



Introduction

TO ISLAM



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الحمصی

SAAD & ABDULAZIZ AL MOUSA ENDOWMENT

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NEW MUSLIM ACADEMY
One-Month Beginning Certificate Program

Course 1:
Introduction to Islam

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“Whomsoever Allah wishes good for, He gives him understanding of the Religion.”

—Prophet Muhammad (recorded by Bukhari)

COURSE OBJECTIVES

At the end of this course, the student should be able to:

- Understand the meaning of Islam;
- Demonstrate the universality of Islam;
- Outline salient features and objectives of the Islamic law;
- Identify the main sources of Islamic law;
- Understand causes of discord among Muslim scholars of jurisprudence with an appreciation and tolerance for juristic differences;
- List the Pillars of Islam and the Pillars of Faith.

COREQUISITES:

- Video Recorded lectures

RECOMMENDED READING/LISTENING:

- How to Approach and Understand the Qur'aan by Jamaal Zarabozo
 - The Authority and Importance of the Sunnah by Jamaal Zarabozo
 - The Evolution of Fiqh by Abu Ameenah Bilal Philips
 - Religious Extremism: in the Lives of Contemporary Muslims by Jamaal Zarabozo
 - Differences of Opinion Amongst the Scholars by Ibn 'Uthaymeen
 - A Guide for the New Muslim (12 audio CD Set) by Jamaal Zarabozo
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Preface

All praise is due to Allah. We praise Him and we seek His divine guidance and assistance in all our affairs. We glorify Him—Supreme and All-Knowing, All-Cherishing—and we implore His forgiveness for our shortcomings, forgetfulness, and mistakes. O our Lord! increase us in guidance! O our Lord Most High, Most Merciful! increase us in knowledge of You! Ameen.

In Islam, knowledge must precede action. Hence seeking knowledge is one of the highest types of worship. Our beloved Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) told his companions,

“Seeking knowledge is a duty on every Muslim.”

He also said,

“A person who follows a path for acquiring knowledge, Allah will make easy the passage to Paradise for him.”

Yet, how does one go about seeking knowledge of the religion of Islam?

Firstly, we remind ourselves and our brothers and sisters in Islam to purify our intentions, so that we begin this journey to knowledge with one ultimate goal in mind and heart: to serve Allah Almighty. Every path to true knowledge, i.e. that knowledge of religion which leads one to personal growth, begins with sincerity. No other platform supports religious growth or spiritual enlightenment; only through sincerity can we reach our goal of drawing closer to Allah Most High and raising our rank in His sight.

Secondly, we must continuously rely upon Allah. Supplicating to Allah Most High is not only a praiseworthy act of worship, it is a powerful tool in achieving any goal. Allah is able to answer our prayers, increase our faith, and guide our path aright. Without His guidance, none is guided. Without His help, none is assisted.

So as you embark on your journey to seek knowledge, ask Allah to help you, and know that He never tires of listening to His worshippers, and that with Him is boundless mercy.

Thirdly, our advice is to delve into Islamic sciences slowly and step-by-step. A moderate and even-paced approach is the key to success in becoming knowledgeable in all aspects of Islam. Understanding emanates from taking time to reflect and internalize, putting lessons into practice steadily. There is no rush, as every Muslim man or woman must continue to learn and improve oneself every day throughout his or her lifespan.

Lastly, a word of glad-tiding and congratulations! Having discovered and accepted Islam, you have already taken the first and most essential step toward closeness to Allah Almighty. In our modern times wherein media smears and other propaganda against Islam defame the religion and plant many misconceptions in people's minds, you have defied their ploys and uncovered the truth, by Allah's mercy. A new Muslim—and, in fact, every Muslim—should turn in thankfulness to Allah, Who has granted him or her vital knowledge and understanding of His religion. Congratulations, new Muslim brother or sister! We pray that Allah continues to guide your steps and bless your path!

1

LESSON

The Religion of Islam

Objectives:

At the end of this unit the student should know:

- The meaning and finality of Islam;
- The mission of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in conveying the final message of Islam;
- The universality of Islam.

Prerequisites:

- Overview Course (recommended)

Recommended Reading:

- Studies in Islam by Dr. Bilal Philips
 - The True Religion of God by Dr. Bilal Philips
 - The Purpose of Creation by Dr. Bilal Philips
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The Meaning of the Words “Islam” and “Muslim”

The Arabic word “Islam” is the verbal noun of the verb *aslama*. This verb is defined as, “He resigned or submitted himself.” When used with respect to God, it means, “He became submissive to God.” In other words, Islam is not only the cognitive realization or intellectual recognition of the Oneness of God or the fact that an Almighty Creator exists; rather, Islam enacts that belief. Islam is the conscious decision made by the individual to wholeheartedly submit to the One and Only God.

The religion sent down by God and delivered to the world by His prophets has been called “Islam” for the simple reason that, in it, the believer yields completely to the power and control of the Lord and makes the rendering of wholehearted obedience to Him the cardinal principle of his life. This is the sum and substance of the Islamic creed which all God’s prophets preached and practiced.

The definition of Islam revolves around forging a direct relationship of worship with God without intercessory gods, idols, or saints. Humanity does this by following the prophet of God sent to our time period and nation.

The Arabic word “Muslim” is lexically derived from “Islam” and means “one who performs Islam” or “one who submits”. Thus, anyone who submits purely and whole-heartedly to God Alone—in accordance with what has been revealed from God and not simply according to his own whims, imagination or socially contrived conventions—is practicing “Islam” and is in fact considered a “Muslim”.

In this sense, the religion of all of the prophets of God was Islam and they were all Muslims. Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus, for example, were all Muslims and their religion was Islam, the true and sincere submission to One God. Thus, Allah says in the Qur’ān to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh):

“The same religion has He

established for you as that which

He enjoined on Noah - that which

We have sent by inspiration to you

- and that which We enjoined on

Abraham, Moses, and

Jesus”. (42:13).

[شَرَعَ لَكُمْ مِنَ الدِّينِ مَا وَصَّىٰ بِهِ
نُوحًا وَالَّذِي أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ وَمَا وَصَّيْنَا
بِهِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَمُوسَىٰ وَعِيسَىٰ]

The brotherhood of Islam and the bond of true faith stretch all the way from Adam until the end of time, spanning all localities and peoples.

All true prophets called to the same God, One God. All believers invest faith and action in worshipping the same God. Believers love one another and support one another. It is truly a blessed and unique brotherhood.

Muslims throughout all the ages believe in all of the prophets who came before them, and they confirm the coming of messengers prophesized to come after them. They support all of them and defend their honor. Muslims are bound to respect, honor and love all prophets of Allah Most High in the manner they deserve without exception.

Islam: The Religion of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)

Before the time of the Prophet (pbuh), one could say that there were many forms of “Islam.” That is, each era or nation had their respective prophet, followed his teachings and were on the path of Islam, yet groups’ specific religious practices and rites of worship differed somewhat from each other.

The moral code and regulations on lifestyle during the time of Prophet Noah and his followers differed somewhat from that of later prophets such as

Prophet Moses. They had different histories, books, edicts, and to some degree styles of worship. However, their fundamental morality and spiritual creed was basically the same.

The advent of the final prophet, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), heralded the last stage in God's revelation and unified previous scattering and discord. Prophet Muhammad's message to humanity was not limited by place or time or nationality; rather it confirmed the spirit of previous forms of Islam but delivered its final, universal form of practice.

In consequence, through the message of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), we see both confirmation and abrogation of previous messages. Additionally, while other messages were lost in the passage of history and through wilful falsification by corrupted followers, the final message would never be distorted or forgotten. God Almighty completed His message and promised to preserve it throughout time.

The following verse of the Holy Qur'an demonstrates the finality and universalism of Prophet Muhammad's mission (pbuh) compared to the missions of previous prophets of God Almighty before him. Allah says,

"And We have sent down to you (O Muhammad) the Book in truth, confirming the Scripture that came before it and a witness over it (old Scriptures). So judge between them by what Allah has revealed, and follow not their vain desires, diverging away from the truth that has come to you"

(Qur'an, 5:48)

[وَأَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ
مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ
وَمُهَيِّمًا عَلَيْهِ ۖ فَاحْكُم بَيْنَهُمْ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ
اللَّهُ ۗ وَلَا تَتَّبِعْ أَهْوَاءَهُمْ عَمَّا جَاءَكَ مِنَ
الْحَقِّ]

This verse shows that the Qur'ān has been revealed in truth and confirms what has been revealed beforehand of the revelations and it is a judge and witness over the previous books. In other words, it preserves, protects and witnesses to the truth found in the earlier revelations.

At the same time, though, it shows the falseness of the distortions that have been inflicted upon previous revelations. Anything that is in conformity with the Qur'ān is true, and anything that contradicts the Qur'ān was either abrogated by it or had its origin in falsification rather than revelation from God.

Thus, the Qur'ān has been revealed to affirm what has been preserved of the earlier revelations while correcting any distortions.

The Final Message

Allah had sent numerous prophets throughout the millennia. However, He had determined that He should send a final messenger with a final message.

This final messenger would be the messenger for all of humankind from his time until the Day of Judgment. There was to be no later revelation and no later prophet to bring any changes to this revelation. Hence, this one had to differ from the previous in some ways. First, since no one could come later to correct any mistakes or distortions, the revelation received by the last prophet had to be preserved in its pristine purity.

Second, the nature of the "sign" of the last prophet would have to be different as well. This is because this sign would have to affect not only the people who were alive during the time of the prophet but also all those who would come later.

Third, this final prophet could not simply be sent for one community among humankind—each then having their own final prophet and then differing with one another. This final prophet had to be sent for all of humankind, putting an end to the succession of prophets and being suitable for the world as a whole.

Fourth, the laws and teachings of this message had to be fixed in matters that need to be fixed for all of humankind until the Day of Judgment and guiding yet flexible or accommodating in those matters that need to be open to change due to the changing circumstances of humankind.

On all of these points, one sees that it is the message of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) that fits all of these criteria. The Qur'ān and the Sunnah were preserved in great detail. Similarly, the nature of his “sign,” the Qur'ān, the ultimate miracle, can still be experienced today.

Every prophet foretold the coming of a next prophet except the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), who announced that he was the last and final messenger of God. Followers of previous prophets should recognize the truth of Prophet Muhammad's message, as it reflects the essence of their own prophet's teachings and because he demonstrates all the signs which their prophet had prophesized. However, people do often cling to previous affiliations, illogically rejecting the command to accept coming prophets. In the Qur'ān, Allah describes such a phenomenon, saying,

“And when it is said to them, ‘Believe in what Allah has sent down,’ they say, ‘We believe in what was sent down to us.’ And they disbelieve in that which came after it, while it is the truth confirming what is with them.” (Qur’an, 2:91)

[وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ آمِنُوا بِمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ قَالُوا نُوْمِنُ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْنَا وَنَكْفُرُونَ بِمَا وَرَاءَهُ وَهُوَ الْحَقُّ مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا مَعَهُمْ قُلْ فَلِمَ تَقْتُلُونَ أَنْبِيَاءَ اللَّهِ مِنْ قَبْلُ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ]

While they err in rejecting Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), he was commanded only to deliver the message and not to compel listeners to believe or follow him. So, people are free to choose their religion. Islam safeguards their freedom from compulsion, as Allah pronounces in the Qur’an,

“There is no compulsion in religion. Verily, the Right Path has become distinct from the wrong path. Whoever disbelieves in false gods and believes in Allah, then he has grasped the most trustworthy handhold that will never break. And Allah is All-Hearer, All-Knower.” (Qur’an, 2:256)

[لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ ۚ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ ۚ فَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِالطَّاغُوتِ وَيُؤْمِن بِاللَّهِ فَقَدِ اسْتَمْسَكَ بِالْعُرْوَةِ الْوُثْقَىٰ لَا انفِصَامَ لَهَا ۗ وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ]

The Universality of Islam and Its Timelessness

The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) is the final messenger and it is inconceivable knowing the mercy of the merciful that He would leave humans without any form of clear guidance. In other words, what He gave this final message must be suitable to guide mankind after him. In fact, the Prophet himself made this very same point in essence when he said,

"I have left with you two things that if you cling to them you will never be misguided after me: The Book of Allah and the Sunnah of His Messenger." [Mustadrak al-Hākim]

In addition to the fact that the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) is the final prophet, Allah has also said,

"This day, I have perfected your religion for you, completed My

Favor upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion"

(Qur'ān; 5:3).

[الْيَوْمَ أَكْمَلْتُ لَكُمْ دِينَكُمْ وَأَتْمَمْتُ

عَلَيْكُمْ نِعْمَتِي وَرَضِيتُ

لَكُمْ الْإِسْلَامَ دِينًا]

The Prophet (pbuh) also said,

"I have been given five aspects that were not given to any prophet before me... of which is, every prophet was sent only to his people while I have been sent to all of mankind." [al-Bukārī]

Thus, the religion is complete and perfect, and there is no need for any alteration or change. The message has come and shall suffice until the Day of Judgment. The Prophet (pbuh) sent for all peoples has already come.

This implies that the Prophet's teaching and his Sunnah (i.e. his teachings) are valid and obligatory upon all of mankind. That is, his example and teaching was not simply for the people of Arabia at his time. Instead, it is just as valid and just as important for each and every Muslim today, whether he be in America, Malaysia, China, or any other place. Someone may logically ask: How is it that this Law is able to fulfil the needs for all of humankind until the Day of Judgment? The answer has to do with the beauty of the Law. When one studies the law promulgated by the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) one finds that it has the needed elements of flexibility that allow it to be just as practicable today as it was during the time of the Prophet.

First, in reality, the nature of humans actually does not change over time. Therefore, worship, which is the foundation of a human's character, does not need to change. These laws are fixed until the Day of Judgment.

Secondly, there are some harmful matters that humans must avoid. These have also been explicitly and permanently forbidden. Beyond that, humans need only some detailed laws and many general principles that allow them to guide their lives in all times and places. This is exactly what Islamic Law provides for them.

In essence, those issues that need to be fixed and permanent are made such by the Islamic Law. Those that need to be flexible so that different peoples at different times may apply them differently are left flexible in the Islamic Law. Hence, it is a Divinely guided way of life that is suitable and practical for all humans until the Day of Judgment. For example, in business dealings, interest is prohibited forever.

In addition to that, general guidelines are given. However, the guidance is such that when new forms of business dealings are developed, as in modern times, one can determine which are acceptable according to Islamic guidelines and which are not. Thus, Islamic Law has been proven to be feasible for over 1400 years and, according to Islamic beliefs, will continue to be feasible until the Day of Judgment. This means that the guidance is complete. It is all that the Muslims need for happiness in this world and in the Hereafter. It cannot be improved upon. It is, therefore, in no need of additions, alterations or deletions. For this obvious reason, the Prophet (pbuh) gave very strong warnings about innovations and heresies. Such things are not needed at all and they will simply take away from the beauty and perfection of Islam.

The Prophet (pbuh) said, "Whoever introduces anything into this affair of ours that does not belong to it will have it rejected." [al-Bukhārī]

2

LESSON

The Sources of Islamic Law, Qur'ān

Objectives:

At the end of this unit the student should know:

- The authority of the Qur'ān;
- How to approach the Qur'ān;
- Methods of interpreting the Qur'ān.

Prerequisites:

- Overview Course (recommended)

Recommended Reading:

- An Introduction to the Sciences of the Qur'aan by Yasir Qadhi
 - The Methodology of Qur'aanic Explanation by Dr Bilal Philips
 - The History of the Qur'ānic Text by M.M. Al-Azami
 - How to Approach and Understand the Quran by Jamaal Zarabozo
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The Sources of Islamic Law and Guidance

The two definitive authorities in Islam are the Qur'ān and the Sunnah—or teachings—of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). Islamic law relies on revelation from God, the Qur'an. We understand how to implement principles laid out in the Qur'an partly through the example and explanations offered by the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh).

In this chapter, we discuss the Qur'an as a source of Islamic law. While the term "Islamic law" might conjure images of a courtroom and penal code, that is not what is meant by Islamic law here. By "Islamic law", we mean the code that governs our religious life, external and internal, private and public, individual and societal. Islamic law includes our sense of morality, rites of worship, and guidelines on lifestyle and beliefs.

Exactly What is The Qur'ān?

The Qur'ān is the literal word of Allah. It is a book that came directly to the Prophet (pbuh) from Allah via the angel Gabriel. The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) transmitted the speech of God faithfully and it has not changed from his time to ours. It guided the early Muslim community. It transformed an Arab people who were on the margins of the civilized world at that time into the leaders of a great civilization, whose influence still continues today. When read, understood and applied properly today, it will also transform individuals or society and exalt them to new heights of piety and closeness to God.

Upon receiving the words of the Qur'ān, the Prophet (pbuh) would pass those words on to his followers, many of whom memorized it verbatim in part or as a whole. In addition, being illiterate himself, he would have scribes record the newly revealed verses. The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said about the Qur'ān,

“There was no prophet among the prophets but was given miracles because of which people had had belief. But what I have been given is the Divine Revelation which Allah has revealed to me. So I hope that my followers will be more than those of any other Prophet on the Day of Resurrection.” [al-Bukhārī]

In other words, the Prophet’s great sign and miracle was the Qur’ān. Indeed, the Qur’ān is miraculous in many ways. For example, the Arabs at the time of the Prophet excelled in language. However, even though they greatly opposed the Prophet for many years, they realized that they could not meet the literary eloquence of the Qur’ān. But the Qur’ān is much more than simply a “literary miracle.” It is miraculous as well with respect to its fulfilled prophecies of future events, its internal consistency, its scientific accuracy, its historical accuracy, its precise preservation, its magnanimous and wise laws, its affect that it had and till has in reforming and changing humans, and much more.

How to Approach the Qur’ān

The Basics

The first thing for a beginner to understand about the Qur’ān is its form. The Arabic word, ‘Qur’ān,’ literally means both ‘recitation’ and ‘reading’. Similarly, the Qur’ān was both recited orally and written down in book form. The true power of the Qur’ān remains in the oral recitation, as it is meant to be read aloud and melodiously, but still the verses were written down on available materials as an aid to memorizing and guarding it, and these were collected and arranged in book form both privately and, at a later stage, institutionally. The Qur’ān was not meant to tell a chronological story, and thus, the Qur’ān should not be viewed as a sequential narrative like the book of Genesis.

The Qur'ān often repeats certain verses and themes, shifting topics between them, and often relates narratives in summarized form. We can see two reasons for this. First, it serves a linguistic purpose and is one of the powerful rhetorical techniques of classical Arabic. Second, all themes of the Qur'ān, no matter how varied, are wrapped around one common thread running through the entire book: there is no true god but Allah, and Muhammad (pbuh) is His messenger.

The Qur'ān, unlike the Bible, is not concerned with genealogies, chronological events, or minute historical details, many of which do not suit an oral discourse. The purpose is to use events, from past and present, to illustrate a central message. So when the Qur'ān is discussing the healing properties of honey or the life of Jesus, neither topic is an end in itself, but each is related in one way or another to the central message – the Oneness of God and unity of the prophetic message.

Another important point to keep in mind is that the Qur'ān was not revealed in one sitting, but rather it was revealed in parts over a span of twenty-three years. Many passages were in response to specific events. Often, Qur'ānic revelation would come from the angel Gabriel to Prophet Muhammad as a response to questions raised by people. The Qur'ān addresses unbelievers, the People of the Scripture (a term used by the Qur'ān for Jews and Christians), humanity at large, believers, and, finally, the Prophet himself - commanding him what to do in a certain situation or solacing him in the face of ridicule and rejection. Knowing the historical and social context of revelation clarifies the meanings contained in the text itself.

How is The Qur'ān Organized?

The Qur'ān is composed of 114 parts or chapters of unequal length. Each chapter is called a surah in Arabic and each sentence or phrase of the Qur'ān is called an āyah, literally 'a sign.' Like the Bible, the Qur'ān is divided into discrete units, referred to as 'verses' in

English. These verses are not standard in length and where each begins and ends was not decided by human beings, but dictated by God. Each one is a discrete act of locution of closed signification, or 'sign', denoted by the word āyah in Arabic. All surahs, except one, begin with Bismillāh hir-Rahmān nir-Rahīm, 'I begin with the Name of Allah, the Most-Merciful, the Compassionate.' Each Surah has a name that usually taken from a distinctive word contained therein. For example, the longest surah, Surah al-Baqarah, or "The Cow", is named after the story of Moses commanding the Jews to offer a sacrifice of a cow.

Style of the Qur'ān

In terms of thematic style, the Qur'ān covers a wide variety of subjects. Most importantly, it talks about the Oneness of Allah and how to live a life pleasing to Him. Other topics include religious doctrine, creation, criminal and civil law, comparative religion, social values, morality, history, stories of past prophets, and science. Some distinctive features of the Qur'ān's style in discussing these themes are:

- (1) The use of parables to stir curiosity of the reader and explain deep truths.
- (2) More than two hundred passages begin with the Arabic word Qul - 'Say' addressing Prophet to say what follows in reply to a question, to explain a matter of faith, or to announce a legal ruling. For example:

"Say: 'O People of the Scripture! Do you disapprove of us for no other reason than that we believe in Allah, and the revelation that has come to us and that which came before (us), and because most of you are rebellious and disobedient?'"

(Qur'ān, 5:59)

[قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ هَلْ تُنَافِقُونَ
مِنَّا إِلَّا أَنْ آمَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْنَا
وَمَا أُنزِلَ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَأَنَّ أَكْثَرَكُمْ
فَاسِقُونَ]

(3) In some passages of the Qur'ān, Allah takes oaths by His marvellous creation, both to strengthen an argument or to dispel doubts in the mind of the listener:

“By the sun and its brightness,
By the moon when it follows it,
By the day when it displays it,
By the night when it covers it,
By the sky and He who constructed it,
By the earth and He who spread it,
By the soul and He who proportioned it...” (Qur'ān, 91:1-7)

[وَالشَّمْسِ وَضُحَاهَا
وَالْقَمَرِ إِذَا تَلَاهَا
وَالنَّهَارِ إِذَا جَلَّاهَا
وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا يَغْشَاهَا
وَالسَّمَاءِ وَمَا بَنَاهَا
وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا طَحَاهَا
وَنَفْسٍ وَمَا سَوَّاهَا]

Sometimes Allah takes an oath by Himself:

“But no, by your Lord, they will not (truly) believe until they make you, (O Muhammad), judge concerning that over which they dispute among themselves, and then find within themselves no discomfort from what you have judged and submit in (full, willing) submission.” (Qur'ān, 4:65)

[قَالَ وَرَبِّكَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ حَتَّى
يُحْكَمُونَكَ فِيمَا شَجَرَ بَيْنَهُمْ ثُمَّ
لَا يَجِدُوا فِي أَنْفُسِهِمْ حَرَجًا مِمَّا
قَضَيْتَ وَيُسَلِّمُوا تَسْلِيمًا]

(4) Lastly, the Qur'ān has what is called 'the disjointed letters,' composed of letters of the Arabic alphabet which, if taken together, do not have a known meaning in the Arabic lexicon. This was one of the ways that Allah challenged the Arabs, who were the most eloquent of people in speech, to bring forth something to the Qur'ān, which consisted of the likes of these disjointed letters. They appear at the beginning of twenty nine surahs. For example, the first āyah of Surah ul-Baqarah appears in different translations as:

Yusuf Ali: A.L.M.

Pickthal: Alif. Lam. Mim.

Muhsin Khan: Alif-Lam-Mim.

The vast majority of the contents of the Qur'an are clear in meaning. Allah Almighty says,

“He it is Who has revealed unto thee (Muhammad) the Scripture wherein are clear revelations— they are the substance of the Book—and others allegorical. But those in whose hearts is doubt pursue forsooth that which is allegorical seeking dissension by seeking to explain it. None knoweth its explanation save Allah. And those who are of sound instruction say: ‘We believe therein; the whole is from our Lord.’ But only men of understanding really heed.”

[هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ مِنْهُ
آيَاتٌ مُحْكَمَاتٌ هُنَّ أُمُّ الْكِتَابِ وَأُخْرُ
مُتَشَابِهَاتٌ فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ زَيْغٌ
فَيَتَّبِعُونَ مَا تَشَابَهَ مِنْهُ ابْتِغَاءَ الْفِتْنَةِ
وَابْتِغَاءَ تَأْوِيلِهِ وَمَا يَعْلَمُ تَأْوِيلَهُ إِلَّا اللَّهُ
وَالرَّاسِخُونَ فِي الْعِلْمِ يَقُولُونَ آمَنَّا بِهِ
كُلٌّ مِنْ عِنْدِ رَبِّنَا وَمَا يَذَّكَّرُ إِلَّا أُولُو
الْأَلْبَابِ]

(Qur'an, 3:7)

Tellingly, this verse is followed by a beautiful supplication, which states,

“Our Lord! Cause not our hearts
to stray after Thou has guided
us, and bestow upon us mercy
from Thy presence. Lo! Thou, only
Thou art the Bestower.”

[رَبَّنَا لَا تُرِغْ قُلُوبَنَا بَعْدَ إِذْ هَدَيْتَنَا
وَهَبْ لَنَا مِنْ لَدُنْكَ رَحْمَةً إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ
الْوَهَّابُ]

(Qur’an, 3:8)

We ask Allah to make us among those whom He calls “men of understanding”.

In terms of grammatical style, in the Qur’an, Allah speaks directly to humanity, directly to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), and directly to specific groups of humanity. He refers to Himself in the first person at times and at other times in the third person. He sometimes uses the first personal pronoun “I” and other times the royal “We” (which connotes loftiness and does not by any means indicate plurality).

Translations of Qur’ān

A beginner should be aware of a few points about Qur’ān translations. First, there is a distinction between the Qur’ān and its translation. A translation of the Qur’ān is not the word of Allah, for the Qur’ān is the exact Arabic words spoken by God, revealed to Prophet (pbuh) through Gabriel. The word of God is only the Arabic Qur’ān as Allah says:

“Indeed, I revealed it as an Arabic
Qur’ān, that you may under-
stand.”
(Qur’ān, 12:2)

[إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ قُرْآنًا عَرَبِيًّا لَعَلَّكُمْ
تَعْقِلُونَ]

A translation is simply an attempted explanation of the meanings of the Qur'ān. The translated text loses the inimitable quality of the original. So be aware of the degree to which a translation reflects the original message at every level of meaning, and that it will not be able to match it. For this reason, all which is regarded as recitation of the Qur'ān is to be done in Arabic, such as the recitation of the Qur'ān in formal Islamic prayer, called Salah.

Second, there is no perfect translation of the Qur'ān. Being human works, each contains some degree of error. Some translations are better in their linguistic quality, while others are noted for their exactness in portraying the technical meaning. Many inaccurate, and sometimes misleading, translations that are generally not accepted as reliable renditions of the Qur'ān by mainstream Muslims are sold in the market.

Third, while a review of all the English translations is out of the scope of this lesson, some translations are recommended over others. The most widely read English translation is by Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali, followed by that of Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall, the first translation by an English Muslim. Yusuf 'Ali's translation is generally acceptable, but his footnote commentary can be odd and unacceptable. Pickthall, on the other hand, has no footnotes or commentary and that makes it difficult for a beginner. The language of both tends to be archaic and difficult to understand for some people. Another widespread translation is done by Dr. Hilali and Muhsin Khan called 'Interpretation of the Meaning of The Noble Qur'ān.' Although it is among the most accurate, the many transliterated Arabic terms and endless parentheses render it hard to follow and confusing for a beginner. A newer version with slightly more flowing text has been published by Saheeh International, and this is probably a better translation. Some of these and other translations are available for free online.

Exegesis (Tafsīr in Arabic)

Although the meanings of the Qur'ān are generally easy and clear to understand, one must be careful to make assertions about the religion without relying on an authentic commentary. Not only did the Prophet (pbuh) bring the Qur'ān, he also explained it to his companions, and these sayings have been collected and preserved till this day. Allah, the Exalted, says:

“And We have sent down to you (O Muhammad) the message that you may explain clearly to men what is sent for them.”
(Qur'ān, 16:44)

[وَأَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الذِّكْرَ لِتُبَيِّنَ لِلنَّاسِ مَا نُزِّلَ إِلَيْهِمْ وَلَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ]

In order to understand some of the deeper meanings of the Qur'ān, one should refer to commentaries which mention these statements of the Prophet (Hadīth) as well as his companions, and not merely upon our own understanding of the text, as our understanding of it is limited.

Within scholarship of the sciences of Islam, specific methodology exists for exegesis of the Qur'ān. The Qur'ānic sciences, as they are called, are an extremely specialized field of Islamic scholarship which requires mastery in multiple disciplines, like exegesis, recitations, script, inimitability, circumstances behind revelation, abrogation, Qur'ānic grammar, unusual terms, jurisprudential rulings, and Arabic language and literature.

According to scholars of tafsīr, the proper method of explaining the verses of Qur'ān are:

1. Explanation of the Qur'ān by Qur'ān.
2. Explanation of the Qur'ān by the Sunnah of the Prophet.
3. Explanation of the Qur'ān by the statements of the Companions.
4. Explanation of the Qur'ān by Arabic language.
5. Explanation of the Qur'ān by scholarly opinion if it does not contradict the above four sources.

A final word of advice to the beginner: keep notes, write down what questions arise during your reading, and finally turn to those who have proper knowledge about the religion and accept their explanation if it is based on evidence.

Every Muslim should make a habit to read the Qur'ān on a regular basis, as the Prophet, (pbuh) said: "Recite the Qur'ān, for it will come as an advocate for its companion on the Day of Resurrection." [Muslim] For a new Muslim, it is especially important to read a good Qur'ān translation to keep him firm in faith, to grow spiritually, and to receive guidance from the Qur'ān. The concern should not be to finish the complete translation as quickly as possible, but rather to understand and ponder over its meaning. Read as much as you are able, even if it be a little, but do it regularly.

How Should I Approach The Qur'ān?

(1) Read Qur'ān with Proper Intention

In order to be guided by the Qur'ān and to receive reward, a Muslim must read it solely for the sake of Allah's pleasure – to be guided by the Qur'ān. It should be a sincere reading to find and follow the truth.

(2) Choose a Good Time and Place, Read Attentively, and Ponder
The Qur'ān must be read with a clear mind and in a proper setting.
Choose the best time to read the Qur'ān, one which is conducive to
contemplation. Allah says in the Qur'ān:

“Indeed, in this [Qur'ān] is a
reminder for those who have a
heart or give ear while they are
heedful.” (Qur'ān, 50:37)

[إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَذِكْرَى لِمَنْ كَانَ لَهُ قَلْبٌ
أَوْ أَلْقَى السَّمْعَ وَهُوَ شَهِيدٌ]

First, a person must have a receptacle ready to receive the message – the ‘heart.’ If this receptacle is not open to the message, it will not ‘receive’ anything even if the lips move. Second, ‘give ear’ is one who listens intently, trying to comprehend what is being said. Third, ‘heedful’ means that his heart is present and in tune with what is being said. If all conditions are present, the person will benefit from the Qur'ān and it will guide him. It must be kept in mind that pondering in itself is not the goal; it is a means to apply the teachings of the Qur'ān in one's life.

(3) Let the Qur'ān Decide True and False

Allow the Qur'ān to guide you. Let it show you the straight path. Approach it with an open mind. If a person has their mind already made up, they will look to the Qur'ān to find support for their views, and the Qur'ān will never guide them, for it never had the opportunity. A new Muslim needs to change their views and attitudes according to the Qur'ān, not to interpret it to suit one's preconceived notions. Approach with humility, consciously setting aside what you have been inculcated with from your culture and traditions, taking on the new text as something fresh and new. Allow it to lead you, rather than try and mould it to your previously learned patterns of belief.

(4) Realize Everything in Qur'ān is True

Allah Most High poses the rhetorical question,

“And whose word can be truer than Allah’s?”

[وَمَنْ أَصْدَقُ مِنَ اللَّهِ حَدِيثًا]

(Qur'ān, 4:87)

Whatever the subject, Allah says the truth. Whether it is related to the Unseen World, life after death, history, natural law, sociology, or anything else, it all comes from our Lord. Sometimes a person may read something and feel that it is contrary to what occurs around him. In such a case, the beginner should realize that they either misunderstood what the Qur'ān is saying, requiring them to seek a better understanding, or that their perception of what they are reading is skewed by their upbringing. It is essential for a new believer not to doubt a verse due to their lack of comprehension, and be confident of their religion and its truth. Grow with the Qur'ān, seek the explanation from genuine Islamic scholars, the men and women of learning, and consult recognized commentaries (Tafsīr) such as that of Ibn Kathīr.

(5) The Qur'ān Addresses You

Realize the Qur'ān has been revealed for you. Allah is talking to you directly. The Qur'ān was not just revealed for Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and his companions, but rather for every person till Judgment Day. It is the word of the Ever-Living God, eternally valid, and addresses people of all times. When Allah issues a command, it is addressed to you. It is your personal guide, a healing for the diseases of your soul. Every single passage has a message for you. Every attribute of Allah asks you to build a corresponding relationship. Every description of life after death asks you to prepare for it. Every description of Paradise encourages you to aspire for it, every description of Hell impels you to seek protection from it.

Every character is a model to either emulate or avoid. Every dialogue involves you. Every legal injunction, even if inapplicable to your situation, has some message for you. This realization will keep your heart awake. The famous companion, Abdullah b. Masūd, said: "When it says, 'O you who believe...'; you must listen closely, as it is either ordering you to what is good for you or prohibiting you what is bad for you."

(6) Release the Text from Constraints of Time and Space

The Qur'an is a living text with relevance to modern life. Without doubt many verses in the Qur'an have a historical context; they refer to certain people or a specific incident. The historical context is important to understand some verses correctly. But the examples and moral lessons are relevant to our lives and provide guidance for our own time and context. The realization will make the person realize that even though the Qur'an is talking about an ancient nation, its moral lessons apply to current events.

(7) Reflect and Analyse

The Qur'an is not meant to be superficially followed or passively received. It is meant to affect the heart, penetrate the soul, and enlighten the mind. The Qur'an has the power to heal hearts and sooth souls, to inspire and motivate one's life, to open our minds to new horizons and more. Allah describes His revelation, saying,

"O mankind! There has come unto you and exhortation from your Lord, a balm for that which is in the breasts, a guidance and a mercy for believers."

[يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ قَدْ جَاءَكُمْ مَوْعِظَةٌ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ وَشِفَاءٌ لِمَا فِي الصُّدُورِ وَهُدًى وَرَحْمَةٌ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ]

(Qur'an, 10:57)

But how can it perform its miracles on a distracted reader or listener? To fully benefit from the Qur'an, you must be a proactive and engaged listener. Analyse its verses, make connections, search for themes, relate it to your own life and what you already know of the world, ask questions, and, generally speaking—THINK.

Islam will never ask you to shut your mind off. On the contrary, the Qur'an repeatedly adjures people to reflect on God's creation and upon His revelation, as these are two sources of truth from Him. For example, in regard to the Qur'an, Allah says,

“Will they not meditate on the Qur'an, or are there locks on their hearts?”
[أَفَلَا يَتَدَبَّرُونَ الْقُرْآنَ أَمْ عَلَى قُلُوبٍ أَقْفَالُهَا]

(Qur'an, 47: 24)

Real faith is not blind; it is sight itself. Faith in the Qur'an is built on reflecting and concluding that what one encounters from the religion is indeed in line with reality, in short that it is true.

3

LESSON

The Sources of Islamic Law, Sunnah

Objectives:

At the end of this unit the student should know:

- The definition of the Sunnah
- The authority of the Sunnah.
- The preservation of the Sunnah

Prerequisites:

- Overview Course (recommended)

Recommended Reading:

- An Introduction to the Sciences of Hadith by Suhaib Hasan
 - Usool al-Hadeeth by Dr Bilal Philips
 - Studies in Hadith Methodology and Literature by M.M. Al-Azami
 - Authority and the Importance of the Sunnah by Jamaal Zarabozo
-

The Sunnah and Its Place in Islam

“Sunnah” is a word you will hear frequently in Muslim discussions of Islamic practices. In Arabic, it literally means “way”; but it is used as a comprehensive term for everything we learned from the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) other than the words of the Qur’an. The Qur’an and Sunnah complement each other, so much so that one often hears them mentioned in unison in the phrase, “Qur’an and Sunnah”.

The Sunnah refers to the actions, statements and way of life of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). It is an essential aspect of the entire system of Islam. Allah Himself in the Qur’an has ordered Muslims to take the Prophet as their role model and to listen to and obey his words. The Sunnah is the ultimate normative practical expression of Islam. It is also the definitive explanation of the Qur’an itself. For instance, Allah Most High ordains prayer in the Qur’an. But how does one pray in an acceptable manner? At what times, how often, with what actions or utterances? Without the Prophet’s example (pbuh), we would not know how to implement Islam.

The Prophet’s Sunnah was preserved in what is known as the Hadith literature. “Hadith” means statement. The Arabic plural of “hadith” is “ahadith”; however, in English Muslims often borrow the Arabic singular form of the word and inflect English pluralisation, resulting in the word “hadiths”. The ahadith of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) are like quotes, snapshots of his life and teachings as reported by his companions and passed on through generations of memorizers and scribes of hadith literature.

What sometimes confuses new Muslims is that the word “Sunnah” is also used to mean “supererogatory”, an act which is considered praiseworthy but not mandatory. In this context, you may hear someone say, for example, “Praying extra night time prayers is a Sunnah (supererogatory act), not a Waajib (obligation).” Both usages are correct, though the meaning is clearly and significantly different.

For the purposes of our discussion in this chapter, we mean the formerly explained “way” or Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) rather than this latter jurisprudential term.

How the Sunnah was Preserved

Because we rely on the Sunnah in understanding our religion, it is important to have confidence in its authenticity. Not every saying purported to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) is authentic; however, there is a reliable, authentic body of hadith literature available to guide Muslims. These hadiths have been preserved in a special manner, which we discuss below.

Allah Glorified and High safeguarded the Sunnah by various means. Some of these aspects are unique to the Muslim nation. Most importantly, these means of preservation were followed from the earliest times, without any interval available for the original material and sayings to be lost.

Some of the factors and means that contributed to the preserving of the Sunnah include the following:

1. The Companions’ Understanding of Their Heavy Responsibilities

The Companions of the Prophet understood that the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was the final messenger sent for humankind and that the task of preserving his teachings would fall upon their shoulders. Both men and women in the generation of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) were essential in the preservation of his Sunnah. His wives in particular, having a privileged knowledge of his private domestic life, were tremendous intellectual resources for the Muslims and played a major role in preserving the Sunnah.

2. The Recording of Hadīth

From the earliest generation of followers of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), during the lifetime of the Prophet, there were Muslims keenly bent on recording what he said. In fact, they were so zealous in this mission, other Muslim companions of the Prophet saw it as odd and objected, basing their objection on the assumption that the Prophet might sometimes speak out of his mood and not want that written down. When news of this debate reached the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), he gave his permission and encouragement for the recording to continue uninhibited, saying,

“Write, for by the One in Whose hand is my soul [i.e. God], nothing leaves it except the truth.” [Al-Albaani; Abu Dawud]

By “nothing leaves it”, he meant no statement escapes his mouth other than a truthful one, regardless of his mood or anything else. It is clear from this incident that the Sunnah was recorded from early times. That said, statements of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) were preserved not only by writing but by oral transmission and rote memorization. In fact, early preservation stages depended more on memory than recording. Arabs at the time of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) were generally not literate; however, they were often highly intellectual and intelligent. Their memories were famously accurate, and it was common practice to memorize lengthy poems, messages sent between people, and other important statements verbatim. In order for something to be preserved, it is not a necessary condition that it be recorded or written down. It is possible that something is recorded incorrectly. Both of these points were duly noted by the early scholars of Hadīth, especially during the era of rare literacy. They focused more on the honesty and trustworthiness of the person or persons who reported the hadith, or statement.

Not every reported saying was accepted by scholars of Islam. The narrator's skills in memory or ability to properly write his or her reported statement was part of their reliability. Their reputation of honesty was considered the most crucial point. If they were known to deceive anyone, lie or cheat in any context, then a reported statement from him or her would be dismissed and not relied upon.

Eventually in the history of the preservation of the Sunnah, major scholars emerged who meticulously collected and documented hadiths both by memory and by writing. In the days before the printing press, their students copied their collections by hand; however, nowadays, they are available in most Islamic bookstores and even online. These landmark works are relied upon until today by students of Islamic sciences. Notably, they include the collections of Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud, at-Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah and others. You will no doubt encounter their names in citations of hadiths.

3. The Importance and History of the Isnād (chains of transmission)

Another important tool used in the preservation of Hadīth was the Isnād system that was developed uniquely by the Muslim nation. The Isnād system is where one states his sources of information, in turn tracing that narrative all the way back to the Prophet (pbuh). The narrator does not merely say, "The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said..." Rather, the narrator says, "I heard from so-and-so, who told me she heard from so-and-so, who heard it from so-and-so...that the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said..." If any individual in the chain is unreliable, either due to his or her ability to recall or his or her reputation of honesty, this would cast doubt on the statement reported.

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The important point to note here is that the practice of Isnaad evolved due to Muslim scholars' early awareness that they were preserving the religion by transmitting the Prophet Muhammad's sayings and other stories of him. They realized the moral weight of this duty and they executed it with utmost care and intelligence.

4. Early Hadith Criticism and Evaluation of Narrators

Another important aspect in the preservation of Hadiths was the early development of Hadith criticism and evaluation of narrators. As part of this specialized science, for example, biographies of narrators in chains (see "Isnaad" above) were collected. If a person claimed that two narrators connected in the chain of narration for a reported saying of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), yet it was known from the science of studying and evaluating the narrators that those two people lived in disparate times or places and could not have met to communicate the statement, then that would cast doubt on the reported saying or story. This investigation of narrators led to the development of the fascinating and unique science of 'al-jarh wa al-ta`dīl', wherein the lives, academic qualities and moral qualities of literally thousands of narrators are discussed in detail.

5. Travelling for the Purpose of Seeking Hadith

Another unique phenomenon that appeared and assisted in the preservation of the Sunnah was the travelling in search of Hadith, in order to check the sources and gather more Hadith together.

The Importance of Learning the Sunnah

In the Qur'an, Allah makes it clear that if someone loves Allah and wishes that Allah should love him in return, the key is to follow the way of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). Allah says,

“Say (O Muhammad to human-kind), ‘If you (truly) love Allah then follow me, Allah will love you and forgive you of your sins. And Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.’”
(Qur’ān, 3:31)

] قُلْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تُحِبُّونَ اللَّهَ فَاتَّبِعُونِي
يُحِبِّكُمْ اللَّهُ وَيَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ
ذُنُوبَكُمْ ۗ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

The Prophet was, in a way, a living Qur’ān. When the Prophet’s wife `Āīshah was asked about his character and behavior, she replied, “His character was the Qur’ān,” [Muslim, 746].

There is a very important relationship between the Qur’ān and the Sunnah. The Sunnah demonstrates how the Qur’ān is to be implemented. It is a practical explanation of what the Qur’ān is teaching. It defines the morals, behaviours and laws of the Qur’ān in such a way that its meaning becomes clear.

This complete, human embodiment of the teachings of the Qur’ān is a great blessing and mercy for Muslims. It makes the guidance from God more complete and accessible to all.

Thus, the Qur’ān and the Sunnah form one united unit that offers all the principles of guidance that humankind will need until the Day of Judgment. The Qur’ān, of course, comprises one book that can be captured in some two hundred pages or so. The Sunnah, on the other hand, is quite different, covering all types of statements and actions of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). The Sunnah is captured in the Hadīth literature.

Muslim scholars recognized that the religion of Allah must be preserved properly. They also recognized that not everything attributed to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) may be correct as even honest people make mistakes. Hence, they meticulously and methodically studied the various Hadīth and statements ascribed to the Prophet (pbuh), sifting those that can be authenticated from those that cannot be authenticated. Thus, in Islamic law, not every Hadīth is considered an authority. Only those that can meet rigid standards of authenticity are considered authoritative. The scholars call these types of Hadīth Sahīh (authentic) or Hasan (good). Unacceptable Hadīth are classified as Daīf (weak), very weak or fabricated.

The more one goes on to study the sciences of Hadīth, the more he/she will be able to differentiate between sources of hadith and their reliability, and the more he or she will be able to understand and utilize the statements of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in his or her life.

4

LESSON

Islamic Jurisprudence

Objectives:

At the end of this unit the student should know:

- Islam's tolerance for jurisprudential differences;
- Origins and the formation of schools of law;
- The nature of legal rulings and their spectrum;
- Dangers of extremism in jurisprudence.

Prerequisites:

- Overview Course (recommended)

Recommended Reading:

- The Evolution of Fiqh by Dr Bilal Philips
 - Philosophy of Islamic Shari'ah by `Alā Eddine Kharoufa
 - Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence by Mohammad Hashim Kamali
 - Ethics of Disagreement in Islam Taha Jabir al `Alwani
-

Islamic Jurisprudence

The majority of Islamic rulings on its practitioners are clear-cut and straightforward. Especially in significant matters—such as matters of belief in God or matters of basic morality or major features of worship—Islamic jurisprudence is nested in well-known Qur’anic principles and famous statements of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). While some outlandish Muslim thinkers may err and stray in these basic ideals of Islam, the mainstream Muslim scholars are in agreement about major issues and basic practices in Islam.

In regard to minor details, however, one will find differences between opinions. For example, although all Muslim scholars agree that one must prostrate in prayer, some scholars believe that it is proper to place one’s hands on the ground before placing one’s knees on the ground while other scholars conclude the versa. If a Muslim prays in either style, it is acceptable, and Allah knows best which is most pleasing to Him.

There may also be differences between scholarly conclusions in analysing current events and modern developments in society and technology. The easy statement, “In Islam, such-and-such is correct,” is not always possible in discussing every issue, and we are more likely to find lengthy discussions with evidences offered from Qur’an and Sunnah, different interpretations, and logical arguments.

While differences can be confusing, particularly to a new Muslim, there are reasons why individuals or groups landed upon divergent conclusions about specific practices, and for the most part there is no harm in these differences. Understanding and tolerating differences between Muslim individuals and groups is an important feature of our brotherhood and unity with each other; therefore we address some sources of differences below and attempt to frame one’s perspective of them.

As stated earlier in Lesson One, guidelines on Islamic life have to be flexible enough to meet the needs of all peoples until the Day of Judgment. Hence, not every detail of the law has been spelled out in the Qur'ān and Sunnah. Allah Most High has left some issues for the Muslims to discover on their own, thus forcing them to learn and study the Qur'ān and Sunnah in great detail. The conclusions that scholars derive from the Qur'ān and Sunnah, which are not explicitly stated in the Qur'ān or Sunnah, are known as "personal reasoning" or *ijtihād* in Arabic (which implies utmost striving to derive a conclusion).

As a source of jurisprudence, personal reasoning is obviously not infallible. It is possible for scholars to come to differing conclusions, yet they are all rewarded by God. Each scholar's efforts, if they are sincere, will be appreciated by Allah, as the Hadīth states,

"If a judge exerts himself and comes to a correct conclusion, he shall receive two rewards. If he exerts himself and comes to an errant conclusion, he shall receive one reward." [al-Bukhārī and Muslim]

However, this does not mean that their conclusions become an ultimate authority. Personal judgments must be evaluated in the light of the Qur'ān and Sunnah, and whatever seems to be most proper according to the Qur'ān and Sunnah should be adhered to.

Schools of Islamic Jurisprudence

A historical development occurred in which specific scholars worked diligently to codify the laws of the Qur'ān and Sunnah as well as extend those laws through personal reasoning to situations not explicitly covered in those texts. The work of these scholars continued until "schools of law" developed based on their teachings.

The most dominant of these schools of law are four, named after their founders as follows:

(1) Abū Hanīfah (80-150 A.H.40) and the Hanafi School: Abū Hanīfah was an early scholar who lived in Iraq. Today, his school is the most predominant in Turkey, Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, the ex-Soviet Muslim states and parts of the Middle East.

(2) Mālik b. Anas (95-179 A.H.) and the Maliki School: Mālik b. Anas lived in Madinah, the city of the Prophet (pbuh), throughout his life. Today, his school is the most popular in North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa. For centuries it was the predominant school of Andalusia or Muslim Spain.

(3) Muhammad b. Idrīs al-Shafī'ī (150-204 A.H.) and the Shafī'ī School: Al-Shafī'ī was from the Qurashi tribe, the same tribe as the Prophet (pbuh). He studied and lived in numerous places, finally settling in Egypt. Today, his school is most influential in Malaysia, Indonesia and some parts of the Middle East.

(4) Ahmad b. Hanbal (164-241 A.H.) and the Hanbali School: Ahmad b. Hanbal lived in Baghdad and was known to be a great scholar of Hadīth. Today, his school is the predominant school in Saudi Arabia and other parts of the Arabian Peninsula.

These great scholars and others sometimes came to differing conclusions, sometimes reconcilable and other times conflicting.

It is important to understand that there are many causes for differences of opinion among the jurists. There are also some important points to be kept in mind with respect to such differences of opinion among the scholars that one is bound to run into in the details of practicing Islam.

1. The ultimate goal of the Muslim is "the truth." Hence, he should exert himself to discover the truth and follow it in every circumstance.

2. These differences in interpretation are bound to occur. A person may sincerely be seeking to please Allah and yet come to a conclusion that another finds weak or unacceptable. As long as a person's view does not clearly contradict the Qur'ān or Sunnah and has some basis via some acceptable proof, he or she, as a person, should be respected.

Defining Law: Nature of Legal Rulings

There are five levels of jurisprudential ruling on any given action: obligatory, recommended, permissible, abominable, and forbidden. Muslims often use Arabic jargon in referring to these ruling levels, and there are many synonymous terms for some of them. These ruling levels represent a spectrum of guidelines for our actions, as you will see.

Before accepting and acting upon these rulings in one's life, it is important to acknowledge who the rule is coming from and why one is following it. Ultimately, Islamic guidelines on the lifestyle of its followers aim to connect the follower to his or her Creator, Who is the Lawgiver. If we are sure that a ruling is coming from Allah Most Gracious, because it is supported explicitly in the Qur'an and Sunnah for example, then we must strive to implement it in our lives, and if we fail to do so we must seek Allah's help and forgiveness. As Muslims, we have submitted to God, surrendered to Him; and though we often fall short in our worship and duty to God, periods of laxity in practice should not define us and we must constantly strive to reform our lives and be the servant of God we were created to be.

It is also important to keep in mind that whatever Allah forbids, allows, or enjoins is for a great wisdom. What is forbidden is prohibited due to its harmful effects on us—not in order to deprive us of worldly indulgence. Most things are permissible, and there are really very few prohibited matters. Our obligations in the religion of Islam—such as praying, giving charity, fasting Ramadaan, and making pilgrimage to Mecca—benefit us immensely, spiritually and in other ways.

Obligatory duties are few compared to the many blessings and mercies God Almighty has showered upon each of us in our lives. Out of gratitude at least, we should strive to use His blessings on us in obedience to Him and not in obedience to His enemy and ours, the accursed devil who constantly tempts us away from Him and away from His mercy and rewards.

Lastly, we must be aware, as we approach Islamic jurisprudential discussions, of a given ruling's level of certainty. As noted above, not all rulings are explicitly stated in the Qur'an and Sunnah. Not all books of jurisprudential knowledge in the market are reliable. And every person is individually responsible for himself or herself in terms of analysing what he or she hears or studies regarding Islamic rulings. If something feels wrong, the practitioner might be misinterpreting, misapplying, misguided by an unreliable book or other resource, or otherwise erring in his or her understanding of the ruling. It is important to find an authentic and trustworthy source of learning about Islamic rulings, so that one is not misguided and confused.

The 5-Degree Spectrum of Right and Wrong in Islamic Jurisprudence

Keeping the above points in mind—i.e. that Islamic law comes from our Creator and that it is ordained with His wisdom, and that it is possible to misunderstand or misapply Islamic law, which one must be particularly wary of as a new Muslim—let us explore the levels of Islamic rulings, which you will hear often in discussions of Islamic practices.

1 Obligatory (Wājib, Fard)

Think: "You must."

This conveys an imperative and binding command from Allah Most High, The Lawgiver, addressed to the individual or community in respect of doing something.

Fulfilling the command to something obligatory leads to reward in this world and the hereafter, while omitting it leads to punishment in this world or in the hereafter.

For example, performing the prescribed five daily prayers (called Salah in Arabic) is obligatory on every single mature and sane Muslim person, man or woman. If anyone neglects to perform his or her Salah, he or she may be punished by Allah Most High. If anyone completes his or her Salah properly, Allah Almighty will reward that person. Salah is Waajib.

2 Recommended (Mandūb, Mustahab, Sunnah)

Think: "You should," or "It would be good if you do."

Recommended rulings ask the individual or community to do something, however, it is not binding. To comply with the demand earns the individual reward in this world and the hereafter, but no punishment is inflicted for failure to perform the act.

For example, it is recommended for a Muslim to break his or her fast during Ramadaan by eating date fruit and drinking water. However, perhaps a person does not have those specific foods available at the time of breaking fast. It is not sinful and one would not be punished if he or she neglects this act and breaks fast with any other food and drink; however, if one remembers to do it, it is a part of how the Prophet (pbuh) used to break fast, it has health benefits, and it is rewarded by Allah Most High.

5 Permissible (Mubāh, Halal)

Think: "It doesn't matter one way or the other, if you do it or leave it." Mubāh or Halal rulings give a person the option to do or not to do something, without a specific encouragement to do it. There is not necessarily a promise of reward associated with rulings sanctioning an action as Halal. In some cases, however, there is reward. If a person does something Halal instead of doing something Haram, he or she would be rewarded by Allah Most High, out of His immense mercy.

For example, leg hair is not commented on in the Qur'an or Sunnah. Scholars have deduced therefore that it falls under those unmentioned things, which we assume to be permissible. If one wants to remove his or her leg hair or leave it to grow, that act in and of itself is neither rewarded nor punished; both are fine according to Islamic jurisprudence. One might be rewarded for doing this, however, if his or her intention is something noble. For example, if a woman removes leg hair in order to beautify herself for her spouse, that is rewarded by Allah Most High because beautifying oneself for one's spouse is a good deed, not merely a permissible act but a recommended one. If a man, on the other hand, leaves his leg hair to grow because he wants to avoid resembling women in his culture, then he will be rewarded by Allah Most Gracious because distinguishing one's gender is a praiseworthy act, Mustahab, not merely a Halal one.

4 Abominable (Makrūh)

Think: "Better not."

Makrūh is a demand of the Lawgiver which requires the individual to avoid something, but not in strictly prohibitory terms. It is disliked if the person does the action; however, there is no punishment. For example, drinking while in a standing position is a disliked action. It is better if the person sits while drinking. The Prophet Muhammad's habit was to drink while sitting, not laying down nor standing up.

So, it is considered abominable, Makru, to drink while standing. However, if one happens to drink while standing, then he or she is not sinful or punished.

3 Forbidden (Harām)

Think: “You must not.”

This is a binding demand to avoid an action. Committing the Harām action is punishable and omitting it is rewarded in this world and the hereafter.

For example, intoxicating oneself by any substance is strictly forbidden in Islam. One’s intellect should be preserved, as many harmful decisions are taken due to intoxication and numbed senses and conscience. Islam goes even further by forbidding even a small amount of any substance which would intoxicate a person if taken in a large quantity. This clear and absolute prohibition means that if a person indulges in intoxicants—drugs or alcohol, for example—then he or she may be punished by Allah Most Just in this world and the hereafter. If a person falls into such behaviour, he or she must struggle to repent and reform him- or herself. If a person succeeds in avoiding intoxicants, then he or she will be rewarded by Allah Most Fair in this world and the Hereafter. We pray that our brothers and sisters in Islam stay clear of all forms of intoxicants, as substance abuse is a difficult disease to conquer once one is addicted and it perpetuates a milieu of problems in the person’s life, family, and society.

Some of the Objectives of Islam

The teachings of Islam are not merely rituals or mysteries that have no rhyme or reason to them. Instead, the revelation has pointed to some very clear, sought after goals. Specific rulings have their specific wisdoms and benefits. There are also general themes which one might deduce from the body of rulings as a whole. These underlying aims include the following:

(A) The Worship of Allah Alone

Undoubtedly, the greatest goal of Islam and its greatest contribution to the welfare of humanity is the true and pure worship of Allah alone, without associating any partners with Him. This is in reality the ultimate purpose and goal of a human. Allah says,

“And I (Allah) created not the jinns and humans except they should worship Me (Alone).”
(Qur’ān, 51:56)

[وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ]

There can be no goal more honorable or noble than this goal for a human being.

(B) Freeing Humans from the Worship of Other Humans or the Worship of Any Other Object

Obviously, this is a corollary of the first principle of worshipping Allah alone. However, it deserves separate mention as humans dominating and subjugating other humans is one of the gravest tragedies in the history of humankind, second perhaps to the tragedy of the humans accepting such a situation and willingly submitting to other humans.

(C) Making Life on Earth Flourishing and Sound

Islam is a beautiful religion that fulfils the needs of both body and soul. A human is made up of both a spiritual as well as a material side. Both sides of a human have to be recognized as “true,” with neither of them being ignored or denied. Furthermore, the individual needs guidance for both of these aspects of his personality. If not, one aspect will dominate the other or be in conflict with the other and the individual will never achieve true happiness.

(D) Justice and the Prohibition of Wronging Others

Life on Earth cannot be truly flourishing and sound without justice. Thus, the call to and the implementation of justice is one of the most prominent features of Islam. In numerous places in the Qur'an, Allah orders the Muslims to fulfil the demands of justice, even if these should go against their own interests or needs.

For example, Allah says,
"O you who believe! Stand out firmly for Allah and be just witnesses and let not the enmity and hatred of others make you avoid justice. Be just: that is nearer to piety, and fear Allah. Verily, Allah is Well-Acquainted with what you do."

[يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ
لِلَّهِ شُهَدَاءَ بِالْقِسْطِ ۚ وَلَا يَجْرِمَنَّكُمْ
شَتَانُ قَوْمٍ عَلَىٰ أَلَّا تَعْدِلُوا ۚ اعْدِلُوا
هُوَ أَقْرَبُ لِلتَّقْوَىٰ ۚ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ ۚ إِنَّ
اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ]

(Qur'an, 5:8)

The justice that is so essential to Islam extends beyond this life to the Hereafter. In other words, Allah will judge all individuals in the most just way and will not wrong anyone in the least. Part of this justice includes the fact that no individual will bear the burden of another's sin and no one will be held responsible for what is beyond his means.

(E) True Peace

The Light and Guidance from Allah is the path to true peace.

For example, Allah says,

“Indeed, there has come to you from Allah a Light and a clear Book where-with Allah guides all those who seek His Good Pleasure to ways of peace, and He brings them out of darkness by His Will unto light and guides them to a Straight Way.”

(Qur’ān, 5:15-16)

[قَدْ جَاءَكُمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ نُورٌ وَكِتَابٌ
مُبِينٌ * يَهْدِي بِهِ اللَّهُ مَنِ اتَّبَعَ
رِضْوَانَهُ سُبُلَ السَّلَامِ وَيُخْرِجُهُم مِّنَ
الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ بِإِذْنِهِ وَيَهْدِيهِمْ
إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ]

True and complete peace can only be had when the individuals themselves achieve internal peace. This results from Islam or the true submission to Allah alone. This is the only way of life consistent with the nature of human beings.

The Higher Objectives of the Shari’ah

The Shari’ah generally is predicated on benefits to the individual and the community, and its laws are designed so as to protect these benefits and to facilitate the improvement and perfection of the conditions of human life on earth.

Extremism in Religion

Unfortunately, one of the mistakes which leads people to harbor intolerance toward differences between juristic opinions is the phenomenon of extremism. Extremism is a disease that has afflicted some Muslim individuals and groups. As a result of extremism, some individuals think and behave rigidly and dichotomously. In their own minds, everything is black or white, right or wrong, and there can be no tolerance of differences. In reality, it is arrogant to believe that one is always right, all others always wrong. Arrogance contradicts Islamic character and morality. Furthermore, rigidity itself is dispraised in the Qur’an and Sunnah. Extremism has led to many evils in the Muslim world, and so it is important to address it here. Islam is a middle path, inherently opposed to extremes.

The Balanced Approach

The balanced approach of Islam is one of its most manifest characteristics. Naturally, then, it is also one of the most manifest characteristics of the nation who accepts the call to Islam. Allah says,

“Thus have We made of you a nation justly balanced, that you may be witnesses over the people and the Messenger a witness over yourselves.”

[كَذَلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا لِتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى النَّاسِ وَيَكُونَ الرَّسُولُ عَلَيْكُمْ شَهِيدًا]

(Qur'an, 2:143)

Therefore, one finds that Islam presents the moderate way in every aspect of life. Not only that, it also warns against heading towards either extreme: the extreme of too much zealousness and the extreme of too much nonchalance.

Ease and Absence of Hardship in the Law

One of the clearest aspects of Islamic Law is the goal of bringing about ease upon the humans and avoiding hardship for them while maintaining positive results for all. Hence, this is not a goal independent of all other goals. In other words, there are a myriad of goals, such as mercy, justice, equity, balance and so forth. Within the context of meeting those goals, though, Allah, in His Mercy and Wisdom, has laid down a law for humans that provides ease for them and is free of any unwarranted hardships.

Numerous verses of the Qur'an point to this very important feature of Islam.

For example, Allah says,

“Allah burdens not a person beyond his scope. He gets reward for that (good) which he has earned, and he is punished for that (evil) which he has earned.”
(Qur’ān, 2:286)

[لَا يُكَلِّفُ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا
وُسْعَهَا ۗ لَهَا مَا كَسَبَتْ وَعَلَيْهَا مَا
اَكْتَسَبَتْ ۗ]

This principle of ease and removing hardship is exhibited throughout many branches of Islamic law. Even becoming a Muslim requires no special indoctrination or ceremony. In fact, it does not even require anyone’s approval or supervision.

Being Harsh Upon People

This religion is built upon ease and removing hardship. The evidence for that is substantial. Allah made this religion a mercy for mankind, with simplicity and ease. The foundation of the Messenger’s mission is that of compassion and mercy for the people and the removing of the chains and fetters that a group of mankind was suffering under. The Messenger of Allah himself said,

“Allah did not send me as someone causing hardship [for the people] or one who seeks out their mistakes, but Allah has sent me as a teacher and one who brings ease [to the people].” [al-Bukhārī]

It is of vital importance to stay away from the destructive tendency of extremism. People need to be aware of the following: 1. First of all, we need to remind ourselves and others of the many Hadīth that warn against extremism and that call to moderation, balance, and justice. For instance, the Prophet (pbuh) said: “No one goes to extremes in his faith except that it defeats him.” [Muslim] 2. We also need to be reminded of the evil consequences of extremism, not the least of which is the fact that extremism is a way of forsaking our Prophet’s Sunnah and it places severe hardships on people.

3. Extremism breeds its opposite, even within a single individual. There are many cases of people that have gone to extremes in their religion, which in turn brought them to the point of forsaking their faith altogether.

4. We need to be reminded to supplicate to Allah for guidance, especially guidance to the "straight path". When the Prophet (pbuh) stood in his night prayers, he would say: "O Allah, Lord of Gabriel, Michael, and Raphael, originator of the heavens and the Earth, knower of the seen and unseen to judge between Your servants in what they used to differ. Guide me to the truth in what they differ about. Surely, You guide whom You please to a way that is straight." [Muslim] We pray that all our new Muslim brothers and sisters remain steadfast on the middle path and avoid the problem of extremism.

5

LESSON

The Fundamentals of Religion

Objectives:

At the end of this unit the student should know:

- The 5 Pillars of Islam;
- The 6 Pillars of Iman.

Prerequisites:

- Overview Course (recommended)

Recommended Reading:

- Islamic Creed Based on Qur'an and Sunnah by Muhammad bin Jamil Zino
 - The Muslim Belief by Muhammad b. Saleh al-Uthaymīn
 - Minhaj Al-Muslim, by Abu Bakr Jabir Al-Jaza'iry
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The Fundamentals of Religion

The fundamentals of practice and belief in Islam are derived from many sources, including many verses of the Qur'an and authentic hadiths of the Sunnah, notably an incident wherein Angel Gabriel appeared in the form of a man. He approached Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) while he sat in a group and he asked the Prophet (pbuh) the questions:

- Tell me about Islam.
- Tell me about Faith.
- Tell me about Perfection.
- Tell me about The Hour (i.e. the Day of Judgement).

After the Prophet (pbuh) answered, Gabriel stood up and departed. Then, the Prophet (pbuh) turned to his companion who had witnessed the exchange and said, "That was Gabriel. He came to teach you your religion." [Muslim, Abu Dawud, at-Tirmidhi, an-Nisai]

The Five Pillars of Islam

When asked by Angel Gabriel, "O Muhammad! Tell me about Islam," the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) listed five actions which would come to be known as the five Pillars of Islam, and Gabriel said, "You have spoken rightly."

Allah Most Gracious has mandated five acts upon which the whole religion of Islam is built. These acts of worship are as follows:

1. Testimony of faith (Shahādah)

One must profess this testimony of faith, summarized in the two testimonies:

- (a) There is no deity rightfully worshipped but Allah,
-

(b) Muhammad is His Messenger.

Through the belief and attestation of the testimony of faith (Shahādah) one enters the fold of Islam. It is the central belief that a believer maintains throughout his or her life, and is the basis for all a Muslim's beliefs and worship.

2. Formal Prayers (Salāh)

One must offer the five daily prayers at their specific times and in their prescribed manners. Through the prayer, a Muslim maintains his relationship with Allah, comes to remember Him often, and avoids falling into sin.

3. Compulsory Charity (Zakāh)

Those who have saved a certain amount of wealth for at least a year must allot a specific portion of it annually to designated recipients among the needy. Zakah is not voluntary charity; it is an obligatory duty upon the wealth-holder and a societal right possessed by the needy people.

4. Fasting (Sawm)

Muslims must fast for a period of one lunar month, which is the month of Ramadān, by refraining from food, drink and sexual intercourse from dawn to dusk. The goal of fasting, as mentioned in the Qur'ān, is to increase one's piety and God-consciousness. It helps people sympathize with impoverished and hungry people. And it purifies the body. Fasting Ramadan is an obligation for physically capable individuals.

Some individual circumstances exempt one from the fast, temporarily or permanently. For example, a traveller or a menstruating woman is temporarily exempted; they may make up

the fast in other days when they return home or finish their period. Ill people with chronic conditions precluding fasting, such as some forms of diabetes, or elderly people may pay a charity instead of fasting. There is not supposed to be any real physical hardship in the fast; it is more a matter of mustering one's patience. If there is physical hardship or harm, then the person is exempted from the fast, but he or she must either make it up by fasting other days or pay the poor tax in replacement of the fast.

5. Pilgrimage (Hajj)

Pilgrimage to the House of God, the Ka'bah, in Makkah is obligatory for every able Muslim once in a lifetime. The Hajj is a physical and visual proof of the brotherhood of humanity, and their equality in servitude in front of Allah. Being capable of performing Hajj includes considerations of financial cost as well as physical health.

The Six Articles of Faith

When asked, "Tell me about Faith," by Angel Gabriel, the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) enumerated six articles of belief which were eventually known as the six Pillars of Iman.

Faith is referred to in Arabic as *Īmān*. You will probably hear the term "Iman" frequently used by Muslims. Iman represents firm belief in the heart, and not simply blind faith or passive following. Islamic doctrine revolves around these six aspects described by the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), and they are as follows:

1. Belief in Allah, which entails the following:

(i) Belief in Allah's existence.

(ii) Allah is the Lord. He is the Creator, the Provider, the Sustainer, and the Owner of the entire universe. None has any share in these roles.

(iii) Allah is the only being entitled to worship. No worship, service or veneration is to be offered to others besides Allah or along with Him, whether they be prophets, priests, saints, angels, idols, or stones.

(iv) Allah has the most beautiful and perfect of names and attributes, which none can be compared to. He is Unique, separate and unlike His creation. No evil or deficiency can be attributed to Him.

2. Belief in the Angels, which entails the following:

(i) Belief in the existence of angels, a creation of Allah.

(ii) Belief that they have no right to receive any form of worship

(iii) Belief in the names by which the angels are identified in the Qur'ān and Sunnah.

(iv) Belief in the special tasks assigned to each of them by Allah in the Qur'ān and Sunnah.

3. Belief in the Revealed Scriptures, which entails the following:

(i) Belief that Allah revealed scriptures to various prophets.

(ii) Belief that they contained the truth from Allah.

(iii) Belief that all previous scriptures other than the Qur'ān have been altered.

(iv) Belief in the Qur'ān has several aspects:

a) Belief that it is one of the scriptures of Allah.

b) Belief that it is the Final Revelation to humanity, and that no other scripture will be revealed after it.

c) Belief that everything in it is true, containing no falseness.

d) Belief that it has remained unchanged, and will remain so for eternity.

e) Belief that it has abrogated all previous scriptures before it.

4. Belief in the Messengers, which entails the following:

(i) Belief that Allah sent prophets to every nation, calling them to worship and obey Allah Alone. One must believe in all of them, known or unknown, without rejecting any of them.

(ii) Belief that they were the best of humanity, chosen due to their virtuousness.

(iii) Belief that they were mere humans, not divine in any way, and that they do not have any right to receive worship, nor did they claim so.

(iv) Belief that they merely conveyed the message from Allah and did not legislate from their own selves.

(v) Belief that they did not err in conveying the message.

(vi) Belief that obedience to them is a must.

(vi) Belief that Muhammad was a prophet.

5. Belief in Life after Death and the Final Day of Judgment, which entails the following:

(i) Belief that a day will come when everything will come to an end, and Allah will raise the creation and judge them according to their deeds.

(ii) Belief that those who believed and practically followed the correct religion by following the prophets will enter Paradise for eternity, and that those who disbelieved will enter the Hellfire.

6. Belief in Divine Decree, which entails the following:

(i) Belief that Allah's Foreknowledge is all inclusive and complete. He has always known everything that would or would not happen, even before the creation of mankind.

(ii) Belief that Allah has recorded everything that was going to occur until the Day of Judgment in a book known as "The Mother of the Books" or "The Preserved Tablet".

(iii) Belief that whatever Allah willed has occurred, is occurring, and will occur. Nothing occurs against or without this Will.

(iv) Allah created everything.

We have mentioned here the minimal requirements of faith in each of these six categories that Muslims believe in. All aspects of faith in Islam have more and more details to discover through learning, and as Muslims we believe in whatever is authentically related to us from the Qur'an and Sunnah. We pray that Allah Most High endows our new brothers and sisters in Islam with sound knowledge and firm faith!

Postscript

In this text, we have endeavoured to present and at least partially explain some of the most crucial themes in learning to live as a Muslim. We have focused particularly on those themes which will enable the reader to further his or her understanding by future reading and studying, such as understanding words and terms commonly used by Muslims in teaching about Islamic practices.

Not surprisingly, in this short scope of time, many important themes are not covered. Furthermore, many themes touched upon may still need clarification. We hope that our new brothers and sisters in Islam will take up the remaining task of learning these religious essentials by asking questions, discussing, reflecting, and trying to implement gained understanding.

We pray that Allah Almighty empowers our new brothers and sisters with the opportunity and means to practice His great religion in its fullest beauty and to their fullest benefit. May Allah Most Supreme continue to guide your steps and enlighten your path in learning and practicing Islam!

We close with a recommended supplication intended to seal good speech and atone for shortcomings and mistakes. Glory be to You, O Allah, and praise is to You! I testify that none is worthy of worship beside You. I seek Your forgiveness, and unto You do I repent.
