Retrieved from: <https://japantoday.com/category/features/opinions/was-the-dropping-of-the-atomic-bombs-necessary>

Most religions and even cultures have the concept of “people in glass houses shouldn’t throw stones”. So now consider for yourself, have you been throwing stones at Muslims, while ignoring the condition of your own house?

But, some people will say that the people mentioned above acted on their own, whereas often times when you see Muslims on television after some act of violence, they seem to be using verses from the Quran to support their crimes. Again, this is no different than abortion clinic bombers using the Bible to support their actions, or the words of the successive Popes during the Crusades, or the ideology of the Ku Klux Klan.

Consider the following quote taken from the book *The First Crusade: The Accounts of Eye Witnesses and Participants*. In November of 1095, Pope Urban II initiated the first European attempt at colonizing the Muslim world, known in the West as the Crusades. He is recorded to have said (words placed in italics are only for emphasis):

For you must hasten to carry aid to your brethren dwelling in the East, who need your help, [for] which they have often asked. For the Turks, a Persian people, [referring here to the Muslim nations] have attacked them. I exhort you with earnest prayer—***not I, but God***—that, as heralds of Christ, you urge men by frequent encouragement, men of all ranks, knights as well as foot soldiers, rich as well as poor, to rush to ***exterminate*** this vile race from the lands of your brethren, ***Christ commands it***.

And if those who set out thither should lose their lives on the way by land, or in crossing the sea, or in fighting the pagans, ***their sins shall be remitted***. Oh what a disgrace, if a race so despised, base, and the instrument of demons, should so overcome a people endowed with faith in the all-powerful God, and resplendent with the name of Christ. Let those who have been accustomed to make private war against the faithful carry on to a successful issue ***a war against the infidels***. Let those who for a long time have been robbers, now become soldiers of Christ. Let those who fought against brothers and relatives, now

fight against these *barbarians*. Let them zealously undertake the journey *under the guidance of the Lord*.¹⁴

So in this disturbing passage we see many statements that, when spoken by people of other religions or cultures, have been utterly condemned. Pope Urban II herein calls Muslim people infidels and barbarians, and he commands the Christian people of Europe to empty their lands to go and exterminate them in the name of Christ, moreover as a command of Christ. The book goes on further to describe the scene at the end of the battle of Jerusalem when the Crusaders had achieved victory.

And, if you desire to know what was done about the enemy whom we found there, know that in the portico of Solomon and his Temple [the area known as the Temple Mount], our men rode in the blood of the Saracens [derogatory term for Muslims] up to the knees of the horses.

When Jerusalem was conquered on the 15th of July 1099 by the Crusaders who were also known as the Christian Knights, more than 60,000 inhabitants, both Jewish and Muslim, were slaughtered in cold blood. In the words of one witness:

...there [in front of Solomon's temple] was such a carnage that our people were wading ankle-deep in the blood of our foes, and after that "happily and crying for joy," our people marched to our Savior's tomb, to honor it and to pay off our debt of gratitude.

It should be further understood that no one survived this carnage on the side of the Muslims, or the Jews who were under the protection of the Muslims at that time. Babies, children, women, and the elderly—all fell under the swords of the Christian knights who then went to say "thank you" before the tomb of Christ. Should Christianity be judged by such events? Of course no Christian, not even a just non-Christian for that matter, would

¹⁴ Krey, A.C. (1921). *The First Crusade: the Accounts of Eye-Witnesses and Participants*. Princeton, Princeton University Press

agree to that premise! So then, it can only be fair that Islam not be judged for the far smaller minority of extremists who kill innocent people in the name of God.

Another point, which is worth remembering, is how the killing and pillaging in the name of Christianity has in most cases been initiated, instituted and supported by governments and the Church alike—what would be termed “institutional terrorism”¹⁵. On the other hand, the acts carried out in the name of Islam are *most* often the work of individuals without the support of any recognized or established government, and more importantly, without the support of authorized Muslim leadership.

What Did the Prophet Muhammad Say About Combat?

I would like to summarize this section by mentioning only one reference—the statement of the first Muslim caliph (ruler), Abu Bakr, who, upon dispatching an army to the territories of the Levant, gave the following command to his General. This command undoubtedly originates from the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad:

Do not kill a woman, nor a child, nor a weak old person; do not cut down a fruit-bearing tree; do not destroy a dwelling [home]; do not kill a sheep or camel, unless [you need to kill it] for food; do not set bees on fire, nor drown them; do not misappropriate the spoils of war; and do not be cowardly. [Malik]

From this one statement, containing ten commands, one should see that the Muslim is obliged in warfare not only to show mercy to innocent and non-combatant humans, but even to the environment and to the animals. If all armies would only follow this advice today, then the wide spread destruction that war brings with it today would certainly not exist, no matter the combatants involved.

¹⁵ Riley-Smith, Jonathan. (1999). *The Oxford History of the Crusades*. New York: Oxford University Press

Does Islam Condemn Terrorism Scripturally?

In the Quran and Sunnah, Muslims are repeatedly reminded to be people of justice and to act upon the truth, not their emotions. A Muslim should never act out of revenge or hatred, for in such a case, he will be accountable to God for his crime. God has commanded in the Quran:

O you who believe! Stand out firmly for God, as witnesses to justice, and let not the hatred of others make you turn to wrong and to a departure from justice. Be just—that is next to righteousness, and fear God. For God is well-acquainted with all that you do.
{5:8}

The great Muslim scholar of Spain, al-Qurtubi, says in commentary on this verse:

The fact that someone disbelieves [in Islam] does not prevent us from being just to him, and that our dealing with them (in a state of war) should only be restricted to fighting or capturing them if they deserve so. It is not permissible to mutilate their bodies, even if they kill our women and children to cause us grief, it is not for us to intentionally mutilate them to cause them grief and sorrow.

Furthermore, Muslims are not only to be people of justice and honor, yet they are also commanded to strictly guard their oaths and treaties with others, a fact attested to throughout the history of Islam. When the Prophet entered into a treaty with the pagans of Makkah, one of the clauses stated that anyone who embraces Islam from the Makkans and then migrates to Madinah seeking refuge amongst the Muslims must be turned back. The following passage taken from *The Sealed Nectar* illustrates how difficult that decision was, and yet, how firm the resolve of the Prophet was to abide by it since he had given his word in the name of God.

It was during this time while the treaty was being written that Abu Jandal, Suhail's son who had accepted Islam not long before, appeared on the scene. He was brutally chained and was staggering with [misery] and fatigue. The Prophet and his Companions were moved to pity and tried to secure his release, but Suhail was adamant and said, "To signify that you are faithful to your contract, an opportunity has just arrived." ... It was indeed an anxious moment. On the one hand, Abu Jandal was lamenting at the top of his voice, "Am I to be returned to the pagans that they might [tempt] me from my religion, O Muslims?" But, on the other hand, the faithful engagement was also considered to be necessary, above all other considerations. The Prophet's heart welled up with sympathy, as he wanted to honor his word at all costs. He consoled Abu Jandal and said, "Be patient, resign yourself to the Will of God. God is going to provide for you and your helpless companions relief and a means of escape. We have concluded a treaty of peace with them and we have taken the pledge in the Name of God ... and in silent resignation was Abu Jandal then borne away with his chains.¹⁶

Abu Jandal ibn Sufyan later freed himself and escaped, but could not go to Madinah to be with the Prophet due to the treaty that had been concluded and he remained for a number of years by the seaside until the some of the terms of the treaty were later repealed by the pagans.

Moreover, it must be remembered that the Prophet also gave instructions to the Muslims on how to deal with people with whom they have an agreement, or with whom they have entered into a treaty. Attesting to this fact, it is authentically recorded that the Prophet Muhammad gave the following warning,

¹⁶ Mubārakfūrī, S.R. (2008). *The Sealed Nectar: (Ar-Raheequl-Makhtum); Biography of the Noble Prophet*. Riyadh: Darussalam

“Whoever kills a *Mu’ahid*¹⁷, will never smell the fragrance of Paradise, although its fragrance can be appreciated from the distance of forty years.” [Bukhari]

The Prophet Muhammad is also recorded to have frequently said in his sermons,

“The one who gives no security has no faith, and the one who does not respect his treaties has no religion.” [Ahmad and several others from the narration of Anas ibn Maalik]

Muslims living in the West, irrespective of which country they live in or which country they come from, be they citizens or residents, legally or illegal; all have been allowed into their respective new country with a mutual pact of security. Just as the police officers in those countries have a legal and a moral responsibility towards all Muslims residing in their countries, the Muslims too have a legal, religious and moral responsibility towards the lives and properties of the residents of those countries, even if those countries are at war with Muslims elsewhere in the world. It becomes a religious requirement upon the Muslims in such places to be law abiding citizens in all matters that do not contradict their religion. Hence, Muslims are religiously prohibited from stealing, cheating and disturbing the peace—not to mention being forbidden from performing the wanton destruction of innocent lives and property that occurs with most terrorist acts.

The last important point that must be clarified is that Muslims are not allowed to individually declare war on others, as some people have wrongly done today. In Islam, order and structure are of paramount importance so as to prevent much of the anarchy that we see these days. As was mentioned previously, the Muslim world today has no leadership (Caliphate) and thus cannot declare war upon another nation. Muslims have certainly been given the right to defend their homes if and when they are attacked, but the act of crossing into another sovereign country

¹⁷ *Mu’ahid*: A non-Muslim with a guarantee of security from Muslims, or those people with whom the Muslims have entered into a treaty

by a small gang of people in order to attack it is entirely illegal in Islamic law.

Thus, the emotionally driven actions of various extremists around the world today are found again and again to be without basis Islamically. God indeed is forgiving, but we do say very loudly and clearly that violating the treaties and guarantees of security that are assumed by entering into other countries and then cowardly killing innocents and non-combatants is something completely forbidden in Islam and leads to the punishment of God in the Hereafter.

In fact, in such turbulent times, the Prophet strongly recommended to the believers that they step back and to wait patiently until issues became clear, as opposed to taking action during times of confusion and trial. And there is no doubt that the issues of today are confusing and extremely frustrating, making it all the more necessary to pull back and not get dragged into something that can easily land someone in Hell.

Is Islam a Religion of Tolerance?

This last section of this chapter discusses one of the most misunderstood aspects of the religion of Islam. Many books and speakers repeatedly attack the religion as being one of intolerance, unable to co-exist with other ideas or ways. Once again, we shall return to history to see if this is truly the case.

But first, it would be beneficial to review some verses from the Quran on this matter to see if there is any scriptural evidence to support tolerance and co-existence in Islam.

And had your Lord willed, those on earth would have believed—all of them entirely. Then, [O Muhammad], would you compel the people in order that they become believers? {10:99}

Say, “Obey God, and obey the Messenger,” but if you turn away, he is only responsible for the duty placed on him, and you, for the duty placed on you. If you obey

him, you shall be on right guidance. Alas, the Messenger's duty is only to preach the clear Message.
{24:54}

In Islam, all of humanity is but one big family,

O humankind! We created you from a single [pair] of a male and female, and made you into nations and tribes so that you may come to know each other. Verily, the most honored of you in the sight of God is the most righteous of you. {49:13}

The religion of Islam insists that all people, not just Muslims, should enjoy freedom of religion and worship in safety and security. Islam provides protection to all religious places of worship (whether Jewish, Christian or Muslim) and commands Muslims to defend the right of freedom of worship for all.

And were it not that God checks people, some by means of others, there would have been demolished monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques in which the name of God is mentioned much. And God will surely support those who support Him. Indeed, God is Powerful and Exalted in Might. {22:40}

In fact, Jews and Christians are given a special status and distinction in Islam, and they are respectfully addressed in the Qur'an as "People of the Book"¹⁸. Jews, Christians and Muslims are viewed as closely related people whose faiths are all based on divinely revealed scriptures and who share in common a prophetic tradition.

...and nearest among them in love to the Believers will you find those who say "We are Christians". {5:82}

¹⁸ During the time of the Prophet Muhammad, most religions were based only upon oral traditions. The Quran encouraged Muslims to be people of reading. Since the Jews and Christians also had the tradition of a written religious record, the Torah and Gospel respectively, they were called the "People of the Book".

So now turning to history, let us look at just a few examples of how Muslims worked with other religions and peoples when power was in their hands. The first aspect that should be mentioned is how the Prophet dealt with the Christians who were conquered during his lifetime. The following words taken from his treaty with the Christian people of Najran (part of present day Yemen), in fact, form the basis of the Islamic understanding of relations with other religions.

Najran and their followers have the protection of God and the protection of Muhammed, the Prophet and Messenger of God, for themselves, their community, their land and their goods, both those who are absent and those who are present, and for their churches and their services (no bishop will be moved from his episcopate, and no monk from his monastery, and no church warden from his wardenship) and for all, great or small, that is under their hands. There is no usury and no blood revenge from pre-Islamic times.¹⁹

Also, a similar covenant was made by the second Caliph of Islam, ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab, with the people of Jerusalem after its peaceful takeover. In fact, ‘Umar’s own assassin, who killed him while he was leading prayer a few years later, was a Magian²⁰ non-Muslim, yet ‘Umar still commanded his successor to be merciful to the non-Muslims and not to violate their rights. It is recorded in the most authentic Islamic books of narrations and history that he said:

I advise the Caliph who will follow me to be kind to the non-Muslims and to fulfill our covenants with them, to

¹⁹ Yaqub, A.Y. (1969). *Kitab al Kharaj (edited Translation)*. Leiden: E.J. Brill

²⁰ Magian – another name for followers of Zoroastrianism, a monotheistic religion where fire symbolizes their concept of the One God, whom they call Ahura Mazda, and thus they worshipped at fire temples.

fight for the sake of their protection and not to overburden them.²¹

Another example of religious tolerance from the time of the Prophet Muhammad is his instruction to the Muslims to treat the Coptic Christian population of Egypt well. What is interesting about this case though is that Islam had not yet spread to Egypt, and thus, the following two hadith have both an element of tolerance and prophecy about them. The Prophet Muhammad said:

“By God, treat well the Copts of Egypt, for you shall conquer them, and they shall be your supporters in the cause of God.” [At-Tabarani, authenticated by Al-Albaani]

“When Egypt is conquered, treat the Copts with dignity, for they have a blood relation with us.” [Al-Hakim in al-Mustadrak meeting the criteria of Bukhari and Muslim; authenticated by Al-Dhahabi and Al-Albaani]

Several hundred years later, this spirit of tolerance continued to exist in the Muslim lands. During the Mongolian Tartar invasions of the Muslim lands, the famous Muslim scholar and warrior Ibn Taimiyyah went as an emissary to Qutlugh-Shah, one of the Tartar commanders, to negotiate the release of all prisoners of war. He was initially granted the release of only the Muslim POW's (prisoners of war), but persisted in his request for all POW's to be released—referring to the non-Muslims who lived under the protection of the Muslims—until it was later granted.²² It is important to note here that this great scholar risked his own life and the fate of all the Muslim POW's to secure the release of non-Muslims because he knew that this was his duty before God.

²¹ Hamidullah, M. (1945). *Muslim Conduct of State*. Retrieved from: <https://archive.org/details/MuslimConductOfStateDr.MuhammadHamidullah/page/n11>

²² Denise Aigle. (2007). The Mongol Invasions of Bilād Al-Shām by Ghāzān Khān and Ibn Taymīyah's Three “Anti-Mongol” Fatwas. *Mamlūk Studies Review*. 11.2: 89-120; Retrieved from: http://mamluk.uchicago.edu/MSR_XI-2_2007-Aigle.pdf

Furthermore, T. W. Arnold records that following the Islamic conquest of Constantinople (present day Istanbul) in 1453, that Sultan Muhammad II proclaimed himself the protector of the Greek Church.²³ Persecution of the Christians was forbidden and a decree was issued securing for the newly elected patriarch, Gennadios, and his bishops and successors after him, all privileges previously enjoyed under the former rule. The patriarch was also empowered to bring to the attention of the government and the Sultan (leader) any acts of injustice done by any of the Muslim governors.

The Christian author P. Bayle makes the following observation regarding the Greek Church in his Dictionary under, “the article Mahomed,”

The Christians have not been given orders to do anything but preach and instruct, yet, despite this, from time immemorial they have been exterminating by fire and sword all those who are not of their religion. We may feel certain that if Western Christians, instead of the Saracens and the Turks [names given by the Europeans to the Muslims], had won the dominion over Asia, there would be today not a trace left of the Greek Church, and that they would never have tolerated [Islam] as the “infidels” have tolerated Christianity there. We (Christians) enjoy the fine advantage of being far better versed than others in the art of killing, bombarding and exterminating the Human Race.²⁴

Not forgetting the tolerance and goodwill shown to the Jewish people, many non-Muslim historians, after reviewing the history of the Jewish people, have also made the following positive remarks regarding the Islamic tolerance of Jews living under their rule. Don Peretz, a Middle East scholar and Professor

²³ Arnold, T.W. (1896). *The Preaching of Islam: A History of the Propagation of the Muslim Faith*. Retrieved from:

http://www.truthandgrace.com/The_Preaching_of_Islam.pdf

²⁴ Bayle, P. (1826). *An Historical and Critical Dictionary*. London: Hunt and Clarke. Retrieved from:

<https://archive.org/details/anhistoricaland01baylgoog/page/n8>

Emeritus at the State University of New York in Binghamton, writes that "Muslim conquests in the 7th Century were welcomed by Jews because they were offered religious toleration".²⁵ As proof of this toleration, he said Jews were appointed to high positions. Wallbank and Schrier's *Living World History* says that conquered peoples "were generally treated with leniency" by Muslims.²⁶ Several books cite the great Jewish physician and scholar Maimonides as an example of how Jews flourished under Islamic governments.

Another non-Muslim scholar, Princeton historian Mark R. Cohen, remarked in one of his speeches that despite the current political instability in the Middle East, which has demonized Jews among Muslims and led to some vehement anti-Islamic Zionism, there is no inherent hostility between the two religions.

Anti-Semitism, understood as the irrational persecution of Jews, is not native to true Islam ... examples from history to show how Jews under Islamic rule were protected, whereas those under medieval Christendom were marginalized at best and, more often, excluded. Jews fared better under the Crescent than the Cross.²⁷

Even till today, anyone who has traveled abroad to countries populated by a Muslim majority will see Churches and Synagogues dating back well before Muslim rule, and even before the coming of the Prophet Muhammad. How were these places of worship protected during the spread of Islam? Even more important, how did the Christian and Jewish people of these territories continue to live there if Muslims were commanded to kill all who don't follow their opinion or religion, as some people say? Compare this to the Spanish Inquisition and the Crusades and you shall see that true tolerance, freedom of religion and peaceful co-existence are all the foundation and practice of only Islam for the past 1400 years.

²⁵ Peretz, D. (1990). *The Middle East*. Boston:Houghton Mifflin Co.

²⁶ Wallbank, T.W. and Schrier, A. (1982). *Living World History*. Glenview, Illinois: Scott Foresman

²⁷ Gabe, J. (2004). *Jews fared better under the Crescent than the Cross*. Retrieved from: http://ctr.concordia.ca/2004-05/oct_21/11/index.shtml

A Special Note on 9/11

Few people will doubt that the world changed for the worse on the fateful morning of September 11, 2001. It should also come as no surprise that Muslims don't feel any different about this statement than non-Muslims do. This brief aside gives me the unique opportunity to pass along their messages to you, as well as providing a platform to discuss a few very important matters related to this grave subject.

Firstly, Muslims worldwide share with non-Muslims a great deal of shock over these despicable and depraved acts. In fact, Muslims in both Muslim countries and the West, are deeply distressed over their religion essentially being hijacked by terrorists. To support this, a 2013 Pew Research Center poll asked Muslims across the globe whether attacks on civilians were justified. World-wide, 72% of Muslims said violence against civilians is “never justified,” and in the US, 81% of Muslims were against such violence.¹ Moreover, a 2010 Zogby poll reported that 69% of American Muslims supported stronger laws to fight terrorism.² Many Muslims reached out to help the victims of 9/11 and the later London bombings through charitable donations, night vigils and even donating their blood at Red Cross centers.³

The Muslims worldwide want non-Muslims to know that they too are struggling with the same evil of terrorism in their own lands and in their own lives. In fact, a 2005 Pew Research study that involved over 17,000 people in 17 countries showed a growing

¹ <https://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Society/2013/0501/How-US-Muslims-are-different-Pew-poll-sheds-light-on-global-contrasts>

² Zogby, J. (2010, Aug 26). *American Muslims Have Mainstream Values*. Retrieved from: <https://www.forbes.com/2010/08/26/muslims-polls-mosque-opinions-columnists-john-zogby.html#581c10e6648f>

³ Yeomans, M. (2015, Oct 11). *Arlington Muslim Community Donates Blood for 9/11 Victims*. Retrieved from:

<https://www.nbcdfw.com/news/local/Arlington-Muslim-Community-Donates-Blood-For-911-Victims-331945041.html>

belief among Muslims that Islamic extremism represents a threat to their own countries.⁴ Extremists who falsely use this noble religion to support their wicked and criminal acts are unfortunately a very vocal and very well covered (from a media perspective) minority. They have caused death and spread corruption even in various places like Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Pakistan, Indonesia Morocco and Egypt—making sincere and devout adherents to Islam look suspect even in their own countries.

It is important to remember that over four million Muslims live in the US with nearly three million living in the UK, where it is the second largest religion. The overwhelming majority of these people are peaceful, respectable and decent individuals who contribute to society in all fields, and try their best to make their towns and countries better places to live. The author of this book is himself a physician who has devoted over twelve years of his life to university and postgraduate training in medicine to help give hope and healing to sick patients, most of which are not Muslim.

All of these Muslims want you to know that they are deeply sorry for all of the horrors and grief that all people in America, the UK, Paris, or elsewhere in the world have experienced secondary to the acts of those who would claim to be Muslims practicing their religion. This is most assuredly a difficult time for all people of the world regardless of their religion, and negative, insulting generalizations about Muslims, that are often promoted on certain news stations, only do more to create hatred in society than to contribute towards healing. Even more than a decade after the attacks, Muslims are still greatly affected.⁵ It is thus hoped that this brief message will bridge the gap that may have been created between us, and be a starting point for understanding and working

⁴ <http://www.pewglobal.org/2005/07/14/islamic-extremism-common-concern-for-muslim-and-western-publics/>

⁵ Garrigan, M. (2011, Sep 11). *Area Muslims 'deeply affected by attacks.'* Retrieved from: https://rapidcityjournal.com/area-muslims-deeply-affected-by-attacks/article_cf102b70-dc2f-11e0-8414-001cc4c002e0.html

together to solve this problem that affects all people regardless of their religion.

Are Muslims Not Speaking Out Enough Against Terror?

This is a strange fallacy that seems to have been repeated often in certain news networks over the past few years. The question that should be asked though is, what is considered speaking out enough? Unfortunately, there seems to be no clear standard, though Muslims around the world have certainly not been silent in voicing their outrage and condemnation of various terror attacks that have occurred in the world from 9/11 onward.

After 9/11, here is a sample of what Muslims said:

For the record, the inhuman attacks of September 11 were condemned in the strongest terms by virtually all Islamic leaders, organizations, and countries. The Chairman of Saudi Arabia's Supreme Judicial Council summarized that, "Islam rejects such acts, since it forbids killing of civilians even during times of war, especially if they are not part of the fighting. A religion that views people of the world in such a way cannot in any sense condone such criminal acts, which require that their perpetrators and those who support them are held accountable. As a human community we have to be vigilant and careful to preempt these evils."⁶

After the July 7, 2005 London bombings, here is a sample of what Muslims said:

A prominent national Islamic civil rights and advocacy group today condemned this morning's bomb attacks in London as "barbaric crimes." In its statement, the Washington-based Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) said: "We join Americans of all faiths, and all people of conscience

⁶ Dodge, C.H. (2017, Mar 17). *Muslim Condemnations of 9/11*. Retrieved from: <https://www.thoughtco.com/muslim-condemnations-of-911-2003741>

worldwide, in condemning these barbaric crimes that can never be justified or excused. American Muslims offer their sincere condolences to the loved ones of those who were killed or injured in today's attacks and call for the swift apprehension and punishment of the perpetrators."⁷

The Muslim Council of Britain and other British Islamic groups issued similar condemnations of the attacks and urged Muslims to help in the recovery effort.⁸

After the 2015 Paris attacks, here is a sample of what Muslims said:

On Saturday, a coalition of eight leading national and local American Muslim groups, held a press conference in Washington, D.C., to condemn the carnage ... "Terrorists are not a representative of Islam in any way whatsoever," Saba Ahmed, president and founder of the Republican Muslim Coalition, told MSNBC. "ISIS should go back to the basic teachings of Islam. They are misusing the teachings of Islam to carry out horrifying atrocities. That's completely un-Islamic, and they have hijacked our religion. The Muslim community strongly condemns [the attacks]."⁹

Furthermore, if we review recent polls that assessed how Muslims feel about terror groups like ISIS, we find the following results, as taken from a 2015 poll:

Pew Research Center collected in 11 countries with significant Muslim populations, people from Nigeria to

⁷ https://www.cair.com/cair_condemns_barbaric_london_terror_attacks

⁸ http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/4660411.stm

⁹ Atkinson, K. (2015, Nov 14). *Muslim groups strongly condemn terror attacks in Paris*. Retrieved from: <http://www.msnbc.com/msnbc/muslim-groups-strongly-condemn-terror-attacks-paris>

Jordan to Indonesia *overwhelmingly expressed negative views* of ISIS.¹⁰

Yet, despite their condemnation of acts of terror and their participation in acts of rebuilding, most Western Muslims today find themselves in a rather precarious position. This was most profoundly documented in a 2018 Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU) poll of 2481 Americans, *American Muslim Poll 2018: Pride and Prejudice*, that documented the following:

Three quarters (76 percent) of U.S. Muslims overwhelmingly reject violence against civilians, compared to 59 percent of the general public. When it comes to targeting and killing civilians, only 12 percent of Muslims say such actions “can ‘often’ or ‘sometimes’ be justified” (for the general public, those numbers are at 14 percent).

At the same time, Muslims disproportionately report religious discrimination, with 61 percent of respondents saying they had encountered Islamophobia. Sixty-two percent of Muslims either strongly or somewhat agreed with the statement “most people associate negative stereotypes with my faith identity.” Muslim women were particularly vulnerable: 75 percent said they had experienced religious bias, compared with 40 percent of women overall.¹¹

¹⁰ <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/11/17/in-nations-with-significant-muslim-populations-much-disdain-for-isis/>

¹¹ Crunden, E.A. (2018, May 2). *Muslims reject violence more than other Americans, but are increasingly targets of discrimination*. Retrieved from: <https://thinkprogress.org/muslims-reject-violence-according-to-poll-421bda06027e/>

Women in Islam: Hidden and Glorious Past, Uncertain Present

- ✓ *Islam honors the woman as daughter, sister, wife and mother.*
- ✓ *Islam gave women many spiritual and human rights (spiritual equality before God, property rights, the right to inherit, the right to consent to marriage, etc.) several centuries in advance of other societies, both secular and religious.*
- ✓ *Islam does not give license to men to beat their wives and it furthermore condemns the practice.*
- ✓ *Islam not only encourages, but even requires, that women be educated, especially in matters of religion.*
- ✓ *Islam affords every woman the right to attend religious services in the Mosque if they choose to go and specifically prohibits men from denying them that right.*
- ✓ *Islamic history, from its outset, proudly documents the lives of numerous female scholars who helped to spread Islam and preserve the purity of its teachings.*

Introduction

Few subjects have been more controversial and intriguing than the role and position of women in Islam. The mere mention of women and Islam together often conjures up images of harems of veiled, submissive women in the desert whose whole purpose in life is the pleasure of their husband. In more recent times, these words have become darkly associated with oppression, domestic violence and barbaric forms of submission. Distorted images of Muslim women saturate media coverage, while critics condemn the religion of Islam for embodying all things anti-woman. While there are many parts of the world, even today, in which women seldom enjoy any real equality with men, Muslim women are repeatedly singled out as examples of the suppression and degradation supposedly brought about by the teaching of their faith.

The true reality behind many of these, and other, misconceptions regarding the position of women in Islam comes, most often, from cultural practices in those countries dominated by Muslims

rather than from any true Islamic teachings. Yet in the beginning, it was in the harsh deserts of 7th Century Arabia that the real dignity and honor of the woman came rushing to life through the revelation of Quranic passages such as:

The Believers, men and women, are protectors one of another, they enjoin what is just and forbid what is evil; they observe regular prayers, practice regular charity, and obey God and His Messenger. On them will God pour His mercy, for God is Exalted in power, Wise. God has promised to the Believers, men and women, gardens under which rivers flow, to dwell therein, and beautiful mansions in gardens of everlasting bliss. But the greatest bliss is the good pleasure of God; that is the supreme joy. {9:71-72}

And women are due rights similar to the rights against them, according to what is equitable, but men have a degree (of responsibility) over them. And God is Exalted in Power, Wise. {2:228}

Also from the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, we discover the new light that would illuminate the status of women, and would lead men to reconsider their whole attitude towards women. He did teach his followers,

The believers with the most perfect belief are also the best of them in manners and character. And the best of you are those who are best towards their wives. [Tirmithi]

In this chapter, the exact role of women in Islam will be clarified through a detailed exploration of the Islamic texts, with brief digressions from time to time to illustrate where culture has regrettably superseded religious practice in the lives of Muslims.

Before beginning this important discussion though, it is important that a few essential points be outlined. Firstly, when trying to understand the role of women in Islam, many people incorrectly try to compare Islamic teachings to modern secular social norms, believing incorrectly that these norms are actually Judeo-Christian teachings. In reality, modern society has cast off

nearly all of the Judeo-Christian tradition, as it relates to women, long ago in favor of more secular, or non-religious, attitudes. Conversely, the majority of Islamic teachings in this matter are still rigorously adhered to by a number of communities today. For the sake of fairness, this study will begin by first comparing the secular society that existed in Arabia before Islam with secular society today, and then move forward to compare Judeo-Christian attitudes towards women with those of Islam.

Women in Pre-Islamic Arabia

The inferior view of women that characterized much of the world in the 7th century CE was also thriving in the pagan societies of Arabia, prior to the advent of the Prophet Muhammad. The social environment at that time was rampant with tribal rivalry, petty wars, plundering, and general chaos lead by the male members of the various tribes. In such an environment, the status of women was unquestionably inferior. Unfortunately, historical resources concerning Arabia before the coming of Islam in the 7th century CE are dreadfully limited yet, despite the limited consensus on a number of matters relating to the details of this period, many points can still be inferred from the Quran and Hadith as they were literarily unquestioned on these issues in their era.

Reminiscent of Hindu tradition, women in Pre-Islamic Arabia were looked down upon from birth as demonstrated by the Pre-Islamic Arabs practice of female infanticide. It was a common belief that male children were more honorable and useful to the family. They would soon grow to be able to help guard against enemies during the many tribal conflicts, and males could also work in the family trading caravans and farms. Dr. Faryal Sulaimani adds:

Also, since tribal wars in that era were nearly continuous in nature... Ancient Arabs valued the capture of hostages and women above that of cattle and booty, since the former were far more profitable to them. They could ask a high ransom for hostages, or exchange them for their own hostages. Another advantage of women captives was to

marry them without a dowry, and to get more children, thus increasing their numbers and therefore their strength, which would raise their status among other tribes. Moreover, in taking women captive, greater humiliation is sustained by their enemy, so that sometimes the major aim of a man was to take the enemy's women captive in order to inflict shame and humiliation upon the enemy's whole tribe... Some even preferred death to being taken captive.¹

Hence, fearing poverty and shame before their people, a number of fathers would bury their infant daughters alive in the desolate desert sands. God condemned this abhorrent practice in the following passage of the Quran:

And when the news of the birth of a female child is brought to any of them, his face becomes dark, and he is filled with inward grief. He hides himself from the people because of the evil of that whereof he has been informed. Shall he keep her with dishonor or bury her in the sand? Surely, evil is their decision. {16:58-59}

Furthermore, women were also not allowed to inherit, whether it be a daughter inheriting from her father, a wife from her husband, or a mother from her son. She also could not own property or hold any claims to wealth, except for women of high social stature (e.g., Khadija).

Also in many cases, a widowed woman was counted as part of her husband's property to be inherited by his male heirs, in which case she was often given in marriage to the deceased man's eldest son from another wife². The Quran clearly abolished this degrading custom:

¹ Sulaimani, F. A. (1986). *The Changing Position of Women in Arabia under Islam during the Early Seventh Century*. Retrieved from:

<http://usir.salford.ac.uk/14814/1/361089.pdf>

² *Nikah al-Muqt*: This marriage also was called *Nikah al Dayyzen* which means "the hateful marriage" and Daizan was an epithet of reproach applied to a man who had made such a marriage. This marriage allowed a son to have his step-mother in marriage, after the death of his father. (Sulaimani, 1986, p.24)

And marry not women whom your fathers married, except those marriages that have already taken place in the past; it was a shameful, detestable, and abominable custom indeed. {4:22}

If the widow was not married to her deceased husband's eldest son, then she was bound to be inherited by her brother-in-law, a practice known as levirate marriage, and sanctioned in the Bible³. Yet, this forced inheritance of a woman was forbidden in the Quran:

O you who have believed, it is not lawful for you to inherit women by compulsion.... {4:19}

In pre-Islamic Arabia, one of his brothers would throw his clothes over her and thus claim her as his property, paying the dowry already paid by the deceased⁴. The widow was not allowed to leave the home of her husband in either circumstance. She couldn't exit such a marriage unless she paid a financial sum to ransom herself⁵.

³ "If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the dead man shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. Her husband's brother shall go in to her and take her as his wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. And the first son whom she bears shall succeed to the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out of Israel. And if the man does not wish to take his brother's wife, then his brother's wife shall go up to the gate to the elders and say, 'My husband's brother refuses to perpetuate his brother's name in Israel; he will not perform the duty of a husband's brother to me.' Then the elders of his city shall call him and speak to him, and if he persists, saying, 'I do not wish to take her,' then his brother's wife shall go up to him in the presence of the elders and pull his sandal off his foot and spit in his face. And she shall answer and say, 'So shall it be done to the man who does not build up his brother's house.' And the name of his house shall be called in Israel, 'The house of him who had his sandal pulled off.'" [Deuteronomy 25:5-10]

⁴ al-Tabari, Muhammad ibn Jarir. (n.d.). *Tafsir al-Tabari*.

⁵ Shah, N. (2006). *Women, the Koran and International Human Rights Law*. Martinus Nijhoff Publishers

Likewise, the power to divorce lied ultimately in the husband's hand, and if he chose to divorce his wife, she was forced to remain in his home⁶. Regarding the ease of divorcing women, and the often resentful reasons behind doing so, Dr. Sulaimani concludes:

So divorce was an easy matter, a woman was just like a puppet in her husband's hands. He could play with her feelings, humiliate her and divorce and remarry her whenever he liked without her being able to defend herself and her life. And even more than that, before Islam, a husband could prevent his divorced wife from remarrying and could drive a bargain for his consent to the application of a suitor.⁷

This disregard for the woman and her right to return to her birth family was as a result of the maternal family holding no significance, in contrast to the paternal family which held all the importance.

Children were often conceived out of wedlock due to the widespread promiscuity in Pre-Islamic Arabia. Wife lending was also common where husbands allowed their wives to live with, and get impregnated by, men distinguished by courage or nobility to produce highborn offspring.⁸ When they did marry however, there was no limit to the number of wives that a man could take at one time. Some historians have reported that it was customary for the men of the wealthy Quraish tribe of Mecca to have ten wives each, and sometimes even more⁹. Furthermore, women had no choice or right to refuse entry into any marriage as the decision regarding spouse selection was entirely in the

⁶ Ali, Jawad. (1955). *Tarikh al-Arab Qabl al-Islam (The History of the Arabs before Islam)*. Iraq: Matba'a al-Ilm. Retrieved from: <http://www.alhasso.com/arab-history-1.pdf>

⁷ Sulaimani, F. A. (1986). *The Changing Position of Women in Arabia under Islam during the Early Seventh Century*. Retrieved from: <http://usir.salford.ac.uk/14814/1/361089.pdf>

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ali, Jawad. (1955). *Tarikh al-Arab Qabl al-Islam (The History of the Arabs before Islam)*. Iraq: Matba'a al-Ilm. Retrieved from: <http://www.alhasso.com/arab-history-1.pdf>

hands of her guardian (father or eldest male relative in his absence), again unless she was of a privileged social class. “*The marriage contract rested completely in the hands of the woman’s legal guardian whose words with regard to her marital status could never be questioned.*”¹⁰

Moreover, women were often beaten severely for disobedience. In most of the tribes, they held little to no honor and were primarily seen as sexual objects for men’s pleasure. They were given the license to dress scantily outdoors, even while performing acts of ritual worship (such as circling around the Sacred House in Mecca naked¹¹)¹², for the pleasure and entertainment of the men in their societies. Though absolute nudity was a characteristic of slave women and avoided by free women in pre-Islamic Arabia.¹³

Yet, similar to the other ancient societies, elite upper-class women in Pre-Islamic Arabia were allowed to hold certain positions of distinction in society and both the concept of goddess and priestess were well accepted in their tribal communities¹⁴ (e.g., the wife of Musaylama the Liar who claimed she was a prophetess and was accepted as such by her followers). Other women were well known for their beautiful singing voices and were used effectively during wars to hasten the defeat of opposing armies.¹⁵ They also commanded high

¹⁰ al-Mubarkpuri, S.R. (2008). *The Sealed Nectar*. Riyadh: Dar-us-Salam Publications

¹¹ Some sources also report that men too would go around the sacred house naked, but there is no consensus on this point whereas the issue of women’s nudity is confirmed in Hadith [Bukhari].

¹² al-Tabari, Muhammad ibn Jarir. (n.d.). *Tafsir al-Tabari*. [In commentary to Quran 7:28]

¹³ Sulaimani, F. A. (1986). *The Changing Position of Women in Arabia under Islam during the Early Seventh Century*. Retrieved from: <http://usir.salford.ac.uk/14814/1/361089.pdf>

¹⁴ Ahmed, Leila (1992). *Women and Gender in Islam*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press

¹⁵ Doubleday, V. (1999). The Frame Drum in the Middle East: Women, Musical Instruments and Power. *Ethnomusicology*. Vol. 43, No. 1, pp. 101-134.

wages (most often paid to their male “agents”) for their singing and even higher dowries for marriage.¹⁶

So in summary, a number of characteristics appear to be in common among many of the ancient societies in regards to their attitudes towards women. Common women in these societies were generally barred from owning property, choosing their own spouses or initiating divorce. They were generally seen as inferior and only useful for the entertainment, sexual or otherwise, of men. Yet, they were also generally free of any formal dress requirements and were in fact encouraged to cover as little of their body as necessary, short of absolute nudity. From a religious standpoint, certain privileged women were also allowed to hold high positions of honor in the religious structures of their societies as priestesses, prophetesses and even goddesses.

Women in Modern Day Secular Societies

In the current era, women's rights have truly made great gains when compared with the societies of ancient civilizations, though a number of basic similarities still remain. Western women have justly earned the rights to own property, to work for themselves and keep their own earnings, to go out freely and without permission, to choose their spouses, and the right to be involved in the political process. Challenges still remain though in the Western world especially in regards to equal pay for equal work, equal opportunity for job selection and job promotion, and dignity—most prominent in the recent #MeToo movement.¹⁷ It is in regards to this last point, the general dignity of the woman that this discussion will now proceed.

As will be later presented in detail, one of the greatest criticisms leveled at Muslim women today is in regards to their dress code. In the minds of many people today, freedom—or women's liberation—somehow equates with a reduction in clothing; the

¹⁶ Ali, Jawad. (1955). *Tarikh al-Arab Qabl al-Islam* (The History of the Arabs before Islam). Iraq: Matba'a al-Ilm. Retrieved from:

<http://www.alhasso.com/arab-history-1.pdf>

¹⁷ Smartt, Nicole. (2018). Sexual Harassment in the Workplace in A #MeToo World. *Forbes*.

more skin that a woman shows, or is allowed to show, is apparently an indicator of how “liberated” she is. Yet, the oppressed and lowest classes of women of ancient societies were often encouraged, if not outright coerced, to display their bodies in public, and to dress as provocatively as possible. This of course did not represent liberation or the attainment of any rights for them, but it represented only the actualization of the carnal desires of the men around them who sought to gaze lustfully at women's bodies in much the same way that they continue to do today. Author Laurie Shrage gathers several revealing historical perspectives on the general status, condition and early objectification of women, noting:

... [The historian Gerda Lerner] argues that to understand how prostitution evolved historically, we need to understand “its relationship to the sexual regulation of all women in archaic states and its relationship to the enslavement of females” (Lerner 1986, 124). Lerner writes,

“It is likely that commercial prostitution derived directly from the enslavement of women and the consolidation and formation of classes. Military conquest led, in the third millennium B.C., to the enslavement and sexual abuse of captive women. As slavery became an established institution, slave-owners rented out their female slaves as prostitutes, and some masters set up commercial brothels staffed by slaves” (Lerner 1986, 133).

Lerner suggests that prostitutes and concubines were used by rulers as symbols of wealth and power, and this practice was then emulated by other men of wealth and status (Lerner 1986, 133). Also, paupers were often forced to sell children, adding to the supply of labor for this purpose. Furthermore, “As the sexual regulation of women of the propertied class became more firmly entrenched, the virginity of respectable daughters became a financial asset for the family.”

Lerner's account connects modern forms of prostitution to oppressive social practices: the enslavement of women and the treatment of non-slave females as sexual property to be exchanged both in and out of marriage. By contrast, rather than attribute the rise of commercial prostitution to slavery and capitalist class formation, Gayle Rubin traces the origins of prostitution to kinship systems in which women are exchanged as gifts among families to cement social bonds (Rubin 1975, 175). Rubin writes,

If women are the gifts, then it is men who are the exchange partners. And it is the partners, not the presents, upon whom reciprocal exchange confers its quasi-mystical power of social linkage. The relations of such a system are such that women are in no position to realize the benefits of their own circulation. As long as the relations specify that men exchange women, it is men who are the beneficiaries of the product of such exchanges — social organization. (Rubin 1975, 174)

In other words, in the very creation of society, women were allegedly subordinated through ritual exchange in order to create bonds of kinship among men as the foundation of the social order ... Rubin writes

The “exchange of women” is a seductive and powerful concept. It is attractive in that it places the oppression of women within social systems, rather than biology (Rubin 1975: 175)

On both Lerner's and Rubin's accounts, prostitution (women engaging in sexual activities for extrinsic rewards) and trafficking in women (control over women's sexual capacities by others) predates the commodification of things,

and it is a transhistorical, transcultural phenomenon that takes on different forms in different contexts.¹⁸

So this “commodification” continues today where the sexual objectification of women has supposedly taken more subtle and socially acceptable forms like: scantily clad women in advertising and media (in many cases having nothing to do with the product itself—hamburger commercials, soft drinks, car sales, etc.), pornography, strip bars, certain chain restaurants requiring waitresses to dress in short and revealing “uniforms”, and most recently the great emphasis on cosmetic surgery—breast augmentation in specific. In short, too often for the women of today does their happiness in life hinge on their usefulness to men; that their worth as a person depends more on the size of their bra than the size of their intellect or character.

The Historical Position of Women in Religious Tradition

Having briefly examined the attitudes of ancient civilizations and modern secular society towards women, we shall now turn our attention separately to a more detailed review of the perspectives particular to the religions of Judaism and Christianity. Since the scriptures of these two religions shape the lives of a great many people today in the world, and due also to their many shared beliefs with Islam, they demand a more in-depth review so as to best understand and appreciate the Islamic position concerning women. It is important to remember the attitudes regarding women and their rights have changed dramatically in Judeo-Christian *societies* over the past several centuries due to secularization of those societies. Therefore, this review will examine only the scriptures and the cited opinions of authoritative figures in each of these two religions, since they are still considered the word of God by a large number of their respective followers. Lastly, important conclusions will be made regarding the relationship of the *cultural* attitudes predominant throughout much of Judeo-Christian history in comparison to the actual Biblical practice of the Prophets.

¹⁸ Shrage, Laurie. (2004). Feminist Perspectives on Sex Markets. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), Retrieved from: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2016/entries/feminist-sex-markets>

The Predominantly Negative View of Women in the Judeo-Christian Texts

To have a proper understanding of the Judeo-Christian scriptural perceptions of women, one must first look to the premise that is used to define the qualities and roles of women. This premise is the Biblical story of the creation of Adam and Eve, and the sin associated with their eating of the forbidden apple. From it stems both the predominantly negative view of women in general, and the theologically significant concept of original sin.

In Genesis 2:4 to 3:24, the creation of Adam and Eve is detailed along with their sin. God had instructed both Adam and Eve not to eat from the forbidden tree in the Garden of Eden. Yet, it was Satan, in the form of a serpent, who then persuaded Eve to eat from the tree, and in turn, she convinced Adam to eat along with her. When asked by God regarding what he had done, Adam replied,

The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree and I ate it. [NIV, Genesis 3:12]

As a result, God then said to Eve:

I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you. [NIV, Genesis 3:16]¹⁹

¹⁹ Throughout this book, all attempts have been made to present information in a fair way by including the context and intended meaning behind quoted passages whenever possible. The context of this particular passage in Genesis is accompanied by the following commentary from the well respected and authoritative Christian commentary of Matthew Henry (d1714). For Genesis 3:16-17, he writes: “The woman, for her sin, is condemned to a state of sorrow, and of subjection; proper punishments of that sin, in which she had sought to gratify the desire of her eye, and of the flesh, and her pride. Sin brought sorrow into the world; that made the world a vale of tears. No wonder our sorrows are multiplied, when our sins are so. He shall rule over thee, is but God’s command, Wives, be subject to your own husbands. If man had not sinned, he would always have ruled with wisdom and love; if the woman had not sinned, she would always have obeyed with humility and

To Adam, God also said:

Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree....
Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you
will eat of it all the days of your life... [NIV, Genesis 3:17]

Thus, in the Bible, the portrayal of Eve as a temptress endures as a lasting legacy shaping much of Judeo-Christian attitudes towards women from that point onwards. This regrettable legacy is the belief that Eve, as the mother of all women, passed on her guilt, deceitful nature, and punishment down to her daughters—the women of all mankind. Evidence of this belief is apparent in the Old Testament where it states:

I find more bitter than death the woman who is a snare,
whose heart is a trap and whose hands are chains. The man
who pleases God will escape her, but the sinner she will
ensnare...while I was still searching, but not finding, I found
one upright man among a thousand, but not one upright
woman among them all. [NIV, Ecclesiastes 7:26-28]²⁰

meekness. Adam laid the blame on his wife; but though it was her fault to persuade him to eat the forbidden fruit, it was his fault to hearken to her. Thus men's frivolous pleas will, in the day of God's judgment, be turned against them” (Henry, M. (1997). *Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary on the whole Bible*. Nashville: T. Nelson.)

²⁰ Solomon, in his search into the nature and reason of things, had been miserably deluded. But he here speaks with godly sorrow. He alone who constantly aims to please God, can expect to escape; the careless sinner probably will fall to rise no more. He now discovered more than ever the evil of the great sin of which he had been guilty, the loving of many strange women, 1 Kings 11:1. A woman thoroughly upright and godly, he had not found. How was he likely to find such a one among those he had collected? If any of them had been well disposed, their situation would tend to render them all nearly of the same character. He here warns others against the sins into which he had been betrayed. Many a godly man can with thankfulness acknowledge that he has found a prudent, virtuous woman in the wife of his bosom; but those men who have gone in Solomon's track, cannot expect to find one. (Henry, 1997)

In another part of the Hebrew literature found in the Catholic Bible we read:

From the woman came the beginning of sin, and by her we all die. [Douay-Rheims Bible, Ecclesiasticus 25:33]

Another often overlooked passage of the Old Testament sets the value of women as between 50% and 66% the value of men depending on their age:

The Lord said to Moses, "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'If anyone makes a special vow to dedicate persons to the Lord by giving equivalent values, set the value of a male between the ages of twenty and sixty at fifty shekels of silver, according to the sanctuary shekel; and if it is a female, set her value at thirty shekels. If it is a person between the ages of five and twenty, set the value of a male at twenty shekels and of a female at ten shekels. If it is a person between one month and five years, set the value of a male at five shekels of silver and that of a female at three shekels of silver. If it is a person sixty years old or more, set the value of a male at fifteen shekels and of a female at ten shekels.[NIV, Leviticus 27:1-7]²¹

In the New Testament, the trend of representing the woman as inferior continues in the writings of Paul.

A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.[NIV, 1 Timothy 2:11-14]²²

²¹ Zeal for the service of God disposed the Israelites, on some occasions, to dedicate themselves or their children to the service of the Lord, in his house for life. Some persons who thus dedicated themselves might be employed as assistants; in general they were to be redeemed for a value. (Henry, 1997)

²² According to St. Paul, women are not allowed to be public teachers in the church; for teaching is an office of authority. But good women may and ought to teach their children at home the principles of true religion. Also, women must not think themselves excused from learning what is necessary to

Also from the New Testament,

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.[Ephesians 5:22-24]²³

Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them. [NIV, Colossians 3: 18-19]²⁴

Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God. [Titus 2:3-5]

salvation, though they must not usurp authority. As woman was last in the creation, which is one reason for her subjection, so she was first in the transgression. But there is a word of comfort; that those who continue in sobriety, shall be saved in childbearing, or with childbearing, by the Messiah, who was born of a woman. And the especial sorrow to which the female sex is subject, should cause men to exercise their authority with much gentleness, tenderness, and affection. (Henry, 1997)

²³ The duty of wives is, submission to their husbands in the Lord, which includes honouring and obeying them, from a principle of love to them. The duty of husbands is to love their wives. The love of Christ to the church is an example, which is sincere, pure, and constant, notwithstanding her failures. (Henry, 1997)

²⁴ The epistles most taken up in displaying the glory of the Divine grace, and magnifying the Lord Jesus, are the most particular in pressing the duties of the Christian life. We must never separate the privileges and duties of the gospel. Submission is the duty of wives. But it is submission, not to a severe lord or stern tyrant, but to her own husband, who is engaged to affectionate duty. And husbands must love their wives with tender and faithful affection. (Henry, 1997)

As regards the opinions and writings of the Judeo-Christian theologians and clergy leaders, the interpretation of the above verses becomes clear first in the Jewish writings. According to Jewish Rabbis, there are nine curses and death inflicted on women due to the Fall. In fact, there exist at least three such listings of curses ascribed to women with the following, taken from the exegesis text—*Chapters of Rabbi Eliezer*, being only one such list. In it, he states:

To the woman He gave nine curses and death: the burden of the blood of menstruation and the blood of virginity; the burden of pregnancy; the burden of childbirth; the burden of bringing up the children; her head is covered as one in mourning; she pierces her ear like a permanent slave or slave girl who serves her master; she is not to be believed as a witness; and after everything—death.²⁵

In the *Talmud*²⁶, Midrash Rabbah states:

The Sages say that four traits apply to women: They are greedy, eavesdroppers, lazy, and jealous.... Rabbi Yehoshua bar Nahmani adds: argumentative and talkative. Rabbi Levi adds: thieves and vagrants.

(*Bereishit Rabbah* 45:5, Theodor Albeck ed., pp. 452-453.)

Furthermore, in several places in the *Talmud*, women are considered untrustworthy as witnesses because they are of deficient moral fiber, being inherently lightheaded, “*nashim daatan kalah*” (e.g., Shab 33b and Kid 80b).

Additionally, Orthodox Jewish men are required to recite in their daily morning prayer:

²⁵ Friedlander, G. (1965). *Pirkei De Rabbi Eliezer translated and annotated with introduction and indices*. New York: Hermon Press, pg. 100.)

²⁶ Written collection of Jewish oral traditions interpreting the Torah. Has two components: the *Mishnah* (200 CE), the actual written form of Judaism's Oral Law; and the *Gemara* (500 CE), primarily a commentary on the *Mishnah*. The terms *Talmud* and *Gemara* are sometimes used interchangeably.

Blessed be God King of the universe that Thou has not made me a woman (Shelo asani ishah²⁷).²⁸

Turning our attention next to the opinions of the early Church Fathers, it is clear that they continued to view women as inferior. The following passages paint a less than admirable picture of a very large portion of Christian history as it relates to women—from the formation of the Church until at least the 17th Century. Yet, it is necessary to review this history since Christians throughout time believe that their saints and scholars are inspired by the Holy Spirit, and hence, make a case that their statements are “the word of God”. It is hoped that a careful analysis of these words will cause people to reconsider their preconceived notions regarding what truly is the “word of God,” and allow them to look with more sincerity, and with less bias, at Islamic beliefs.

Firstly, it is important to remember that much of Christian theology developed under the shade of the 3rd Century Roman Empire, where the Romans and Hellenists viewed society as layered in superior and inferior forms of human being. In this setting, women were generally regarded as inferior to men by nature. This perception appears to have significantly influenced the opinions of the early Fathers of the Church who also considered women to be inferior.

Both nature and the law place the woman in a subordinate condition to the man.

(St. Irenaeus²⁹, Fragment no 32.)³⁰

²⁷ Itshakov, I. (2015). *Morning Blessings with Keriat Shema Birkhot Hashahar Im Keriat Shema*. Flushing, NY: Ben Israel Inc.

²⁸ Schlesinger, J. (1891). *Five books of Moses. Hamishah humshe Torah: ‘im ha-haftarot ye-seder ha-tefilot le-Shabtot ha-shanah*. Boston, MA: Harvard University

²⁹ Bishop of Lugdunum in Gaul during the 2nd Century CE, which is now Lyon, France. His writings were influential in the early development of Christian theology, and he is established as a saint by both the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church; with both considering him a Father of the Church. He was also a disciple of Polycarp of Smyrna, considered by many to be a disciple of John the Evangelist.

It is the natural order among people that women serve their husbands and children their parents, because the justice of this lies in (the principle that) the lesser serves the greater . . . This is the natural justice that the weaker brain serve the stronger. This therefore is the evident justice in the relationships between slaves and their masters, that they who excel in reason, excel in power.

(St. Augustine³¹, *Questions on the Heptateuch, Book I*, § 153.)

What is the difference whether it is in a wife or a mother, it is still Eve the temptress that we must beware of in any woman.³² (St. Augustine)

Women must cover their heads because they are not the image of God . . . How can anyone maintain that woman is the likeness of God when she is demonstrably subject to the dominion of man and has no kind of authority? For she can neither teach, nor be a witness in a court, nor exercise citizenship, nor be a judge—then certainly not exercise dominion.³³ (Ambrosiaster³⁴, On 1 Corinthians 14, 34.)

³⁰ Schaff, P. (translator). (2012). *The Sacred Writings of Saint Irenaeus*. Altenmünster: Jazzybee Verlag

³¹ Aurelius Augustinus, Augustine of Hippo, very commonly known as Saint Augustine (354 – 430CE) is one of the most celebrated and central figures in the development of Western Christianity. In Roman Catholicism and the Anglican Communion, he is a saint and highly distinguished Doctor of the Church, in addition to his patronage of the Augustinian religious order. Many Protestants attribute the foundation of their Reformation teachings regarding salvation and grace to St. Augustine’s teachings.

³² (n.a.). (1977). *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation Volume 32. Saint Augustine: Letters Volume V* (204-270). Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press

³³ Berry, J. (2016). *Why Historical Phenomena Instigates Resistance to Female Clergy*. Lulu.com

³⁴ The name given to the author of a commentary on all the Epistles of St. Paul, with the exception of that to the Hebrews. It is usually published among the works of St. Ambrose (P.L., XVII, 45-508).

The Apostle wants women, who are manifestly inferior, to be without fault, in order that the Church of God be pure.³⁵ (Ambrosiaster, On 1 Timothy 3,11.)

In very truth, women are a feeble race, untrustworthy and of mediocre intelligence. Once again we see that the Devil knows how to make women spew forth ridiculous teachings, as he has just succeeded in doing in the case of Quintilla Maxima and Priscilla.³⁶ (Epiphanius³⁷, Panarion 79, §1.)

Almost 1000 years later, the 13th Century Catholic scholar and Doctor of the Church, St. Thomas Aquinas, considered by many Catholics to be the Church's greatest theologian, still viewed women in a narrow way:

As regards the individual nature, woman is defective and misbegotten, for the active force in the male seed tends to the production of a perfect likeness in the masculine sex; while the production of woman comes from a defect in the active force or from some material indisposition, or even from some external influence.³⁸

This quote comes from St. Thomas Aquinas' famed *Summa Theologica* (Part I, Question 92), but in reality is actually an excerpt from "*On the Generation of Animals*," by the Greek philosopher Aristotle (384 BC – 322 BC). Here St. Thomas is making a scientific statement about the physical formation of females and he quotes Aristotle because he was the best scientific authority at the time.

³⁵ *Ambrosiaster on John 8:1-11*. Retrieved from:

<http://textualcriticism.scienceontheweb.net/FATHERS/Ambrosiaster.html>

³⁶ Tucker, R.A. and Liefeld, W.L. (1987). *Daughters of the Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan

³⁷ Church Father from the 4th century, known for his extensive pursuit of heresies wherever they could be found in the difficult era of the Christian Church immediately after the Council of Nicaea.

³⁸ Mantravadi, A. (2017, March 24). *No Thank You, Aquinas: Women Are Not Misbegotten*. Retrieved from:

<http://mymantravadi.com/2017/03/24/1594/>

Immediately after the passage in question, St. Thomas proceeds to discuss the creation of women from a *theological* angle. His theological conclusion though is different than that of Aristotle quoted earlier:

On the other hand, as regards human nature in general, woman is not misbegotten, but is included in nature's intention as directed to the work of generation. Now the general intention of nature depends on God, Who is the universal Author of nature. Therefore, in producing nature, God formed not only the male, but also the female.

What St. Thomas states here is in effect his theological rejection of Aristotle's biological idea. For clarity, Aristotle's theory was that all children are intended to be male, since the male was believed to represent perfection. If a female is born though, this would represent a defect in the process somewhere—thus women were nothing more than defective and infertile males, hence their description as “defective and misbegotten”. This Greco-Roman view of procreation, a scientific biological view, was dominant in Europe until the 18th century.

St. Thomas was among the first Christian authors to refute this concept, at least theologically, if not biologically, by stating that God's plan included both men and women. Hence, women were therefore not defective males, but a precise part of God's creation. Nonetheless, although his words represented a step forward for women, their role was still relegated to little more than, “the work of generation” (producing children). While presenting a slightly more positive view regarding women in that era, this still implies a narrow view of their role in 13th Century Europe and the Church.

Exemplifying this continued narrow view of women and their role in society, declarations from other Church theologians from the Middle Ages continued to endorse the inferiority of women.

Women cannot carry any public responsibility... Women cannot hold any civil office... Nature produced women for this purpose that they give birth to children... The man is

the image of God.... The womb is the soil in which the seed grows....

(Johannes Teutonicus³⁹, Apparatus, passim)

It is fitting that woman does not possess the power of the keys because she is not made in the image of God, but only man who is the glory and image of God. That is why a woman must be subject to man and be as his slave, and not the other way about. (Antonius de Butrio⁴⁰, Commentaria, II, fol. 89r.)

Upon reading these statements, there are some people who proclaim that these were only minority opinions of some otherwise very noble and great leaders of the Church. Notwithstanding the previous comment made concerning inspiration by the Holy Spirit, the following statements made from *Decretum Graniati* (The Law Book of Gratian⁴¹, also known as *Concordantia discordantium canonum*), originally written in 1140 CE, clearly state that such theories regarding the

³⁹ John the Teuton (1180 - 1252), among the first disciples of Saint Dominic and the fourth master general of the Dominican order. He occupies a significant position in the early history of the Dominican order. He was a Provincial in Hungary, and later a Bishop in Croatia. He traveled as an envoy of Pope Gregory IX to the Bulgarian Prince Asen II. He also credited with standardizing the Dominican liturgy.

⁴⁰ 14th century Italian jurist and law professor at Bologna. De Butrio penned numerous commentaries to the Decretals of Gregory IX and the Liber Sextus, which give a comprehensive glimpse into the existing practices of canon and civil law at that time.

⁴¹ Johannes Gratian, considered by Catholics to be the true founder of the science of canon law, compiled Church laws (canons) from all available sources and called the collection *Concordia Discordantium Canonum* (the synchronizing of discordant canons). The collection became known as the *Decretum Gratiani* and is considered by Catholics to be the first truly scientific treatise on canon law (*Catholic Encyclopedia*). It was the primary textbook of canon law for over a century until it was absorbed into the *Corpus Iuris Canonici* as the first part of this collection of six legal texts. The *Corpus Iuris Canonici* was then the primary source of Canon Law in the Roman Catholic Church until Pentecost Sunday, May 27, 1917, when a revised Code of Canon Law was issued by then Pope Benedict XV.

inferiority of women were in fact Church teachings (canon) throughout the Middle Ages and well beyond.

He must know that Ambrose does not call him “man” on account of his male gender, but by the strength of the soul; and he should realize that “woman” is not called so because of the gender of her body, but because of the weakness of her mind.⁴²

Women are in servile submission, on account of which they must be subject to men in everything. (*Decretum*, chapter 11)⁴³

Ambrosius says: “Women must cover their heads because they are not the image of God. They must do this as a sign of their subjection to authority and because sin came into the world through them. Their heads must be covered in church in order to honor the bishop. In like manner they have no authority to speak because the bishop is the embodiment of Christ. They must thus act before the bishop as before Christ, the judge, since the bishop is the representative of the Lord. Because of original sin they must show themselves submissive.”⁴⁴

Even if a woman is learned and saintly, she still must not presume to baptize or to instruct men in a [congregational] assembly. As found in the Council of Carthage, “About baptizing by women we want you to know that those who presume to baptize bring themselves into no small danger. So we do not advise it, for it is dangerous, yes, even forbidden and godless. That is to say, if man is the head of woman and he is promoted to the priesthood, it militates against divine justice to disturb the arrangement of the

⁴² Friedberg, E.A. (ed). (1879). *Decretum Gratiani Causa 32*, question 7, chapter 18. *Corpus Juris Canonici*; reprint Graz 1955; vol. 1. Retrieved from: <https://geschichte.digitale-sammlungen.de/decretum-gratiani/online/angebot>

⁴³ Friedberg, E.A. (ed). (1879). *Decretum Gratiani Causa 32*, question 7, chapter 18. *Corpus Juris Canonici*; reprint Graz 1955; vol. 1. Retrieved from: <https://geschichte.digitale-sammlungen.de/decretum-gratiani/online/angebot>

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Creator by degrading man from the preeminence granted to him to the lowest place. For woman is the body of man, has come from his rib and is placed in subjection to him, for which reason also she has been chosen to bear children. The Lord says, 'He will rule over her.' Man has lordship over the woman, since he is also her head. But if we have already forbidden women to preach, how would anyone want to permit them to enter the priesthood? It would be unnatural. For women to be priests is an error of heathen godlessness but not of Christ's way. But if women are permitted to baptize, then Christ would surely have been baptized by his mother and not by John and he would have sent women with us to baptize also, when he sent us out to baptize."⁴⁵

Yet the reader should not think that these teachings were limited to the Catholic Church alone. In reality, this was a perspective and attitude that was shared by numerous branches and sects of Christianity, including that of the Protestant movement. In fact, in the 16th century, history records the words and actions of the often controversial Martin Luther, father of the Protestant Reformation—the movement for church renewal which signified a break from the Catholic Church. Although his theories revolutionized Christianity, his renewal unfortunately did not seem to promote any change in the predominant attitudes toward women.

If (women) become tired or even die, that does not matter. Let them die in childbirth, that's why they are there.⁴⁶
(Works of Martin Luther, 20.84)

The word and works of God is quite clear, that women were made either to be wives or prostitutes.
(Works of Martin Luther, 12.94)

God created Adam master and lord of living creatures, but Eve spoilt all, when she persuaded him to set himself

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ellerbe, H. (1995). *The Dark Side of Christian History*. Melbourne, Australia: Morningstar Books.

above God's will. 'Tis you women, with your tricks and artifices, that lead men into error.⁴⁷

(The Bondage of the Will, 1527)

Taking all of this a step further, it becomes apparent that the Biblical Eve takes on a far greater theological significance. Her sin gave rise to the very central theme behind Christianity. Her one act of disobedience led to the central reason behind Jesus Christ's mission and eventual sacrifice in Christian theology. Due to her sin, she caused Adam to fall out of grace, expelling them both from Heaven to Earth. As punishment, Earth itself became an accursed place of dwelling. All descendents were born in sin, due to the fact that their repentance was not accepted by God. And so, to purify all of humanity from this "original sin," Jesus was believed to have been sacrificed on the cross. In essence, Eve is believed to be responsible for the fall of all of mankind.

Yet, before moving forward to the next section, an important point must be made after reviewing so many of these regrettable and derogatory opinions about women; they are nonetheless the statements of men and not supported in the actions of many of God's Prophets. Many of these statements were made by otherwise devout men who, in most cases, appear to have been reflecting the predominant views of their own societies and cultures. Yet, when comparing their statements to the practice of Jesus for example, differences soon become apparent.

For example, although the canon of the Church prohibited women from teaching, Jesus himself had several female followers. Furthermore, only his women followers and his mother, plus the "beloved disciple" in the Gospel of John, whose identity is not recorded, stay with him during his crucifixion (Matthew 27 and John 19). It was also to women, especially Mary Magdalene, who Jesus appeared to first after what was believed to be his resurrection (Mark 16, Matthew 28, and John

⁴⁷ Luther, M. (2018). *The Collected Works of Martin Luther: Theological Writings, Sermons & Hymns: The Ninety-five Theses, The Bondage of the Will, The Catechism*. Amazon.com

20). Yet, although there seems to be some basis here for argument, the truth remains shrouded in the variance of scriptural texts and opinions held by esteemed members of both the Jewish and Christian authorities.

The Islamic View of Women – Direct from the Sources

Before the Quran was revealed, true religious teachings were being distorted by the theories and interpretations of men. There was a dire need for another divine message that would guide humanity back to the straight path and away from their unhealthy perceptions and treatment of women. Therefore, the purpose of this section is not to introduce Islam as a rival to Judaism or Christianity. Rather, Islam should be viewed as the restoration of the divine messages that had preceded it.

From the start of the revelation, Islam restored the rights of the woman and ensured her full spiritual equality with man. In Islam, men and women are described as partners in life, each having different, but complementary roles and responsibilities, suited to their unique abilities and strengths. When the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad reached the women of Arabia, they knew that in these teachings there would be liberation for them. In fact, the first person to accept Islam was a woman—Khadijah, the first wife of the Prophet. Another notable woman was Fatimah bint al-Khattab, who became Muslim before her brother, Umar, and then became influential in his later conversion. In becoming servants of God, they would become free from the worship of created objects. In Islam, women were freed from the shackles of oppression that were previously placed upon them. The Prophet Muhammad defended and reinforced women's rights throughout his mission, even till the very end, where he stated in his farewell sermon (his last public sermon wherein he emphasized the essential aspects of Islam):

O People, it is true that you have certain rights in regard to your women, but they also have rights over you. Remember that you have taken them as your wives, only under God's trust and with His permission. If they abide by your right, then to them belongs the right to be fed and clothed with love. Do treat your women well, and be kind

and gentle with them, for they are your partners and committed helpers. And it is your right that they do not make friends with anyone of whom you do not approve, as well as never to be unchaste. [Bukhari, Muslim, Tirmithi]

After centuries of being second-class citizens in all spheres of life, women were finally liberated. Islam came, establishing their rights and equality with men, as partners and helpers. It established for every woman specific and sacred rights, elevating her to the noble status that she deserves. How did these far-reaching and pioneering changes arise?

In Islam, the liberation of women did not stem from women, or even men for that matter. It was revealed by God to humanity. When the Prophet Muhammad received revelations, he would convey them unto the people and the people would then work to implement them immediately. Thus, the revelations concerning the rights of women, and the commands to treat women kindly, were not taken lightly. Muslim men, for the most part, adjusted their previously held views and attitudes as they heard the revelations of God recited to them. This meant that women did not have to fight for their rights. There were no rebellions, no rallies, and no protests needed. Those same men who grew up in Pre-Islamic Arabia burying their daughters alive and indulging in the promiscuity of women were now merciful, God-fearing men, remorseful of their past sins. They harkened to and emulated the Prophet Muhammad when he said,

The best among you in faith is he who is the best to his wife, and I am the best to my wives. [Tirmithi]

Among the earliest teachings of the Quran, there is the story of Adam and Eve. To develop a first impression of Islam's view of women, it will benefit the reader to look to the first woman ever created and then see what Islam, from the beginning, had to say about her.

All About Eve: The Islamic Perspective

When the Quran was revealed, all previous notions about the evil nature of women were abolished. This can first be seen in the story of Adam and Eve. The story of Adam and Eve is mentioned in several parts of the Quran. One such passage states (emphasis mine):

"O Adam, dwell, you and your wife, in Paradise and eat from wherever you will but do not approach this tree, or you be among the wrongdoers." But Satan whispered to them to make apparent to them that which was concealed from them of their private parts. He said, "Your Lord did not forbid you this tree except that you become angels or become of the immortal." And he swore to them both that he was their sincere adviser. So by deceit he brought about their fall. And so when they tasted the tree, their shame became manifest to them and they began to sew together the leaves of the Garden over their bodies. And their Lord called unto them, "Did I not forbid you that tree and tell you that Satan was your avowed enemy?" They said, "Our Lord we have wronged our own souls and if You forgive us not and bestow not upon us Your Mercy, we shall certainly be lost." {7:19-23}

Comparing the two accounts of the story of the Creation, important differences become apparent. Contrary to the Bible, the Quran places blame on *both* Adam and Eve for their disobedience. In the Quranic description of the story of creation, Eve is not wholly blamed for the sin, and neither are the pains of menstruation and childbearing given to her as a punishment. On the contrary, in Islam, the fall of man was destined and well known to all the inhabitants of the Heavens, as humanity was created to be tested.

Spiritual Equality between Men and Women

Islam clearly states that all human beings have a common origin. This fact is mentioned throughout the Quran, as the following two passages illustrate:

O Mankind, fear your Lord who created you from a single soul and created from it its mate, and brought forth from the two of them many men and women. {4:1}

And,

O Mankind, verily we created you from a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes so you may come to know one another. Truly, the most honorable of you in the sight of God are those who are most righteous. {49:13}

Equal Opportunity Reward for Righteous Deeds

When one looks to what the Quran has to say about the spiritual status of women, it soon becomes evident that the Islamic conception of women is drastically different from that of nearly any other religion. For example:

Verily, the Muslim men and women, the believing men and women, the men and women who are obedient, the men and women who are truthful, the men and women who are patient, the men and women who are humble, the men and women who fast, the men and women who guard their chastity and the men and women who remember God much with their hearts and tongues, God has prepared for them forgiveness and a great reward. {33:35}

And,

And their Lord answered them, “Truly, I will never allow the efforts of any one of you, be you a male or female, to be lost; you are members one of another.” {3:195}

And,

Whoever does evil will only be repaid with evil, and whoever performs a righteous deed—be it a man or woman—and is a believer, such will enter Paradise. {40:40}

So it is clear that in Islam, the spiritual value of women is no different than that of men. Both male and female are the creation of God. They also share the same purpose in life—to worship Him, and to live a life of righteousness. Likewise, both will be judged accordingly. Looking to the Quran and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, one will find no mention of the woman being the “devil’s gateway”, or that she is a “deceiver” by nature.

Also, according to the Quran and Sunnah, a woman’s role in this life is not limited simply to childbirth. On the contrary, women have numerous avenues of activity open to them which Islamic law in fact encourages them to pursue (pursuit of knowledge, medical care of women as physicians, midwives and nurses, early childhood and secondary education, counseling, just to name a few). An example of this expansion of the role of the female during the life of the Prophet Muhammad can be seen in the bold persona of Rufaidah Al-Aslamia. Rufaidah was a prominent female Companion who managed the medical care of the wounded in the Prophet’s city of Madinah. She is mentioned in the hadith literature wherein the Prophet specifically directed that the injured be taken to Rufaidah’s medical tent which he had authorized be set-up within the mosque itself [Adaab Mufrad, Silsilah Sahihah]. Other women in that time also fought in battles when necessary.

Furthermore, Islamic teachings never denied the existence of upright women. On the contrary, the Prophet Muhammad acknowledged and praised several women from his time, and prior to his time. In fact, one authentic hadith praises Khadijah (his wife), Fatima (his daughter), Asiyah (the believing wife of Pharaoh in the time of Moses), and the Virgin Mary, as being four women who had attained excellence in their faith.⁴⁸ Additionally, in the Quran, God has instructed all the believers,

⁴⁸ Ibn ‘Abbaas narrated that the Messenger of God (may God exalt his praise) drew four lines on the ground, then he said, “Do you know what this is?” We said, “God and His Messenger know best.” The Messenger of God said: “The best of the women of Paradise are Khadijah bint Khuwaylid, Fatimah bint Muhammad, Asiyah bint Mazaahim the wife of Pharaoh, and Maryam bint ‘Imraan—may God be pleased with them.” [Ahmed]

women and men, to follow the example of those ideal women such as the Virgin Mary and the Pharaoh's wife, Asiyah:

And God sets forth, as an example to those who believe, the wife of Pharaoh. Behold she said, "O my Lord, build for me, in nearness to you, a mansion in Paradise, and save me from Pharaoh and his evil, and save me from those who do wrong." And Mary, the daughter of Imran, who guarded her chastity and We breathed into her body of Our spirit, and she testified to the truth of the words of her Lord and of His revelations and she was one of the devout. {66:11-13}

Also, women's spiritual acts of worship are of the same merit, and can even potentially be superior, to the actions of the righteous men. The Quran clearly proclaims,

Truly, the most honorable among you in the sight of God are those who are most righteous. {49:13}

This passage shows that it is not a person's race, gender, wealth, intellect or lineage which makes them superior over another. Rather, it is their piety and righteousness which elevates them in status. Similarly, the Prophet Muhammad is recorded to have stated,

A woman is married for four reasons: her wealth, her nobility, her beauty, and her piety. Choose the pious one and you shall be successful. [Muslim]

Surely if women were only useful for producing children, then he would have advised choosing the one with beauty! Instead, the Prophet instilled this respect and admiration for pious women into the minds and hearts of men, even to the point that he encouraged them to marry for piety. This point is emphasized further in another hadith wherein the Prophet Muhammad declares a pious woman to be the best of all God-given blessings in this world:

The whole world is a provision, and the best thing a man can be given in this world is a righteous wife. [Muslim]

In fact, women are held in such high esteem in Islam that the very merit of a man and his faith is judged according to how well he treats his wife. The Prophet said:

The best among you is the one who is the best towards his wife. [Tirmithi]

Having now understood that the spiritual aspect of a woman's life is equal to that of her male counterparts, let us next review the Islamic value of a woman's life.

The Right to Life and Dignity in that Life

From the beginning, a woman's life and purpose in Islam was presented as equal in value to that of men. In fact, the heartless crime of burying female children alive would have never stopped in Arabia had it not been for the strong condemnation and absolute prohibition of this heinous practice in the Quran:

And do not kill your children for fear of poverty. We provide for them and for you. Indeed, their killing is ever a great sin. {17:31}

He hides himself from the people because of the evil of which he has been informed [the birth of a girl]. Shall he keep her with dishonor or bury her in the earth? Certainly, evil is their decision [burying his daughter alive]. {16:59}

In the Quran, the birth of either a boy or a girl is viewed as a gift and a blessing from God. In fact, the Quran even mentions the gift of the female birth first:

To God belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth. He creates what He wills. He bestows female children to whomever He wills, and bestows male children to whomever He wills. {42:49}

Furthermore, the Prophet greatly impressed upon his followers the importance of treating their daughters as equals with their sons, not favoring one over the other. In return for this love, kindness and equal attention, the father would then be rewarded by God with Paradise. The Prophet Muhammad taught:

He who is involved in bringing up daughters, and treats them with kindness, they will be a protection for him against the Hell-Fire. [Bukhari and Muslim]

Whoever maintains two girls till they attain maturity, he and I will come on the Day of Judgment like this; and he joined his fingers. [Muslim]

Anyone who has three daughters and provides for them, clothes them and shows mercy to them will definitely enter Paradise. A man then asked, "What about two daughters, Messenger of God?" He replied, "Even if just two." [Adab Mufrad]

A'isha said, "A poor woman came carrying two of her daughters and I gave her three dates. She gave each of the girls a date and lifted the other date to her mouth to eat it, but before she could, her daughters asked to eat it. So she divided between them the date which she was going to eat. I was astonished at what she did and I mentioned her deed to the Messenger of God. He said, 'God has made this woman's entry into Paradise mandatory because of this act.'" [Muslim]

Motherhood in Islam: More than "Just a Housewife"

One of the most unfortunate developments of the modern age is the condescending and demeaning attitude shown to those women who devote themselves to the raising of their children and the creation of a home. Too often has a woman gone out to a social function where others boast about their careers, whereas all she can say, often with great dishonor, is that she is "just a housewife". Since when has the preparation of the next generation and the dedication to their upbringing become a

matter of shame and embarrassment? It is this very sad reality that has led to so many of the children of today being raised by strangers like overworked day-care workers, nannies, and babysitters while parents chase their corporate or academic ambitions. Is then the decaying state of the family structure or the increase in teenage pregnancy (indicative of the far greater prominence of sexual promiscuity among our youth) any wonder? Truly, we have neglected the critical significance of the mother in today's material society.

One of the causes of this neglect today is the lack of honor and importance attached to motherhood. Although among the Ten Commandments, little else can specifically be seen about the importance of the mother in most scriptures. Yet in Islam, the dignity, respect, and esteem attached to motherhood are entirely unparalleled. The Quran views the obligation and significance of treating one's parents with love and kindness as second *only* to the worship of God:

And your Lord has commanded that you worship none other than Him. And that you honor your parents. If one, or both, of them attain old age in your life, say not to them a word of disrespect, nor raise your voice at them, but speak to them with honor and respect. And in mercy be submissive and humble with them, and pray, "My Lord! Bestow on them Your Mercy as they did raise me when I was small." {17:23-24}

This distinction and dignity was also often mentioned by the Messenger of God when he spoke to his Companions and followers. In one hadith, the Prophet was asked about the most pleasing deeds to God that a person should strive to do. He told him that the best deed was to make your prayers on time, indicating the importance of taking worship seriously. The same person then asked him what deed came next in importance. The Prophet replied, "*To honor your parents.*" [Bukhari]

In another hadith, the Prophet favors honoring and serving the mother over even the importance of supporting other Muslims in warfare.

A man came to the Prophet and said, "O Messenger of God! I intend to go on a voluntary expedition, but I have come to ask your advice." The Prophet asked him, "Is your mother alive?" He said, "Yes." The Prophet then replied, "Then stay with her, for Paradise is under her feet." [Nasaa'i, Ibn Majah]

Contrary to the Judeo-Christian texts, the Quran puts special emphasis on the mother's great role in giving birth to her children and nursing them:

And We have commanded man to be dutiful and kind to his parents. His mother bore him in weakness upon weakness, and hardship upon hardship, and his weaning is in two years. Show gratitude and thanks to Me and to your parents. Unto God is the final destination. {31:14}

The very special position that women in Islam hold has been beautifully stated by the Prophet Muhammad when a man came to him and asked him, "O Messenger of God! Who is more entitled to be treated with the best treatment and companionship by me?"

The Prophet said, "Your mother." The man asked, "Who next?" The Prophet repeated, "Your mother." The man again asked, "Who next?" The Prophet again replied, "Your mother." The man then asked for the fourth time, "Who next?" Upon this the Prophet said, "Then your father." [Bukhari]

Moreover, the Prophet Muhammad would even shorten the obligatory prayer when he prayed with his followers out of respect for the mothers in the congregation who had children to tend to, saying:

When I stand for prayer, I intend to prolong it, but on hearing the cries of a child, I make it short, as I dislike causing anxiety to the child's mother. [Bukhari]

Consequently, dishonoring the parents ranks as one of the major sins in Islam. In the matter of this sin, the mother has even been specified to further demonstrate her paramount importance and position. The Prophet Muhammad taught:

God has forbidden to you:

1. *to be undutiful to your mother*
2. *to bury your daughters alive*
3. *not to fulfill the rights of others*
4. *to beg of others (when it can be avoided)*

[Bukhari]

Specific Women's Issues: In-Depth Comparisons

Throughout this chapter, and more specifically in the research that follows in this section, extensive historical references and scriptural commentaries are often discussed. This respected Rabbi said this, this Christian Saint or Church father said that. Truly it can be a bit overwhelming. Yet, as respected as these prominent scholars may be, a number of people who follow both Judaism and Christianity today are likely to think that a number of these references don't apply to them.

No doubt, Judaism, and to a greater extent Christianity, have evolved to a certain degree over the past two thousand years. As a result of this evolution, some of the opinions and rulings that were previously part of both of these religious traditions have long since faded away. So why discuss old ideas and interpretations? All of this history does bring us to a very important conclusion.

In Islam, women were granted their rights and their inherent dignity directly through revelation; directly by the word of God. Muslims never had to concern themselves with changing or reinterpreting their scriptures to erase outdated views or to correct clear injustices. The Judeo-Christian scholars on the other hand, despite their deep knowledge and religious devotion, most often inserted *their own* societal practices and opinions into the scriptures. This practice then led to Judeo-Christian women having to fight for their God-given rights—either by

reinterpreting the Holy Scriptures or by discarding them entirely in favor of secular laws. Thus, the historicity of these matters is vitally important to demonstrate both the original positions which the Judeo-Christian authorities took on a number of these issues, as well as the changes that they felt were necessary to be made.

Education

In Judaism, there is considerable evidence pointing to the deplorability of women studying the religious scriptures and consequently the teaching of religion. In Kiddushin 29b, the Talmud states:

How do we know that she [the mother] has no duty to teach her children? Because it is written, [and you shall teach], which also reads [and you shall study]: hence whoever is commanded to study, is commanded to teach; whoever is not commanded to study, is not commanded to teach. And how do we know that she is not bound to teach herself? Because it is written, [and you shall teach]—[and you shall learn]: the one whom others are commanded to teach is commanded to teach himself; and the one whom others are not commanded to teach, is not commanded to teach himself. How then do we know that others are not commanded to teach her? Because it is written, “And you shall teach them to your sons” — but not your daughters.

Thus, Rabbis have concluded that a woman’s exemption from the commandment of learning Torah is manifested in three ways:

1. A woman is not required to teach her sons Torah;
2. A woman is not required to learn Torah herself;
3. A father is not required to teach Torah to his daughters.

On this matter, Rabbi Eliezer⁴⁹ of the 1st Century CE states:

⁴⁹ Rabbi Eliezer ben Horkonus, a Jewish scholar of the second generation (1st century CE), who traced his pedigree for ten generations back to the Biblical Prophet Ezra. Viewed by many Jews as one of the great teachers of the

Whoever teaches his daughter torah teaches her obscenity (sometimes translated – it is as though he taught her promiscuity).⁵⁰ [Babylonian Talmud: Mishnah Sotah: 3, 4]

Furthermore, according to Jewish rabbis, women were mentally deficient and thus incapable of undertaking the challenging task of learning the scriptures. For example, in the writings of the 12th Century CE Rabbi Maimonides, whose works and views are considered a cornerstone of Orthodox Jewish thought and study till today, we read:

A woman who studies Torah is rewarded, but not to the same degree as is a man, for she is not commanded and anyone who does that which he is not commanded to do, does not receive the same reward as one who is commanded, but only a lesser reward. However, even though she is rewarded, the Sages commanded that a man must not teach his daughter Torah. This is because the mind of the majority of women is not disposed to study and they will turn the words of Torah into words of nonsense according to their limited understanding. Our sages said that anyone who teaches his daughter Torah is to be considered as if he had taught her trivial and unimportant things. What were they referring to? The Oral Torah. However, the Written Torah should not be taught before the fact, but if he has taught her, it is not considered as if he has taught her promiscuity (*tiflut*).⁵¹

[Hilchot Talmud Torah 1:13]

Moreover on the same point, the Jewish law code known as the Mishnah states clearly:

period of the Mishnah, he was known in the Talmud simply as Rabbi Eliezer although there are references to him as Rabbi Eliezer the great.

⁵⁰ Swidler, L. (1979). *Biblical Affirmations of Woman*. Westminster: John Knox Press

⁵¹ Angel, M.D. (2009). *Maimonides, Spinoza and Us: Toward an Intellectually Vibrant Judaism*. Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing

May the words of Torah be burned [first five books of the Old Testament], than that they should be handed over to women.⁵² [Babylonian Talmud Sotah, 10a]

On the contrary, the Gospels record that Jesus not only taught women, but he even went so far as to praise a particular women (Martha's sister Mary in Luke 10:38-42) for her learning over her sister's concern for entertaining the guests. Yet, Christianity in general continued the Jewish tradition of limiting the scholarship of women as can be demonstrated in the clear instructions of Paul in the New Testament. It must be remembered that Christianity is based upon the foundation of the Old Testament which is the fountainhead of many Jewish legal commandments, and thus *legally* there should be little difference between the two religions as has been proven true historically. What then do the writings of St. Paul reveal about the education of women? There are two main passages that critics point to in this regard.

As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church. [NIV, 1 Corinthians 14:33-35]

A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.⁵³

⁵² Swidler, L. (1979). *Biblical Affirmations of Woman*. Westminster: John Knox Press

⁵³ Commentary: When the apostle exhorts Christian women to seek information on religious subjects from their husbands at home, it shows that believing families ought to assemble for promoting spiritual knowledge ... The way to keep peace, truth, and order in the church, is to seek that which is good for it, to bear with that which is not hurtful to its welfare, and to keep

Conversely in Islam, education is not only allowed to women, but it is an individual obligation that every Muslim must perform; man or woman. In fact, Islam is the religion of knowledge. The first five verses of the Quran to be revealed to the Prophet Muhammad establish the importance of reading, the key to knowledge and understanding. God states:

***Read! In the Name of your Lord Who created ...
He created man from a clot .
Read! And your Lord is the Most Generous.
Who has taught by the pen,
Taught mankind that which they knew not {96:1-5}***

It is essential to understand from these verses that God didn't distinguish between men and women; the virtue of knowledge was discussed for the benefit of all who cared to seek it, and not restricted to men. Furthermore, this obligation to seek knowledge was not merely an encouragement for women to pursue, but it was obligatory upon women; young and old, rich and poor. The Prophet Muhammad said,

Seeking knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslim. [Ibn Majah]

The Prophet Muhammad also sought to ensure that women were being educated in Islam to the point that he even ordered the men who had traveled from afar to learn directly from him to pass on what they had learned to the women in their families:

Malik ibn al-Huwayrith said, "We came to the Prophet, may God exalt his praise and grant him peace, as young men of about the same age and stayed twenty nights with him. The Messenger of God was very kind and generous with us. When he realized that we were missing our families he asked us about those we had left behind us and

up good behavior, order, and decency. (*Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary*, 1706)

we informed him. He said, '*Return to your families and stay with them and teach them and instruct them*' ..."
[Abu Dawud]

Furthermore, Islam places absolutely no limits on scholarship in regards to women, a fact that has allowed women to reach the highest positions of education throughout the history of Islam. Hence, the earliest women in Islam were active in seeking and applying knowledge. The Prophet Muhammad even set aside a special time especially for teaching women, upon their request. Islam also recognized female scholarship in an age when women had no opportunity for education, much less teaching. In fact, women could be, and in fact were, sometimes superior to men in the mastery of Islamic sciences. It is no exaggeration to say that women have been involved in the teaching and development of Islamic legal thought since the very time of the Prophet.

As explained previously, revelation in Islam is composed of both the text of the Quran and of the Hadith. Thus, the hadith has been one of the most closely guarded and cherished of texts throughout all of Islamic history. The scholars of Hadith have possessed a special prestige since the earliest days of Islamic history due in part to their astoundingly expansive and accurate memories, and due to the fact that their knowledge and research protected the science of hadith from being infiltrated by distortions and fabrications. Thus, it may come as a surprise just how many of these noble and greatly honored scholars were in fact Muslim women.

Since the very beginning of Islamic history, Muslim women have played a significant role in the preservation of hadith, and this task was equally venerated by their successors down the centuries. In fact, in every generation of Muslim history there lived numerous distinguished female scholars of hadith, treated by their male brethren with the utmost of reverence and respect, as not only their noble teachers, but also their colleagues and students in other cases.

During the life of the Prophet Muhammad, a great number of women had not only been the reason behind the revelation of important and far-reaching statements of the Prophet for the rest

of the Muslims, but had also been the ones to transmit these venerated statements of the Prophet to their Muslim sisters and brothers in faith. After the Prophet's death, many female Companions, particularly the Prophet's respected wives, were looked upon as central keepers of this knowledge, and were approached for instruction by other Companions, to whom they readily dispensed the precious pearls of wisdom and understanding which they had gathered in the company of the Prophet Muhammad. The names of 'Aisha, Hafsa, Umm Salamah, Maymuna, and Umm Habiba, are well-known to every student of hadith as being among the earliest and most prominent transmitters of hadith. 'Aisha, in particular, is one of the most central figures in all of hadith literature, not only as one of the most prolific narrators of hadith⁵⁴, but also as one of the most knowledgeable and respected analysts of the wise words of the Prophet Muhammad.

'Aisha, the "Mother of the Believers"⁵⁵ as she was named in the Quran, was not only a model for wives and mothers, but she was also a prominent commentator on the Quran, an authority on Hadith and also well versed in the disciplines of Islamic Law, Arabic history and literature. In fact, for those who question the role of women in Islam, one need only look back at how she was regularly consulted in countless and diverse religious matters both during the life of the Prophet, and even more after his death.

Among the most famed Companions and later great scholars of early Islam, Abu Musa al-Ash'ari is recorded to have said: "If we, the Companions of the Messenger of God, had any difficulty on a matter we asked 'Aisha about it." [Al-Muwatta of Imam Malik]

Moreover, the great scholar of the Students of the Companions, 'Urwa ibn al-Zubair says,

⁵⁴ She ranks fourth in highest number, having narrated 2210 hadiths from the Prophet Muhammad.

⁵⁵ All of the wives of the Prophet were known as "Mother of the Believers" due to their position and honor.

I did not find anyone more proficient [than ‘Aisha] in the knowledge of the Quran, the Commandments of Halal (lawful) and Haram (prohibited), Ilmu-Ansab (lineage) and Arabic poetry. That is why even senior companions of the Prophet used to consult ‘Aisha in resolving intricate issues.

(Ibnul Qayyim and Ibn Sa'ad, *Jala-ul-Afham*, vol. 2, p. 26.)

Also, the great 8th Century scholar ibn Hajar said about ‘Aisha: “... it is said that a quarter of the rulings of Islamic law are narrated from her.”⁵⁶

Truly, in the field of hadith scholarship ‘Aisha stands tall. She narrated 2,210 authentic Hadith (more than any other Muslim except for the male Companions Abu Hurairah, Abdullah ibn ‘Umar and Anas ibn Malik). Moreover, over 300 people narrated hadith from her.⁵⁷ Thus, she made a priceless and profound contribution, not only to the preservation of the tradition, or Sunnah, of the Final Prophet of God, but to all of Islamic knowledge in general. She is undoubtedly one of most distinguished personalities, not only in Islamic and women’s history, but in world history altogether.

Although ‘Aisha was the most prominent of the female scholars from the generation of the Prophet’s Companions, she was by no means the only such scholar of distinction and advanced learning. The celebrated 8th Century scholar and author Ibnul Qayyim gives a detailed account of 22 female companions who were known for issuing religious verdicts (fatawa) in the immediate years after the death of the Prophet.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Geissinger, A. ‘A’isha bint Abi Bakr and her Contributions to the Formation of the Islamic Tradition. *Religion Compass* 5/1 (2011): 37–49. Retrieved from:

http://www.academia.edu/4240885/_Aisha_bint_Abi_Bakr_and_Her_Contributions_to_the_Formation_of_the_Islamic_Tradition_

⁵⁷ Nadwi, M.A. (2007). *Al-Muhaddithat: the Women Scholars in Islam*. Oxford: Interface Publications

⁵⁸ Al-Jawziyyah, I.Q. (n.d.). *I’lam al-Muwaqqi’in ‘an Rabb al-‘Aalamin*. Beirut: Dar al Kotob al Ilmiyyah,

In the period after the Companions too, women held vital positions as learned scholars of all Islamic sciences, hadith in particular. The late seventh century (less than 50 years after the death of the prophet Muhammad) witnessed the rise of several significant and key women scholars of hadith such as: Hafsa bint Sireen (who memorized over half a million hadith), Umm al-Darda al-Sagheerah, Mu`aadha al-`Adawiyyah and bint `Abd al-Rahman ibn Sa`d—one of the outstanding students of `Aisha the wife of the Prophet. In addition to being well known hadith scholars, `Amrah and Hafsa were also legal scholars. Hafsa was also distinguished in Quran and counted the well-known Quranic commentator Qatadah as one of her students.

In the decades after them came the likes of 'Abida al-Madaniyyah, 'Abda bint Bishr, Umm Umar al-Thaqafiyya, Zaynab the granddaughter of Abdullah ibn Abbas, Nafisa bint al-Hasan ibn Ziyad, Khadija Umm Muhammad, 'Abda bint Abd al-Rahman, and several other Muslim women who were renowned for their notable public lectures on hadith. These pious and scholarly women came from the most diverse backgrounds, demonstrating that neither class, nor gender, were obstacles to ascending the ranks of Islamic scholarship.

This collaboration between women and men in the gathering and preserving of hadith literature continued into the ninth century CE when the great foundational collections of hadith were compiled. A detailed analysis of these essential compilations confirms that all the chief hadith compilers obtained a significant portion of their education from female hadith scholars. In fact, every major collection of hadith in use today lists the names of numerous women as the immediate authorities/narrators who narrated and explained the hadith to the authors of these key collections. And even after these central works had been compiled, many other women hadith scholars would later master them, and then pass on the knowledge they had gained by teaching these books through public lectures to large classes of male and female students, to whom they would then issue their own “ijzas”, or certifications of proficiency.

One such distinguished hadith scholar was Karima al-Marwaziyya who lived in the eleventh century CE and was

considered the preeminent expert on Sahih al-Bukhari (the authentic hadith compilation of the hadith specialist Muhammad al-Bukhari) of her era. In fact, among her many students were the illustrious and celebrated scholars al-Khateeb al-Baghdati and al-Humaydi.⁵⁹

Dr. Muhammad Zubayr Siddiqi writes the following regarding later female Islamic scholars of hadith in his excellent and ground-breaking book, *Hadith Literature: Its Origin, Development, Special Features & Criticism*:

In his work *al-Durar al-Karima*, Ibn Hajar provides several short biographical descriptions of about 170 prominent female scholars of the eighth century, most of whom were hadith specialists, and under many of whom the author himself had studied. Some of these women were acknowledged as the best hadith experts of their era. For example, the renowned hadith scholar Juwayriya bint Ahmad studied a series of works on hadith, under scholars both male and female, who taught at the great universities of that period. She then progressed to deliver several prominent lectures on a number of Islamic branches of study. ‘Some of my own teachers,’ reports Ibn Hajar, ‘and many of my contemporaries, attended her discourses.’ A’isha bin Abd al-Hadi, who for a substantial time was one of Ibn Hajar’s teachers, was considered to be one of the finest hadith specialists of her time, and many students undertook long journeys in order to sit at her feet and study the sciences of Islam.

⁵⁹ Many modern day “Muslim feminist” writers falsely and unjustifiably allege that early Islamic legal and societal practices were a direct result of male domination of scholarship, and hence, interpretation of the central scriptural texts (Quran and Hadith). Yet, even a cursory review of the history of Islamic scholarship reveals that even the most revered book of Hadith, Sahih al-Bukhari, was in a number of cases taught to men by women. Later scholars who gave commentaries on Sahih al-Bukhari, like the famous Palestinian scholar ibn Hajar, also counted a number of female scholars as their teachers. These female teachers provided ibn Hajar with the deep understanding of literally thousands of hadith allowing him to write his famous commentary on Sahih al-Bukhari (*Fath al-Bari*).

The famous historian of Damascus, Ibn Asakir, reports that he had studied under more than 1,200 men and 80 women scholars, obtained the certification (ijaaza) of Zaynab bint Abd al-Rahman for the Muwatta collection of Imam Malik. Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti studied the Risala of Imam Shafii with Hajar bint Muhammad. Afif al-Din Junayd, a traditionist of the ninth century AH, read the Sunan collection of al-Darimi with Fatima bin Ahmad ibn Qasim, and so on.⁶⁰

Other notable female scholars outside the realm of primary hadith specialization include: Zaynab bint Makki ibn `Ali ibn Kamil al-Harraniyyah who was a prominent 14th Century scholar from Damascus and a teacher of Ibn Taymiyyah and the famous hadith scholar al-Mizzi, among others. Zaynab bint Sulayman ibn Ibrahim al-As`ardi who was among the teachers of the two great mid-14th Century scholars al-Subki and al-Dhahabi. Zaynab had also studied Sahih al-Bukhari from the great scholar Ibn al-Zabidi. Also, Fatimah bint `Abbas al-Hanbaliyyah who was a prominent mid-14th Century legal scholar in the Hanbali legal school of Islamic Law and also a mufti, first in Damascus and then in Cairo. Other later female scholars of great eminence include Hanifah bint Abdur Rahman ibn Al-Qimni, Malikah bint Sharf-ud-Din ibn Abdullah Maqdisi and Um `Umar bint Taqi-ud-Din Rafe as-Salami of the 15th Century, who were teachers of the great scholars Jalal ad-Din as-Suyuti and ibn Hajar, respectively.

Hence it can be concluded that Muslim women, from the time of the Prophet Muhammad till at least the 15th Century, were respected by their male peers as not only equals in the realm of worship before God, but in fact they were in a number of cases the teachers of great male scholars and their collaborative partners in teaching such magnificent collections as Sahih al-Bukhari. In sharp contrast to the other religions that coexisted with Islam who limited or even barred their women from studying their respective scriptures, Islam lived its respect and reverence for women by not only directing them to study the

⁶⁰ Siddiqi, M.Z. (1961). *Hadith Literature: Its Origin, Development, Special Features & Criticism*. Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society

divine revelations of God, but by further entrusting them with the momentous and heavy undertaking of preserving and explaining the profound meanings of these revelations to the student of knowledge and layman alike. The foundations of Islam, especially in narrating and preserving the statements of the Prophet Muhammad, would not have been complete had it not been for the impressive contributions of Muslim women throughout history.

*Polygyny*⁶¹

Scriptural evidence indicates that polygyny, though not extremely common, was neither particularly unusual among the ancient Hebrews, and without doubt not prohibited or discouraged. The Bible documents approximately forty polygynists, including the Prophets Abraham, Moses, Jacob, Esau, and David. The Torah (the first five books of the Old Testament) does specifically discuss polygyny in other cases too—for example in the practice of levirate marriage, wherein a man was required to marry and support his deceased brother's widow:

If brothers are living together and one of them dies without a son, his widow must not marry outside the family. Her husband's brother shall take her and marry her and fulfill the duty of a brother-in-law to her. The first son she bears shall carry on the name of the dead brother so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel. [NIV, Deuteronomy 25:5-6]

Today, Judaism has forbidden polygamy as a result of a rabbinic ban declared in the 11th century. Some Jewish sects though—Sephardic and Mizrahic—discontinued polygyny only more recently, as a result of immigration to countries where it was forbidden. The State of Israel has outlawed polygynous marriages, but existing polygynous families who emigrated from nations where this practice is legal are exempted from this law.

⁶¹ Polygyny is the marital practice of a man marrying more than one woman at the same time. Differs from polygamy where either a man or woman can have multiple spouses. Polygyny is thus restricted to men.

Christians on the other hand have historically prohibited polygyny. St. Augustine, for example, discussed the polygyny found in the Old Testament in *The Good of Marriage*, saying that though it “was lawful among the ancient fathers; whether it be lawful now also, I would not hastily pronounce.” St. Augustine did not pass judgment on the Biblical patriarchs, but he also did not permit polygyny based upon their example referring instead to the common practice of modern society in his time. He wrote, “Now indeed in our time, and in keeping with Roman custom, it is no longer allowed to take another wife, so as to have more than one wife living.”

At the same time though, Christian reformers who came later seeking to remodel Christian doctrine, based solely on the Bible, have sometimes, if only temporarily, accepted polygamy as a Biblical practice. For example, in a letter to the Saxon Chancellor Gregor Brück, the Protestant father Martin Luther stated that he could not “forbid a person to marry several wives, for it does not contradict Scripture.”⁶²

In most western societies today, many have commented that although polygyny may be prohibited, the end result of a man having more than one female partner is alive and well. The only difference is that only one of these women will have the security and rights of a wife, whereas the others, be they mistresses or girlfriends, may be “dumped” at any moment without any rights or concern for their future.⁶³

In Islam, polygyny is permissible, but not required. God says in the Quran:

And if you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly with the orphan girls then marry other women of your choice, two or three or four; but if you fear that you shall

⁶² Luther, M. (1972). *Luther's Works: Letters II*. Edited by Jaroslav Jan Pelikan et al., Missouri: Concordia Pub. House

⁶³ Bartlett, N. (2015, Feb 19). *Adultery: Which countries are most unfaithful?* Retrieved from: <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/adultery-countries-most-unfaithful-5188791>

***not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one ...
That is nearer to prevent you from doing injustice. {4:3}***

Accordingly, a man is allowed to be married to up to four wives at one time, provided that he meets two conditions. The first is that he must be equitable and fair between the wives,

... But if you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one. {4:3}

Thus, if a man is afraid that he will not be able to treat his wives justly if he marries more than one, then it is forbidden for him to marry more than one. What is meant by fairness here is that he should treat his wives equally in terms of financial expenditures: clothing, food, and time spent with each.

As regards being equitable in terms of love, he is not accountable for that, because he has no control over his heart. This is what is mentioned in the verse,

You will never be able to do perfect justice between wives, even if it is your desire. {4:129}⁶⁴

The second essential requirement is the financial and physical ability to get married in the first place. This is evidenced in the following verse:

And let those who find not the financial means for marriage keep themselves chaste, until God enriches them of His Bounty. {24:33}

⁶⁴ Ibn Kathir reports in his exegesis of the Quran regarding the meaning of this passage: "O people! You will never be able to be perfectly just between wives in every respect. Even when one divides the nights justly between wives, there will still be various degrees concerning love, desire and sexual intimacy," as Ibn `Abbas, `Ubaydah As-Salmani, Mujahid, Al-Hasan Al-Basri and Ad-Dahhak bin Muzahim stated. Imam Ahmad and the collectors of the Sunan recorded that `A'ishah said, 'The Messenger of Allah used to treat his wives equally and proclaim, 'O Allah! This is my division in what I own, so do not blame me for what You own and I do not own,' referring to his heart." [Tafseer ibn Kathir]

Thus, a man has to be able to provide for every wife and cannot require them to live in the same house as is sometimes done by some ignorant and careless people today. He must also have the physical stamina to be able to satisfy each wife as necessary, for it would violate the equitability condition for him to give intimacy to one wife and deny it to the others though they desire it.

Statistically speaking, polygamous marriages constitute a minority of all marriages amongst Muslims⁶⁵ today, even though it is a common subject of non-Muslim fascination and questions. The financial burden alone limits the practice for many, and as Mark Twain once reportedly said when asked to cite a Scriptural reference that forbids polygamy, he responds with, "No man can serve two masters."

Wife-beating

In this section, a momentary departure will be taken from the usual format of this section in order to first discuss the Islamic position, before that of Judeo-Christian texts. The issue of wife-beating in Islam is an unfortunate source of much misconception, and, often times, outright malicious and misleading inaccuracies throughout Western critiques on Islam. Yet, should be known that the Islamic stance on domestic violence is that it is absolutely *prohibited*. This prohibition comes directly from the words of the Prophet who on several occasions instructed his followers not to beat their wives.

Mu'awiyah al-Qushayri narrated, "I went to the Messenger of God and asked him, 'What do you command us regarding our wives?' He replied, '*Feed them from what you eat yourself, and clothe them by which you clothe yourself, and do not beat them, and do not revile them.*'" [Abu Dawud]

⁶⁵ Stack, PF. (2001) Polygamy: Not as Rare as You May Think. *The Salt Lake Tribune*. Retrieved from:
<http://www.beliefnet.com/Faiths/2001/02/Polygamy-Not-As-Rare-As-You-May-Think.aspx>

So then, why is there so much controversy over this issue when it appears that the Prophet clearly prohibited his followers from beating their wives? The source of this criticism can be traced back to one passage in the Quran which discusses the stepwise management and resolution of marital discord between the husband and his wife:

Men are in charge of women by right of what God has given one over the other, and what they spend [for maintenance] from their wealth. So righteous women are devoutly obedient, guarding in the husband's absence what God would have them guard. But those wives from whom you fear arrogance—first advise them. Then, if they persist, forsake them in bed, and finally, strike them. But if they obey you once more, seek no means against them. Indeed, God is ever Exalted and Grand. {4:34}

Hence, the controversial portion of this passage is that which states “strike them”. But, like any other statement in the Quran, its meaning will be demonstrated by both other passages in the Quran as well as the behavior and words of the Prophet.

Firstly, the word in the verse *does* convey the meaning of striking in a physical sense as has been mentioned in every book of early Quranic commentary. Those who seek to re-interpret the Quran by changing the meaning of this word have little ground to stand upon. But, the striking that is spoken of herein must be understood in the correct sense.

Striking another person can be done in two ways: (1) violently, abusively and with the intent to cause physical injury and pain, or (2) symbolically with the intent to alert the other person to something important. This second meaning can be inferred from the commonly used English phrase, “a slap on the wrist”, which is understood to mean a gentle warning or light punishment. This meaning also occurs in many Middle East countries where a gentle slap on the back of the neck represents displeasure with that person’s actions or words. Neither “a slap on the wrist”, nor the slap on the nape in the Middle East, brings about any injury or pain, but they do have notable symbolic meanings. So can this verse then be understood to be *symbolic only*? Yes.

As mentioned above, it is a principle of Quranic commentary that a verse from the Quran cannot be understood independent of other parts of the Quran. Thus, in order to better understand the verse in question, we should see what else the Quran says about dealing with wives:

... Do not retain your wives to harm them ... {2:231}

If a wife fears cruelty or desertion on her husband's part, there is no blame on them if they arrange an amicable settlement between themselves. And such settlement is best, even though men's souls are swayed by greed. But if you do good and practice self-restraint, God is well-acquainted with all that you do. {4:128}

And among God's signs are that He created for you spouses from among yourselves that you might find tranquility and peace with them. And he has put love and gentle kindness between you. Herein surely are signs for those who reflect. {30:21}

Additionally, from the Prophet's guidance:

The best of you in faith is the one who is best towards his wife, and I am the best of you towards my wives. [Tirmithi, Ibn Majah]

This hadith represents one of several which clearly demonstrate that the Prophet Muhammad commanded his Companions to treat their wives well, in accordance with the Quranic injunctions of living with them in love and gentle kindness, and not to beat them. How can a man be a good husband and treat his wife well, and yet beat her? In fact, this very idea was conveyed in another hadith of the Prophet wherein he said,

Could any one of you beat his wife as he would beat a slave, and then be intimate with her in the evening? [Bukhari and Muslim]

Furthermore, the great 1st century scholar of Makkah, `Ataa' ibn Abi Rabah, said, "I asked (the famed Companion and respected commentator on the Quran) Ibn `Abbas: 'What is the hitting that is not in a harsh manner (*ghayr mubarrih*⁶⁶)?' He replied, 'With the *siwak* (early form of toothbrush, about the size and width of a pencil) and the like.'" (Tafsir Tabari)

Another well-known commentator on the Quran, Al-Razi, mentions in his commentary that such beating, as a rule, must: (a) be a light beating, and (b) the face must be avoided. He added that the jurists said "a whip or a stick" was absolutely prohibited and could not be used to strike a woman, but that instead something like a handkerchief or a finger would be allowed, again underlying the principle that injury and pain are not the objectives, and are, in fact, strictly forbidden.

From these Quranic passages, statements of the Prophet and early commentaries, Muslim legal experts derive the Islamically agreed upon understanding that the basic rule (*asl*) in regards to beating is ***strict prohibition***, followed by restricted permission (*rukhsa*) as a symbolic gesture as explicitly stated by the Prophet in the hadith below:

The Prophet said, "*Do not hit the female servants of God!*" Then `Umar came to the Prophet and said, "The women are rebelling against their husbands!" So the Prophet *gave a restricted permission* to strike them lightly (as a symbolic gesture and not to harm). Whereupon women started pouring in to see the family of the Messenger of God in order to complain about their husbands (who had abused this license and gone too far). Seeing this, the Prophet said with great displeasure, "*Many women have poured in to see the family of Muhammad, complaining of*

⁶⁶ The Prophet is reported to have said, "Fear God with regard to women, for you have taken them as a trust from God and intimacy with them has become permissible to you by the words of God. Your right over them is that they should not allow anyone whom you dislike to enter your house; if they do that, then you may hit them, but not in a harsh manner. And their right over you is that you should provide for them and clothe them on a reasonable basis." [Muslim]

their husbands, and the latter are certainly not the best of you.” [Abu Dawud, al-Nasaa’i, Ibn Majah]

Moreover, if such a symbolic gesture leaves bruises, the husband is to be penalized in Islamic court according to Islamic law (not a slap on the wrist). Also, Islamic jurists are united in their view that wife-beating is a **valid reason for a wife to get divorced** from her husband *even if he wants to keep her*. The following quote is an example of one present-day Muslim judge’s ruling in regards to a woman whose husband was, in her own words, “verbally and emotionally abusive ... physically abusive to a small degree ... has pushed me lightly and smacked me lightly”:

Based on what has been mentioned in your case, it is permissible for you to ask for a divorce (khula’), because living with this man and anyone like him is something that is unbearable. Perhaps God will compensate you with someone better than this man. If you cannot find another husband, then staying without a husband in your parents’ house, where you will be cared for and respected, will be better for you than staying with this man, so long as you do not fear that you will be tempted ...⁶⁷

Thus, although domestic violence is a reality in Muslim society, just as it is a reality in all non-Muslim societies today, as well as in the past, it is no less tolerated or overlooked than other crimes in Islam. Muslim women are entitled to security and peace, and Islamic law continues to be committed to abolishing this distorted and evil practice.

Lastly, it is important to realize that the symbolic gesture referred to in the verse is actually the **last** of three courses of action that can be taken, actions which must be taken in that chronological order when dealing with problems in the marriage.

In conclusion, the common misconception that Islam condones or recommends wife-beating is baseless and far from the truth.

⁶⁷ As answered by Dr. Muhammad Saalih Al-Munajjid, retrieved from: <https://islamqa.info/en/answers/13803/her-husband-beats-her-severely>

In reality, it is only allowed in a symbolic sense. Causing injury, harm or pain to the woman is *strictly forbidden* and punishable by law. The greatest guidepost on the matter is that the Prophet Muhammad, as our role model, *never once* raised a hand to his wives and he commanded his followers not to beat their wives. Consequently, domestic violence in Islam is grounds for a woman seeking a divorce. Whatever may occur in Muslim communities of domestic violence then is sinful and culturally based, wherein religion is only used as a weak and unjustifiable excuse. It is important that Muslims be educated about this crime so as to avoid the sin associated with it and so that Muslim women may live in the tranquility and security which God aims for them to enjoy.

The Judeo-Christian approach to this issue though is distinctly different from that of Islam. The Judeo-Christian religious history reveals a tolerance, even encouragement, of physical beatings in order to keep women in line, and laws to that effect have only been abolished from their respective legal codes in the past few centuries.

Beginning with Jewish religious writings, the renowned Rabbi Maimonides from the 12th century, in his *Mishnah Torah*, recommended beating a disobedient wife as a suitable form of discipline:

A wife who refuses to perform any kind of work that she is obligated to do, may be compelled to perform it, even by scourging her with a rod (sometimes whip).⁶⁸ [Ishut 21:10]

Later, 16th century Jewish writings seem to recognize that wife-beating is wrong, yet they simultaneously circumvent relieving the woman from an abusive marriage. These evasive opinions are part of Jewish religious law (*halakha*) and are grounded in the husband's dominant place in marriage. Hence, domestic abuse is *not* automatic grounds for Jewish divorce. So, although in modern times there are almost no rabbinic authorities remaining who justify wife-beating for the purpose of education or due to

⁶⁸ Peskowitz, M. Levitt, L. (1996). *Judaism Since Gender*. Abingdon: Routledge Company

negligence of household duties, there are many who still do not allow a forced divorce to free the victim of wife-beating⁶⁹

In Christianity, wife beating was specifically allowed by canon law (Power 35), and also maintained in civil law as well, which authorized the right of “reasonable chastisement”. In Beirne Stedman’s 1917 article summarizing the rights of a husband to beat his wife, he reports the following about the United States:

The right of a husband to chastise his wife has been recognized in [the United States of America]. Chancellor Kent laid down the rule that the husband may put "gentle restraints upon her liberty, if her conduct is such as to require it." For the old doctrine that a man had a right to thrash his wife whenever he pleased, provided he did not "use a switch larger than his thumb," or did not "do serious bodily harm or inflict permanent injury," three reasons were given: (1) It is the "husband's duty to make his wife behave herself" and thrash her if necessary to that end. (2) "To draw a veil over dealings between man and wife," the idea being that a little wholesome chastising, to "make her behave herself," privately administered, would make less noise and scandal than the publicity of a court trial. (3) That there was a long line of decisions giving the husband privilege and immunity to inflict chastisement.⁷⁰

Another review article also documented the persistence of legalized wife beating, or “correction,” by stating:

Until the late nineteenth century, Anglo-American common law structured marriage to give a husband superiority over his wife in most aspects of the relationship. By law, a husband acquired rights to his wife's person, the value of her paid and unpaid labor, and most property she brought into the marriage.

⁶⁹ Graetz, N. (n.d.). *Domestic Violence in Jewish Law. How Judaism views wifebeating*. Retrieved from:

<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/domestic-violence-in-jewish-law/>

⁷⁰ Stedman, B. (Aug, 1917). Right of Husband to Chastise Wife. *The Virginia Law Register New Series*. Vol. 3, No. 4, pp. 241-248

A wife was obliged to obey and serve her husband, and the husband was subject to a reciprocal duty to support his wife and represent her within the legal system. According to the doctrine of marital unity, a wife's legal identity "merged" into her husband's, so that she was unable to file suit without his participation, whether to enforce contracts or to seek damages in tort. The husband was in turn responsible for his wife's conduct—liable, under certain circumstances, for her contracts, torts, and even some crimes.

As master of the household, a husband could command his wife's obedience, and subject her to corporal punishment or "chastisement" if she defied his authority. In his treatise on the English common law, Blackstone explained that a husband could "give his wife moderate correction,"⁷¹

Referring to Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England*⁷², we read:

BUT, though our law in general considers man and wife as one person, yet there are some instances in which she is separately considered; as inferior to him, and acting by his compulsion

THE husband also (by the old law) might give his wife moderate correction. For, as he is to answer for her misbehavior, the law thought it reasonable to entrust him with this power of restraining her, by domestic chastisement, in the same moderation that a man is

⁷¹ Siegel, Reva B. (1996). *The Rule of Love: Wife Beating as Prerogative and Privacy*. *Faculty Scholarship Series*. Paper 1092. Retrieved from: http://digitalcommons.law.yale.edu/fss_papers/1092

⁷² The *Commentaries on the Laws of England* are an influential 18th century treatise on the common law of England by Sir William Blackstone, originally published by the Clarendon Press at Oxford, 1765-1769. The *Commentaries* were long regarded as the leading work on the development of English law and played a role in the development of the American legal system. They were, in fact, the first methodical treatise on the common law suitable for a lay readership since at least the Middle Ages.

allowed to correct his servants or children; for whom the master or parent is also liable in some cases to answer. But this power of correction was confined within reasonable bounds; and the husband was prohibited to use any violence to his wife, [other than lawfully and reasonably pertains to the husband for the rule and correction of his wife]. The civil law gave the husband the same, or a larger, authority over his wife; allowing him, for some misdemeanors, [To beat his wife severely with whips and sticks], for others, only [with moderate punishment]. But, with us, in the politer reign of Charles the second, this power of correction began to be doubted: and a wife may now have security of the peace against her husband; or, in return, a husband against his wife. Yet the lower rank of people, who were always fond of the old common law, still claim and exert their ancient privilege: and the courts of law will still permit a husband to restrain a wife of her liberty, in case of any gross misbehavior.⁷³

D. Dieterich also comments on how wife-beating was greatly tolerated by the Christian religious establishment in 16th century Europe:

While Ozment notes that “wife-beating ... certainly knew no religious confession,” he implies that Protestants took a more severe view of such abuse than Catholics. This view is shared by John Witte in his study, *From Sacrament to Contract*. He credits the Genevan marriage ordinances with a number of “innovations, or novel emphases” including “the stern prohibition against wife abuse.” In practice, however, even in Geneva this prohibition did not change legal practice in the treatment of abusive marriages; in the marriage ordinances “separation from bed and board was not an option, save in the most dire cases of danger to an innocent spouse’s body and soul.” This does not mark much of a change from medieval practice. Nor does it contrast much with Catholic jurisdictions, as Joel Harrington notes in his more

⁷³ Blackstone, William, 1723-1780. (1962). *Commentaries on the Laws of England*. Boston: Beacon Press

balanced study of Catholic and Protestant states in the region of the Rhenish Palatinate. His evidence suggests that in practice the remedies of domestic abuse were similar, and supports O'Day's contention that a certain level of violence was considered normal. Citing cases from different jurisdictions, he summarizes the problem of abuse as follows:

Significantly, few authorities, Protestant or Catholic, ever considered physical abuse in itself—except in life-threatening situations—as worthy of serious punishment. . . . Relying almost exclusively on warnings and threats of excommunication to achieve their end, ecclesiastical officials surely found the possibilities for significant behavior modification extremely limited, to say the least (Joel F. Harrington, *Reordering Marriage and Society in Reformation Germany*, p. 266)⁷⁴

Thus, Judeo-Christian historical attitudes towards wife-beating, some continuing till this day, espoused a physical correction of behavior similar to that used against slaves. These beatings were also often unrestricted as regards to cause, hence allowing men, particularly in medieval Judaism, to beat their wives even for not performing household chores. When brought before the courts or clergy, these acts were often tolerated to a great degree, and even justified, leaving the woman to suffer without even the recourse of divorce as is the case with many Jewish Agunah⁷⁵ today. Fortunately, many of these practices have been abolished in later religious writings, although statistically domestic violence is still a significant problem in the world today, Judeo-Christian societies included.

Divorce

⁷⁴ Dieterich, D.H. (Oct, 1998). *Church, Property, and Wife-Beating in Sixteenth-Century Liège: The Case of Catherine Woet de Trixhe*. Paper presented at the Sixteenth Century Studies Conference, Toronto, Ontario, 1998. Retrieved from: <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~hdiet/frames6.htm>

⁷⁵ Women unable to obtain divorce certificates from their abusive husbands

Divorce is understood to be the act of fully dissolving a marriage bond between husband and wife, releasing them from all marital obligations. Throughout time, this important issue has been the source of much contention and disagreement. The position of the Judaism, Christianity and Islam is rather variable on divorce and reflects much on the position of the woman.

In Judaism, divorce has historically been completely acceptable, and can in fact be performed for any reason of displeasure. The only major stipulation though is that a husband *alone* can initiate a divorce.

Jewish belief stems from the idea that a man may divorce his wife if she:

... becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her. [NIV, Deuteronomy 24:1]

In this case, the man may “write her a certificate of divorce,” and send her out of his house. This verse of Deuteronomy has caused much debate amongst Jewish scholars due to the difference of opinions on what the words “displeasing” and “indecent” mean within their context. The Talmud records their differing interpretations:

Beth Shammai say: a man should not divorce his wife unless he has found her guilty of some unseemly conduct, as it says, because he hath found some unseemly thing in her⁷⁶. Beth Hillel, however, say [that he may divorce her] even if she has merely spoilt his food, since it says, because he hath found some unseemly thing in her. Rabbi Akiba says, [he may divorce her] even if he finds another woman more beautiful than she is, as it says, it cometh to pass, if she find no favor in his eyes.⁷⁷

Both historical and modern day Jewish law are based upon this Hillelite interpretation wherein the man may divorce his wife on grounds of any dislike that he may have. Also, according to the

⁷⁶ Deuteronomy 24:1

⁷⁷ Babylonian Talmud Mishnah: Folio 90a

teachings of the Talmud, it is obligatory for a husband to divorce his wife if she is barren, defined as not bearing any children for ten years.

The Mishnah (Talmud: *Yevamot* 6.6) says that when a married couple is childless for many years, the husband **must** take another wife in order to fulfill the commandment to be fruitful and multiply: “If a man has taken a wife and been with her ten years, and she has not born child, he may not abstain [from fulfilling the commandment to be fruitful and multiply].⁷⁸⁷⁹ If he divorces her, she may be married by another man, and that man may live with her for ten years.

A woman’s right to divorce though is quite different in Jewish law—it doesn’t exist. In no circumstance can she actually call for a divorce or give a certificate of divorce. If a Jewish wife desires a divorce from her husband, she can appeal to a Jewish court. She must have a valid reason for why she desires such a divorce though. For instance, if her husband has a physical defect or he is not fulfilling his responsibilities, she may succeed with her petition in court. The court though cannot actually dissolve her marriage, only a husband can truly grant a bill of divorce. If judgment is found in favor of the wife, then the court can whip, fine, imprison, or ex-communicate the husband to coerce him to give the wife a bill of divorce. Although these measures may be taken to compel the husband, he still can refuse to grant a divorce to his wife. This right lies solely with him.

This legal structure has a number of far-reaching consequences. In some cases, husbands choose to leave their wives, deserting them. This places the wife in the dilemma of being unmarried

⁷⁸ Rabbi Tahlifa bar Abimi quotes Samuel: “even if he has taken a wife and been with her for ten years [during which time] she has not born a child, he is to be forced [to divorce her].”

⁷⁹ In the time of the Talmud, divorce depended entirely on the man’s wishes; also, polygamy was permitted. The law only began to change on these two issues in the 12th century, with the laws known as the Ban of Rabbenu Gershom. For more on this ban, see *Encyclopedia Talmudit*, Vol. 16, pp. 384-390.

and “undivorced”. The woman is left unable to remarry or to live legally with another man, for to do so means to commit adultery. Moreover, if a woman would choose one of these options (in effect committing adultery), and then bears children, these children, called *mamzers*, and the next ten generations would be considered illegitimate⁸⁰. *Agunah* (literally, chained woman) is the name given to women in such a plight.

On the other hand, the runaway husband can still legally marry again or live with a single woman. Since it is legal, the children from either of these two relationships would then be considered legitimate.

In Christianity, on the other hand, divorce is completely forbidden in agreement with the Shammai Jewish school position. There is only one exception to that rule—if a wife is unfaithful to her husband. In this case, a husband may divorce his wife. The New Testament records Jesus as saying:

It has been said, “Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.” But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery. [NIV, Matthew 5:31-32]

So a husband may then grant his wife a certificate of divorce if she had committed adultery during their marriage. Otherwise, neither husband, nor wife, can divorce each other.

Islam though, stands on a middle ground between Christianity and Judaism with respect to its laws on divorce. Islam does not entirely forbid divorce, yet it discourages it by all means, providing reconciliation remedies for couples to first apply, in hopes of preserving the marriage. Islamic teachings encourage men to be patient and treat their wives with kindness, even if they are is some element of dislike towards them. The Quran states:

⁸⁰ “A *mamzer* shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord; even to his 10th generation shall he not enter into the congregation of the Lord.” [Deuteronomy 23:3]

Live with your wives on a basis of kindness and equity. If you dislike them, it may be that you dislike something in which God has placed a great deal of good. {4:19}

The Prophet Muhammad gave a similar instruction:

A believing man must not hate a believing woman. If he dislikes one of her traits, he will be pleased with another.
[Muslim]

If however, the marriage reaches the point of no return, Islam gives right to **both** partners to end their matrimonial relationship. The husband holds the primary right for divorce, while the court, unlike in Judaism, has full rights to grant the wife a divorce. If the husband dissolves the marriage by divorcing his wife, he cannot take back any of the marriage gifts he has given her. The Quran clearly prohibits them from this, no matter how expensive or valuable these gifts might be:

But if you want to replace one wife with another, and you have given one of them a great amount in gifts, do not take back from it anything. Would you take it in injustice and manifest sin? {4:20}

However, the wife, if she dissolves the marriage, she must return the marriage dowry to her husband. In this case, it is considered fair compensation for the husband who did not want the marriage to end while she chooses to leave him. The Quran has instructed Muslim men not to take back any of the dowry they have given to their wives, except in the case of the wife offering it when she is the one choosing to dissolve the marriage:

And it is not lawful for you to take anything of what you have given them unless both fear that they will not be able to keep [within] the limits of God . But if you fear that they will not keep [within] the limits of God, then there is no blame upon either of them concerning that by which she ransoms herself. These are the limits of Allah, so do not transgress them. {2:229}

This act, referred to as *Khula'* in Islamic law, means the separation of the wife in return for a payment; the husband takes the payment of the dowry he gave and lets his wife go.

Another evidence for this practice comes from the words of the Prophet when one woman⁸¹ came to him seeking a divorce, although she found no fault in the character or religious commitment of her husband—she just didn't like him. The Prophet asked her, “*Will you give back his garden [given to you as the dowry]?*” She agreed, and so the Prophet said to her husband to take back his garden, and divorce her. [Bukhari]

In other cases, a Muslim woman might be willing to keep her marriage, but find herself obliged to seek divorce because of some compelling reasons such as: cruelty of the husband, desertion without a reason, a husband not fulfilling his conjugal responsibilities, not providing for her as he should financially, etc. In these cases, the Muslim court dissolves the marriage.⁸² In fact, even the secular court's ruling in such cases is considered Islamically valid as well, as evidenced by the following religious verdict (fatwa) given to a physically and emotionally abused woman who divorced her husband in a US court:

With regard to what you mention, that a woman in your country might arrange her own divorce through the [secular court], if this is for a reason for which it is permissible to seek a divorce, such as disliking her husband, not being able to stay with him or disliking him because of his immoral ways and his indulgence in forbidden and illegal actions, etc.—then there is nothing wrong with her seeking divorce, but in this case she should divorce him by *khula'* and return to him the dowry that he gave to her.

But if she is seeking divorce for no reason at all, then that is not permissible and the court ruling on divorce in this case does not count for anything in terms of [Islamic law].

⁸¹ The wife of Thaabit ibn Qays ibn Shammaas

⁸² Sabiq, A.S. (1972). *Fiqh al-Sunnah*. al-Qāhirah: Dār al-Kitāb al-Islāmī

The woman still remains the wife of the man. Now we have a problem. The fact that she is still married to him means that she cannot marry anyone else, but according to the court ruling she is apparently divorced from him, and [can remarry after her Islamic waiting period ends]. I think that the only way out of this problem is that good and righteous people should get involved in this matter, to bring about reconciliation between the man and his wife. Otherwise she has to give him some payment, so that it will be a proper *khula'*.⁸³

In short, Islam has offered the Muslim women some unequalled rights: she can end the marriage through *khula'*. A Muslim wife thus can never become chained by a bitter and merciless husband.

Covering the Hair. Is it Just for Muslim Women?

Few things today are quite as attention-grabbing in the Western media as the issue of Muslim women's dress code. The *hijab*⁸⁴ has a different meaning depending on who you ask though. In the West, women dressed in *hijab* evoke both anger and sympathy, as some see them as having no voices, no rights and no place outside the home. It has been called oppressive and degrading, and open calls have been made to "liberate women" from these restrictive garments. There is one glaring problem with these impassioned cries though—no one really cared to ask Muslim women what they thought about the whole matter. Before actually exploring this very important question, a brief review of the views of the three religions regarding veiling—all three of which either currently require or have historically required the veil—will again be made.

Beginning again with Judaism, one quickly discovers the requirement for covering the hair of the woman, which continues till today among the Orthodox sects. In Judaism though, a number of factors appear to be at play when attempting to understand the *reasoning* behind the traditional

⁸³ *Liqā' al-baab al-Maftooh*, Uthaymeen

⁸⁴ The modest dress code of the Muslim woman, which includes the hair covering, but is not limited to that.

requirement that women cover their hair. The *Midrash* of the Talmud, on one hand, unreservedly understands Eve's beauty as having contributed to her temptation of Adam. As a result, she was then required to modestly cover her hair, as it was considered so sexually alluring that men would be simply incapable to resist. Again from the *Midrash*:

Why does a woman cover her head and a man not cover his head? A parable. To what may this be compared? To a woman who disgraced herself and because she disgraced herself, she is ashamed in the presence of people. In the same way Eve disgraced herself and caused her daughters to cover their heads.⁸⁵

The *Midrash* continues in this regards, explaining that women are required to cover their heads as they walk before the bier at funeral processions in order to atone for Eve having brought death into the world by her sin. This is also related to the ten curses placed on women that was mentioned previously.

Yet, from another perspective the act of covering the hair in Judaism has also been viewed, as we shall also see in Islam, as a badge of honor and distinction. In the Jewish case, it is because it is a requirement only for women who are, or have been, married. A woman who has never been married is not required by most Jewish authorities to cover her hair. The Talmud [Kesuvos 72a] regards the source for this requirement as being Numbers 5:18 which deals with the laws of a *sotah* (a suspected adulteress) and states,

The priest shall stand the woman before God and uncover her hair...

Rabbi Shlomo Yitchaki of the 11th century provides two explanations for the Talmud's conclusion requiring veiling. Firstly, she is punished for exposing her hair to her lover which demonstrates that the act of uncovering the hair before another man (other than family) is prohibited, and, secondly, from the

⁸⁵ Bronner, L.L. (1994). *From Eve to Esther: Rabbinic Reconstructs of Biblical Women*. Westminster: John Knox Press

fact that we expose her hair we see that under typical conditions, a Jewish woman's hair should be covered.

Jewish men, married or not, must cover their heads in virtually all Jewish sects. This requirement, however, does not only stem from ideas of modesty or temptation, but as a symbol of the "Fear of Heaven". This concept comes from the Talmud, where the mother of Rabbi Nachman bar Yitzchak would not allow him to go with his head uncovered saying, "Cover your head in order that you should have the fear of heaven upon you."⁸⁶

The Practice of Covering the Head and Face in Christianity

Early Christianity too continued this requirement for women as not only a tradition, but also due to scripture. In the New Testament, Paul writes:

And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is just as though her head were shaved. If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head. A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head. [NIV, 1 Corinthians 11:5-10]

Although this is the only Biblical passage explicitly requiring the covering of the head, a number of Early Church Fathers discussed, at length, head coverings in their works. The classic nun's garb, for example, stands as being most representative of the conservative style of female dress in the Christian world. Furthermore, Christian art from its earliest forms shows women, such as the Virgin Mary, wearing head coverings. In Christian

⁸⁶ Krauss, S. (1945). The Jewish Rite of Covering the Head. *Hebrew Union College Annual*. Vol. 19, pp. 121-168. Retrieved from: https://www.jstor.org/stable/23503676?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

writings and art though, as opposed to those of Judaism, greater attention is paid to the issue of modesty as it relates to the covering of the head, and even at times the veiling of the face. Dr. Alan Ingalls, Assistant Professor of Old Testament at the Baptist Bible Seminary in Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania writes:

Whether a woman wore a veil at all times or not is best left to further study. The woman, like the man, seemed to wear some kind of headcovering as a part of her normal attire. That headcovering was likely different than that worn by the man. It seems safe to say that veils which obscured the face might be worn by women, at least at times, as a sign of modesty or propriety. Removal of the basic everyday headcovering was a sign of immodesty or vulnerability.⁸⁷

To better understand the reasoning behind the veiling of women's heads in Christianity, we shall now review some quotes taken from the writings of several Church Fathers and other significant personalities in Church history.

The great Church Father Tertullian is often cited on this matter, for he dedicated an entire work, *On the Veiling of Virgins*, to the subject. In it, he argues that virgins are not exempt from the law of veiling. He argues in conjunction with St. Paul's text that the veil should be worn "on account of the angels." Further, Tertullian calls for women to keep themselves veiled, **out of modesty**, even outside of the liturgy:

... as they veil their head in presence of heathens, let them at all events in the church conceal their virginity, which they do veil outside the church. They fear strangers: let them stand in awe of the brethren too; or else let them have the consistent hardihood to appear as virgins in the streets as well, as they have the hardihood to do in the churches.

He continues:

⁸⁷ Ingalls, A.D. (2000). Headcoverings in the Old Testament. *The Journal of Ministry & Theology*. Vol. 4, No. 2, pp. 41-52

I pray you, be you mother, or sister, or virgin-daughter—let me address you according to the names proper to your years—veil your head: if a mother, for your sons' sakes; if a sister, for your brethren's sakes; if a daughter for your fathers' sakes ... Put on the panoply of modesty; surround yourself with the stockade of bashfulness; rear a rampart for your sex....⁸⁸

These writings of the 2nd and 3rd centuries are enhanced by another distinguished Christian author of the 3rd century, St. Clement of Alexandria. In his extensive work called *The Instructor* (*Paedagogus*), St. Clement goes further and connects the face veil to the issue of modesty:

Woman and man are to go to church decently attired ... Let the woman observe this, further. Let her be entirely covered ... For that style of dress is grave, and protects from being gazed at. And she will never fall, who puts before her eyes modesty, and her shawl; nor will she invite another to fall into sin by uncovering her face. For this is the wish of the Word, since it is becoming for her to pray veiled.⁸⁹

Next, we look to the writings of one of early Christianity's most renowned Biblical scholars, St. John Chrysostom, who was sometimes called the "Golden-mouthed Doctor". St. John Chrysostom, in his homilies on St. Paul's text from 1 Corinthians, sees St. Paul as saying that women should be veiled *at all times*, not only in church:

... the man he compels not to be always uncovered, but only when he prays ... But the woman he commands to be at all times covered ... [he] also proceeded to say, "for it is one and the same thing as if she were shaven." But if to be shaven is always dishonorable, it is plain too that being

⁸⁸ Børresen, Kari E. (1986). Tertulliano. De virginibus velandis. *Augustinianum* 26 (3):591-593.

⁸⁹ Clement of Alexandria. (1867). *The Instructor, Book III*. Tr. William Wilson. Edinburgh: T&T Clark. Retrieved from: https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Ante-Nicene_Christian_Library/The_Instructor:_Book_3

uncovered is always a reproach. And not even with this only was he content, but added again, saying, "The woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head, because of the angels." He signifies that not only at the time of prayer but also continually, she ought to be covered.⁹⁰

Shifting ahead to the middle ages, we next see in the commentary of St. Thomas Aquinas on the same Biblical passage (Commentary on First Corinthians) his understanding that women **must** be veiled "because of the angels." St. Thomas states that this can be comprehended both literally and metaphorically. In the literal sense, "angels" actually means angels:

This can be understood in two ways: in one way about the heavenly angels who are believed to visit congregations of the faithful, especially when the sacred mysteries are celebrated. And therefore at that time women as well as men ought to present themselves honorably as reverence to them according to Psalms 138 (v. 1): "Before the angels I sing thy praise."⁹¹

In a more metaphorical way, St. Thomas says that "angels" can also be understood to mean the priests who celebrate the liturgies, and in this way he too connects the issue of veiling to modesty:

Therefore, the woman should always have a covering over her head because of the angels, i.e., the priests, for two reasons: first, as reverence toward them, to which it pertains that women should behave honorably before them ... Secondly, for their safety, lest the sight of a woman not veiled excite their concupiscence.⁹²

Moreover, the first Protestant Reformers also required the covering of the head. Katharina von Bora, Martin Luther's wife

⁹⁰ St. John Chrysostom. (n.d.). *Homilies on First Corinthians, Homily 26*, ver. 4. Retrieved from: http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/0345-0407,_Iohannes_Chrysostomus,_Homilies_on_First_Corinthians,_EN.pdf

⁹¹ Aquinas, T. (n.d.). *Super I Epistolam B. Pauli ad Corinthios lectura*. Tr. Fabian Larcher. Retrieved from: <https://dhspriority.org/thomas/SS1Cor.htm>

⁹² *ibid*

and a former nun, was known to wear a head-covering even after leaving Catholicism. Also, 16th century Protestant founding fathers like John Knox and John Calvin both called for women to cover their heads. John Calvin's views on the veiling of women are also tied to the question of modesty. He writes:

So if women are thus permitted to have their heads uncovered and to show their hair, they will eventually be allowed to expose their entire breasts, and they will come to make their exhibitions as if it were a tavern show; they will become so brazen that modesty and shame will be no more; in short they will forget the duty of nature.⁹³

Furthermore, European Renaissance artists and those who came later—well into the 16th and 17th century—regularly depicted women, both commoners and those of high status, as covering everything except the face and hands. This trend continued with the settling of America as can be seen in Puritan portraits of women wearing headcoverings, and lasted into the late 19th century and early 20th century. In the early 20th century, Protestant churches did away with their requirement that women cover their heads during church service. In Catholicism, though it was Church canon that women should cover their heads and also "desirable" that women should be separate from men in church, the Roman Catholic Church also omitted these requirements in the 1983 Code of Canon Law. In this manner has Christianity continued to change its position on this matter up till the present day where now only a few sects of Christianity still implement female headcoverings.

⁹³ Skolnitsky, S. (tr.). (1992). *Men, Women and Order in the Church: Three Sermons by John Calvin*. Dallas, TX: Presbyterian Heritage Publications



Modesty and the Headcover in Islam

Modesty too is considered an important part of faith in Islam for women *and* men, for without it, a person's faith is incomplete. Once, the Messenger of God passed by a man who was

criticizing his brother for being too modest. To this, the Messenger of God stated,

Let him be. Modesty is part of faith and belief. [Bukhari and Muslim]

In other hadith the Prophet commented,

Every religion has a distinctive character and the distinctive character of Islam is modesty. [Ibn Majah]

Modesty brings nothing but good (also reported, modesty embodies all of goodness). [Adab Mufrad]

Modesty and faith are interlinked; if one of them is lacking, then the other shall be lacking as well. [Adab Mufrad]

Modesty is never part of anything except that it enhances and beautifies it, and indecency is never part of anything except that it dishonors it. [Adab Mufrad]

So then modesty, represented by decency, humility, and inhibition against sin, offers protection from indecency and sin. Modesty represents the shyness of a person before God when it comes to indecent and dishonorable actions; such that this shyness acts as a barrier between the person and the sin. Consequently, the person who loses modesty, loses that which prevents him from doing evil, allowing him then to freely indulge in sin.

Among the outward manifestations of a Muslim's modesty, are good speech, unrevealing clothing, and abstinence from sexual promiscuity. Based on such principles of moral dignity, Islam brought about a moral revolution of unprecedented dimensions with modesty being the cornerstone. Pre-Islamic societies may have recognized some aspects of modesty in their lifestyle, but they did not grasp the meaning of modesty in its complete form of inward and outward application. How did Islamic teachings then change this?

First, let us look to the case of human dress. At a time when other societies were using garments primarily as a form of adornment and to elicit sensual feelings from the public, Islam came to remind people that the primary purpose of dress is to cover our nakedness.

O' Children of Adam! We have bestowed clothing upon you to cover your shame, as well as to be an adornment to you. But the garment of righteousness, that is the best. {7:26}

Hence, the need for garments to cover nakedness has been instilled into the nature of human beings from the beginning. It is this inherent feeling of shyness which distinguishes the human being from lesser forms of creation.

For a Muslim, there is no Islamic life without Islamic morality, and there is no Islamic morality without modesty. In the Quran, God exhorts the believing men and women to lower their gaze and guard their modesty, and then further urges the believing women to extend their head covers to cover the neck and the body. The commands for modest dress code can be seen in the following verses:

Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty ... And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not show off their beauty, except only that which is apparent (hands and face); and to draw their veils over their bodies, necks and bosoms and not to reveal their adornment ... {24:30-31}

O Prophet! Tell your wives, your daughters and the believing women to draw their cloaks over their selves. That will be better, that they should be known as free respectable women and as not to be annoyed. {33:59}

Also, the Prophet clarified this position in the following hadith,

Once Asmaa bint Abu Bakr entered into the presence of the Messenger of God wearing a thin, transparent garment. Upon seeing her, the Messenger of God turned away from her saying, "*Asmaa, when a women reaches the age of menstruation, it is not allowed that any part of her body should be seen except this,*" and he pointed to his face and two hands. [Abu Dawud, Bayhaqi]

Thus, modesty is protection. It has been prescribed to protect women from harassment and disrespect. It is hoped that by dressing this way she will not be seen as a sexual object, but will rather be appreciated for the person that she is. Thus, protection is among the primary objectives of the female headcover in Islam. Unlike the covering taught in Christian tradition, it is *not*

a sign of man's authority over woman, nor is it a sign of women's subjection to man. The Islamic headcover, as opposed to the headcover in the Jewish tradition, is not a sign of married women, nor is it a sign of mourning. The regulations of modest dress in Islam are only a sign of distinction with the purpose of protecting all women of faith.

Additionally, the Quran is so concerned with protecting women's bodies and their noble reputation that a man who dares to falsely accuse a woman of unchastity will be severely punished under Islamic Law. This is because Islam came with the commandment to protect the women's honor; therefore the utmost respect is given to protecting the woman's chastity and her good reputation. Accusing a chaste woman is actually one of the major sins in Islam:

And those who accuse chaste women, and produce not four witnesses to support their allegations, flog them eighty times; and reject their evidence ever after—for such men are wicked transgressors. {24:4}

Thus, a woman's chastity has to be respected and protected under all circumstances, and this verse refers to all women, not only to Muslim women.

Now we return to the central question which was posed in the beginning of this section, "Do Muslim women feel oppressed by the dress code of *hijaab*?" The answer to this question comes from a 2005 Gallup poll survey entitled, *What Women Want: Listening to the Voices of Muslim Women*, by The Gallup Organization as part of The Gallup World Poll.

In more than 8,000 face-to-face interviews conducted in eight predominantly Muslim countries, the survey discovered that what a majority of Muslim women polled resented most about their own societies was the lack of unity among Muslim nations, violent extremism, and political and economic corruption. The hijab, or head scarf, and burqa, the garment covering face and body, seen by some Westerners as tools of oppression, ***were never mentioned in the women's answers*** to the open-ended questions, the poll analysts said.

Furthermore, a majority of those polled did not believe that adopting Western values would help the Muslim world's political and economic progress. The most

frequent response to the question, "*What do you admire least about the West?*" was the general perception of moral decay, sexual promiscuity and pornography that Gallup pollsters called the "*Hollywood image*" that is seen by many as degrading to women.

On the other hand, an overwhelming majority of the women polled in each country cited "attachment to moral and spiritual values" as the best feature of their own societies. In Pakistan, 53% of the women polled said attachment to their religious beliefs was their country's most admirable quality. Similarly, in Egypt, 59% of the women surveyed cited love of their religion, Islam, as the best part of life in that society.⁹⁴

In conclusion, the head covering in Islam does not result in negative feelings among *most* Muslim women. It remains a fact fourteen hundred years after the message of Islam was delivered by the Prophet Muhammad that women still proudly wear this garment of modesty and religious distinction. Furthermore, the act of covering for millions of Muslim women today remains a choice that they freely make, and not an act of coercion as is often portrayed in the West. These women choose to dress in this way so as to "please God," in the words of one woman, while others dress the way that they do in order to please the societies in which they live. To highlight this issue of choice and the positive outlook of a number of women regarding the head cover, this section will close with a beautiful poem written by Heather Gladden, an American convert to Islam:

⁹⁴ Andrews, H. (2006, Jun 8). Muslim Women Don't See Themselves as Oppressed, Survey Finds. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from: <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/06/08/world/middleeast/08women.html>

Me,
 Love,
 Respect,
 Sense of Self,
 Covering my hair,
 Showing God I care,
 Protecting my modesty,
 Exchanging lies for honesty,
 Without Hijab, no one could tell,
 Unprotected; without my Islamic shell,
 Lies, as if to tell the world “Muslim, I am not”,
 “I want to die with all of you and burn in Hell so hot”,
 “Come men and talk with me, I am married but do not care”,
 “I give you my permission to desire with your unbroken
 stare”,
 “I want to show you what I have, make it look pretty for you
 to see”,
 “I want you to desire and lust, while other Hijab-wearing
 women envy me”,
 But I chose to be honest allowing the world to see; I am a
 Muslimah⁹⁵ so happy,
 Free from Satan’s enslavement, free for Heaven’s engagement, I am free!
 God’s blessings so gently bestowed upon my head, so gently in deed,
 Hugs from the cloth that covers me, Liberated from Satan’s greed,
 I am a Muslimah, Shouting it out, yet silently without a voice,
 I am a Muslimah, I am a Muslimah *by my own choice*,
 No man owns me, no man controls me. I am free,
 God owns me, God freed me to be me,
 God loves me, and I respect God,
 Allah is my God, Oh Allah!
 I am me, I am a Hijabi⁹⁶!
 My Sense of Self,
 My Respect,
 Love,
 Me!

⁹⁵ Muslimah: a Muslim woman

⁹⁶ Hijabi: a woman who chooses to wear the Hijab

Table of Contrast

This comparative table briefly summarizes a number of subjects as they relate to women.

	Judaism	Christianity	Islam
<i>Education</i>	Forbidden for females to study the Torah/Talmud.	Women should learn from the husbands. Women are prohibited from teaching in Bible except to children.	Women are obligated to Study scripture; Female scholars contributed much to the development and spread of Islam.
<i>Post childbirth</i>	Unclean for 33 days with birth of male, but for 66 days with birth of female.	As with Judaism, but not practiced in current era Christianity.	No distinction is made between male and female child.
<i>Marital Consent</i>	Scripturally the woman has no right to consent to her own marriage, but must accept the decision of her guardian.	Had no rights to consent to her own marriage until somewhere between the 9 th and 12 th Century CE.	Marriage is invalid without the consent of the woman as was demonstrated in the life of the Prophet.
<i>Polygyny</i>	Allowed Biblically and historically till the 10 th century without limitation as to number of wives	Prohibited entirely	Restricted to 4 wives at once, provided the man can equally divide time and finances between the 4
<i>Wife-beating</i>	Historically mentioned as a punishment for disobedient	Was a written part of Church canon and English Common Law till the 16 th century as a	Viewed only symbolically; strongly discouraged by

	women till the 16 th century; not commonly a grounds for a woman to obtain a divorce.	form of domestic chastisement	the Prophet; forbidden to cause injury or pain to woman; violence is grounds for divorce.
<i>Divorce Rights</i>	Women have no right to contract their own divorce, but must instead obtain certificate from husband.	Divorce is forbidden per the words of Jesus, and in the canon based on these words.	Women may divorce their husbands through “ <i>khul’a</i> ” by going to court.
<i>Inheritance</i>	Do not have the right to inherit per Torah/Talmud.	In accordance with Old Testament verses, Church canon also denies women rights to inheritance.	Women have a God-given right to inheritance and cannot be prevented from getting their share.
<i>Bearing Witness</i>	Forbidden in all cases due to the general unreliability and deficient intellect of women per Scripture.	Same as in Jewish tradition.	Women are admissible as witnesses in all legal cases, except in cases of criminal punishment. Also, in some legal cases, their testimony is the only one admissible (men barred as witnesses).

Some Controversial Women's Issues Today – Q&A

There is a lot of discussion these days about Muslim women being barred from praying in mosques. Is there any valid reason or truth to this statement?

Muslim women are NOT in any way forbidden from praying in mosques *per the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad*. In fact, there are a number of hadith which mention women going to the mosque for various reasons (like attending the Prophet's women's only classes) and others which specifically give them the right to pray in the mosque. The Prophet Muhammad said,

Do not prevent the female servants of God (women) from going to the mosques of God. [Bukhari]

Thus, a woman may go to the mosque whether it is for religious seclusion (*I'tikaaf*), congregational prayers, classes, or even to receive personal advice from a scholar. It is important though that she respects the sanctity of the mosque by dressing appropriately and acting with humility and modesty; qualities required of all, be they men or women.

Much of the controversy that has erupted today can often be broken into two categories: the ever present problem of culture based ignorance, and issues of limited space. The first category is self-explanatory, in that such people do not know their religion. Whereas in the second case, there exist some small mosques where there is not even sufficient space for men to pray. In Islam, men are required to pray in the mosque, whereas women are exempted from this. Thus, in mosques where there is significant over-crowding, Muslim women are encouraged to allow men to complete their obligations and to try to attend either bigger mosques with more space or to return to those smaller mosques at times of less traffic; so as to show the most consideration to their brothers in faith. This in fact is commonly done throughout many predominantly Muslim countries like Egypt, which have dedicated women's prayer and learning facilities in certain larger mosques.

You cited the relevant Biblical verse from the Old Testament wherein women are valued at between 50% and 60% the value

of a man. Isn't this inferior view of women the same as the Quranic verses which confer only half the inheritance of the male for the female, and also where the testimony of a woman is equal to half of a man's?

No. The general rule is that the female share of the inheritance is half that of the male's, but exceptions do occur such as when the mother receives an equal share to that of the father. The general rule of providing the man twice as much inheritance as the female, if taken in isolation from other legislations concerning men and women, does at first seem clearly unfair. But in order to understand the rationale behind this rule, one must take into account the fact that the financial obligations of men in Islam far exceed those of women.

Firstly, the groom must provide his bride with a marriage gift (dowry). This gift becomes her exclusive property and remains so even if she is later divorced by him. The bride though is under no obligation to present any gifts to her groom. Secondly, the Muslim husband is charged with the maintenance of his wife and children which means providing food, shelter, clothing and other necessities. The wife, on the other hand, is not obliged to help him in this regard, *even if she works*. Her property and earnings are for her use alone, except what she may **voluntarily** offer her husband. Thirdly, the man is obligated to care for the parents whereas the woman has no such obligation, no matter how wealthy she may be. Hence, the provision of giving more inheritance to the man is directly connected with the fact that he is required to spend upon others with that money. The money the woman receives from inheritance has no requirements upon it and can be entirely spent on what she wants, or used in charity to help others.

As regards the issue of testimony, yes the testimony of one woman is equal to that of half of a man—but only in cases of financial or business transactions where two men cannot be found. In some other legal proceedings though, the testimony of a woman is the **only** admissible testimony in the court, as in issues of virginity, breastfeeding, etc. Conversely, in criminal proceedings women do not testify at all according to most Muslim legal opinions.

With regards to the most important testimony in Islam though—the testimony of a person reporting a hadith—the testimony of a woman carries the exact same weight as that of a man. Thus, there is no validity associated with the claim that the testimony of the woman carries less weight due to some mental deficiency on the part of the woman, for nothing in Islam takes a higher priority than the preservation of scripture—a mission that many Muslim women successfully and nobly attended to throughout the history of Islam. Prophetic Hadith have been narrated by women on the authority of the Messenger of God, and they have the same authenticity as those narrated by men. No scholar has ever rejected a woman’s narration simply on the basis that she is a female.

One should also keep in mind that women in both Judaism and Christianity have absolutely no scriptural right to testify in *any* legal matter whatsoever. All rights to testify in today’s societies are based on secular laws and not religious ones.

Thus, in summary, neither the issue of testimony, nor that of inheritance demonstrates that a woman is half of a man in the view of Islam, but only shows the different roles and obligations that they have in these two separate arenas.

Although women in virtually all Western nations have now secured the right to vote, why is it that women in a number of predominantly Muslim nations have yet to achieve this right?

The answer to this question again revolves around the central theme of “Muslim countries” today being based far more on culture than on any substantial amount of Islam. Looking into the earliest part of Islamic history, we see that during the election process of the third Caliphate, the famed Companion `Abd al-Rahman ibn `Awf took it upon himself to poll every person living in Madinah as to their opinion regarding who should take charge of the Islamic state. This process of course involved him asking every woman living in Madinah, as well as a large segment of the young people too. As a result of his efforts, he declared,

I have sought the opinion of every person in Madinah—man, woman and youth—and have found that all of them prefer `Uthman as Caliph over Ali.⁹⁷

This indicates to us that even those women who remained concealed in their homes were consulted on the matter. Hence, to deny a woman the right to vote can not be based upon any Islamic evidence, and is in fact contrary to the established practice among the Companions which would herein qualify as consensus (*ijma`a*).

Many of the Islamic positions regarding Women and their Rights sound good in theory, but why is it then that women in predominantly Muslim countries appear to have such few rights?

Stanford University student Saimah Ashraf answers this question best in her award winning article, *Shattering Illusions: Western Conceptions of Muslim Women*, when she writes:

Islam in its original state gave women privileges and imposed no harsh restrictions or double standards upon them. However, with the progression of time, the rights of Muslim women began deteriorating, and today, very few Muslim countries adhere to the Islamic ideal in their treatment of women. This deviance from Islam can be seen when evaluating the rights that women possess in different countries.⁹⁸

So unfortunately what many people in the West see today is not Islam, but instead it is the dying remains of backward cultures that bury, instead of represent, Islam in most cases. It is sincerely hoped that by returning to a better understanding of Islamic scriptures and its early history that women will once again be given the honor they so richly deserve by the very words of God. This is indeed the only way that women will attain true success, which in Islam not only means in this material world, but in the more important sense of the Hereafter.

⁹⁷ Ibn al-`Arabī, M.A. (n.d.). *Al-`Awāšim min al-qawāšim*. al-Qāhirah: Maktabat Dār al-Turāth

⁹⁸ Ashraf, S. (1997). *Shattering Illusions: Western Conceptions of Muslim Women*. Retrieved from:
<https://www.islamawareness.net/Women/shattering.html>

Why Many American Women Choose Islam

By Julie S. Mair, JD MPH

Each year thousands of American women convert to Islam. One study estimates that of the nearly 20,000 US converts in 2000, nearly 7,000 were female. These women are diverse in ethnicity, race, and socioeconomic status. A common assumption is that most women who convert do so because they are engaged or married to a Muslim. Muslim men, though, are specifically permitted to marry chaste Christian or Jewish women. Thus, a woman does not have to convert to Islam to marry a Muslim. Of course, the fact that a woman does not have to convert for a man does not mean that she does not do so.

I graduated from a liberal women's college in the Northeast—one of the Seven Sisters. I practiced law for over eight years including a position with a large urban prosecutor's office and then conducted scientific research in a leading university for nearly seven years. A number of people whom I meet cannot understand how someone with my academic background and presumed intelligence could convert unless I was married to a Muslim man. I did not convert for a man, and the available evidence suggests that this reason is not prevailing in other women either.

What then attracted me and so many other women to Islam? While spirituality is a very personal matter and the factors that most influence a particular individual's decision to convert vary, common themes emerge when American converts, both male and female, are asked why they chose Islam. Some of the main factors that emerge when talking with converts include: "Islam makes sense" and it resolves issues in their prior religion or belief system that either confused or disturbed them; Islam prohibits blindly following the faith and requires Muslims to use their intelligence to increase their understanding of God; Islam provides a complete way to live one's life with clear guidelines; and Islam promotes values that appear to be lost in the dominant, non-Muslim secular society.

With respect to women converts in particular, one of the most intriguing aspects of conversion concerns those women who begin to investigate Islam more closely in an effort to confirm their already *negative* attitudes toward the religion--specifically, that Islam oppresses and devalues women, and promotes violence, intolerance and hate. To their surprise, they discover quite the opposite. Islam not only promotes peace, tolerance, and love, but in Islam women are highly regarded, equal before God with a pivotal role to play in both their families and society-at-large. They learn that from the beginning, women contributed to Islam's success and the spread of Islamic knowledge, and that some of the earliest and most influential scholars of Islam were women like 'Aisha, a wife of the Prophet Muhammad (May Allah be pleased with her). Far from oppressing women, Islam produces and nurtures strong female role models of piety, intelligence, and dignity.

These women also discover the truth about the beloved Prophet Muhammad (may Allah bless him and grant him abundant peace) and the unjust vilification against him. The Quran has been translated to describe the Prophet as having an "exalted standard of character" (68:4) and a "beautiful pattern of conduct" (33:21). Muslims believe that the Prophet reached the highest attainable stage of human perfection and that he exemplifies beautiful behavior. He treated women with respect, love, and appreciation and instructed his Companions and followers to do the same.

To the extent that women are devalued or abused in countries inhabited by mostly Muslims, they find that this attitude or conduct toward women is not inherently part of Islam but results from cultural factors and the misinterpretation of Islam often for secular ends. Of the few countries that apply Islamic Law, none do so completely or without error. Perhaps, this should not be too surprising as the Prophet is reported to have said: "The best of my people is my generation, then those who follow them, then those who follow them." It would be a mistake to hastily reject Islam based on the incorrect practice of others when you yourself could be among the guided.

After prior misconceptions about Islam are shattered, American women investigating Islam often look more critically at their own reality. They begin to ask exactly what does “liberation” and “equality” mean and whether the American lifestyle truly delivers what it professes. Studies consistently show that women in the United States earn less than men; that of the hundreds of thousands of rapes and sexual assaults each year in the U.S., the vast majority involve men as perpetrators and women as survivors; that intimate partner violence against women is epidemic often with fatal consequences; and that beauty, youth, and sex appeal appear to be more valued than piety, character, intelligence, and societal contribution. Although such facts do not lead to the conclusion that America is morally bankrupt or has nothing worthwhile to offer the rest of the world, they do suggest that all is not perfect in the land of milk and honey.

In the final analysis, many American women find Islam liberating--freeing their minds, bodies, and spirits from veils of ignorance and guiding them to a harmonious existence in this life and ultimately the presence of the Lord in the next. Conversion though transcends logic and explanation, and words can only express what is in our thoughts. The light of Faith is a blessed, undeserved and indescribable gift that illuminates our hearts. And for that, all praise and gratitude is due to Allah.

The Islamic Belief in the Afterlife

Although belief in the afterlife is a matter of the unseen as described in the Quran, God never asks the believer to have “blind faith,” as has been frequently “required” in other religions. Instead, God continually provides logical evidence throughout the Quran for everything that He asks us to accept.

Then did you think that We created you uselessly and that to Us you would not be returned (for account)?
{23:115}

And not equal are the blind and the seeing, nor are those who believe and do righteous deeds and the evildoer. Little do you remember. {40:58}

Or do those who commit evils think We will make them like those who have believed and done righteous deeds—that they will both be equal in their life and their death? How poor is the judgment that they make. {45:21}

And We did not create the heaven and the earth and that between them aimlessly. That is the assumption of those who disbelieve, so woe to those who disbelieve from the Fire. {37:27}

These verses are all indicative that seeking and implementing justice is an innate human sense found throughout all societies from the dawn of time till today. Indeed, the level of civilization of a people is often directly correlated to their implementation of justice in their society. How then can the manifestation of all Perfection, God, allow such injustice to occur by allowing the righteous and the corrupt to both have the same end?

A Resurrection that We Witness Every Year

And Allah has sent down rain from the sky and given life thereby to the earth after its lifelessness. Indeed in that is a sign for a people who listen. {16:65}

He brings the living out of the dead and brings the dead out of the living and brings to life the earth after its lifelessness. And thus will you be brought out. {30:19}

Throughout time, people of doubt have questioned how the Creator would be able to bring them back to life for judgment after they had decayed into dust and bones. Once again, God answers such questions with logical answers, one of which can be seen over and over again every year – the death of the earth every winter, and its return to life in the spring. This is a resurrection that all people have witnessed and likewise a great sign from God.

Is it So Strange that the Creation will be Repeated?

And he presents for Us an example and forgets his [own] creation. He says, “Who will give life to bones while they are disintegrated?” Say, “He who produced them the first time will again give them life, and He is, of all creation, Knowing.” {36:78-79}

The next compelling argument presented above asks why this resurrection should be so difficult when indeed it was God that brought both mankind and the entire universe into existence from nothing. In fact, it should be far easier for Him to bring us back into existence with actual working materials, be they bones or dust, as opposed to nothing at all, as was done with the first creation.

A Sign from Prehistoric Times

Yet, the evidences don't stop there. God engages His creation on yet a higher level, and that it is the realm of scientific understanding. Using verses in the Quran reinforced with scientific knowledge, He drives the point even further to those who still have doubts.

God states that He would bring them back to life even if mankind were stones, as seen in the following passage from the Quran:

And they say, "When we are bones and crumbled particles, will we really be resurrected as a new creation?" Say, "Be you stones or iron or any creation which is great within your estimation." And they will say, "Who will restore us?" Say, "He who brought you forth the first time." Then they will nod their heads toward you and say, "When is that?" Say, "Perhaps it will be soon." {17:49-51}

Why would God tell the disbelieving people that He would resurrect them even if they were stones? The amazing answer comes with the discovery of fossils.

A fossil is defined in the Merriam-Webster dictionary as, "a remnant, impression, or trace of an organism of past geologic ages that has been preserved in the earth's crust". One of the few ways that we know anything at all about prehistoric life is through such fossils. Some people refer to specimens of dinosaurs as "dinosaur bones", but in fact, they are not. No organic material can remain unchanged for millions of years. That is why many of the artifacts of the past that survive to be looked upon and studied by human eyes do so as *stones*, or fossils.

How do things turn to stone, or become fossilized? First of all, only a very small amount of prehistoric life was fossilized. In order for this phenomenon to take place, conditions had to be exactly right. Only the hard parts of an organism can become fossilized, such as teeth, claws, shells, and bones. The soft body parts are usually lost, except for in very special conditions.

Specifically though, an animal would die and be buried in sand or earth that over the next few centuries would continue to pack harder and harder, partly preserving the bone or shell and also infusing it with rock-like minerals in a process called permineralization. Over millions of years, the original bone or shell is completely replaced by the minerals and what remains is a rock-like copy of the original shell. The fossil has the same shape as the original object, but is actually rock.

Amber too has been recently found to preserve species from millions of years ago. Amber, in fact, creates the world's most

perfect fossils. It's an unusual stone that begins as sap flowing from some types of trees. Sometimes insects, plants or other small animals become trapped in that sap, and go on to become preserved in near-perfect, three-dimensional condition. Over millions of years of hardening and fossilization, the resin eventually becomes the stone amber and can be found in very few areas around the world where the conditions were just right for its formation and preservation.

How does all of this information then relate to the resurrection? The disbelieving peoples found it difficult to believe that God would resurrect them from dust and bones, so God shows them how even if they were to have turned to stone – stone here being even more difficult than actual bones as a substrate from which to recreate - that He is well capable to resurrect them with ease and thus the stone fossils that remain show His power to easily preserve the remnants of past life even under very challenging circumstances.

Again, another example of the use of scientific knowledge not discovered for over one thousand years after the revelation of the Quran is a miracle for you and me, people of the twenty-first century. God is telling you that, as the Creator of the Heavens and the Earth, He is well acquainted with our make-up and composition. He is the One that takes our souls away, and He is the One well capable of giving us life again. And from His immense Mercy and concern for us, He answers every doubt – for example, here about the idea of the resurrection - so as to give us every chance to accept Him and submit to Him, thereby achieving success, both in this life and the hereafter.

Is Islam an Exclusivist Belief?

Returning to the definition of Islam first provided in the opening chapter, Islam is the religion of all people who submit themselves completely to the will of the One God from the beginning of time till the end of the world. And God has said concerning this belief:

And whoever seeks a religion other than Islam, it will not be accepted from him and he will be amongst the losers in the Hereafter. {3:85}

And He also reveals in that same surah of the Quran:

And verily the only religion in the sight of God is Islam {3:19}

So, without doubt, Islam is an exclusivist belief. As seen in the verses of the Quran listed above, whoever comes before the Almighty in the Hereafter believing anything else shall be consigned to eternal punishment. What then if a person lived and the message of Islam never reached them during their lifetime and there was no reasonable way for them to obtain such knowledge? Or if the message of Islam they received - from either a sinful and misguided Muslim person or a biased book - was so distorted with inaccuracy, error and/or hypocrisy that they were, in fact, rejecting this false message and not true Islam? Such people will then be tested by God on the Day of Judgment – but such people are a very small minority.

Indeed, God states clearly and repeatedly in the Quran, “*And God is not unjust to His servants*” {3:182, 8:51, and 22:10} and the Prophet Muhammad also states in one Hadith,

And no one is fonder of accepting an excuse than Allah. For this reason, He has sent Messengers as announcers of glad tidings and warnings. [Bukhari]

To this end, the insane, mentally challenged and children before the age of puberty will not have any judgment and will have no accountability, because in Islam accountability requires understanding. Thus, God gives mankind all the opportunity to be guided aright, and in the rare case that this guidance doesn't reach them, nor do they have the ability to sincerely seek it out due to lack of correct information, then He will deal with them justly in the Hereafter.

What makes Islam different in regards to its exclusivity is that, once again, it is the faith of all the believers from the first

generation of humanity till its last. When one looks at other faiths in comparison, you find that all other religions tie their salvation – if any – to a certain person or idea that came long after many civilizations had existed on earth.

For example, in Christianity, a person must accept Jesus as their personal savior in order to attain salvation, yet Jesus came near the end of life on earth (according to Christian and Muslim beliefs). Most people agree that if Jesus was really the key to salvation that he should have been sent to people at the beginning of creation, not towards its end. Is it consistent with the justice and logic that God demonstrates all around us that He tie salvation to something that the majority of humanity weren't able to experience because they lived before its time?

What will be the End of People who Perform Good Deeds but Don't Submit?

Amongst the disbelievers, there are those who may do deeds that seem to be good because they bring positive results for others, such as humanitarian or philanthropic acts. However, these acts, although good in nature, are not the kind that will lead to their ultimate salvation. What will be their condition in the Hereafter then? God answers this very question in the Quran by saying:

Whoever desires the life of this world and its adornments - We fully repay them for their deeds therein, and they therein will not be deprived. Those are the ones for whom there is not in the Hereafter but the Fire. And lost is what they did therein, and worthless is what they used to do. {11:15-16}

Commenting on this verse some of the Companions of the Prophet and their students stated:

Ibn `Abbas said concerning this verse, “Therefore, whoever does a good deed seeking to acquire worldly gain - like fasting, prayer, or standing for prayer at night - and he does so in order to acquire worldly benefit, then God says, ‘Give him the reward of that which he sought in the worldly life,’ and his deed that he did is then of no value

in the Hereafter because he was only seeking the life of this world. In the Hereafter he will be of the losers.”

Qatadah said, “Whoever's concern, intention and goal is this worldly, material life, then God will reward him for his good deeds in this life. Then, when he reaches the next life, he will not have any good deeds for which to be rewarded. However, concerning the believer, he will be rewarded for his good deeds in this life and in the Hereafter as well.”

Such people claim to be doing good, while at the same time they are refusing to submit to God. Hence, there can be no real, or full, goodness in them. God describes them in the Quran by stating:

Say, “Shall We tell you of the greatest losers in respect of their deeds? Those whose efforts have been wasted in this life while they thought that they were acquiring good by their deeds? They are the ones who deny the signs of their Lord and the meeting with Him in the Hereafter. So their works are in vain, and on the Day of Resurrection, We shall not give them any consideration. Hell shall be their repayment, because they disbelieved and took My signs and My Messengers as a joke.” {18:103-106}

Thus, consistent with all of the other verses in the Quran where God states that not one single good deed will go without reward, He rewards those who deny Him and the religion He established for them by giving them their reward in this material world only. And so these people will come forth on the Day of Judgment without any good for which to be rewarded, because they have already received their reward in the worldly life. Yet, they will then receive their punishment for having denied their Lord and because they did not submit themselves in worship to Him exclusively (i.e., they did worship God, but also submitted themselves to others besides Him by obeying them or praying to them, etc.).

Why Will those who do not Submit be Punished with an Eternal Punishment?

Many people, even some Muslims, have wondered why it is that someone may only live a few decades on this Earth and yet receive in return, either an eternity of Paradise or an eternity of punishment. The answer is actually quite straightforward when one looks at the matter from the perspective of intentions. The Prophet Muhammad is authentically recorded as having said:

Indeed, all actions will be judged according to their intentions and everyone shall have what he intended
[Bukhari and Muslim]

Those people who lived a life of denial and were concerned only with themselves would live that way if they were given a thousand years or more. They never had the intention to do anything different than that which they were doing, and the same goes for those who submitted to the worship of God. If they were given a million years of life, they too would have worshipped Him for that long.

Thus, as the hadith mentions, everyone will be judged according to what they intended. If the person had no real intention to ever worship their Lord alone, then they will be put far from God's mercy on the Day of Judgment and be thrown into Hellfire forever, and vice versa.

For this reason, it is so important that people take a serious look at what they are doing with their lives. It is amazing that some people will spend several months researching options before buying a car that they may only keep for a few years, yet they will not even give one hour to consider the meaning of their life and their relationship with the One that brought them into existence. You have been given an entire lifetime, and for so many people, in the end it was all about serving their own self and not their Creator.

Of course, the details of the Hereafter and its study are matters which are extremely deep in Islam and comprise large portions of both the Quran and Sunnah. This brief discussion was only intended to discuss the evidences behind the concept and to show the lack of "blind faith" in Islam. For more information on the description of Paradise and Hellfire in Islam, please refer to the recommended resources at the back of this book.

Excellent Manners – the Path to Paradise

This brief chapter is being written for both Muslims and non-Muslims. For Muslims, it is a reminder from which we can all benefit. It should serve to guide us back to the excellent conduct exhibited by the Prophet Muhammad which, in of itself, is one of the most excellent and effective methods of demonstrating the beauty of Islam to others and calling them to it.

For non-Muslims though, this chapter serves two purposes. Firstly, it gives an in-depth look into the beautiful teachings of this noble religion in the area of interpersonal relations, and just how much emphasis Islam places upon values like: forgiveness of others, sincerity, compassion, gentleness, truthfulness and thoughtfulness. Secondly, it offers a guide as to how Muslims should behave, for those non-Muslims who interact with Muslims.

Unfortunately in the world today, many people who come from Islamic backgrounds, but otherwise know or practice little of the teachings of Islam, are coming into more and more contact with non-Muslims. Non-Muslims naturally think that such people are in some ways representatives of Islam, and they often judge Islam based on their interaction with these people. Hence, this chapter is intended in many ways to show non-Muslims what Islam truly teaches so that they will judge the religion based upon its teachings, and not base it upon the behavior of some Muslims.

Certainly, most fair and reasonable people will refrain from judging others based on the actions of a minority of their adherents, as they don't want their own religions or nationalities to be judged in a similar manner. For example, Germans should not be judged for the actions of the Nazi party, nor should the average American be held responsible for the mistreatment and oppression of Native Americans or African slaves.

Most Christians are similarly truly appalled by the barbarity of the Crusade wars or the Spanish Inquisition. Indeed, this is the same logic that the great boxer Muhammad Ali used when a Christian reporter asked him how he felt knowing that he practiced the same religion as Osama bin Laden when he simply

replied to the reporter, "How do you feel about Hitler belonging to your religion?"

A Sample of the Guidance of the Prophet on Manners

Many of the hadith recorded below are also mentioned in the chapter on the Sunnah of the Prophet. Muslims and non-Muslims are further encouraged to explore more from the Quran and the Sunnah to learn how to become better people and better worshippers. Undoubtedly, Allah cares not for our worship, if that worship is accompanied by a lack of kindness and concern for the people, animals and environment around us.

On the Excellence of Good Manners

1. Abu Hurairah reported: The Messenger of Allah said, "*The believers who show the most perfect Faith are those who have the best manners, and the best of you are those who are the best to their wives*". [Tirmidhi]
2. Abu-Darda' reported: The Prophet said, "*Nothing will be heavier in the Scales of the believer on the Day of Resurrection than their good manners. Allah hates one who uses foul or coarse language*." [Tirmidhi]

On Being Content with what you Have

3. Abu Hurairah reported that the Messenger of Allah said, "*Look at those who are inferior to you and do not look at those who are superior to you, for this will keep you from belittling Allah's Favors to you*." [Bukhari and Muslim]

On the Best Kind of Food

4. Abu Hurairah reported: The Prophet said, "*No food is better to a man than that which he earns through his own manual labor. David, the Prophet of Allah, ate only out of the efforts of his manual labor*." [Bukhari]

On the Some of the Best Deeds in Islam

5. `Abdullah bin `Amr bin al-`Aas reported: A man asked the Messenger of Allah, "Which act in Islam is the best?" He replied, "*To feed the poor and the needy, and to give*

greetings to those whom you know and those whom you do not know." [Bukhari and Muslim]

On Charity, Honor and High Status

6. Abu Hurairah reported that the Messenger of Allah said, *"Wealth is never diminished by the giving of charity. Allah increases the honor of one who forgives others, and the one who displays humbleness towards other people thereby seeking the pleasure of Allah, Allah exalts him in status."* [Muslim]

On the True Meaning of Arrogance

7. `Abdullah bin Mas`ud reported: The Prophet said, *"He who possesses in his heart the smallest degree of arrogance will not enter Paradise."* Someone said, *"A man likes to wear beautiful clothes and shoes?"* The Messenger of Allah replied by saying, *"Allah is Beautiful and He loves beauty. Arrogance is to ridicule or reject the Truth, and to look down upon people."* [Muslim]

On the Command to Make Matters Easy for People

8. Anas reported: The Prophet said, *"Make things easy and do not make them difficult. Cheer people up by conveying glad tidings to them, and do not push them away (with negativity)."* [Bukhari and Muslim]

On the Excellence of Modesty

9. `Imran bin Husain reported: the Messenger of Allah said, *"Modesty does not bring anything except good."* [Bukhari and Muslim]

On Kindness in Business Dealings and in Regards to Loans

10. Jabir reported: The Messenger of Allah said, *"May Allah's Mercy be upon a man who adopts a kind and easy attitude when he sells and buys, and when he demands repayment of loans that he gave out."* [Bukhari]

11. Abu Mas`ud al-Badri reported: The Messenger of Allah said, “A person from amongst the people who lived before you was called to account by Allah on the Day of Resurrection. No exceptional good deeds were found in his credit except that he, being a rich man, had financial dealings with people and had commanded his servants to show leniency to those who were having difficulty repaying their loans. Upon this, **Allah the Exalted and Majestic said**, ‘I am more entitled to this characteristic (of leniency), so waive this man’s sins.’” [Muslim]

On the Excellence of the Attitude of the Believer

12. On the authority of Suhayb who narrates: The Messenger of Allah said: “How wonderful is the attitude of the believer, for his attitude is always good, and this applies to no one except the believer. If something good happens to him, he gives thanks and that is good for him. And if something bad happens to him, he bears it with patience, and that is good for him.” [Muslim]

On Kindness to Widows and the Poor

13. Abu Hurairah reported: The Prophet said, “One who strives to help the widows and the poor is like the one who fights in the way of Allah.” The narrator said, “I think that he added also, ‘I shall regard him as the one who stands up (for prayer) without rest, and as the one who observes fasts continuously.’” [Bukhari and Muslim]

On Kindness to the Neighbor and Hospitality

14. Abu Shuraih Al-Khuza`i reported: The Prophet said, “He who believes in Allah and the Last Day, let him be kind to his neighbor. And he who believes in Allah and the Last Day, let him show hospitality to his guest. And he who believes in Allah and the Last Day, let him either speak good or remain silent.” [Muslim]

On the Relationship between Faith and Brotherhood

15. Anas ibn Malik reports that the Prophet said, “No one amongst you truly believes until he loves for his brother that which he loves for himself.” [Muslim]

On Concealing the Faults of Others

16. Abu Hurairah reported: The Prophet said, “*Allah will cover up on the Day of Resurrection the defects (faults) of the one who covers up the faults of the others in this world.*” [Muslim]

So it is hoped that Muslims will humbly turn back in repentance to Allah and strive hard against the temptations of Satan, so that they will truly become the ambassadors that this noble religion deserves. And that they may also be the examples of mercy, charitableness, tolerance and general righteousness that this religion has undoubtedly produced throughout every century, calling all peoples towards the success and light that the worship of Allah alone brings—amen.

And further, for those who have not yet accepted Islam, it is hoped that they will reflect deeply upon the evidences and arguments presented in this book, remembering that this life is certainly a gift and an opportunity that should not be wasted. How can you meet your Lord, after your time has expired in this life, having spent your whole life pursuing your own desires and not bowing yourself down to worship Him, except on your own terms? Act before it's too late, or you will have the rest of eternity to regret your inaction.