

An Introduction to Islam: Fundamental Beliefs and Practices

**God is Great. God is Great.
I witness that there is no god but God;
I witness that Muhammad is the messenger of God;
Rise to worship.
Rise to peace.
God is Great. God is Great.
There is no god, but God.¹**

This is the customary call to worship in Islam. From the minarets of mosques throughout the Muslim world this call is heard five times a day: at dawn, at noon, at mid-afternoon, at sunset and at night. The call to morning prayer has the additional words which mean “Worship is better than sleep.”² With this summons, all devout Muslims rise and prepare for early morning service.

From the moment Muslims wake up, worship integrates them into the rhythm of universal adoration - adoration of the one God, Creator of all beings. For, in truth, all things worship God, as the Qur’an, the Revealed Book, declares:

*“The seven heavens and the earth, and whatsoever in them is, extol Him, nothing is, that does not proclaim His Praise.”*³

The word “*Islam*” comes from the Arabic root, *Salima*, which means to submit, to surrender, to enter into peace. Thus Islam means complete submission to the Will of God, a submission that leads to peace. A believer in Islam is called Muslim,⁴ one who has made a total commitment to peace and submission to the Divine Will. This emphasis on peace finds expression in the standard greeting of one Muslim to another, *Assalāmu ‘Alaykum*, which means “peace be on you.”⁵ The one who is thus greeted has a religious obligation to answer *Wa ‘alaykum al-Salām*, “and on you too, be peace.” It is an obligation because peace is an attribute of God.⁶ The greeting evokes memory of God and is thus an act of worship.

We emphasize the meaning of Islam as submission to God and the relatedness of the word *Islām* to *salām*, meaning peace, because Muslims are sometimes called in the West, Muhammadans, which, to say the least, gives a very wrong impression. Most people in the West do not realize that Muslims themselves resent being called Muhammadans. The term Muhammadans implies that Muhammad founded the religion, and that Muhammad occupies the same place in Islam as does Christ in Christianity. Muslims believe that God Himself gave man his religion, Islam,⁷ and all prophets before Muhammad preached the same religious tradition.⁸ All of them invited man to one and the same God. The differences in earlier revelations of the same religion are largely those of outward expression, but they are also due to distortions, introduced, not by the prophets, but by the so-called followers. To the Muslims, Muhammad was not the only prophet, but the last of a long series of prophets.⁹

The basis of faith in Islam is mainly five-fold ... belief in: God, the angels, the Holy Books, the Messengers, as well as the Last Day and the Life Hereafter.¹⁰ Let us now consider these.

God Reveals Himself

To comment first on the belief in God, a Muslim believes that his knowledge of God comes from no other source than God Himself. Man knows of God only what God has chosen to reveal of Himself. God has revealed to man His attributes and names, ninety-nine in all. But God is not limited by these Names and Attributes. These, at best, form a veil around the essence of God who is one and only, who has no equal.¹¹ He is the Absolute, the Living, the Hearing, the Seeing, the Speaking, the Sustaining, God, endowed with Power and Will, the Knower of the Unseen and the Visible. He is the Creator, the Maker, the Shaper. To Him belong the Names Most Beautiful.¹² He is the Mighty, the Majestic, the Lord, Proud and Generous. He is the First, the Last, the Manifest, the Hidden,¹³ the Everlasting, the All-Present, the All-Holy, Total Peace.¹⁴ The attributes of God oft repeated and most emphasized in the holy book of Islam, the Qur'an, are those of mercy and compassion.¹⁵ These attributes are entailed in the word "Allah," the proper name of God, for none else can be called Allah.¹⁶

His Transcendence and Immanence

Yet Allah, though ever present, is transcendent and man has no power to comprehend Him.¹⁷ To quote from a Muslim theologian and mystic: "...*He is neither body, nor shape, nor form, nor person, nor element, nor accident.... with Him there is neither combination nor separation, neither movement nor rest, neither augmentation nor decrease; ... He has neither parts nor particles, neither members nor limbs...He is not affected by faults nor overcome by slumbers, nor altered by times... He is not contained within space, nor affected by time. That he cannot be said to be touched or to be isolated, or to dwell in places; that He is not compassed by thoughts, not covered by veils, nor attained by eyes.*"¹⁸

However, one must not think God is unapproachable and far removed, sitting "up there" or "out there." God is very close to man. God reveals in the Qur'an... "And We (God) are nearer to him (man) than his own jugular vein."¹⁹ No image, figure or symbol can represent God, since no object or symbol can be nearer to man than God. Yet God is independent of man, but man is not independent of God.²⁰ Man's neglect of worshipping God does not diminish God, rather it diminishes man, who harms his own soul.²¹ It is man who needs God. God, the Holy is beyond the needs of the world.²²

To conclude this discussion on the nature of God, we quote the celebrated verse in the Qur'an, the Throne verse, which clearly states the position of Islam with respect to such modern western controversies as the death of God or God's place in religion and Society today.

*God;
There is no god but He, the Living,
The Everlasting.
Slumber seizes him not, neither sleep.
To Him belongs
All that is in the heavens and the earth.
Who is there that shall intercede with*

*Him save by His leave?
He knows what lies before them and
what is after them,
and they comprehend nothing of His
knowledge save such as He wills.
His Throne comprises the heavens and
The earth; the preserving of them
Oppresses him not;
He is the All-High, the All-Glorious.*²³

Belief in Angels

Let us now consider the belief in angels. Generally speaking, angels are the celestial beings created by God. They do not eat, drink, or sleep. Their function and occupation is to celebrate the praise of God.²⁴ They were already in existence when man was created. God commanded them to prostrate themselves before Adam, which they faithfully did.²⁵ According to the Qur'an, Satan defied God, but he was not an angel. He was one of the *jinn*.²⁶

In passing we may say something about *jinn*. As we said, Satan (*Iblīs*) was a *jinn*, and it seems that through his efforts and devotion to God he had been admitted to the company of the angels, but he rebelled against God, refusing to bow before Adam on the basis of his racial pride that he was created of fire and Adam was created of clay.²⁷ God says in the Qur'an that God created *jinns* from fire without smoke.²⁸ The fire without smoke may be a flame or what we moderns may call energy. The root *Janna*, or *Yajinnu*, simply means to be covered or hidden. To be precise, by *jinns* we understand spirits or hidden forces. In our own day we see that energy does carry hidden forces, and it is through the medium of energy that we are able to hear or see those forces. For example, energy brings to us voices from all over the world which we normally do not hear, but energy makes it audible on our radio, and the same is true with pictures which are carried and made visible on television by waves of energy. Those men who have higher spiritual powers are able to contact *jinni* and to influence them. Unlike angels, *jinn* have the capacity to do good and evil. God reveals in the Qur'an that several *jinn* came in contact with the Prophet, and they took guidance from him.²⁹

We now revert to our theme on angels. The Arabic word for an angel is *malak* which means a messenger. In this case it would mean a celestial messenger. The chief of the angels is Gabriel,³⁰ which means literally "the power of God."

Angels do not disobey God but perform their duties faithfully.³¹ In the Qur'an, angels are referred to as those who direct different affairs.³² At death, they take souls of man,³³ and in life they also help those men who faithfully serve their Lord.³⁴ For example, they protected Lot against his people,³⁵ consoled Hajar in the wilderness, and helped Job in understanding the mystery of predestination and free-will. They also helped the Prophet Muhammad in his struggles against the invading armies of the Meccans.³⁶

The Archangel Gabriel

The Qur'an declares that "God chooses messengers from among the angels in order to deliver God's message to His chosen one among mankind." Gabriel had been chosen to bring the Divine Message to Prophet Muhammad. The Qur'an mentions him by name and says:

*"... he it was that brought it down upon thy heart by the leave of God, confirming what went before it and for a guidance and good tidings to believers."*³⁷

The Qur'an also calls him the Faithful Spirit (*Rub al-Amin*):

*"Truly it is the revelation of the Lord of all being, brought down by the Faithful Spirit upon thy heart."*³⁸

He is also referred to as the Holy Spirit and the noble Messenger and at another place as Our Spirit. This latter reference is in relation to when he presented himself as a man without fault to Mary, the mother of Jesus, and gave her the good tidings of a boy most pure.³⁹ The Prophet speaks of his experiences of meeting Gabriel and of receiving messages from him:

*"The Revelation is always brought to me by an angel: sometimes it is delivered to me as the beating sound of the bell - and this is the hardest experience for me - and when that ceases, I retain well engraved in my memory all that is has said; but sometimes the angel appears to me in the shape of a human and speaks to me and I retain what he says."*⁴⁰

Those who saw the Prophet in this state, relate that his condition would change. Sometimes he would stay motionless as if some terribly heavy load was pressed on him and, even in the coldest day, drops of sweat would fall from his forehead.⁴¹ At other times he would move his lips. The unbelievers would accuse him of being possessed by some evil spirit who dictated the revelation to him. However, in forceful language the Qur'an answered that it was no other than the angel, the noble celestial message - bearer, who gave him the revelation:

*"No, I swear by the slinkers
the runners, the sinkers,
by the night swarming
by the dawn sighing
truly this is the word of a noble
Messenger having power, with the Lord
Of the Throne Secure,
Obeyed, moreover trusty.
Your companion is not possessed,
He truly saw him on the clear horizon
He is not niggardly of the unseen."*⁴²

The tradition records that Gabriel used to bring him the message at different times of day and night, sometimes frequently, at other times after a long pause. During the month of *Ramadān*, Gabriel used to visit him every day and used to listen⁴³ or revise the portion of the Qur'an which

had already been revealed. But during the long 23 years of the period of revelation, the Prophet saw Gabriel undisguised only twice. And, on both these occasions the Prophet observed that Gabriel's form filled the whole of the sky.⁴⁴

Although the Qur'an speaks of the powers of Gabriel in glowing terms, his function was set, and he was operating in total submission to the Will of God. In his longing to hear from God, the Prophet once asked the angel why he did not come to him more often. There upon came the frank reply which is reflected in the language of the Qur'an and on which we close our talk on the angels:

*"We come not down, save at the commandment of the Lord. To Him belongs all That is before us, and that is behind Us, and all between that. And thy Lord is never forgetful, Lord He is the heavens and earth and All that is between them So serve Him, And be thou patient in His service; Knowest thou any that can be named with His Name?"*⁴⁵

The Divine Scriptures

The third element of faith of Islam concerns belief in the Divine Scriptures. This in turn comprises belief in the prophets before Muhammad and belief in Muhammad as the last of the prophets. Thus the Qur'an declares:

*"Say you: We believe in God, and in that which has been sent down on us and sent down on Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac and Jacob and the Tribes, and that which was given to Moses and Jesus and the prophets of their lord: we make no division between any of them, and to Him we surrender."*⁴⁶

The Divine Scriptures associated with these prophets are the Scrolls which were revealed to Abraham, the Torah which was revealed to Moses, the Psalms revealed to David and the Gospel revealed to Jesus.

Obviously, then, Islam considers that all the prophets belonged to but one brotherhood, no matter to what people or at what period in history they preached. Some of them were appointed to preach to their own clan or tribe; others were sent for a certain region; while for still others, the scope of preaching comprised the whole of the universe. About twenty-eight prophets are mentioned in the Qur'an, among them many of those of the Old and New Testaments. Some of their stories are related in the Qur'an, to serve as guidance to believers and reminders of God's unceasing love for man and His concern for man's instruction. Of the Torah and the Gospel, the Qur'an speaks:

“Surely We sent down the Torah, wherein is guidance and light; thereby the prophets who had surrendered themselves gave judgement for those of Jewry, as did the masters and the rabbis, following such portion of God’s Book as they were given to keep and were witness to.”⁴⁷

In the same chapter the Qur’an speaks of the Gospels:

“And We have sent down to thee the Book with the truth, confirming the Book that was before it, and assuring it.”⁴⁹

And then it admonishes the Jews and the Christians:

“Say: People of the book, you do not stand on anything until you perform the Torah and the Gospel, and what was sent down to you from your Lord.”⁵⁰

The Qur’an

With respect to the Qur’an itself, the word Qur’an literally means recitation. It is a modest sized book of about 300 pages, consisting of 114 chapters of varying lengths. The longest chapter contains 286 verses, and the shortest one has only three verses, making in all, the number of verses 6,237, consisting of 77,934 words. These chapters are arranged according to their length, not according to the chronological order which they were received. The very nature of the books calls for such an arrangement since it is not a book of history nor a register for maintaining the records of the events of certain periods. The very purpose of the revelation was to admonish man and to guide him in all aspects of his life.⁵¹ So whenever a piece of revelation was received, and it was revealed to the Prophet bit by bit over a 23-year period - the Prophet had it inserted at a place most appropriate for it in a chapter.

Every word of the Qur’an is the word of God revealed to the Prophet through the agency of the angel Gabriel.⁵² Consequently, the Qur’an should not be confused with the sayings and sermons of Muhammad; these are separately preserved in different collections known as *Hadith*.⁵³ The Qur’an is the supreme source of Islamic law and the last word in terms of divine guidance. The Prophet himself was only a follower of the injunctions of the Qur’an. His own sayings, though authoritative, have only the secondary position in Islam. They supplement and make explicit, ideas implicit in the Qur’an.

Indeed, the Qur’an is concerned with *total* guidance. It refuses to limit itself exclusively to so-called spiritual affairs, thus leaving man to grope in darkness in his material pursuits. The scope of the Qur’an comprises the totality of existence. The concept of *Ibādah* (worship in Islam) is all-embracing: getting married,⁵⁴ conjugal fidelity,⁵⁵ raising children⁵⁶ - these are all acts of worship, and all are dealt with in the Qur’an. The Qur’an also promulgated laws of inheritance⁵⁷ as well as payment of obligatory charity,⁵⁸ and it elaborated civil and criminal codes⁵⁹ - each formulated as an extension of Divine Justice and in the light of Divine Guidance.

The strength of the Qur’an manifests itself in the beauty and power of its expression. Whether proclaiming the Majesty of God or instructing on the division of inherited property, the Qur’an is unsurpassed in the magnificence of its rhythmic flow, in the simultaneous profundity and

simplicity of meaning - qualities that transport men and women of all stations and capacities into ecstasy.

The Authenticity of The Qur'an

These qualities astounded the listeners when the Prophet first began reciting the Qur'an at Mecca. The influential Meccans, a people with a long and proud history in matters of eloquence, jeered at the Prophet Muhammad and called the Qur'an a fabrication of his own devising.⁶⁰ The Qur'an, however, disproved their claims by pointing at the background of Muhammad as the one who could not read nor write⁶¹ and by asking them how such a one as the unlettered Prophet could produce a work of the highest quality like the Qur'an:

“Not before this didst thou recite any Book, or inscribe it with thy right hand, for then those who follow falsehood would have doubted.

Nay: rather it is signs, clear signs in the breasts of those who have been given knowledge, and none denies Our signs but evildoers.

They say, ‘Why have signs not been sent down upon him from his Lord?’ Say: ‘The signs are only with God, and I am only a plain warner.’

What, is it not sufficient for them that We have sent down upon thee the Book that is recited to them? Surely in that is a mercy, and a reminder to a people who believe.”⁶²

Moreover, to prove its own uniqueness as the uncreated Word of God Himself, there came the revelation challenging the expertly eloquent Meccans to produce even one chapter to equal the magnificence of those contained in the Qur'an:

“The Qur'an could not have been forged apart from God but it is a confirmation of what is before it, and a distinguishing of the Book, wherein is no doubt, from the Lord of all Being.

Or, do they say, ‘Why, he has forged it?’ Say then produce a sura like it, and call on whom you can, apart from God, if you speak truly.⁶³

The similar challenge was put forward at Medina:

“And if you are in doubt concerning what We have sent down on Our servant, then bring a sura like it, and call your witnesses, apart from God, if you are truthful.

And if you do not - and you will not – then fear the Fire, whose fuel is men and stones, prepared for unbelievers.”⁶⁴

The revelations of the Qur'an were committed to memory by both Muhammad and his companions as each chapter or portion thereof was revealed. In this way, and by means of exact transcription from memory to written form, the Qur'an remains today exactly as it was when the angel Gabriel first communicated it to the Prophet.

The Qur'an is by far the most widely read book in the world: selected verses are recited during obligatory prayer. Every generation of the believers has always produced hundreds of thousands of men and women around the world who have known the whole of the Qur'an by heart. Indeed, an English Muslim, Marmaduke Pickthall, who translated the Qur'an into English, observes:

*"The translator, who finds great difficulty in remembering well-known English quotations accurately, can remember page after page of the Koran in Arabic with perfect accuracy."*⁶⁵

Prophets and Messengers of Islam

The fourth of the fundamentals of faith in Islam is belief in the prophets of God. As mentioned earlier, Muslims believe that all the prophets constitute one brotherhood, dedicated to transmitting the message of the One God, a message which has always been the same in its basic intent, varying only outwardly, according to time and local circumstance. Thus, Muslims consider Adam to have been the first Prophet of Islam, and they revere the memory of Abraham as the one who built a house of worship dedicated to God—that is the Holy *Ka'bah*, located in Mecca.⁶⁶

The Qur'an reminds man that "not a nation is, but there has passed away in it a warner."⁶⁷ Muhammad, then, was not the only prophet of Islam, but is held to be the last in a long line of prophets - the last one, and the Seal of all the earlier Messengers. Moreover, a Muslim is commanded to believe in all the prophets without discrimination. If a person were to affirm his belief in God as the One God and in Muhammad as the Prophet of God, but were to deny his belief in Moses or Jesus or in any of the prophets mentioned by name in the Qur'an, that person would not be a Muslim.

Abraham and his Descendants

Many prophets were honoured with special favors.⁶⁸ For instance, Abraham prayed that more prophets be appointed from among his decedents. Both his sons Ishmael and Issac were honoured with the distinction of Prophethood, and many more followed from among their children.⁶⁹ The Qur'an commands the believers to follow the example of Abraham:

*"Then We revealed to thee 'Follow thou the creed of Abraham, a man of pure faith and no idolater."*⁷⁰

Again:

"No; Abraham in truth was not a Jew, nor a Christian; but he was a Muslim and one of pure faith, certainly he was never of the idolaters."

*Surely the people standing closest to Abraham are those who followed him, and this Prophet, and those who believe; and God is the Protector of the believers."*⁷¹

Moses also enjoys great honour among Muslims. God spoke to him directly and strengthened him with the appointment of his brother Aaron as prophet to assist him in his mission.⁷²

Jesus and his Followers

Of the qualities of Mary and Jesus, the Qur'an speaks in glowing terms when the angels announced to her:

*"Mary, God has chosen thee, and purified thee, He has chosen thee above all women (of all the worlds). Mary, be obedient to thy Lord, prostrating and bowing before him."*⁷³

Furthermore, the fact of virgin birth should neither cause man to blame Mary, nor raise Jesus to Divinity, for the Qur'an further explains:

*"Truly, the likeness of Jesus, in God's sight, is as Adam's likeness; He created him of dust, then said He unto him, 'Be' and he was. The Truth is of God; Be not of the doubters."*⁷⁴

The Qur'an firmly rejects the idea of Divinity or Sonship of Jesus.⁷⁵ It regards the crucifixion as a fable.⁷⁶ It also rejects the doctrine of original sin - no soul bears the burden of another⁷⁷ declares the Qur'an, and every child is born innocent says the Prophet Muhammad.⁷⁸ On the other hand, the good qualities of practicing Christians are greatly appreciated:

*"...thou wilt surely find the nearest of them in love to the believers are those who say 'We are Christians;' that because some of them are priests and monks, and they wax not proud, and when they hear what has been sent down to the Messenger, thou seest their eyes overflow with tears because of the truth they recognize."*⁷⁹

We conclude this section on belief in the earlier prophets with one verse from the Qur'an. This verse sums up the general attitude of Islam towards the followers of Judaism and Christianity:

*"Dispute not with the People of the Book save in the fairer manner, except for those of them that do wrong; and say 'We believe in what has been sent down to you; Our God and your God is One, and to Him we have surrendered.'"*⁸⁰

The Mission of Muhammad

With particular reference to the Prophet Muhammad, his most outstanding quality is that he was an 'Abd, a servant of God, a created being. 'Abd is commonly applied to any man. As an 'Abd, a Muslim asserts the most important tenet of his faith, which is commonly called *Shahādah*, or the testimony. Immediately after the assertion of his faith in the Unity of God, a Muslim declares *Wa ashhadu anna Muhammadan 'Abduhu wa Rasūluh*: and I witness that Muhammad is His servant and His Messenger. The Qur'an commands him to declare:

“Say, ‘I am only a man like you are: it is revealed to me that your God is One God: So stand true to Him and ask for His forgiveness.’”⁸¹

Never did Muhammad invite man to worship him. He invited all to worship God. He was a mortal, only God is eternal. The Qur’an declares.

“Muhammad is naught but a Messenger; Messengers have passed away before him. Why if he should die or is slain, will you turn about on your heels? If any man should turn about on his heels, he will not harm God in any way; and God will recompense the thankful.”⁸²

The fact that Muhammad was simply a man and lived and died as man, fills a Muslim with confidence and dignity in himself as a member of the human race. Did not God already give man the highest position in the creation? “We indeed created Man in the fairest stature” declares the Qur’an.⁸³ And were not the angels commanded to prostrate themselves before man, whereas man himself was commanded to prostrate before none other than God Himself?⁸⁴ Thus, the Qur’an declares that the whole universe, the heavens, the earth, the sun, the moon, the oceans - all have been subjected to the service of man, the viceroy of God on Earth.⁸⁵

Man himself was created for no other purpose than to serve God.⁸⁶ So long as man fulfills the purpose for which he was created, he enjoys the dignity and bliss which is experienced by him alone in the creation. But if he forgets God, then God causes him to forget his own soul,⁸⁷ and reduces him to the lowest of the low in the creation.⁸⁸ This was the essence of the mission of Muhammad - born as man, yet chosen to be the Messenger of God for mankind to call man back to God.⁸⁹

“And We have not sent thee except as Mercy unto all beings.”⁹⁰

Life After Death

The fifth element of faith in Islam is belief in the Last Day and the Life Hereafter. The Qur’an declares:

“What is the life of this world but play and amusement? But the best is the Home in the Hereafter, for those who are righteous.”⁹¹

The Prophet said “Live in this world as a traveller: he stays for awhile, then moves forward on his journey.”⁹² In yet another saying, the Prophet declares that man is in a state of sleep. As he dies, he wakes up.

Islam teaches that this world is but temporary, whereas the life to come is eternal.⁹³ This world will come to an end suddenly - a blast followed by another blast, and the whole of the universe will be overturned.⁹⁴ Whereas at present, so the Qur’an notes, the sun and the moon and all the other planets are swimming along in their own orbits,⁹⁵ on the Last Day the sun and the moon will be brought together and extinguished.⁹⁶ Man’s sight will be dazed thereby, and the heavens will split open and will appear as molten copper; the mountains will be scattered as plucked wool-tufts and will vanish in vapour; the seas will swarm over and the graves will be thrown

up.⁹⁷ Then, man will be brought back to life to face the consequences of his deeds and misdeeds.⁹⁸

Thus, it will be man's own judgement of himself, and he will be incapable of judging other than truthfully. Those, however, whose bad deeds exceed the good, will have condemned themselves to the fires of Hell. And in this judgement, not the slightest deed or misdeed will escape attention. Man's every action will be repaid in full. As the Qur'an says, "even to the weight of a single mustard-seed,"⁹⁹ and:

*"On that day, when their tongues, their hands and their feet shall testify against them, touching what they were doing."*¹⁰⁰

The Qur'an declares again:

*"Today We set a seal on their mouths, and their hands speak to Us and their feet bear witness as to what they have been earning."*¹⁰¹

It may be noted that much has been made of "the paradise of Muhammad" by some Western writers who picture it as a sensuous place, with beautiful *houris* to fit the base passions of man. In our view, these writers fail to realize that the *houris* are spiritual companions, pure and holy, whom no man or jinn has touched, and that they are eternal virgins.¹⁰² Moreover, what the Qur'an emphasizes is that in paradise, the abode of peace, where life is eternal, the real reward will be to dwell in the presence of God.¹⁰³

The Five Pillars of Islam

Thus far we have been speaking mainly about what the Muslim believes. In Islam, faith must always be supported by right action. The Qur'an generally couples faith with righteous deeds, and one frequently comes across the phrase, "those who believe and do righteous deeds."¹⁰⁴ The essential practice is based on certain actions known as the Five Pillars of Islam. These are: assertion of faith; obligatory worship, obligatory charity, fasting during the month of Ramadān and pilgrimage to the *Ka'bah*.¹⁰⁵ We will now comment briefly on each of these.

The Witness: The First Pillar

The first and foremost of the pillars is the assertion of faith. One must declare by tongue and confirm in one's heart the statement: "I testify that there is no god but God and I testify that Muhammad is His servant and His messenger."¹⁰⁶

The first part of the statement starts with a negation - "there is no god," followed by the assertion that there is but one God. By negating first the notion of any god other than the Real One, a Muslim liberates himself from all deities, no other power, be it a national god, a deep-rooted social tradition, or material pursuit. With freedom from the power or love of all else, he asserts his belief in the one and only God.

The second part consists of the declaration of faith in the Messenger of God. The assertion of the second part necessarily implies a faithful and conscious adherence to the example of Muhammad.

Worship, the Second Pillar

The second pillar of Islam is the obligation to worship five times a day. Cleanliness is a prerequisite to worship. A Muslim must be bodily clean and must put on clean clothes. He then makes the ritual ablution - washing not only hands (up to the elbows) three times, but also washing mouth, face and feet three times.

With humility a worshipper stands in the presence of God and facing towards the *Ka'bah* in Mecca (believed by Muslims to be the oldest House of God on earth) he then begins by pronouncing: "God is Great." After this he recites a hymn and the opening chapter from the Qur'an, followed by other verses. Then, announcing "God is Great," he bows. With both hands on his knees and his head downward, he praises his Lord saying: "Glory to my Lord who alone is Majestic." He then stands up announcing, "God has heard the one who has praised Him." (If he is praying with the congregation, he would say: "Our Lord, praise be to Thee"), and then, pronouncing "God is Great," he prostrates, putting his head, the symbol of man's dignity, on the dust in a posture of extreme humility. He then says: "Glory to my Lord who alone is High." Then, saying, "God is Great," he prostrates again and says: "Glory to my Lord who alone is High." With this gesture of total surrender to his Lord, the dignity of the worshipper emanates. The head that bows before God, refuses to bow before anyone else.

Repeating the whole procedure, the worshipper sits up, knee to knee, and says: "The blessed and purest greetings to God - Peace be with Thee O Prophet and the mercy and blessing of God; Peace be with us and with all pious servants of God." This completes the service.

Sometimes the service is longer, however the procedure is always the same, and the language of worship is always the language of the Qur'an. Furthermore, since in Islam there is no priesthood, any believer can lead the service provided the individual has knowledge of the service and can recite the Qur'an according to the authentic recitation.

Every Friday a special service is held at noon. The special feature of this service is the *khutbah*, a sermon given by the *imām*, the leader of the prayers. The Prophet recommended that the sermon and the congregational service be brief; individual prayers can be as long as an individual wishes them to be.

There are two other congregational services where the *imām* gives a sermon. The first is conducted in the morning following the end of the month of fasting which commemorates the feast known as *īd al-fitr*, the second on the 10th day of the last month of the lunar year, the day after the day of pilgrimage, commemorating the feast known as *al-adhā*.

Congregational services are usually performed in a mosque. However, a Muslim can offer his worship anywhere if he cannot reach a mosque. According to tradition, Muhammad said: "The whole earth is a mosque."¹⁰⁷ Moreover, the Prophet, according to Islamic tradition,

recommended that individual worship should also be said at home, for a home where worship is not held is like a grave. Worship at home sets a good example for the children. Indeed, according to the Islamic tradition, the parents who fail to perform worship at home are guilty of neglecting their children.

A Mosque, an Open House of God

A mosque is open for worship to all Muslims. No one can bar a worshipper from it. There are no membership dues, and there are no fixed places for people of different social status, for all worshippers are equal. Every Muslim enjoys equal right to participate in all activities within the mosque, irrespective of financial donations or lack thereof.¹⁰⁸

The mosque is the heart of the Muslim community and the base of Islamic civilization. It was in the mosque that the Prophet not only led the prayers and imparted religious instructions, but in the mosque, he used to consult the community in all their affairs. It was there he used to receive delegations from different peoples. From the mosque, he would dispatch his own emissaries and ambassadors to other countries, and it was there he used to hear legal cases and give his judgements. It was there he used to receive the state revenues and give help to deserving people from the collected revenues, and it was from the mosque that he used to dispatch his armies, governors and officers to different places. Moreover, during the time of the Pious Caliphs, that is, the first four successors of the Prophet, the mosque continued to be the seat of government as well as the focus of the other activities mentioned above.

Nobody, whether an individual or an organization, can claim ownership of a mosque.¹⁰⁹ It is the congregation as a whole which has the custody of the building and which cares for it. Even if a person should name his own building as mosque, once he has invited people to worship there, and they have performed the prayer in it, it becomes a mosque forever.¹¹⁰ The owner can no longer lay claim to it.¹¹¹ All schools of Islamic law are unanimous in this opinion; that once a building is named a mosque, it always remains a mosque. It cannot be sold, nor can it be put to any other use, nor can it be torn down to provide ground for something else.¹¹²

As indicated before, Islam stresses the equality of all believers. Neither birth nor wealth nor intelligence is justification for the adulation of one's fellows. Neither, for that matter, is the sex of the believer of any consequence in the sight of God in determining one's spiritual station.¹¹³ This leads us to say a few words about the position of women in Islam.

Position of women

Much has been made in the West of the supposedly debased status of women attributable to Islamic beliefs; but in view of the comments previously made regarding the equality of all worshippers, it will be seen that such myths, (which have long been circulating in the West), are simply that - myths, and nothing more. While it is true that a Muslim man may take more than one wife, the practice is, in fact, discouraged and is permissible only under special circumstances.¹¹⁴ With respect to the much misunderstood subject of divorce, the annulment of marriage is by no means the exclusive right of the man, nor can it be executed by means of a simple declaration thrice repeated.¹¹⁵ In

fact, marriage - its preservation and cultivation - are so important in Islam that the Prophet himself once declared, "Marriage is half the religion."

Regarding the religious duties of woman, she is expected to dress modestly in public.¹¹⁶ Men and women pray with the congregation led by one and the same *imām* but they form separate sections, women standing shoulder to shoulder with women, and men standing shoulder to shoulder with men. Furthermore, women are excused from prayer during their monthly indisposition, and when this occurs during the month of Ramadān, are excused from fasting during that time, although the days missed are to be made up at a later date.¹¹⁷

As for the individual rights and responsibilities of a woman, her rights are protected by the Qur'an.¹¹⁸ She is allowed to transact business in her own name, to hold and dispose of her own wealth and property,¹¹⁹ and to seek and hold public office.¹²⁰ As a partner in marriage, she is asked to defer to her husband in all matters of joint concern, but he, for his part, is expected to act in the interest of both, and treat his wife with kindness and respect. For all his responsibility to his wife, he is answerable to God.¹²¹

Clearly then, whether the believer is male or female, rich or poor, lettered or unlettered, noble or peasant, the only distinction of any consequence in the eyes of God is to individual piety. Indeed, the Qur'an says:

*"O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of male and female and made you nations and tribes that you may know each other. Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of God is (one who is) the most righteous of you. And God has full knowledge and is well acquainted."*¹²²

Charity: The Third Pillar

Zakāt, alms giving, is the third pillar of Islam. The term *zakāt* was used in the Qur'an in a number of verses. It means "growth" and "purifying."¹²³ In other words, one must purify one's wealth by giving away something from the surplus for the benefit of society. *Zakāt* was levied as a tax on the Muslims. It included tax on agricultural products, sub-soil exploitation, hoarded cash and other forms of income. The rates differed from one type of commodity to another. *Zakāt* is to be used for certain purposes which are determined by the Qur'an.

*"Alms are for the poor (al-fuqarā) and the needy (al-masākin) and those employed to administer the funds; for those whose hearts have been (recently) reconciled to the Truth; for those in bondage and in debt; in the cause of God; and for the wayfarer. (Thus, it is) ordained by God, and God is full of knowledge and wisdom."*¹²⁴

During the time of the Prophet and his two immediate successors, it was collected by the agents of the government. But the third caliph, 'Uthmān, ruled that the tax-payers themselves should pay to the deserving individuals that part of the tax which came from hoarded cash.¹²⁵

This tax was considered a right, a right of the poor and an obligation of the wealthy. Now Islam not only calls on the rich to pay this tax from their hoarded income, but it also prohibits usury, in fact, interest of any kind.¹²⁶ In the long run, both these demands helped to curb hoarding. One

should also add that the second caliph, ‘Umar, ruled that the poor among the non-Muslims also have a right to receive *zakāt*.¹²⁷

Zakat must be paid sincerely and in a spirit of selflessness. If one’s motives are mixed or worldly, then one’s charity is useless in the eyes of God. In this regard, the Qur’an gives a stern warning:

*“O ye who believe!
Cancel not your charity
By reminders of your generosity
Or by injury - like those who spend
Their substance
To be seen of men,
But believe neither in God nor the
Last Day.”*¹²⁸

Fasting: The Fourth Pillar

The fourth pillar of Islam is the fast during the month of *Ramadān* of the Muslim calendar. All able-bodied Muslims must fast from early dawn till dusk throughout this month.¹²⁹ During the fast, the Muslims must neither eat, drink, smoke, nor indulge in sex. In addition, one must abstain from evil thought, gossip and back-bite. Any of these acts would negate the spiritual effects of fasting, reducing the exercise to mere starvation.¹³⁰

The Qur’an gives no reason for fasting except that it is the command of God, that it is done for God alone and that God will reward it.¹³¹ To a spiritually conscious servant of God, this thought is more than enough: he is fulfilling a command of God. Consequently, while many individuals have enumerated the advantages of fasting (such as various physical benefits and in terms of inculcating discipline), those who perform the fast do not go into such reasons. They simply fast in obedience to God. Performed in this manner, fasting becomes a spiritual experience, and those who go through it enjoy the bliss.

The daily schedule of a Muslim changes drastically during this month. His fast begins with the appearance of morning twilight, a Muslim starts preparations for the morning service, followed by recitations of the Qur’an until after sunrise. Throughout the day, he is conscious of fasting and abstains from vain talk, anger and amusements. After sunset he breaks the fast with some light meals and says the sunset prayers. These are followed by the night prayers, with additional *Ramadān* night prayers which are the longest of any prayers. He thus goes to bed late at night and gets up early in the morning. Towards the end of *Ramadān*, some people perform ten days meditation in the mosque.¹³² In this manner the month of fasting passes, hard on the body, but refreshing to the soul.

***Al-Hajj*: The Fifth Pillar**

The last pillar is the pilgrimage to the *Ka’bah*, the cube-shaped building in the city of Mecca, which according to Islamic tradition, was built by Abraham.¹³³ Every able-bodied Muslim, if he

can afford the expenses of the journey, must perform the pilgrimage to the *Ka'bah* at least once during his lifetime.¹³⁴

At a certain point on his way to the *Ka'bah*, a pilgrim must clean himself, discard his usual clothing and put on the *ihram* - two unsewn sheets, one around the waist and another over one shoulder. The head and one shoulder must remain uncovered. All pilgrims, princes and paupers, are dressed alike. Distinction in class, race and national allegiance is erased. Moving in groups, the pilgrims recite in unison, *labbayka, labbayka*. "I come to thee, I come to thee, O Lord!" and *Allahu Akbar*, "God is Great." As the pilgrim enters Mecca's great mosque, at first glance of the *Ka'bah* he recites the prayer:

"O God! You are peace and peace comes from you. So greet us, O Lord, with peace."

The main rites take place during the first few days of *Dhu' l-Hijjah*, the last month of the Muslim calendar. A pilgrim first makes seven rounds around the *Ka'bah*. He then offers prayers at the station of Abraham and proceeds to the hills of *Safā* and *Marwā*, where according to Islamic tradition, Hagar wandered in search of water for her son Ishmael. On the seventh day of the month, the whole body of pilgrims listens to a sermon, and on the following day, all the pilgrims go to the old city of *Mina*. They stay there for a night and day in prayer and meditation. Then the pilgrims proceed from there to the plain of 'Arafāt. In the centre of this plain stands the mount of mercy. The following day, on their way back to Mecca, they halt at *Mina*, following the tradition of Abraham, to offer sacrifice and symbolically cast stones at the devil, who, according to Muslim belief, tempted Abraham there and was chased away by him. The pilgrims then return to Mecca to perform circumambulation around the *Ka'bah* and run between the hills of *Safā* and *Marwā*. They then return to *Mina* where they stay in meditation for two more nights and days. Having completed the rites of pilgrimage, they usually proceed to *Medina* to visit the Prophet's grave and offer thanks.

It is difficult to convey what the pilgrimage has meant to millions of Muslims throughout the ages in terms of selfless devotion to God and feeling of brotherhood towards men. But perhaps a glimpse of that can be conveyed from the words of the late American black leader Malcolm X, who writing to his associates from Mecca, said:

"You may be shocked by these words coming from me. But on this pilgrimage, what I have seen, and experienced, has forced me to rearrange much of my thought-patterns previously held, and to toss aside some of my previous conclusions..."

"During the past eleven days here in the Muslim world, I have eaten from the same plate, drunk from the same glass, and slept in the same bed (or the same rug) - while praying to the same God - with fellow Muslims, whose eyes were the bluest of blue, whose hair was the blondest of the blonde, and whose skin was the whitest of white. And in words and in actions and in deeds of the white Muslims, I felt the same sincerity that I felt among the black African Muslims of Nigeria, Sudan and Ghana."¹³⁵

When asked by some fellow pilgrims at Mount 'Arafāt what impressed him most about the pilgrimage, he answered:

“The brotherhood! The people of all races, colours from all over the world coming together as one! It has proved to me the power of the Once God.”¹³⁶



The Ka'bah and Al-Haram Mosque, Mecca, Saudi Arabia

Muhammad The Last of Prophets and Messengers of Islam

Earlier, in the section on belief, indications were given of how a Muslim is commanded not to make any division among the prophets of God, since his belief embraces a conscious adherence to the complete prophetic tradition. However, for a Muslim, Muhammad, the seal of the prophetic tradition, stands at the crossroads of history and, therefore, occupies a central position in the Islamic religious tradition. On the one hand, it is through the revelation given to Muhammad that man is connected with his ancient past in Islam. On the other hand, it is through the grace of the final revelation given to Muhammad, that man receives guidance for all generations and for all times to come. Consequently, given that Muhammad represents the link with, as well as extension of, the past prophetic tradition and given that he, as the last of the prophets, serves as the vehicle through which the final revelation came to man, it is not difficult to understand why Muslims consider Muhammad to be the fountainhead of the Islamic culture and civilization. And, since he holds such an important place in the life of a Muslim, it will be well worthwhile to have an overview of the prophet's life and the circumstances surrounding it.

The Birth and Early Life

Muhammad was born in Mecca in the year 570 A.D. At that time, Mecca was the religious and cultural centre of Arabia. It housed the *Ka'bah*, the most ancient house of worship on earth, which had been built by Abraham and his son Ishmael. Abraham himself was a monotheist, but the Arabs after him had degenerated to a state of idol-worship. By the 6th century A.D., the *Ka'bah* housed nearly 360 different idols. Once a year, the various Arabian tribes used to assemble at Mecca and a delegation from each tribe would offer worship to its own special god or goddess. After the worship the tribesmen would participate in a trades fair which was held outside Mecca.

The most powerful and influential tribe in Mecca was the Quraish. Certain clans in this tribe were responsible for the care and maintenance of the *Ka'bah* itself. This was a major source of pride for the Quraish. Moreover, the offerings at the *Ka'bah* and the annual fair yielded a considerable income to them.

Muhammad was born in a noble, but impoverished clan of the Quraish. His father had died only a few weeks before his birth.¹³⁷ At the age of six, the child visited Medina with his mother. As they were on the way back to Mecca, his mother suffered a sudden death, and Muhammad was forced to return in the company of a maid servant.

In Mecca, his grandfather took custody of him, but not long afterwards the grandfather also died, leaving the orphan in the charge of his uncle, Abū Talib.¹³⁸ Abū Talib had limited resources and a large family of his own. Therefore, from early childhood, Muhammad had to work for a living, first as a shepherd boy,¹³⁹ and later as an assistant in the business of his uncle.

Marriage

When he was about 25 years of age, he came under the employ of a rich widow, Khadijah, as one of her agents whose duty it was to take her merchandise for sale to Syria. The profits returned by Muhammad were far greater than those of the other agents. Khadijah became impressed with the honesty, efficiency, as well as the personal charms of her agent and offered her hand in marriage to him. With the approval of Abū Talib, the marriage was performed.

Khadijah was fifteen years senior to Muhammad, and as long as she lived, he never took another woman in marriage. All of his surviving children - all daughters - were born of this marriage. This was so, even though according to tradition, having an unrestricted number of wives and even larger number of male children was a source of great pride for a young Arab. When Khadijah died, Muhammad was already a man over fifty, and it was only sometime after her death that Muhammad took other wives. Furthermore, these subsequent marriages took place for a variety of reasons - in some cases, to forge ties of relationship with his close associates; in others, to provide for destitute widows whose husbands had been slain in defending Islam.¹⁴⁰

As a young man, Muhammad was regarded as a sincere, kind and honest man, always ready to assist others. His fellow citizens named him *Al-Amīn*, the "Trustworthy One".¹⁴¹ As one of

“We relayed each other, if Muhammad led the caravan, he did not enter his house on his return to Mecca without clearing accounts with me; and if I led the caravan, he would on my return enquire about my welfare and speak nothing about his own capital entrusted to me.”¹⁴²

Seclusion, Meditation and Revelation

The religious consciousness in Muhammad began to manifest strongly at about the age of 35. At about this time he began to retire for the purpose of meditation, from time to time, to a cave in a mountain outside Mecca, now known as *Jabl al-Nūr* (Mountain of Light). With the passage of time, the periods of meditation became longer and longer, until, at the age of 40, the first great experience of the revelation occurred.¹⁴³ He beheld the vision of an angel before him who commanded him to:

“Recite: in the name of thy Lord who created, Created man of a blood-clot. Recite: And thy Lord is most generous, who taught by the pen. Taught man what he knew not.”¹⁴⁴

This unusual experience shook him. Terrified, he returned home and expressed the fear to his wife that some evil spirit might be attempting to take control of him. Khadijah comforted him, reminding him that he had always helped the poor, the widowed, and was generous and kind to everybody.¹⁴⁵ She gave Muhammad the assurance that God intended something good for him. She believed in him and stood by his side.

No further revelations were forthcoming for some time. In the meantime, Muhammad devoted himself more and more to prayer and meditation. Finally, after 3 years, a revelation came commanding him to warn the Meccans against idol worship and to be kind to orphans and downtrodden people.¹⁴⁶ When Muhammad made these revelations known to his fellow Meccans, he was largely ignored. Only his close associates, his wife, his cousin and ward ‘Alī, his freedman Zayd, whom he had adopted as a son, and his childhood friend Abū Bakr, along with a few poor people of the city, answered his call.¹⁴⁷

Opposition and Persecution

As the number of his followers slowly grew, and the Meccans realized the danger posed by Muhammad’s preaching to their special religious and social status, as well as profits derived from trade, they let loose their fury - hurling insults and abuses upon, and physically intimidating Muhammad and his followers.¹⁴⁸ In order to escape this persecution, the Prophet suggested that his followers migrate to Abyssinia, and about 80 men, women, and children followed his advice. Although they were immediately followed by a Meccan delegation demanding their extradition, the ruler of Abyssinia, Negus, gave them a safe asylum there. Muhammad and his close associates, however, remained at Mecca and continued preaching.

The opposition became intensified against Muhammad’s clan and attempts were made to entice or force the Prophet’s clan to disown him and deliver him to the Meccans. Eventually, due to their unwillingness to meet the Meccan’s demands to abandon or give up Muhammad, his whole clan - including women and children, Muslims and non-Muslims - suffered the rigors of ostracism for 3 long years and were eventually reduced to living on hide¹⁴⁹ and tree leaves. However, in view of

the misery inflicted by this ostracism, some Meccans defied the boycott and consequently it was removed.¹⁵⁰

The persecution against Muhammad, however, was to continue in different forms. As Muhammad preached to the outsiders who came to visit the *Ka'bah* during the traditionally peaceful months, the Meccans would follow him, shouting warnings to the strangers not to listen to him, that he was a man possessed, a wizard of words. When Muhammad paid a visit to Tā'if, the home of his maternal uncles, the rich people of that town chased him out, pelting stones at him.¹⁵¹ Badly bleeding and grieved, he was forced to return to Mecca.

The Migration to Medina

For 13 long years, Muhammad worked in Mecca amid such insults and persecution. In that time, however, Islam had gained some ground in Medina through the efforts of those Medinites who had been converted to Islam in the course of their pilgrimages to Mecca. Now, in small groups, Muhammad began sending his Meccan followers to Medina. He himself continued to remain in Mecca, facing with patience the ever-increasing fury of the Meccan crowd. Finally, when events came to such a pass that the Meccans had planned Muhammad's assassination and were besieging his home, he slipped out in the darkness of the night, and accompanied by his close associate, Abū Bakr, fled to Medina.¹⁵² The year was 622 which marks the beginning of the Muslim calendar.¹⁵³

The situation in Medina, however, was also not without dangers for him. To begin with, Muhammad had to rehabilitate the Meccan immigrants. They were primarily business people, but Medina was an agricultural town. Moreover, the Meccan immigrants were rootless, homeless, and penniless. Furthermore, despite the fact that many Medinites had become Muslims, not everybody in Medina was pleased with the arrival of the penniless strangers. The tribal leaders were jealous of the attention and respect the newcomer, who had been rejected in his own town, was now receiving from their tribesmen. Jewish people who had been expecting a Messiah from among themselves, rejected him outright.¹⁵⁴

Bond of Brotherhood

In order to solve these problems, Muhammad first created an order of fraternization which called for every well-to-do Medinite Muslim to take an uprooted Meccan as a brother; the families of both the contractual brothers would work together and share the proceeds of their labor.¹⁵⁵ The Medinites thus received their historic name, Ansār, the Helpers, and the Meccans became known as *Muhājirūn*, the immigrants. This plan of rehabilitation worked very well.

In addition, Muhammad formed a city-state in Medina based on the pattern of a commonwealth, with the minority Jewish population and the Muslims, who constituted the majority, forming two units with Muhammad as the head.¹⁵⁶ The Jews were to be governed by their own rabbis.¹⁵⁷ Furthermore, a written charter, which is still extant, was promulgated with provisions for defence and foreign affairs.

Muslim's Permitted to Defend

The Meccans, meanwhile, continued to intimidate the Muslims, and attempted to incite the Medinite tribal leaders to expel Muhammad from the city.¹⁵⁸ Friction between the two cities increased. Finally the hostilities led to the battle at Badr, where the ill-equipped Muslim army met a Meccan army 3 times its size. It was the first occasion that the Muslims were permitted by Allah to take up arms in their defence, as related in the following excerpt from the Qur'an:

*To those against whom war is made,
Permission is given (to fight),
Because they are wronged, - and verily, God is most powerful for their aid,-
(They are) those who have been expelled from their homes, without justification
(for no cause) except that they say,
Our Lord is God.
Did not God check one set of people by means of another,
There would surely have been pulled down monasteries, churches, synagogues and mosques,
In which the name of God is commemorated in abundant measure.
God will certainly aid those who aid His cause,
For verily, God is full of strength, exalted in might (able to enforce His will).¹⁶⁰*

The Meccans were defeated and fled with most of their leaders dead on the battlefield, and the Medinites returned with a number of prisoners of war. Muhammad made a bold departure from Arab tradition in his treatment of these prisoners. Instead of putting them to death, or condemning them to a life of slavery, he ordered that each of the educated prisoners would teach ten Medinites reading and writing, and, thereby, earn his release from the prisoner of war status.¹⁶¹ Those of the well-to-do prisoners, who were either unwilling or unable to teach the Medinites, could earn their freedom for a certain price in money. Finally, those unable to pay, could still earn their freedom if they gave their word of honour not to continue hostilities against the Muslims.¹⁶²

All during this period, religious activities were also being intensified. During the last year of Muhammad's stay at Mecca when the persecution of the Muslims was at its climax, the number of the daily obligatory prayers was raised from three to a minimum of five.¹⁶³ In addition, within almost a year of the arrival at Medina, the most rigorous duty of all the obligatory practices, the fast during the month of *Ramadān*,¹⁶⁴ was introduced, and the use of alcohol for Muslims was completely banned.¹⁶⁵

A year after the battle at Badr, the Meccans returned with a heavier force. The battle took place at the foot of Uhad, a mountain on the outskirts of Medina. The Muslims suffered heavy losses, though Medina itself was not attacked.

Three years later, however, the Meccans formed a grand confederation of various tribes and laid siege to Medina. Despite the strength of the opposition, the Prophet was able to prevent their entry by having a ditch dug around the open (non-mountainous) parts of the city. Due to bad weather and internal divisions among the confederates, clan after clan quit the siege until, in the year 627, the entire project was abandoned.

Treaty of Peace

In the following year, the Prophet and his followers made an attempt to perform pilgrimage, but the Meccans prevented them from proceeding any further than Hudaibiyah. However, a treaty was concluded. Although the treaty stipulated that Muhammad must return to Medina without performing the pilgrimage, it made provisions such that Muhammad and other Muslims could come the next year and would be allowed a short stay of 3 days. But, as important as establishing the conditions of pilgrimage were, the clause in this treaty most pleasing to Muhammad was the one indicating that hostilities between the Muslims and the Meccans were to cease for a period of 10 years. This clause also stipulated that the parties concerned were not to support their allies against the other party or its allies.¹⁶⁶ For the Prophet, this was indeed a great victory.¹⁶⁷ Since the beginning of his mission in 610, it was the first time in all those trying years that he was able to obtain a promise of peace from the Meccans.

Muhammad took advantage of the spell that peace offered him, by dispatching his emissaries to various tribes inviting them to Islam. Emissaries and letters were also sent to the King of Persia, the Emperor of Byzantium, and to other foreign heads of state.¹⁶⁸ However, these activities were cut short when after only a year of peace, the Meccans broke the treaty by supporting one of their allied tribes against the allies of Medina. The latter subsequently appealed to the Prophet for help.

Mecca Conquered: Treatment of the Enemies

One early dawn in 630, the Prophet surprised Mecca with an army of 10,000 standing over the head of the half-asleep town. The city was taken without bloodshed.¹⁶⁹

Bowing his head forward in humility on his horseback, as if in prostration, the Prophet marched through the city to the *Ka'bah*. The only casualties of the day were the idols inside the ancient House of God. To each one the Prophet pointed with his staff and said the Qur'anic verse:

*"Truth comes and falsehood perishes, Verily the falsehood is destined to perish."*¹⁷⁰

Thereupon, his followers seized each idol in turn and shattered it. The Prophet then assembled the Meccans. After reminding them of their cruelty and heartless treatment of the past, he told them: "Today you are free: You are all forgiven."¹⁷¹

Such generosity shown by the Prophet to his mortal enemies shook the Meccans tremendously, and one of the tribal chiefs stepped forward and declared with great emotion, "I bear witness that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God," The Prophet responded by saying, "And I in my turn appoint you the Governor of Mecca." The whole city thereupon embraced Islam, and Muhammad left Mecca without leaving a single soldier of his army posted in the city. He did not even reclaim Muslim property which had earlier been confiscated by the Meccans. Old enemies now became devoted followers and enthusiastic supporters of Islam.¹⁷²

Most of the remaining Arabian tribes had been awaiting the fate of Mecca. Once Mecca surrendered, delegation after delegation from the various outlying tribes came to announce their acceptance of Islam. Shortly thereafter, the Prophet led the pilgrimage to the *Ka'bah*, where he delivered his famous sermon known as the Farewell Address, and in the year 632 he breathed his last.



Green dome of the Mosque of the Prophet Muhammad, Peace be upon him, Medina, Saudi Arabia

The Qualities of the Prophet

On the human plane, the outstanding qualities of the Prophet were his truthfulness, sincerity, simplicity, warmth and generosity. He always maintained that he was no more than a slave of God, whose duty it was to deliver Allah's message and who devotedly served his Master and Lord.

He worked as a labourer, shepherd, business man, preacher, teacher, lawgiver, judge, head of the community and state, and leader of the prayers. He married and raised a family. He gave women the right of inheritance, independent of men. Although polygamy was not altogether abolished, it was restricted, with a strong recommendation for monogamy. Even at the height of his mission's success, the Prophet lived in stark poverty, cobbling his own shoes and patching his own clothes.

He was always accessible to everybody. People belonging to all stations of life would come to him seeking advice concerning every aspect of their personal life. This relationship between the Prophet and his followers pleased God, and this pleasure was confirmed in a revelation:

“Now, there has come to you a messenger from among yourselves. Grievous to him is your suffering: Anxious is he over you. Gentle to the believers, compassionate.”¹⁷³

He never asked any man to do anything he himself was unable to do. He prayed longer than anybody, worked harder than anybody, and endured suffering more than anybody. For Muslims he is the ideal example to be followed. As the Qur’an declares:

“Ye have indeed in the Apostle of God a beautiful pattern (of conduct) for anyone whose hope is in God and the Final Day

And who engages much in the remembrance of God.”¹⁷⁴

The author of the foregoing introduction to Islam was a professor of Islamic Studies until his return to Allah Subhanahu Wa Ta’Allah in 1988. He is known as one who fully turned his heart towards his Lord, steeped in the remembrance of Allah, fully devoted to spreading the message of Islam and especially its deep spiritual peace and nearness to God. He was a Shaykh in the Chishti spiritual order, fully immersed in helping those who sought his guidance, instruction and friendship. He was a founder of the first mosque in Toronto, and a bringer of the peace, beauty and light of Islam



Sultan Omar 'Ali Saifuddien Mosque, Brunei, South East Asia

Notes:

1. al-Bukhārī, 10:1-11 (Book 10, hadith 1-11); Muslim 4:1-6; Abū Dā'ūd 2:27; Tirmidhī 2:26, 27; Ibn Mājah 3:1. The *Adhān* consists of 19 phrases. Tirmidhī 2:26; Ibn Mājah 3:1, 2. For the symbolic significance of the number 19 see note 15 below.
2. al-Bukhārī 10:13; Muslim 13:38, 40; Abū Dā'ūd 2:40; Tirmidhī 2:37.
3. The Qur'an 17:44.
4. The term 'Moslem' which is in general usage in English, is a corruption of the word Muslim which is correctly written as Muslim. This term is applied to all believers in God even prior in time to the birth of Muhammad. (The Qur'an 2:133, 136; 3:67, 84; 21:108; 72:14.)
5. *Assalāmu 'Alaykum* is the standard greeting of the people in paradise. The Qur'an 7:46; al-Bukhārī 79:13; Tirmidhī 40:27, 28, 34.
6. The Qur'an 59:23.
7. The Qur'an 3:19; 5:3.
8. The Qur'an 2:281; 40:78; al-Bukhārī 2:1.
9. The Qur'an 33:40.
10. The Qur'an 4:136; Muslim 1:1; Abū Dā'ūd 39:16; Tirmidhī 30:10, 17; 38:4, 5.
11. The Qur'an 2:163; 23:91; 27:64; 41:6.
12. The Qur'an 20:8.
13. The Qur'an 57:3.
14. The Qur'an 59:23.
15. The Qur'an 1:1, 3.

In each instance the total number of times the word appears in the Qur'an is a perfect multiple of 19. Thus, *Ism* appears 19 times; Allah appears 2698 times (19 x 142); *al-Rahmān* appears 57 times (19 x 3), and *al-Rahīm* appears 114 times (19 x 6). In fact, 19 is a symbolic number (see the Qur'an 74: 31-32). This is demonstrated by the way in which all mystical letters that stand on their own as the first verse of various *surahs* of the Qur'an for example, A L M *Surah* 2, 3, 29, 30, 31, 32; A L R 10, 11, 12, 14, 15 A L M Ş 7; A L M R 13; K H Y 'Ş 19; Ṭ H 20: Ṭ S M 26, 28, Ṭ S 27: Y S 36: Ş 38; H M 40, 41, 43, 44, 45, 46; H M 'S Q 42; Q 50; N 68; participate in the symbolism of 19. When one adds the total number of occurrences of each of these mystical letters in those *surahs* where such letters appear at the beginning of the *surah*, the sum is always a perfect multiple of 19. Moreover, the Qur'an discloses that the symbol of 19 (which the pattern of mystical letters is woven around) is a trial for unbelievers and serves as a warning to those who would reject the perfection upon which the Qur'an is structured. On the other hand, the symbolism of 19 is also a sign which increases the believers in their faith (The Qur'an 74: 16-31).

For a detailed description of the symbolism of nineteen see a recent study of the mathematical pattern of the Qur'an by Dr. Rashid Khalifa.

16. The Qur'an, 112:1.
17. The Qur'an, 2:255.
18. Abū Bakr ibn 'Alī al-Kalabādī: *Kitāb al-ta'arruf*. English translation by A. J. Arberry. Cambridge 1935. P. 15.
19. The Qur'an, 50:16.
20. The Qur'an, 35:15.
21. The Qur'an, 29:6.

22. The Qur'an, 3:97.
23. The Qur'an, 2:255.
24. The Qur'an, 39:75, 42:5.
25. The Qur'an, 15:30, 38:73.
26. The Qur'an, 18:50.
27. The Qur'an, 38:76.
28. The Qur'an, 15:27, 55:15.
29. The Qur'an, 72:1, 2.
30. The Qur'an, 2:97.
31. The Qur'an, 66:6.
32. The Qur'an, 79:5.
33. The Qur'an, 6:93, 79:1, 2.
34. The Qur'an, 66:4.
35. The Qur'an, 11:81.
36. The Qur'an, 3:125.
37. The Qur'an, 2:97.
38. The Qur'an, 26:192, 193, 194.
39. The Qur'an, 19:17, 18, 19.
40. al-Bukhārī, 1:2.
41. al-Muslim, translated in four volumes by 'Abdul Hamīd Siddīqī, Vol. IV, Chapter CMLXXIII, Number 5764.
42. The Qur'an, 81:15-24.
43. al-Muslim, Ibid, Vol. IV, Chapter CMLXIII, Number 5718.
44. The Qur'an, 81:23, 53:7, 13-18.
45. The Qur'an, 19:64, 65.
46. The Qur'an, 3:84.
47. The Qur'an, 5:44.
48. The Qur'an, 5:46.
49. The Qur'an, 5:48.
50. The Qur'an, 5:49.
51. The Qur'an, 5:48.
52. The Qur'an, 2:97.
53. There are a number of books of Ḥadīth. Six of these collections are called Sihāh Sitta, these are al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Abū Dā'ūd, al-Tirmidhī, al-Nasā'ī; Ibn Mājah.
54. The Qur'an, 4:3, 19-22.
55. The Qur'an, 4:15-16, 60:12.
56. The Qur'an, 2:233.
57. The Qur'an, 4:4-12.
58. The Qur'an, 9:60.
59. The Qur'an, 4:19-35; 5:38, 39, 90, 91; 4:15, 16; and 24:2.
60. The Qur'an, 10:38, 39.
61. The Qur'an, 29:47.
62. The Qur'an, 29:47-50.
63. The Qur'an, 10:37, 38.
64. The Qur'an, 2:23, 24.
65. M. Pickthall. The Meanings of the Glorious Qur'an, P. 380.

66. The Qur'an, 2:127; 22:26. "The first House established for the people (*lil-nās* - mankind) was that at Bakkah (Mecca), a place holy, and a guidance to all beings (*lil'ālamīn*)" The Qur'an 3:96. Muslims believe that this place was first established by Adam. In due course Abraham was guided to this place (The Qur'an, 22:26) and he, along with his son Ishmael, 'raised up the foundation' and built the House. (The Qur'an, 2:127).
67. The Qur'an, 35:24.
68. The Qur'an, 2:253.
69. The Qur'an, 14:35-41; 4:163, 164; 2:136.
70. The Qur'an, 16:123.
71. The Qur'an, 3:67, 68.
72. The Qur'an, 20: 31-36; and 14:163, 164.
73. The Qur'an, 3:42, 43.
74. The Qur'an, 3:59, 60.
75. The Qur'an, 4:171; 112:1-4.
76. The Qur'an, 4:157.
77. The Qur'an, 2:286.
78. al-Bukhārī. Book 6, Chapter 1, Hadith 3.
79. The Qur'an, 5:82-83.
80. The Qur'an, 29:46.
81. The Qur'an, 41:6.
82. The Qur'an, 3:144.
83. The Qur'an, 95:4.
84. The Qur'an, 2:34 along with 18:110.
85. The Qur'an 2:22, 30; 14:33; 16:10-16; 10:14.
86. The Qur'an, 51:56.
87. The Qur'an, 59:19.
88. The Qur'an, 95:5.
89. The Qur'an, 7:158.
90. The Qur'an, 21:107.
91. The Qur'an, 6:32.
92. al-Bukhārī. Book 26, Chapter 99, Hadith 125.
93. The Qur'an, 87:16, 17.
94. The Qur'an, 77:8-10; 78:19, 20; 79:1-9.
95. The Qur'an, 13:2; 36:40; 55:5.
96. The Qur'an, 75:6-10.
97. The Qur'an, 77:1-14; 78:18-20.
98. The Qur'an, 79:14.
99. The Qur'an, 99:7, 8.
100. The Qur'an, 24:24.
101. The Qur'an, 36:65.
102. The Qur'an, 55:56, 74.
103. The Qur'an, 55:26, 27; 75:22, 23; al-Bukhārī, Book 27, Chapter 145, Ḥadīth 317; Book 30, Chapter 536, Ḥadīth 1092, 1093, 1094.
104. The Qur'an, 2:25, 87, 277; 3:57; 4:57, 122, 173; 5:9, 92, 93; 7:42; 10:4, 9; 11:23; 13:29; 14:23; 18:30, 107; 19:96; 22:14, 23, 56; 24:55; 26:227; 29:7, 9, 58; 30:15, 45; 31:8;

- 32:19; 34:4; 35:7; 38:24, 28; 41:8; 42:22, 26; 45:30; 47:2, 12; 48:29; 65:11; 84:25; 85:11; 95:6; 98:7; 103:3.
105. al-Bukhārī. Book 1, Chapter 2, Ḥadīth 7.
 106. al-Bukhārī. Book 1, Chapter 2, Ḥadīth 7.
 107. al-Bukhārī. Book 2, Chapter 296, Ḥadīth 423.
 108. Burhān al-Dīn ‘Alī (A.H. 593/1196 A.D.) Hidāyah. (English translation) P. 239-240. Fatāwā’i ‘Ālamgīri. Vol. IV. P. 207. Mulla: Principles of Mohomedan Law, Revised Edition by M. Hidayatullah (former Chief Justice of India) P. 217.
 109. Burhān al-Dīn ‘Alī Hidāyah P. 239-240.
 110. Burhān al-Dīn ‘Alī Hidāyah P. 239.
 111. Burhān al-Dīn ‘Alī Hidāyah P. 240. Fatāwā’i ‘Ālamgīri Vol. IV. P. 207. al-Nawāwī, Muḥī al-Dīn Abū Dhakariyā Yahyā ibn Sharīf al-Nawāwī: Minhāj al-Tālibīn. English translation by Howard London, 1914, P. 232. Minhāj al-Tālibīn is regarded as the standard text of Islamic Law especially by the Shāfi‘ī School of Law.
 112. Hidāyah P. 240. Minhāj al-Tālibīn P. 232. Principles of Mohomedan Law P. 218.
 113. The Qur’an, 16:97; 49:13.
 114. The Qur’an, 4:3, 4.
 115. The Qur’an, 2:229, 230. For a woman’s right to divorce her husband see al-Bukhārī, Book 22, Chapter 167, Ḥadīth 252, 253, 254.
 116. The Qur’an, 24:31.
 117. The Qur’an, 2:184, 185; Muftī Muhammad Shafi‘-*Ma’arif al-Qur’an*, Vol. 1, P. 449. al-Bukhārī, Book 20, Chapter 208, Ḥadīth 296. A woman is exempted from prayers during her indisposition. She is not obliged to make up the prayers she missed during that period. (al-Bukhārī, Book 20, Chapter 222, Ḥadīth 313).
 118. The Qur’an, 2:228; 4:10, 11, 12.
 119. The Qur’an, 4:10, 11, 12.
 120. Muftī Muhammad Shafi‘: *Ma’arif al-Qur’an*, Vol. 1, P. 549. While commenting on the verse 2:228 The Grand Mufti of Pakistan observes: The Prophet “gave a law which was based on justice and equity where by the rights of women on men were given the same recognition as was enjoyed by men. She was made free and independent...”.
 121. The Qur’an 4:13, 14, 35. The Prophet said “the best of women is one whose sight fills you with joy, who is pleased to fulfil your wish and who guards her chastity and belongings in your absence.” *Ma’arif al-Qur’an*, Vol. 2, P. 398.
 122. The Qur’an, 49:13.
 123. The Qur’an, 9:103, 19:13.
 124. The Qur’an, 9:60.
 125. Muhammad Hamidullah. Introduction to Islam, P. 75.
 126. The Qur’an, 2:275, 276, 278; 3:130; 4:161; 30:39. al-Bukhārī, Book 8, Chapter 424, Ḥadīth 656, 657.
 127. Muhammad Hamidullah. Introduction to Islam, P. 77.
 128. The Qur’an, 2:263.
 129. The Qur’an, 2:183-187.
 130. Al-Bukhārī, Book 7, Chapter 317, Ḥadīth 486.
 131. The Qur’an, 2:183. al-Bukhārī, Book 7, Chapter 311, Ḥadīth 477.
 132. The Qur’an, 2:187. al-Bukhārī, Book 8, Chapter 383, Ḥadīth 600, 601, 602.
 133. The Qur’an, 2:127; 22:26; (see note 66 above).

134. The Qur'an, 3:97.
135. Malcolm X. Autobiography, P. 340.
136. Malcolm X. Autobiography, P. 338.
137. Muhammad Hamidullah. Introduction to Islam, pp. 4-5.
138. Ibid., P. 5.
139. *Mishkāt Al-Masābīh*, Ibid., Book IV, Chapter XLIV, P. 229.
140. *Mishkāt Al-Masābīh*, Ibid., Book IV, pp. 488-497.
141. Ibid., P. 229.
142. Muhammad Hamidullah. Introduction to Islam, pp. 5-6.
143. Al-Bukhārī, Book 15, Chapter 422, Ḥadīth 1031.
144. The Qur'an, 96:1-5.
145. *Mishkāt Al-Masābīh*, Ibid., No. 77, pp. 356-358.
146. The Qur'an, 74:1-7, 93:1-11.
147. Al-Bukhārī, Book 15, Chapter 444, Ḥadīth 1038.
148. Al-Bukhārī, Book 15, Chapter 423, Ḥadīth 1032, 1034, 1036; Chapter 447, Ḥadīth 1042; Chapter 448, Ḥadīth 1043; Chapter 449, Ḥadīth 1047, 1048.
149. Muhammad Hamidullah, Ibid. P.10.
150. Muhammad Hamidullah, Ibid. P.10.
151. Muhammad Hamidullah, Ibid. P.10.
152. al-Bukhārī, Book 15, Chapter 459, Ḥadīth 1087.
153. al-Bukhārī, Book 15, Chapter 462, Ḥadīth 1113.
154. al-Bukhārī, Book 15, Chapter 459, Ḥadīth 1092; Chapter 465, Ḥadīth 1117.
155. al-Bukhārī, Book 15, Chapter 460, Ḥadīth 1108; Chapter 464, Ḥadīth 1116.
156. Muhammad Hamidullah, Ibid., P.12.
157. Ibid., pp. 171-173.
158. Ibid., P.12.
159. al-Muslim, Ibid., Vol. III, Chapter DCCXXI, No. 4360.
160. The Qur'an, 22:39, 40. Comments on the verses, Muhammad Shafī - *Ma'ārif al-Qur'an*, Vol. VI, P. 270.
161. Muhammad Hamidullah, Ibid., P.29.
162. al-Bukhārī, Book 12, Chapter 258, Ḥadīth 379.
163. al-Bukhārī, Book 15, Chapter 462, Ḥadīth 1114.
164. The Qur'an, 2:183.
165. The Qur'an 5:90.
166. al-Muslim, Ibid., Vol. III, Chapter DCCXXXVI, Footnote 2256.
167. The Qur'an confirmed it as a great victory, 48:1-3.
168. Muhammad Hamidullah, Ibid., pp. 13-14.
169. Muhammad Hamidullah, Ibid., P. 14.
170. The Qur'an, 17:81.
171. The Qur'an, 12:92 (The Prophet forgave his enemies and repeated the same words as were spoken by Prophet Joseph when he announced forgiveness for his brothers).
172. The Qur'an, 3:103.
173. The Qur'an, 9:128.
174. The Qur'an, 33:21.