

THE QURAN

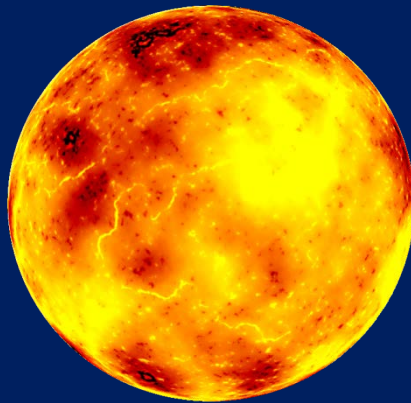
GOD'S MESSAGE TO MANKIND

New Millennium Exposition

An exegesis for the 21st. Century

English rendition from the original Arabic by

Paigham Mustafa



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

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*You never expected this guidance to come your way,
but this is a mercy from the One who sustains you.*

[The Quran: verse 28:86]

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Bismallah-Alrahman-Alraheem

In the name of God, Most Merciful, Most Beneficent



THE QURAN

GOD'S MESSAGE TO MANKIND

This is a declaration for all mankind,
a guidance and an explanation for those
who seek protection from lasting harm.

[Verse 3:138]

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THE QURAN: GOD'S MESSAGE TO MANKIND

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THE QURAN

Good News for the Righteous And a Warning for the Corrupt

[Verses 6:48; 17:105]

Why do we need Permanent Values from the Quran and accountability to God?

Collective wisdom is just as fallible as individual wisdom and even democracies cannot be used as a metric for ethics. Remember: slavery was legal, genocide was legal and apartheid was legal. The world needs an external set of values and laws; values and laws that are found in the Quran.

Consider the treatment of humanity: for millennia the world's religious, atheist and secular leaders and governments have applied their collective genius to the riddle of statehood. The results have been corruption, secret sex societies, cultic obsession by the elite with child sex, secrecy, aggression, state sponsored homicide and genocide, war, famine, infanticide, slavery, control, exploitation, manipulation and abuse of the masses in a variety of ways so scary that it defies description.

[SEE VERSE 8:25]

***Wisdom without power is preaching.
Power without wisdom is barbarism.***

The unexamined life is not worth living.

Socrates

Greatness may be thrust on some, but goodness can be thrust on none. Those who accept this guidance will do so because they use not their sight, but their insight, to see the profoundness of this message. You must deliberately and of your own free will choose the path pointed out to you.

God does not compel you to accept His way: such forced goodness would have no value. It is not your abilities that show your worth, but your choices. You are accountable only for your actions and will be judged by the measure of your endeavour.

[SEE VERSES 10:28-30]

***In the creation of the heavens and the earth,
and the alternation of the night and the day,
there are signs for those who possess intelligence.***

[The Quran verse 3:190]

IF ISLAM IS TRUE, WHY THEN ARE MUSLIMS IN SUCH A DESPICABLE STATE?

In the Quran, to those who follow His guidance,
God promises peace, security, health, wealth and happiness.
Indeed, but do we not witness something totally different?

The Muslim nations are some of the least developed, the poorest,
the most corrupt and the most tyrannised countries in the world.

God promises those who follow His guidance victory and success, yet
what we see is that the majority of professed believers live in failed
nations and in abject poverty. So why this blatant contradiction?
Does God not keep His promise? Or is it that the Muslims, while
believing they follow the Quran, are in fact not doing so?

ISLAM AND MUSLIMS: AN EVALUATION

SEE PAGE 17

In the Quran freedom of belief is a right granted by God. Muslims are those who are tolerant of other beliefs.

Tolerance treat each other well 17:53. **Debate** in best manner 29:46; 42:37.
Invite with wisdom 16:125. **Disregard** opposition in kind manner 73:10.
Don't berate other beliefs 6:108. **Freedom** of belief 109:1-6; 18:29; 25:63.
Don't say you are not a believer to one who offers peace 4:94. **Show** leniency 45:14.
Forgive, advocate tolerance 7:199. **Those** who believe and then disbelieve 3:90; 4:137.
Respond to make friends of your enemies 41:34. **Respond** with peace 8:61.
Friendship with disbelievers 60:8. **No compulsion** in Deen-Islam 2:256; 4:137.
Disregard opposition in kind manner 73:10. **Kind** words better than insult 2:263.
Treat all people amicably 2:83. **Better** to pardon 42:40-43; **Racism**, no basis 49:13.
Righteous seek protection when angered 42:37-43. **Suppress** anger 3:134.
Only God can call to account 13:40. **Do not kill**, except in justice 17:33.
Aggression forbidden: maintain good will and tolerance,
but not peace at any price: 4:89-91; 8:39; 8:58; 42:39; 42:41; 47:35.

This book is dedicated to all
people who think. They *are* different.

THE QURAN: NEW MILLENNIUM EXPOSITION

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NOTE

The footnotes provided throughout this work give explanations to add additional insight to concepts and words that some readers may encounter for the first time. These explanations are necessary to help understand the Quran's original message that might be difficult to appreciate without some amplification.

Religion, deen and Deen-Islam

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE?

Religion, whether theistic or non-theistic, is a subjective experience shaped by the susceptibilities and prejudices of individuals and is mainly a personal reflection. A traditional religious life is occupied with rites and rituals with the sole aim to attain salvation, liberation from sin and rescue from evil through a saviour or by appeasing a chosen deity, prayer, pilgrimages, miracles, austerities, self-mortification, penance and mercy being the main routes to a heaven. Entry to this paradise is available only to those belonging to the particular fold and all others are excluded and sent to hell, a place of torture to pay for their life of sin.

Any ordered way of living is a deen – this includes all social and political systems - and everyone lives by a system of some description. Deen-Islam is the holistic social system that encompasses everything, operates according to the ordinance of God and is the System of God. This is based on the Absolute Laws and Permanent Values that are the foundations of the optimum standard that develops the Self: the human personality. Implementing this shows measurable results not only for the individual but has meaning for society as a whole and is concerned with the progress and welfare of all mankind. The fabric that holds together and moves life forward is founded on action through good deeds and underpinned by accountability. It is this, and only this, that raises the measure of human endeavour.

Religion, any religion, is an opiate, designed to subdue and control the masses who resign their intellect to others. Deen-Islam on the other hand is a stimulant that invigorates individuals into positive action and raises the measure of human value by developing the Self, making it fit for this life and the life yet to come. This development can be attained by anyone who aligns his or her beliefs with the Absolute Laws and Permanent Values found in the Quran, and Quran alone, with ultimate accountability to the One God and to the One God alone.

Unlike religion, the Quran confirms that salvation for those who follow this guidance is not in attaining a state of bliss, but a positive achievement, the acquisition of enhanced values and each individual creates a new paradise by realising his or her potentialities. The reward of salvation is not a well-earned rest but a greater zeal for action and renewed outlook of an ambition, which is the life yet to come. In Deen-Islam, to achieve salvation is to prove one's fitness for entering on a higher plane of existence in the next life.

The only way for people to achieve the promised state of peace and security, both here and the life yet to come, is to break away from all religions, all false teachings, and all fabricated systems that have a stranglehold on mankind. God has assured every man, woman and child an exalted status only if they believe and follow His guidance. People therefore have to return to the only consistent source of this guidance: the Quran. No reasonable person can deny that we need order, and it is Deen-Islam that provides the ultimate social system for *all* mankind.

When intelligent people look at the absurdities and futility of religion they often reject God, when in reality they should reject religion. It is religion that steals the identity of God and distorts it, while Deen-Islam properly defines God, His System and mankind's position and role within that system.

It was to undo and loosen the vicious grip of religion on humanity, and to restore Deen-Islam as an effective code of guidance that God sent His messengers amongst all communities from time to time. This culminated in the final detailed and complete guidance of the Quran. It is the Quran that deconstructs religious thought of all description and replaces it with God's System: the Deen-Islam, the dynamic order for social reform. The Deen-Islam invigorates people to establish the system designed for all people. Moving into the system of *Deen-Islam*, as given in the Quran, and the Quran alone, replaces fear with security and turmoil with peace. The challenges of life: see verses and footnotes 3:154; 5:48; 6:165; 18:7; 94:5-6; 97:1-5; 8:75 ; 7:75; 16:30 and 26:71; 37:125-128.

FOREWORD

The two most important days in your life are the day you were born and the day you find out why.

Mark Twain

DISCOVER THE MEANING OF LIFE

Whether you are a muslim or not, the Quran¹ is a compelling read. Now for the first time, here is an exposition in English that really is different. The values and concepts, however, are entirely as originally expounded when the Quran was first revealed, but now with the added clarity and accuracy of an improved translation, this exegesis is a far better rendition than any of its predecessors, or that of any edition available today. Also the *Quranic thought process* that had deteriorated, stagnated and stunted progress has been reconstructed and strengthened on its original foundations.²

If the word 'Islam' conjures up a medieval image frequently projected by some of the media, and in no small way substantiated by many sections of the self-appointed 'guardians of faith', then prepare yourself to be enlightened.

The Quran says that people develop by the measure of their endeavour and that is why it puts human beings at the centre of a moral outlook that is the very fabric of society. Individuals, communities and the world are the focus of its attention to progress and a prosperous life, it encourages all men and women to develop their Self by facing up to the inevitable challenges of this world. The Quran says that life is continuous and that by developing the Self, the human being makes himself fit, not only for this life but also for the life yet to come. From a modest being he has the potential and opportunity to become an eminent creation ready to take on greater and more rewarding challenges.

¹ **The Quran**, often wrongly transliterated as the *Koran*, for muslims, is the revealed word of God. Originally conveyed in Arabic by the *malaika* Gabriel to Muhammad, as God's message to mankind, Muhammad being the last of the messengers and the Quran as the complete and final testament. The Quran is one of the most influential books in the world, and therefore deserves careful consideration. Previously a challenging read, this exposition makes it easy to understand especially for those who are unable to appreciate it in its original language. This is an exposition, not a translation, therefore the phrasing used is to convey the *meaning* of the many-faceted words of the original Arabic. For example verse 50:43 states "We are the ones who control life and death, to Us is the final return." It is impossible to present in English (or perhaps any other language) the force of the five-times repeated 'We' in the one sentence of the original.

² **There is a distinction** between 'muslim', the adjective for an individual who follows the Absolute Laws and Permanent Values in the Quran and Quran alone, and 'Muslim' with a capital M, a label and a title for those who profess to follow the Quran but in practice have other doctrines and rites and rituals not found in the Quran. A person need not be called a *muslim* in order to be one. Any suitable description (i.e. submitter, humanitarian etc.) may be used instead, the key aspect being that they believe and follow guidance in the Quran alone. See verses and footnotes 3: 199; 22:78; 28:53.

To enable this the Quran provides the means through the Social System it terms as *Deen-Islam*. This is the *optimum* system that offers something no religion, alternative belief or political ideology can ever give.

The Quran draws attention to man's fantastic surroundings. It pushes each person to search, discover and know his world, to harness and manage nature for his own benefit and for the benefit of the world at large. To explore by science and reason is at the heart of all discovery and the Quran inspires man to stretch his mind and imagination.

Championing human rights is a duty, the Quran proclaims. Indeed all who are fit and able are not exempt from striving with their money *and* their lives. Promoting, flourishing and giving life to the natural and human system is an act of great virtue, the Quran stresses, time and time again.

But a good deed or any act of virtue is of no value if its worth is not realised, that is why the Quran underpins all activity with accountability. And it is this that puts the Quran's Permanent Values and Absolute Laws over and above any other.

The Quran vehemently champions the cause not only *against* religion, but also the erroneous innovations and banal traditions appended *to* it. This may seem paradoxical until you understand the comparative difference between 'religion' and 'deen', a word with no English equivalent but in the Quranic context can be translated as the living social order: the System of God.

Religion is a subjective experience shaped by the susceptibilities and prejudices of individuals, while *Deen* is an objective reality that shows measurable results, and is concerned with the progress and welfare of mankind.

The religions masquerading as Islam (and all other religions for that matter) have been properly relegated to the eccentric fringes where all religions belong. The Deen-Islam has been brought forward to re-invigorate people who think, and to reinstate their dignity and establish the order designed for all mankind.

To develop and progress the world needs Permanent Values; the optimum unchanging principles for changing times. This is exactly what the Quran gives.

This book is a first in presenting Islam, the *Deen* in such a forthright, refreshing and objective manner. Issues that are usually swept under the carpet are now brought to the forefront, opening up topics often considered undebatable, in a daring, challenging and thought-provoking manner.

PREFACE

The Quran, literally The Recitation, muslims believe was revealed to a man called Muhammad whom God chose as His final messenger. It was revealed in Arabic because the original recipients were Arabs, but the message is for all mankind, whatever language they speak.

The belief that the Quran has divine authorship is not faith or blind trust, but has firm foundation and substance. One has just to read it to discover that it contains some perceptive information firmly based on scientific facts confirmed by discoveries and research over past few centuries. The intrinsic structure, complete with self-reference, makes it inimitable and unique. On this foundation rest the Permanent Values that are the very fabric of an ordered progressive society living in peace and security.

Those who doubt its authenticity are challenged to produce a like-for-like facsimile; one which like the Quran is without flaws:

You may wish to disregard some of this guidance that is revealed to you and you may be discouraged by it... However, you (Muhammad) are only a warner, It is God who controls all things. If they say, "He (Muhammad) fabricated this recitation," then tell them, "Produce ten verses like these, fabricated, and invite as witnesses whomever you can, other than God, if you are truthful." [Verses 11:12-13].

This is one of the challenges in the Quran. If the author of the Quran is telling you how to defeat Him, then He is certain that He is undefeatable. This challenge has yet to be met. Without a doubt the Quran is unique and forever inimitable.

Those who truly believe and implement this message, do so not because of faith or any mystical experience but because they see the value of its profoundness, its intense, insightful and penetrating wisdom. Once the message is *understood*, its power becomes overwhelming.³

The Quran describes not only how the world works but how it *should* work. It is in fact the moral compass for leading a virtuous life for the welfare and progress of all mankind. Living such a life is important because it develops the Self; the human spirit or personality, making it fit for the next stage in evolution: the life yet to come.

In the Quran, those who lead a life according to the Permanent Values are described as muslims, generally translated as *submitters to God's will*, but the best description is *those who harmonise with His ordinance*: the Deen-Islam. The Deen-Islam is the holistic socio-economic system of God's ordinance and when fully applied brings peace and security for all - not only for the elite in society.

³ **When asked** how they recognise a messenger from God, the believers said that the profound guidance he brought made them believers. See verses and footnotes 7:75; 85:21-22.

While religions and other lifestyles do include some positive moral aspects, it is the Deen-Islam that is based on the Absolute Laws and the Permanent Values underpinned by ultimate accountability to the One God. Unlike religion, this demands strong conviction in *positive action* to develop an individual's personality. Religions, on the other hand, rely on people being 'saved', either through *faith* (blind belief) in a saviour or by the *grace* of God. There is a Bukhari narrative that says 70,000 people will go to heaven *without* being held to account for their actions, and in the Bible it says that people are saved *not* by their good deeds but by the grace of God.⁴

This is in total conflict with the Quranic message where 'good works' are central to the development of the Self, making it fit for the life ahead. Each person is responsible for what they do - it is not our abilities that show who we are, but our choices. Accountability according to God's Law of Requitil ensures that justice is done. Deen-Islam is the perfect system for those who are concerned with *justice*: the criminals are punished and the righteous are rewarded as a direct consequence of their own actions.

The Quran encourages people to form communities where each individual looks after the welfare of others. So belief and action have meaning not only for the individual but for society as a whole. Bad things happen to good people when they care only for themselves. Those who follow this guidance are the ones who not only want to protect themselves from lasting harm but also become the true benefactors of humanity.

The truth will set you free, but first it will test you to see if you are worthy of it. And to look for the truth you must first believe there are advantages in it. The rewards described in the Quran start here, by invigorating life, creating an environment which is just and fair: strengthening communities for a better safe and peaceful future. The rewards are the result and the measure of your endeavour.

Those who accept the Quran will do so because they use, not their sight, but their insight to see the profoundness of this message. You must deliberately and of your own free will choose the path pointed out to you. God does not compel you to accept His way as such forced goodness would have no value.

The Quran was originally revealed to Muhammad, but now anyone who reads it becomes a witness to this covenant with God and as such has an incumbent duty to follow it and be an example for others. As you read it your responsibilities and obligations will unfold before you.

⁴ **Salvation without accountability:** Sahih-al-Bukhari 6059 and the Bible: Titus 3.5. Authentic Bukhari is the Sunni corpus of hadith literature. See verses and footnotes 4:42; 68:37.

INTRODUCTION

*What of this life so full of care, yet to make a sacrifice we do not dare,
The truth we have no time to seek, to fight for justice we are too weak,
A poor life this, if before we die, we do not probe to question why.*

Paigham Mustafa

Born into a Sunni family, Paigham Mustafa completely rejected religion when he discovered Deen-Islam. This may appear paradoxical but can easily be resolved after the comparative difference between *religion* and *deen* has been understood.

Religion is in the main a personal reflection, but deen changes not only the individual, but has meaning for the society at large. Religion - any religion, is an opiate designed to subdue and control the masses who resign their intellect to others. A religious life is occupied with rites and rituals with the sole aim of attaining salvation through a saviour or by appeasing a chosen deity. Deen-Islam on the other hand is a stimulant that invigorates individuals into positive action and raises the measure of human value by developing the Self, making it fit for this life and the life yet to come. This development can be made by *anyone* who aligns his or her values with the Permanent Values found in the Quran, and Quran alone, with ultimate accountability to the One God and to God alone.

It was in 1991 that a visitor to Mustafa's home was able to show from the Quran the anomalies that exist between what people believed and practiced to what was actually in the Quran. The state of affairs transpired not only because the translations were poor, but also because people did not understand what they were reading, even when they could recite the Quran perfectly from memory. Most people rely, as they have always done, on priests, clerics and religious 'scholars' to provide the interpretations. This reliance is misplaced, as leaders and the imams, in their zeal to control people, have created many religions and sects with differing doctrines and rituals - which are all alien to the true nature of Deen-Islam.

Mustafa decided he must find out the truth for himself. To his great surprise he discovered some amazing realities that were hidden from the general view.

The stimulus for this rendition of the Quran came from the 1930s publication *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* by Dr. Muhammad Iqbal, the philosopher of the East who was knighted in 1922 by King George. Like all great men, Iqbal was a thinker and his ideas were exceptionally advanced for his time. His writings and the writings of his contemporaries were the inspiration for this exposition of the Quran.

The compiling of this edition first started in 1991 based on the research of many Quran readers. These people were not all necessarily great philosophers as was Iqbal, but in their own way they contributed their findings to ensure that this rendition is the most thorough to date. The people who helped complete this work sacrificed a great deal to enable this achievement to take place. For that, Mustafa is eternally grateful. This is the work of many great hands and, to borrow and paraphrase a quote from Sir Isaac Newton, Mustafa can genuinely say that he has "seen further and clearer, because [he] stood on the shoulders of giants".

This book does not present anything new. It's not a reconstruction of Islam - which can only be defined by God, who does so in the Quran: this is the reconstruction of thinking *and* Islam. This is *ijtihad*: the endeavour of independent thinking, the door to which most Muslims have closed because of their reliance on interpretations encapsulated in the 9th century and have surrendered their right of independent reflection to their 'scholars' - who have their own self-serving political motives.

The values and concepts advanced here are entirely as originally expounded in the Quran when it was first revealed. This can be checked with the original Arabic text still available today. What has been done is that the 'thought process' which had deteriorated, stagnated and stunted progress has been reconstructed and strengthened on its original foundations. The *religion* of Islam has been properly consigned to the place where all religions belong. The *Deen-Islam* has been brought forward to re-invigorate mankind, reinstate its dignity and establish the System designed for all people.

The Quran says that *muslims* are knowledgeable, forward thinking *and tolerant*, but the traditional Muslims and their imams condemn and persecute those who differ from their medieval interpretation and seek a better understanding.

Someone once said: "*You can stand in a Christian country and say the Bible is false: you go back home alive. Which means Christianity is religion of peace. But, if a person goes to a Muslim country and questions the Quran, he goes home in a body bag. This means Islam is religion of violence, hatred and suppression.*" - Is this really the *true* face of Islam?

Does this also mean people remain Muslims only because they fear being killed? Do they then instead become 'non-practising' Muslims, saying they believe, when in reality they do not?

This is just one reason why it is important to understand the true meaning of the Quran. Those individuals that do, will become *muslims* with the power of true knowledge to support them and the ability to answer many challenging and difficult questions.

THE PROLOGUE

Do not read to contradict and refute,
but to weigh and consider.

*I do not feel obliged to believe that the same God who has endowed
us with sense, reason, and intellect has intended us to forgo their use.*
Galileo Galilei

ISLAM AND MUSLIMS: AN EVALUATION

They are those who believe in this guidance and lead a life of good works according to it. For them enjoyment and happiness is in this world as well as in the life yet to come. This is God's unchangeable law. Such is the greatest achievement.
[Verse: 10:63-64]

If Islam is true, why then are Muslims in such a despicable state?

In the Quran, to those who follow His guidance, God promises peace, security, health, wealth and happiness. Indeed, Muslims are not too shy in telling the world they have the best religion - but do we not witness something that is totally different?

The Muslim countries are some of the least developed, the poorest, the most corrupt and the most tyrannised countries in the world.

God promises those who follow His guidance victory and success, yet what we see is that the majority of professed believers are living in failed nations and in abject poverty. So why this blatant contradiction? Does God not keep his promise? Or is it that the Muslims, while believing they follow the Quran, are in fact not doing so?⁵

All over the world the professed Muslims are perpetually in a pitiful condition. This is still their predicament, even after the various infusions of fresh thoughts that are occasionally injected to transform their plight. Despite all efforts, they still remain intellectually restricted and materially poor.

In the last few decades they have also become more demonised and despised. Their beliefs, culture and general living standards are considered to be backward and medieval. The media is continually shaming them for their actions, branding them terrorists and barbaric people. Indeed, their activities attract and often justify such labels.

This is not exactly the eminence God promises the believers.

Since their actions affect citizens of all countries, the time has now come for muslims, intellectuals and all people who want a better world to critically analyse and evaluate the whole of the 'Islamic' tradition, not only from the last few hundred years, but even the millennia before that. And in this evaluation there must be no place for sentiments or prejudice.

Compared to the Europeans and Americans, the Muslims in all parts of the world are in total disarray. This is despite the boast that the current figure of more than one and a half billion Muslims are [READ MORE....](#)

⁵ **The messenger** confirms that his people have indeed abandoned the Quran. See verse 25:30.

LOST IN TRANSLATION

In my formative years I tried to read the Quran in English but without much success. The obstacle for me was the language. It wasn't my English that gave me trouble, but the style in which it was written. I had a Marmaduke Pickthall translation with archaic words and grammar that became an insurmountable barrier to my enjoyment and understanding of this wonderful book.

I now know that although translators like Pickthall tried to emulate the Quran's original style and rhythm, they missed the point. The Quran is a book of guidance and for it to be of any practical use, the reader must be able to *understand* it, otherwise it loses its function.

Of course for many the Quran remains a *holy* book reserved for *recitation* in prayer and at weddings, funerals and other social functions. Some insist that no attempt should be made to understand it. However, the mistaken belief that continues to be indoctrinated is that the words of the Quran each have many varied and hidden meanings, depending on when and why they were revealed, and that they cannot be understood without a scholar's interpretation - which should be accepted without question. This is an unreasonable view, and does not rest well with those who have indeed *read* the Quran and see many grave anomalies in the translated texts, as it is these that have led to many assorted and disturbing beliefs. The inquiring mind needs to be satisfied.

The Quran states that it is a book that makes things clear. It says that things are clearly explained, without ambiguity and as if this was not plain enough, it boldly states that had it been from any other than God, it would have contained many discrepancies. Surely this means that there is consistency in the message - consistency that can only be achieved by dependable rules of the language. If the translator changes the rules at will, then where is the reliability?

When I find that a word has been translated with a different *shade* of meaning to suit the context of the statement, I can accept it without any hesitation. But when the meaning appears to create ambiguity or confusion, it worries me. It is then I have a tendency to question, not the author, but the translator's skill or indeed the motive.

Unlike some languages, Arabic is not a concept language. The words in Arabic are based on *root* letters. Words that stem from one root may have different *shades* of meanings but the *essence* will remain the same.

An example of this is the root S'L'M. One word that comes from this root is ISLAM. This means submission (i.e. harmonisation) to a set of laws. This could also mean a group of elements subject to fixed laws, e.g. atoms, planets etc. This can also be applied to a set of harmonious values by which

a community - people, birds, insects - live. The word to describe such a community is MUSLIM – also formed from the root S'L'M. In fact, anything or anyone that submits to an absolute law, rule or value (creating or maintaining harmony) can be said to be *muslim*, in English a 'submitter'.

This one example shows that although the two words (Islam and muslim) appear quite different, one describes a physical system or a social order (submission) and the second describes the one that submits to it, i.e. submitter: planets, people, animals etc. within that system or order. The *essence* of the words is the same because importantly, the *root* is the same. Should we take another word with the same root, yet give it a meaning that is different in essence, then we know the translator has made a fundamental error.

This basic rule applies to all the key words in the Quran - same root, same essence - throughout the Quranic vocabulary. Likewise, the word *Quran*, root Q'R and its derivatives *Qari*, *Qiraat* and *Iqra* are all anchored to the same base and have the same substance, although they each carry a different meaning without changing the essence of the root connotation: *Recitation*, *Reciter*, *Recital* and *Recite*, respectively.

While some analogies can be made, to compare the Quranic grammar and structure to just any other language is to degrade it. The Quran needs to be incisive and perfect in its delivery of God's message. Anything less would make it unfit for purpose. Some may still argue that the beauty of the Quranic language is in these variations of meanings. However, this is only a belief and carries no validity. These people have been indoctrinated to leave the thinking to 'scholars', who have their own self-serving agendas.

There are many weaknesses in the traditional translations, not least the hotchpotch of meanings attributed to certain words. This is largely due to the desire and need to conform to prevalent beliefs. Failure to comply with accepted dogma could of course mean being ostracised, or worse, being declared an apostate with the consequences it brings. This alone ensures that little or no change takes place, let alone vibrant discussions needed to keep fresh the living system that God has entrusted us with.

Those who have been brave enough to try to wade through the mire of translations should not be sniped at. Instead, a constructively critical eye should be cast over the findings. These can then either be discredited and discarded or validated and accepted.

To attach arbitrary meanings leaves the Quran open to abuse and is in fact an insult to God. Did He in his infinite wisdom create a message of guidance for all time, yet leave it open to ambiguity? I suspect not.

Paigham Mustafa, February 2006.

QURAN: SELF-REFERENCE

We have revealed this consummate reminder and absolutely We will safeguard it.

[Verse 15:9]

The self-reference theorem can be applied perfectly to the Quran. It works in a similar way to that in which a check digit operates in a barcode. The statements in the Quran can be checked with each other to verify and validate the information. We can see that comparative word occurrences as a logical demonstration of how the Quran meets the test of self-reference, where other books claiming to be divine guidance do not.

There was a fundamental crisis around the turn of the 20th century: a basic disturbance that affected all logic until it was repaired. Logicians realised that for centuries they had left out the concept of 'Self-reference'. For centuries, Aristotle's rule of the 'Excluded Middle' had been used. This rule is a proposition that states "Every proposition is either true or false". But what if that proposition is in itself false? People did not pose this question for centuries; not so in the Quran. If the Quran is what it claims to be then it should be aware of self-reference as applied to its own statements.

Paul Davies, professor of Mathematical Physics at the University of Adelaide in Australia, in his book, 'The Mind of God' (1992), talks about how self-reference shook the very foundations of logic and how, eventually, the issue was resolved. In spite of its superficial plausibility, the formalist interpretation of mathematics received a severe blow in 1931. In that year the Austrian mathematician and logician, Kurt Gödel, proved that there are some mathematical statements for which no systematic procedure is able to determine whether they are true or false. The fact that there can be undecidable propositions in mathematics came as a great shock, because it seemed to undermine the entire logical foundations of the subject.

Gödel's theorem springs from a constellation of paradoxes that surrounds the notion of *self-reference*. The great mathematician and philosopher, Bertrand Russell, demonstrated that the existence of such paradoxes *strikes at the very heart of logic*, and undermines any straightforward attempt to construct mathematics rigorously on a logical foundation.

Gödel went on to adapt the difficulties of self-reference to the subject of mathematics in a brilliant and unusual manner. He considered the relationship between the description of mathematics and the mathematics itself. In this way, logical operations about mathematics can be made to correspond to the mathematical operations themselves, and this is the essence of the self-referential character of Gödel's proof. By identifying the subject with the object - *mapping the description of the mathematics onto the mathematics* - he uncovered a Russellian paradoxical loop that led directly to the inevitability of un-decidable propositions (Davies 1993: pages 100-101). [READ MORE.](#)

ARABIC: THE LANGUAGE OF THE QURAN

The root system of the Arabic language is an unfamiliar concept to most people. Even many religious scholars do not seem to grasp the essential facts of how Arabic words are constructed. This is one of the reasons why the Quran is often poorly translated.

All Arabic words are made from a few component letters, commonly called a 'root'. A root usually consists of three letters (sometimes two or four), which define the meanings of all words formed from the root. By adding various vowels (i.e. changing pronunciation) as affixes, associated meanings can be derived. For example, the Arabic letters S'L'M form the root for the following words: *salaam*: (peace or harmony by conforming and submitting to a law or order), *Islam*: harmonise/conform, *muslim*: one who acts in harmony and conforms. In all these words, you will see the root (component letters) is the same, *and in the same order*, i.e. S'L'M.

Arabic words are therefore made by using word elements such as a prefix (insertion before the word), infix (insertion within the word) or suffix (insertion after the word) that are attached to a base, stem, or root. In a root language, words (and their derivatives) mean what they mean because they are built from other words, these base words are called roots. Now, while many languages, like English for example, are concept based, there are some words that can be likened to the root system, For example if you learn what the word 'obligation' means, you should have no problem when you hear the word 'obligate' or 'oblige' - you use the root to understand the word built from the root. Also loan words from other languages that are root based can show how this works. If you learn that the Greek root word 'khronos' (In English: chronic) means *time*, you should have no problem when you hear the word 'chronicle' or 'synchronise' - you use the root to understand the word built from the root. Here are some examples:

<u>chronic</u>	lasting a long time - especially of illness.
<u>chronicle</u>	a factual account of important events in the order in which they happened.
<u>chronological</u>	arranged in the order in which events happened - chronological order.
<u>chronometer</u>	a device for measuring time exactly.
<u>chronometry</u>	the science of the accurate measuring of time.
<u>chronostratigraphy</u>	the branch of geology concerned with establishing the age of strata of rocks
<u>anachronism</u>	an error in chronology; setting a person, fashion, object etc. in the wrong period (e.g. a clock striking in Shakespeare's Julius Caesar).
<u>synchronise</u>	to arrange for events to happen at the same time.

The important point to understand here is that the essential meaning does not change. One root can form many different words but the essence of the meaning stays the same. Classical Arabic, as one of the most primitive Semitic languages, is primarily a root language. Words get their meaning from the roots they are built from rather than by associating a concept with the word, as you would in a concept language. This gives Quranic Arabic a crystal clear aspect to it; there is no ambiguity or confusion in a classical Arabic sentence. The language is one of clarity, directness, and certainty - qualities that are hard to achieve in other languages. This means that the same word (or derivatives formed from the same root) cannot have different meanings. This essence of the word and its meaning always remains secured to the same root.

Here is an example to illustrate how misunderstandings can occur when the structure of roots is poorly understood:

To gamble means to play games of chance to win money or another specified prize. Are games of chance forbidden in the Quran? The verses of the Quran normally considered to mention gambling are verse 2:219 and verse 5:90. However, gambling is not mentioned here as the word '*maysiru*' has been wrongly translated to mean gambling. If we, for argument's sake, take the usual understanding that it means gambling then how would we translate the same word which also appears in verse 2:280? The translation of the verse 2:280 then would wrongly become: "If the debtor is in difficulty, then wait for a gambling (*maysiru*)."

The correct translation of this verse is, of course: "If the debtor is in difficulty, then wait for an easier time (*maysiru*).". In other words, if someone is unable to pay a debt, then allow additional time to help the debtor. There is only one mention of gambling in the Quran in sura 5:90 where games of chance are termed as abominations.

The word '*maisra*' means additional or extra time. This can be explained further. The origin of this word means 'excess or additional time'. To corroborate this we need to look at both verses 2:280 and 2:219 where the same word is used. In verse 2:219 with its correct meaning: "If the debtor is in difficulty, then wait for an easier time (*maysiru*).". [Verse 2:280], and also: "In (excess time, i.e. free time) there is gross harm and some benefits. But their potential to cause harm is greater than their benefit." [Verse 2:219]. When there is too much time on a person's hands this could lead to mischief. An English idiom aptly says "The devil makes work for idle hands". What this means is that when someone is not busy or being productive, trouble is likely to follow.

The word '*zaka*' is traditionally translated as 'charity/poor due' and sometimes, correctly as 'pure', as in verse 19:19. However, '*sadaqat*' which means sincere is also translated as charity as in verse 58:13 in which both

words appear, therefore causing some confusion. Also the word '*haji*' is wrongly translated as 'pilgrimage' and as 'dispute', but it is '*jadali*' that means to dispute or argue and both these words appear in verse 2:197. When words are wrongly translated it highlights the deficiency in understanding their true and proper meanings. Another example is the use of words '*bayta*' and '*buyat*'. Traditionally translated as 'house' and 'family/people' both these are wrong as can be seen in verse 33:33 in which they both appear. The proper meaning is 'system' and 'house' as can be confirmed by the roots of the words - this is true for all words shown here as examples and for other words throughout the Quran.⁶

The Quran can and should be translated into other languages in order for people to receive the message (see Verses 26:198-201 and 41:44-45). Today the Quran has been translated into many languages and is available to people around the world. However, it is essentially difficult, if not impossible, to translate anything into another language in the same style as the original and translating from Arabic is no different. An English translation or exposition must employ arbitrary and precise words for the many-faceted and jewel-like phrases of the Arabic, and the more literal it is, the greyer and more colourless it must be. Even a simple sentence as: "We are the ones who control life and death, to Us is the final return." [Verse 50:43]. It is impossible to present in English (or perhaps any other language) the force of the five-times repeated "We" in the short sentence of the original.⁷

The Arabic in the Quran is a clear and precise language [verse 26:195]. It is a highly developed instrument of communication that allows it to express important concepts with a high level of accuracy. For example, the verbs and adjectives can selectively and unmistakably refer to males, females, or two people, or more than two people. The efficiency of Arabic can be illustrated, for example '*qaalataa*' in verse 28:23 requires four words in English: "The two women said".

In this New Millennium Exposition, the word 'he' is used for both 'he' and 'she'. This is only to maintain the flow of reading and does not necessarily imply only the male gender. Also when in this exposition God is referred to as 'He', this does not imply that God is male. God is neither male nor female, God is above gender. In the same way, in Arabic 'the door' is

⁶ **Words generally mistranslated:** with correct meanings in brackets: *sadaqat* (truth/ sincerity), zakaa (pure) and solaa (commitments) - all three appear in verse 58:13. *haji* (challenge/ confront) and *jadali* (argue), both appear in verse 2:197. *bayta* (system) and *buyat* (home), both appear in verse 33:33. See also verse and footnote 71:28. *afu* (pardon) and *ghafur* (protect), both appear in verse 58:2. *nabi* (envoy) and *rasul* (messenger) both appear in verses 7:157; 22:53. Please see footnotes to verses and also read the Quranic Concepts section.

⁷ **Professor** H.A.R. Gibb, Modern Trends in Islam.

masculine and 'the window' is feminine, even though we know that neither of these things have gender. In English, however, when God is referred to as 'He' it can create the subconscious impression that God is male, and when God is referred to as the 'Father', it reinforces the image of God as particularly male. Similarly when God speaks the word 'We' is used and this does not represent multiplicity implying that God is one of many acting together, but shows the majesty of God as the sustainer of all things.

What makes this rendition different?

Arabic is the language in which the Quran was first revealed, because the first recipients were Arabs. It is important to understand the basic structure of Arabic as used in the Quran for those who wish to know the Quran with some accuracy, and to appreciate why some of the fundamental aspects of Deen-Islam have been dealt with differently from the traditional understanding.

While translations try to mirror what is said in the original text, an exposition is an interpretation that *conveys the message* in a way that the recipient can easily understand, without necessarily trying to imitate the linguistic style or structure of the original. Where the use of language does not detract from the message, the original structure can be maintained, as it has been in this rendition. This may give the verses a more 'Shakespearean' tone but also gives them character and distinction and sets them apart from ordinary prose.

However, nothing can replace the original Quran in Arabic. This rendition is presented only as an endeavour to express the original meaning of the Quranic message in everyday English. This is by no means a definitive work, in the course of time other, better interpretations may appear and should be welcomed.

The Deen-Islam, the Quranic Social Order, is grossly misunderstood and this is perpetuated by poor translations of the Quran: a metamorphosis has taken place: a unique and dynamic social system, the Deen-Islam, has been changed into a perverse *religion* masquerading as Islam. The very fact that there are so many versions practised by diverse sects is evidence enough that there is something seriously wrong.

Traditional readers may not recognise some of the concepts elucidated here, just as Muhammad, to whom the original message was given, would not recognise any of the perversions practiced today.

None of these concepts are new, of course. While the Deen-Islam, the social order, has always maintained the same enduring Permanent Values, when we look around, the 'Islam' we see today has unrecognisably changed into a religion: hollow, ritualised and utterly meaningless - in fact, the same as any other religion. This rendition has pruned all the superfluous

elements and the embellishments of tradition, culture and political bias and reverted to the original text of the Quran to reconstruct the tenets of Deen-Islam to its former pristine status.

The words in this rendition have been checked to correspond to their roots so that the meaning remains consistent throughout the reading. Some of the words have been left in the original Arabic, as the corresponding English meanings are either completely deficient or totally distorted - however, an explanation is provided in such cases. The English language has liberally absorbed many foreign, including Arabic words, and the introduction of some new words can only add to its richness.

Arabic words have been translated according to the context to give an accurate understanding of the verse. For example, the word '*hadith*' has been translated as narration, remark, discourse or message, depending on the best fit to explain the verse. The reason why synonyms are used for this and some other words is to convey the many facets of the Arabic words. This helps express the different shades of the meanings while remaining true to the root. This technique is necessary due to the deficiency in English that no single word projects the depth and breadth of some Arabic words found in the Quran. The context identifies and confirms that the meaning is correctly transposed in accordance with the root.

It will be very useful to read the 'Quranic Concepts' section for a better understanding of the Quranic perspective and how it differs from traditional beliefs. Also the reader will be able to appreciate why the footnotes give cross references to words which at first appear unrelated. For example, the words '*haji*' and '*jadai*' are shown together. Why is this? Hajj means to challenge or confront, and jadal means to argue, but in traditional translations '*haji*' is shown to mean pilgrimage *and* argue, however, it is only jadal that means argue. This strange murky water needs to be made clear so that when reading the Quranic exposition it is consistent and can be understood with ease.

As previously mentioned, the Arabic language derives its vocabulary from root words. Conjugations of the root word can produce new derivatives and generally these derivatives are constructed in accordance with established vocalic moulds or patterns to which certain prefixes or suffixes are added. The Arabic verbs have two 'voices' - active and passive.

It is common to see in the Quran a prefix like '*ma*' or '*mu*' placed before a word to form a new word in the same class. The two parts are joined together, written as one word. A suffix can also be placed after a word so that a new word is formed. The suffix decides which word class the new word belongs to.

These appear only in the perfect and imperfect and they are constructed according to established moulds or patterns. The imperfect is formed by

the addition of prefixes and suffixes that indicate the form of the verb as well as by the gender and number of the participants of the action. Being specific is a strength of the Arabic language and it does not leave room for ambiguity.

The Arabic in the Quran is very precise but there are those who wrongly claim that the Arabic in the Quran is inferior as a definitive language. It would be prudent to remember that, at the time of writing, Arabic was among the most developed languages of the time. Even now the Arabic in the Quran is exceptional in its consistency, only the understanding has deteriorated with time. From another perspective, God used the most current and up to date language of that era to explain a simple and perfectly defined message. After all, it is doubtful that anyone on earth speaks God's language, thus he wisely chose to use the *lingua franca* of the time. Subsequently, however, the original meanings were contorted and as a consequence the original message became beyond recognition, changing the perception of the Quran from a book of guidance to a book of religion.

Allegorical verses

The main two categories of verses are clearly explained in verse 3:7 of Sura Aal-e-Imran:

"He sent down to you this revelation containing straight forward guidance, which constitutes the essence of these decrees, as well as allegorical narratives, descriptions and explanations. Those who harbour doubts in their hearts will pursue the symbolic meanings and create difficulties and confusion and construe distracting illusions. The proper interpretations are known by God and clearly understood by those well founded in knowledge. They say, 'We believe in this, all of it comes from the One who sustains us.' Only those who possess intelligence will take heed."

We should not wrestle with the metaphorical and allegorical verses trying to find hidden meanings without first understanding the basic message and guidance. Since Arabs were the first recipients of the Quran, descriptions of heaven, hell and some other situations are illustrated by using symbolic language so that they could easily be understood even by a largely illiterate population. While these figurative descriptions may help to illustrate certain places or event, they are still allegories and should not be taken literally.

The verses in the Quran are structured in a way to inform and enlighten the reader at many levels. As stated at the beginning of verse 3:7, the commands, permanent values and general guidance are straightforward and can be followed easily, other information is given as allegorical examples and scientific knowledge. Only those, the scientists and academics will be able to understand their proper interpretations. The message is clear: we should first apply the obvious standards and values which will have an immediate and positive effect on our lives before we attempt to understand the deeper, more complex meanings.

Other information and footnotes

The footnotes give a brief description of the word used or the concept introduced and the last section explains the Quranic concepts in more detail. Furthermore, these are also cross-referenced to show that a continuity of meaning is expressed throughout the rendition. These references validate the root and its usage, demonstrating consistency, and also show that the meaning does not change, as it wrongly does in traditional translations to support innovated rituals or ideas.

When reading the Quran it should be noted that verses relating to any one particular subject may not be found together. So it is important to read all the relevant verses together in order to understand the context and substance of the message, decree or set of values given. In his translation, *The Message of the Quran*, Muhammad Asad has made some excellent points. He said: *"The Quran must be viewed not as a compilation of individual injunctions and exhortations but as one integral whole: that is, as an exposition of an ethical doctrine in which every verse and sentence has an intimate bearing on other verses and sentences, all of them clarifying and amplifying one another. Consequently, its real meaning can be grasped only if we correlate every one of its statements with what has been stated elsewhere in its passages, and explain its concepts by means of frequent cross-referencing, always subordinating the particular to the general and the incidental to the intrinsic. Whenever this rule is faithfully followed, we realise that the Quran is its own best commentary."*

The reader should not hesitate to carry out further research in order to check the accuracy of verses and to get a better understanding. The reader may also want to use some reference works, firstly an Arabic Quran is a must - a transliteration can also be helpful if you are not familiar with the Arabic text. Also other references such as a lexicon and a concordance can be very useful, although traditional works may not be entirely accurate, simply because they have chosen to follow custom rather than the proper rules of the language. This is why they suffer from having a peculiar view of meanings. For example, in Kassiss Concordance the root Z'K'W is shown to have five derivatives, one of which is given the meaning of *alms* and four have been given the meanings of *pure, innocent, clean, faultless, to purify, to cleanse, purifies*. Also the root S'L'W has been shown to have only two derivatives, when in fact it has more than twenty. And also the meanings given to the two forms are wrongly diverse; *place of prayer, prayer, worship or oratories*. The same root (S'L'W) in some translations also gives such inconsistent meanings as: *prayer, blessing, honour or synagogues*.

Attaching inconsistent meanings is typical of all traditional translations this is why they are replete with anomalies. For example, the two translations by Rashad Khalifa state that it is the first English rendering by

a Muslim whose mother tongue is Arabic. However, this only provides evidence that knowing Arabic as a mother tongue is no guarantee that you understand the Quran. To illustrate this point both Khalifa's translations of verse 4:3 are worth looking at. The first lines of this verse are quoted here:

Khalifa *First edition*: If you deem it in the best interest of the orphans (to give them a home), you may marry their mother if you like; you may marry two of them, or three, or four.

Khalifa *Second edition*: If you deem it best for the orphans, you may marry their mothers - you may marry two, three, or four.

Now it does not take a native Arabic speaker, or even a scholar to see the glaring error in the interpretation of this verse. The question that should now be asked is: how on earth do you marry the *mother* of an *orphan*, let alone two, or three or four of them?

It has to be said, that although Kahlifa is severely discredited by his second edition, along with his claims to be one of God's appointed messengers, his first edition generally remains one of the better translations of the last century.

Abdullah Yousaf Ali's translation is one of the most popular, but most readers do not know that Yousaf Ali used an Urdu version and translated it into English with no reference to the original Arabic. He simply followed the traditions confirming prevalent beliefs. His translation of Verse 4:3, though not quoted here, does not give any clearer a picture than does Khalifa's. Ali's translation, as with most traditional translations, of the word *solaa-waa-tun* is astonishing. In verse 22:40 he has translated it as *synagogues* while in verse 2:157 he has translated it as *blessings*. Some, just as bizarrely, translate it as churches or oratories. Generally speaking, it has to be said that Ali's translation is no worse than any of his contemporaries.

When translators overlook such simple matters that are easy to check, what of the other inconsistencies that are not so easy to verify?

Unless you make yourself familiar with the Quran and understand the structure of the Arabic language, traditional translations can be confusing and misleading. However, for those who seek the truth, the Quran is enough.⁸

The reader should approach the Quran with sincerity, and keep his or her mind open and free from all preconceived notions and traditional *religious* ideas. If this is done, the meaning of God's message will become clear.

⁸ **The sincere who seek the truth** never fail to understand it: The Most Merciful who teaches the Quran. Verses 55:1-2. Once revealed by God He explains the Quran 75:16-19.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Bismallah-Alrahman-Alraheem

In the name of God, Most Merciful, Most Beneficent



LA ILAHA ILALLAH

THERE IS NO AUTHORITY TO RANK WITH GOD

Shall I seek other than God as an authority of law,
when He has revealed this book fully detailed?

[Verse 6:114]

THE QURAN

GOD'S MESSAGE TO MANKIND

As you read the Quran, God's message is being revealed to you.

**THIS SECTION CONTAINS SAMPLE PAGES FROM
THE QURAN: NEW MILLENNIUM EXPOSITION**

THE QURAN

GOD'S MESSAGE TO MANKIND

*Most high is the One who revealed this criterion: the statute,
to His servant, so that he can serve as a warner to the whole world.*
[Verse 25:1]

GOD'S COVENANT WITH YOU

The Quran, although the first recipients were the residents of Arabia, is guidance for the whole world with the history of the Children of Israel featuring prominently as a lesson for all mankind. As mentioned in verse 2:40 the Children of Israel made a covenant with God and attested it with the words "We hear and we obey". In the following verses up to verse 2:44, God is calling them to accept the Quran and they should not confound the truth with falsehood nor conceal the truth knowingly. They are commanded to uphold their commitments and keep them pure. This clearly shows that the Quran was meant not only for the Arabs but for entire mankind, including the Children of Israel. However, the Children of Israel broke their covenant and failed to keep their promise to serve God. As noted in verse 2:93, they defiantly declared: 'We hear but do not obey.'

The Quran addresses all mankind but its *message* is revealed only to those who receive God's mercy, and *it is for the individual to ignite that compassion by taking steps to seek the truth*. The majority may not even realise this as they begin to understand and make the distinction between truth and falsehood [verse 2:185] - however, when you accept God's guidance you are taught by Him to declare "We hear and we obey." [verse 2:285] as a covenant between servant and Master. It is reasonable to say that it is a duty upon the servants to commit themselves totally to what is revealed by Him in His book as a way of life to attain harmony within His System, and furthermore this commitment must be kept pure at all times. As an inaugurating supplication to seek God's protection, the example in verse 2:286 is an excellent way to affirm this.

As you continue your study of the Quran you are reminded in verse 5:1 not to break your covenant with God and in verse 5:3 individuals are told by God that: "This day, I have perfected your Deen, the established Order, perfected My favours upon you and I have decreed for you harmony in the System of this Deen-Islam." The word '*you*' here is actually addressed to all individuals.

As we continue reading His sanctions in 5:4 and 5:5, the next verse 5:6 begins with an instruction of a simple cleansing process, this not only symbolizes our willingness to commit ourselves to His way of life, but for general and spiritual cleanliness in preparation for our daily commitments. The Quran also mentions in the same verse that God wishes no hardship for you - He wishes to cleanse you so that He can complete His favours upon you - so that you may become appreciative of His favours in perfecting the harmonious way of life for you.

In verse 5:7, a strong and clear message is given: "Remember God's favours upon you and the promise that He makes with you, and say: 'We hear and we obey.' You shall follow God's guidance, God is fully aware of your innermost thoughts." It's also important to note that in verse 5:1 God says "Fulfil your promises." - and in 5:7 again the Quran says: "You shall follow God's guidance."

The Quran is in fact a document of *your* covenant and promise with God.⁹

⁹ **Covenant with God:** see verse 2:285. Obedience an obligation 24:53. Blueprint for success: 22:15. Contract with God: 9:111. Knowledge priori / conscience 7:172. Pledging allegiance to God 48:10.

*When you read the Quran, you shall seek refuge in God
from shaitan, the egotistic aspect of your Self, so that
you do not deviate from the right path.*

[Verse 16:98]

Sura 1: The Opening (Al-Fatehah)

In the name of God, Most Merciful, Most Beneficent

[1:1] Praise be to the One God,¹⁰ the Sustainer¹¹ of the universe.

[1:2] The One who is Most Merciful, Most Beneficent¹²

[1:3] The Sovereign: who has full control over the established Order.

[1:4] You alone we serve.¹³ From you alone we seek help for our progress.

[1:5] Guide us along the straight and balanced path of Self-development;¹⁴

[1:6] the path of those who have progressed, not the path of those who have regressed, nor of those who have lost their direction.¹⁵

¹⁰ **God, The One God.** (Arabic: *allah*). God has no names, only attributes. In the Quranic text God is referred to as 'He', this does not mean that God has gender. See Verses and footnotes 112:1-4.

¹¹ **Sustainer:** (Arabic: *rabb*. Root R'B'B). One who provides nourishment for growth and development not only for the body but also for the personality: the human Self. *Rabb* provides all opportunities for realising one's full potential. **The Self:** see verse and footnote 1:5.

¹² **Merciful:** Being merciful is not unconditional forgiveness. Mercy takes place when God provides circumstances for restoring oneself to the original condition before damage was done. Mercy is the balm on a wound and its medical property is also the mercy that heals. The time it takes to heal depends on the extent of the damage done. **Beneficent:** Creating and maintaining suitable environment for healthy growth to realise one's full potential. See verses and footnotes 55:1; 85:16

¹³ **Serve:** (Arabic: *ibadat*. Root B'D. Derivatives: *abd, abada*). Serve is not the same as worship. Service is through deeds and it means to fulfil the requirements or actively to achieve a purpose, as opposed to worship which means to show devotion by rituals, pilgrimages, singing of hymns etc. Hands that serve are better than lips that pray.

¹⁴ **The Self:** (Arabic: *nafs*. Root N'F'S. Derivatives: *anfus nufus*). The Self, or the human personality, is often referred to as the 'spirit' or the 'soul' but these are incomplete descriptions of the 'nafs'. The Self is the latent personality that develops or regresses subject to the activities of the individual. It grows not by the subconscious intentions but through the deliberate and premeditated thoughts and acts that the human being performs, not so much by social influence to which the individual is exposed, but by the way in which he reacts to it. Therefore, it is the duty of society to provide opportunities of Self development and it is the duty of every individual to realise such opportunities to their full potential. Freedom is the indispensable condition of moral life. Morality is irrelevant to a being whose actions are determined by outside forces. This freedom, of course, has its stresses and limitations, nevertheless, his actions are free in the sense that they are self-determined, choosing freely from the alternatives available. The individual feels free when his actions are in accord with the characteristics of his Self. However, these need to be disciplined and restricted but when these restrictions are imposed, it is for the sole purpose of turning them to the best account. The self-imposed restrictions are not derogatory to his status as a free individual, freedom properly channelled is the necessary condition of human development, both individual and social. A weak Self can easily deviate from the right path. Only a strong Self can forge ahead towards the goal of Self-realisation, survive death and take its proper place in the life yet to come. This is in essence the purpose of life and to achieve this goal God provides His guidance in the Quran. See verses and footnotes 6:54; 49:17; 85:16. **Drifter:** see verse 15:42.

Sura 2: The Heifer (Al-Baqarah)

In the name of God, Most Merciful, Most Beneficent

[2:1] A.L.M.¹⁶

[2:2] This is a book, without doubt a reliable and truthful guidance for the righteous who seek to safeguard themselves from lasting harm,¹⁷

THE BENEFACTORS OF HUMANITY

[2:3] who also believe¹⁸ in what is not directly evident, observe their commitments¹⁹ and from what We bestow on them they spend²⁰ and become the benefactors of humanity.

[2:4] And they believe in this revealed guidance and in what was revealed before you and with regard to the continuation of life, they are certain.²¹

¹⁵ **Most** people prefer to travel on a well-established road for speed, safety and comfort. The Quran is the guidance from God, to follow it means that we do not have to suffer the mishaps of trial and error. The Deen-Islam, a working social system, has come to us readymade: to take us on a sure and guaranteed road to peace and security. See verse and footnote 15:42.

¹⁶ **A.L.M:** There are many chapters that start with individual letters perhaps similar to check digits in bar codes systems. The significance of this is something future researchers will discover but does not affect the essential guidance. See verse and footnote: 3:7.

¹⁷ **Righteous** who safeguard themselves: (Arabic: *mutaqeen* from *taqwa*. Root T'Q. Derivatives: *taqi*, *tuqat*, *ittaq*, *muttaqi*). People who take care and safeguard their righteousness and protect themselves from lasting harm by following this guidance and fulfilling their duty to God. The word '*mutaqeen*' has been translated as 'righteous', because safeguarding good works from corruption is an implicit act of being a righteous and conscientious individual.

¹⁸ **The criteria** for a righteous person is given in verse 2:177. The word 'muslim' (root S'L'M) is the Arabic word for one who submits and harmonises with God's law. It is an adjective and expresses the characteristic of an exemplary person who believes and acts to develop his or her Self in order to advance society. No one is born a muslim, but *becomes* a muslim. A person can be a 'muslim' only by choice, not birth and it is his or her character and actions that shows this status, whether the word 'muslim' is used to describe such an individual or not is irrelevant.

¹⁹ **Commitment**, obligation, pledge, steadfastness. (Arabic: *solaa*. Root: S'L'W. Derivatives: *faSolaa*, *yuSilla*, *muSollan* plus others). Commitments mean remaining steadfast with the positive fulfilment of obligations and to keep your promises: to yourself, your family, your friends and everyone else including your community and country. Commitments should be kept pure of any corruptions and within Quranic values. Other usages of *solaa*: 2:157; 2:249; 4:101-102; 5:58; 5:106; 5:12-13; 9:4-6; 10:87; 11:87; 11:114; 19:31; 21:73; 24:41; 107:1-7. See also footnote to verses 2:43; 2:125. Also see 33:43; 33:53 & meaning of *zaka* (pure) 2:43.

²⁰ **Spend**: expenditure, spend, dues. (Arabic: *anfaqa*. Root N'F'Q Derivatives: *yunfiq*, *anfiq*, *infiq*, *munfiq*). This word has been translated in various shades of the root meaning depending on the context: provide, payment [verse 60:10], contribute [verse 9:92]. The importance of spending and contributing for the welfare of society is heavily emphasised throughout the Quran. This needs to be in words and deeds throughout the year as opposed to being charitable and giving donations once in a while, or paying annual religious tithes. The Quran advocates not charity but dignity. Social welfare. See verse 2:215, and footnote to 21:112. For related word *munafiqa*, see verse 2:8. **Social Welfare/** Citizen's Income: see verse and footnote 21:112 and the Quranic Concepts section.

[2:5] These are the ones guided by their Sustainer, these are the ones who will achieve ultimate success.

DISBELIEVERS: THE REJECTERS OF THIS GUIDANCE

[2:6] As for those who reject this guidance, it is the same for them, whether you warn them or not warn them, they will not believe.²²

[2:7] With time their minds and their hearing becomes impervious and their eyes become veiled. They have incurred severe retribution.

THE HYPOCRITES: THOSE WHO FEIGN SINCERITY

[2:8] Then there are those who say, "We believe in accountability to God and the ultimate reckoning," while in reality they reject the truth.²³

[2:9] In an attempt to deceive God and those who believe, they only deceive their own Self without perceiving.

[2:10] In their minds there is a disease. Consequently, God augments their disease. They have incurred a painful retribution for their lies.

[2:11] When they are told, "Do not commit evil." they claim: "But we are honourable."

[2:12] In fact, they are evildoers, but they do not perceive.

[2:13] When they are told, "Believe like the people who believed," they say, "Shall we believe like those who became unreasonable?" In fact, it is they who are intemperate, but they do not know.²⁴

²¹ **This world** is an environment for the development of the Self and 'death' is a transition to the next stage of life, easy progression for those who have realised their potential and a tormenting rut for those who have wasted their opportunities. Just as when we go to sleep with the certainty that there will be a tomorrow, those who understand this guidance are certain of the life yet to come and prepare their Self to make it fit for that future. See verses 73:20; 75:40; 90:4; 97:1.

²² **Disbeliever/rejecter:** (Arabic: *kafir*. Disbelief: *kuffr*). Disbelievers are people who openly reject, deny, or conceal the truth, who reject and act against the Absolute laws, Permanent Values as given in the Quran and accountability to God and His sovereign authority and who reject Deen-Islam, the established Social Order. See verses and footnotes 6:25; 109:1-6.

²³ **Hypocrite:** (Arabic: *munafiq*. Root N'F'Q. Derivatives: *nafaqa*, *nafaqu*, *nifaaq*). The word *munafiq* has been translated as hypocrite simply because the lack of a more appropriate word. There is no single word in the English language that comes close to its proper meaning. The human body survives by taking air, food, drink etc. By its very nature it is greedy, selfish, gluttonous and avaricious. The Self fights an ongoing battle in its desire to be magnificent and realise its potential by developing itself. It seeks to be benevolent, philanthropic, generous, giving and eager for self-sacrifice. The hypocrites feign these highly desirable qualities and attitudes that receive great public approval, while in their private lives such opinions belie their public statements. It is these people who are *munafiq*, those that are stingy and grudging when it comes to self-sacrifice and expending their Self for the good of others. The *munafiq* holds back in everything except that which is in their self-interest. God tolerates the hypocrites, giving respite, and they confirm their hypocrisy with their deeds. See verse and footnote 33:73. For related word *anfaaq*, see verse 2:3. See verses 3:167; 4:60-61; 9:64; 9:67; 9:97; 9:101; 29:11; 47:30; 63:1; 66:9. **What is evil?** See verses and footnotes 7:201; 10:109; 65:11.

[2:14] When they meet the believers of this guidance, they say, "We believe in this." but when alone with their mischievous companions, they say, "We are really with you, we were only being sarcastic."

[2:15] God tolerates their delusion and allows them on in their transgression, blundering.

[2:16] It is they who bought the drifting at the expense of guidance. Such trade never prospers nor does guidance ever inspire them.

[2:17] Their example is like the ones who start a fire, then, as it begins to shed light around them, God takes away their light, leaving them in darkness, unable to see.²⁵

[2:18] Deaf, dumb and blind, they fail to return.

[2:19] An example of their lack of good sense: a rainstorm from the sky in which there is darkness, thunder and lightning. They put their fingers in their ears, to evade death, as if they could evade death if lightening struck them. God is fully aware of those who reject this guidance.

[2:20] The lightning almost snatches away their eyesight. When it lights for them, they move forward and when it turns dark, they stand still. If God wills, He can take away their hearing and their eyesight. God is all-powerful.²⁶

[2:21] O people, serve only God, the One who created you and those before you, that you may safeguard yourself from lasting harm.

[2:22] The One who made the earth habitable for you and the sky a structure. He sends down from the sky water, to produce all kinds of fruits for your sustenance. You shall not accept any authority to equal or rival God, now that you know.²⁷

[2:23] If you have any doubt regarding what We revealed to Our servant, then produce one verse like the original and call upon your own witnesses against God, if you are truthful.²⁸

²⁴ **Unreasonable:** Intemperate, lacking in self-control, going beyond excesses, lacking in self-restraint. (Arabic: *safaha*. Root S'F'H). See verses 2:130; 15:42.

²⁵ **Throughout** the Quran there are many verses which use allegories, parables, metaphors and other descriptive images that are clearly symbolic. We must remember that since the first recipients of this message were mostly uneducated, simple-living, pagan Arabs, in the scorching desert heat so the description of heaven (and some other things) are an expression of alleviating the daily sufferance of these people, cool shades, flowing rivers and delicious drinks are figures of speech and not literal descriptions. See verse 9:72 and corresponding footnote.

²⁶ **God's Will** (God's ordinance) is not an arbitrary or a capricious decision. God is absolute and maintains peerless integrity though his laws and all things are determined by them. God's laws are God's way (*sunnatullah*) and this does not change on whim. There is never any change in God's law, it is always consistent. See verses and footnotes 33:62; 49:18. See also verse and footnote 3:7.

²⁷ **Shirk:** high treason, the most treacherous of all crimes is to set up or accept an authority to rival or equal God. This also includes accepting or living by laws or values that go against the Quranic injunctions and that are derived from other books. See verses and footnote 2:105; 9:1-10.

²⁸ **A challenge** from God. See verses and footnotes 4:82; 11:13.

[2:24] If you cannot do this - and you can never do this - then beware of the miserable retribution that awaits to consume you and other material as fuel, it is in abeyance for those who reject this guidance.

[2:25] Give good news to those who believe and lead a life of good works, that they will have possessions more excellent than orchards and gardens watered with flowing streams. When provided with a provision of fruits therein, they will say, "This surpasses what was provided for us previously." Thus, they are given allegorical descriptions. They will have pure companions therein and they abide therein forever.

[2:26] God does not shy away from citing any kind of allegory, from a tiny mosquito and greater. As for those who believe, they know that this is the truth from the one who sustains them. As for those who reject this, they say, "What did God mean by such an example?" Many go adrift thereby and others are guided thereby. But God never misleads, except that the depraved are harmed by their own mischief,

[2:27] who violate God's covenant after pledging to uphold it, sever what God has commanded to be joined and commit evil. These are the losers.

THE BEGINNING OF MANKIND

[2:28] How can you disbelieve in God when you were naught and He gave you life, then He puts you to death, then He brings you back to life, and to Him you ultimately return?

[2:29] He is the One who created for you everything on earth, then turned to the sky and perfected the universe and He is fully aware of all things.

[2:30] Recall that the One who sustains you said to the malaika²⁹, "I am placing a successor on Earth."³⁰ They said, "Will You place in there one who

²⁹ **Malaika:** the energies, forces of nature and messengers, working in the universe, the world and within the body: neuron transport messaging, creating atmospheric changes, light and heat etc. See verses and footnotes 6:8; 8:9; 17:95; 43:19; 53:27. **Iblees** (*shaitan*) is a malaika, albeit invisible and latent with the capacity to manifest as a detrimental force of influence. See verse and footnote 18:50.

³⁰ **Successor:** (Arabic: *khalifa*. Root: KH'L'F. Derivatives: *khalif*, *khilafa*, *istakhrafa*). Khalifa means to succeed, to follow or replace through change and evolution. This word is often mistakenly translated as 'representative' and man is wrongly considered as 'khalifatulla' or representative of God. There is not a single instance in the Quran where man is described as 'khalifatulla'. Man is rather described as 'khalifat-al-ard', that is successor on earth. This simply means that man has evolved as a successor from previous creations in the process of evolution. If we follow the view that God has delegated power to man, then God must no longer be omnipotent or omniscient. The Quran, as we can see, amply clarifies that a *khalifa* is a successor in the absence or death of his predecessor. The question of somebody being a representative of God does not arise. The concept of 'representative' is the innovation of self-interested individuals who wanted to exploit people by posing as God's 'vice-regents'. **God made man** to succeed the previous generations of creation. The corruption and bloodshed spread by man is evident, lawlessness is the rule of the day. In contrast, the total obedience by the malaika who consistently and without fail follow the laws of God is also evident in the world around us. How do the malaika glorify God? Honouring

will spread evil and shed blood, while we exalt Your praises, glorify You and uphold Your absolute authority?" He said, "I know what you do not know."³¹

[2:31] He gave Adam the ability to distinguish all things, then presented him to the malaika, saying, "Give Me the names of these, if you know."³²

[2:32] They said, "Be You glorified, we have no knowledge, except that which You have taught us. You are the One who is aware of all things and the One Most Wise."

[2:33] He said, "O Adam, tell them their names." When Adam told them their names, He said, "Did I not tell you that I know the secrets of the Heavens and the Earth? I know what you declare and what you conceal."³³

[2:34] When We said to the malaika, "Yield yourselves before Adam," they conceded, except Iblees, his latent ego was too arrogant and rejected God's command.³⁴

[2:35] We said, "O Adam, live with your wife in Paradise and eat from there generously, as you please, but do not divide as the branches like this tree creating a schism, lest you transgress and harm yourself."

[2:36] But their ego perplexed them and caused their downfall in status and from a state of harmony. We said, "Go down to earth and face the trials

God and glorifying Him is by following His laws. Willingly following and implementing His guidance is the best way to glorify God. See verses 10:15; 21:20; 27:62; 35:39; 36:82.

³¹ **Evil and bloodshed.** Of all the animals, man alone has the capacity to learn and develop from his knowledge. A lion today does much the same as a lion did a thousand years ago, and the same is true of a sheep or a fish. Man alone has the capability for extreme corruption and for the systematic killing of his fellow beings, even people that he has known, lived and shared food with. However, conversely, man also has the exceptional power of self-sacrifice for the good of others in a way that no other creature has. Humans, like their closest relatives (and those they share a common ancestry with) the chimps, may have a predisposition to coalition violence and the associated tendency for genocide, but the difference is that humans are not constrained by genetic inheritance. God has endowed humans with the ability to reason and choose to act against their detrimental natural impulses. God knows what the malaika or anyone else does not know. See verse 7:201.

³² **Adam** is a symbolic name and reference for all mankind, every individual Self is represented by this allegorical person called Adam. When the malaika are ordered to submit to Adam, in reality the ability to harness the forces of nature are given to mankind, except of course the independent 'free will', the egotistic aspect of the Self, which is represented here by Iblees, also mentioned as shaitan, the negative feature of our personality. See verses: 7:11-27; 17:61-65; 18:50-53; 20:116-124; 36:60-64; 45:13.

³³ **What** are the heavens and the earth? This, of course is the Universe, all the systems that we can see and the ones that we cannot see. See verse 45:13.

³⁴ **The malaika** do not have 'free will', they comply with God's law, however, Iblees, the rebellious malaika, represents the egotistical Self of all mankind and is a 'Free-willed' entity. This is a metaphorical description of God granting mankind dominance over the world's resources. Everything, except man's own free will/ego, is committed to serve mankind. See verses 17:60; 22:65. See also verses and footnotes 31:20; 45:13.

of life and endeavour to redeem your Self. On the earth shall be your habitation and provision for awhile."³⁵

[2:37] Then, Adam received from his Sustainer some words of guidance, whereby He raised his status. He is the Redeemer, Most Merciful.

[2:38] We said, "Go down there, all of you. When My guidance comes to you, those who follow My guidance will have nothing to fear, nor will they grieve.

[2:39] "As for those who disbelieve and reject My guidance, they will become dwellers in a hell of their own making, wherein they abide forever."³⁶

THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL

[2:40] O Children of Israel,³⁷ remember My favours, which I bestowed upon you and fulfil your promise and I will fulfil My promise and do your duty to Me.

[2:41] You shall believe in this guidance that I have revealed here, confirming what you have, do not be the first to reject it. Do not trade away My guidance for a cheap gain and fulfil your duty to Me.

[2:42] Do not confound the truth with falsehood, nor shall you conceal the truth knowingly.

[2:43] You shall observe your commitments³⁸ and keep them pure³⁹ and humbly consent to harmonise with all those who submit.⁴⁰

³⁵ **The Self:** (Arabic: *nafs*. Root: N'F'S. Derivatives: *anfus*, *nufus*). This is the latent human personality that emanates from the Ruh, the directive energy *from* God, but not *of* God. Good, munificent deeds progress the development of the Self and bad, corrupt actions regress and stunt its growth. As part of our evolutionary movement and as we transit into the next stage of life, after death, it is the strong Self that will live an enriched life, while the weak Self will struggle in a torment that we call hell. So in fact each individual decides their own future by what he or she chooses to do in this life.

³⁶ **Hell** in its conventional meaning is misleading as it conveys a religious description of a *place* of torture for those who sin. The Arabic word *jahannam* is a much better description as it means life in regression. We either develop our Self or stunt its progress and when the transition to the next life takes place only a developed Self will be fit to enjoy the pleasures, while a weak Self will struggle: this is the misery and torment of the life yet to come, a hell of our own making. This is because hell is a state of mind and environment that is the result of our own deeds. A higher life can be achieved only by a developed personality. The evolution of a personality not so developed is bound to be thwarted. This kind of infernal life is called *Jahannam* i.e. hell. To cease to aspire, or have frustrated the ability by your own actions, is to be doomed to hell. See verses 2:206; 15:42.

³⁷ **'The Children of Israel'** now generally known as Jews, are so called because they are of the Judean tribe, one of the tribes of the Hebrews. Now all Hebrews are called Jews - irrespective of which tribe they originally belonged to, not only that but over the millennia many people who were not Hebrews have been assimilated into the Jewish fold. In the Quran, communities such as Lot's people, Noah's people and Shu'aib's people are used as historical examples. The Children of Israel are the most important case study for all people to learn from. God gives their examples throughout the Quran in significant detail: all events that the Children of Israel experienced in the past are lessons for people today. See 2:135, 3:67-68.

³⁸ **Commitments:** (Arabic: *solaa*). Solaa of the Children of Israel. See footnote to verse 2:3.

³⁹ **Pure:** (Arabic: *zakaa*. from the root Z'K'W. Derivatives: *zakka*, *taZakka*, *zakki*, *taZak-ki*, *yu-Zakka*, *yuZak-ki*). Purity is an essential condition to help an individual grow, develop and progress. Therefore, keeping your commitments and obligations pure and unadulterated is an important

[2:44] Do you exhort other people to do good while forgetting yourselves, though you have My guidance? Do you not understand?

[2:45] You shall seek help through steadfastness and observing your commitments. This is difficult indeed, but not for those who keep their duty to Him,

[2:46] who believe that they will meet their God, the One who sustains them, and that to Him they ultimately return.

CHILDREN OF ISRAEL SAVED FROM FIR'AWN

[2:47] O Children of Israel,⁴¹ remember My favours which I bestowed upon you and that I blessed you more than any other people.

[2:48] Beware of the day when no person can help another; no intercession will be accepted, no ransom can be paid nor can anyone be helped.⁴²

[2:49] Recall that We saved you from Fir'awn's⁴³ people who inflicted upon you the worst persecution, slaying your sons and defiling your women. That was an exacting test from your Sustainer.

[2:50] Recall that We parted the water for you, We saved you and drowned Fir'awn's people before your eyes.

[2:51] Yet, when We summoned Moses for forty nights, you worshiped the calf in his absence and became depraved.

[2:52] Still, We pardoned you thereafter that you may be appreciative.⁴⁴

part of life because genuine sincerity cannot exist when mixed with polluted ideas. See verses 2:83; 2:129; 2:151; 2:277; 9:102-3; 18:81; 19:13; 19:19; 19:31; 22:78; 24:21; 35:18; 58:12,13; 79:17-18; 91:1-9.

⁴⁰ **Humbly concede:** (Arabic: *ruku-wa-sujud*). Submission, to accept and concede or yield, is one of the key concepts for those who accept the Deen-Islam. Submission is to acquiesce fully and completely to the injunctions in the Quran and accountability to God. To humbly concede is to accept them with absolute deference and without any arrogance. This does not mean that we do not apply intellect and intelligence - far from it. We accept physical laws and never revolt against them and any person who attempts to do so will suffer the consequences. None but the insane will try to defy gravity by jumping off a cliff or climbing down into an erupting volcano thinking himself invulnerable to the effects of fire. Quranic values offer long term benefits to both individuals and societies. They nurture the strength of the Self to help face the challenges that life inevitably throws at the human being. None but those lacking insight will reject this concept.

⁴¹ **Children of Israel:** so called because they were the descendants of a man called Israel and not because they were destined to live in a land named Israel. See also verse and footnote 2:40.

⁴² **Intercession** is undeserved favouritism. See verse and footnote 2:254.

⁴³ **Fir'awn:** commonly known as Pharaoh, is a proper name of a person and not a term or description for rulers such as kings. Archaeological research shows that the Egyptians were excellent record keepers. However, there is no evidence in any of the hieroglyphs to show that rulers in ancient Egypt were called Pharaohs. The name for Egypt during Muhammad's time was Qubt. Even today the Christians of the region are called *Coptic* from the word Qubti. This ruler called Fir'awn was an overlord of *misr* and its surrounding territories and wielded great power and authority in the area. See verse and footnote 10:58.

⁴⁴ **Pardon/overlook:** to forgive, to be clement. (Arabic: *afa*. Root F'W. Derivatives: *afuw*, *yafu*, *u'fu*, *ufiya*, *afw*, *afi*). It can also mean forgiveness or to eradicate, in the sense to overlook or erase

[2:53] Recall that We gave Moses guidance and the statute book, that you may be guided.

[2:54] Recall that Moses said to his people, "O my people, you have wronged your Self by worshiping the calf. You must repent to your Creator. You shall kill your ego. This is better for you in the sight of your Creator." He did redeem you. He is the Redeemer, Most Merciful.

[2:55] Recall that you said, "O Moses, we will not believe unless we see God physically." Consequently, you were stunned by lightning, as you looked.

[2:56] We then revived you, after you became lifeless, that you may be appreciative.

[2:57] We shaded you with clouds and sent down to you manna and quails: "Eat from the good things We provided for you." They did not hurt Us by rebelling, they only hurt their own Self.

[2:58] Recall that We said, "Enter this town, where you will find as many provisions as you like. Just enter the gate humbly in submission and speak to people amicably. We will then protect you from your faults and increase the reward for those who do good."⁴⁵

[2:59] But the transgressors distorted the commands given to them. Consequently, We sent down upon the wrongdoers condemnation from the sky, due to their wickedness.

[2:60] Recall that Moses sought water for his people. We said, "Set forth your aims at the rock with your staff from where twelve springs gush out." The members of each tribe knew their own source of water. Eat and drink from God's provisions and do not roam the earth disgracefully.⁴⁶

someone's faults, an excess, depending on the context of the verse. There are 35 occurrences of this word. See verses and footnotes: 2:58; 2:109; 2:178; 2:237; 2:286; 3:134; 3:152; 4:149; 5:101; 7:95; 7:199; 22:60; 28:16; 42:25; 42:30-34; 42:40; 64:14. See verses and footnotes: 2:219; 58:2.

⁴⁵ **Protect/Protector:** (Arabic: *ghafur*. Root GH'F'R. Derivatives: *maghfirah*, *maghfir*). Except in rare occasions, (see verse 2:52 and footnote) the Quran negates the concept of unconditional forgiveness. Every action, according to the Law of Requit, has a logical outcome and there can be no forgiveness. Free will means freedom of choice, but once the choice is made there is no control of the consequences of that choice. People walk into the future they create. *Maghfir* means to protect and provide a process of reparation and indeed protection from further damage. Prevention is better than a cure, so individuals must protect themselves by strengthening their Self. This guidance provides the means for doing just that. Proper compliance with God's laws gives sufficient strength to resist destructive forces and if a person should fall into error, the remedy would lie in good conduct to recuperate and strengthen his personality and save him from lasting harm. This is *maghfirah*: protection. See verses and footnotes 2:52; 28:16; 4:43; 22:60; 58:2.

⁴⁶ **This was a starting point** for a community and they 'set forth' (*idrib*) their aspirations at the rock: with food, water and God's guidance to direct them, they were motivated. **Set forth/cite/advance:** (Arabic: *daraba*. Root D'R'B. Derivative: *idrib*, *yadribuna*, *yadribu*, *wayadribu*). See verses 4:34; 13:17; 14:24-25; 16:75-76; 24:35; 30:28; 36:78; 39:29; 43:17; 47:27; 66:10-11. *Daraba* is often mistakenly translated as 'to beat or to strike', but 'to strike' is *urkud*. See verse 38:42.

[2:61] Recall that you said, "O Moses, We can no longer tolerate one kind of food. Call upon your God to produce for us such earthly crops as beans, cucumbers, garlic, lentils and onions." He said, "Do you wish to substitute that which is inferior in place of something which is good? Go down to the town, where you can find what you asked for." They incurred condemnation, humiliation and disgrace and brought upon themselves wrath from God. This is because they rejected God's guidance and killed the messengers unjustly. This is because they disobeyed and transgressed.⁴⁷

[2:62] Surely, those who believe, those who are the haudi, the nassara and the sabians,⁴⁸ anyone who believes in God and accountability to Him and lead a righteous life, will receive their recompense from their Sustainer. They have nothing to fear nor will they grieve.

[2:63] We made a covenant with you, as We raised Mount Sinai above you: "You shall uphold strongly what We have given you and remember Our decrees, that you may become respected."

[2:64] But you turned away thereafter and if it were not for God's favour towards you and His mercy, you would have been doomed.

[2:65] You have known about those among you who desecrated Our decrees, We said to them, "Be you as despicable like apes."

[2:66] We set them up as an example for their generation, as well as subsequent generations and an enlightenment for those who do good.

THE SACRIFICE OF A HEIFER

[2:67] Moses said to his people, "God commands you to sacrifice a heifer." They said, "Are you mocking us?" He said, "God forbid, that I should behave like the ignorant ones."

[2:68] They said, "Call upon your God to show us which one." He said, "He says that it is a heifer that is neither too old, nor too young, of an intermediate age. Now, carry out what you are commanded to do."

[2:69] They said, "Call upon your God to show us her colour." He said, "He says that it is a yellow heifer, bright coloured and pleases the beholders."

[2:70] They said, "Call upon your God to show us which one. The heifers look alike to us and, God willing, we will be guided."

[2:71] He said, "He says that it is a heifer that was never humiliated in ploughing the land or watering the crops, free from any blemish." They said, "Now you have brought the truth." They finally sacrificed her, after much reluctance.

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⁴⁷ **Town:** a market place, trade station, citadel. (Arabic: *misr*). *Misr*, as this usage shows, is a common noun, a market place or trade station and not a name for ancient Egypt, which was then known as Qubt. See verses: 10:87; 12:21; 12:99; 28:15; 43:51. See footnote to verse 12:111.

⁴⁸ **These are** characteristics, not ethnic groups. For example, the nassara, were Christ's helpers.

Sura 3: The Family of Imran (Aal-e-Imran)

In the name of God, Most Merciful, Most Beneficent

[3:1] A.L.M.

[3:2] God, the One: there is no authority to rank with Him; the Living, the Eternal.

[3:3] He sent down to you this guidance, truthfully, confirming all previous scriptures and He sent down the Taurah and the Injeel⁴⁹

[3:4] before this to guide the people, and now He sent down this statute book. Those who go against God's guidance incur severe harm. God is Almighty, the punisher of those who do wrong.

[3:5] Nothing is hidden from God, on earth or in the heavens.

[3:6] He is the One who shapes you in your mothers' wombs in harmony with His laws. There is no authority to rank with Him; the Almighty, Most Wise.

METAPHORICAL & ALLEGORICAL VERSES

[3:7] He sent down to you this revelation containing straightforward guidance which constitutes the essence of these decrees, as well as allegorical narratives, descriptions and explanations. Those who harbour doubts in their hearts will pursue the symbolic meanings and create difficulties and confusion and construe distracting illusions. The proper interpretations are known by God and clearly understood by those well-founded in knowledge. They say, "We believe in this, all of it comes from the One who sustains us." Only those who possess intelligence will take heed.⁵⁰

[3:8] "Our Sustainer, let not our hearts falter now that You have guided us. Shower us with Your mercy; You are the One who grants all things.

[3:9] "Our Sustainer, You will surely hold people accountable and that is inevitable. God never breaks a promise."

[3:10] Those who disbelieve will never be helped by their money nor by their children, against God. They will be fuel for hell.

⁴⁹ **Taurah:** the Book of Law and guidance revealed to Moses, this is not the Old Testament in the bible. Just as the Injeel confirmed the Taurah, the Quran now too confirms and encompasses all the guidance given to previous messengers. See verses and footnotes 5:46; 62:5.

⁵⁰ **The two** categories of verses in the Quran are clearly distinguished here. Many people wrestle with metaphorical and allegorical verses without even having fully read, studied or understood the Quran. Lacking in even any basic knowledge of the text in original Arabic, they question and argue about it. There are many more practical and immediate matters covered by this guidance that need to be given greater priority. Since Arabs, then a largely illiterate population, were the first recipients of the Quran, descriptions and concepts are therefore often given in symbolic language so that they could easily be understood by them, as well as those of higher education and intellect. Even today these simple examples and descriptions will be helpful to many. However, the doctors of knowledge: the jurists, the sociologists, the academics and the scientists of today too have their work cut out. See verses 10:38-39; 47:24.

Sura 4: The Women (Al-Nisa)

In the name of God, Most Merciful, Most Beneficent

[4:1] O people, fulfil your duty to the One who sustains you; the One who created everything from one Self, a single entity, and created from it its mate, then evolved from the two many creations. You shall regard God by whom you pledge and care for your parents. God is watching over you.⁵¹

BE FAIR WITH ORPHANS - ENCOURAGE MARRIAGE

[4:2] You shall hand over to the orphans their rightful properties. Do not substitute the good for worthless things and do not consume their properties by mixing them with yours. This would be a gross injustice on your part.⁵²

[4:3] When you deem it best for the orphans in your care, you may marry off the female orphans in twos, threes or fours. If you fear lest you become unfair to any of them, then you shall arrange marriage for only one at a time, preferably with someone already within your acquaintance. Additionally, you are thus more likely to avoid financial hardship.⁵³

[4:4] All women should be given their due mahr⁵⁴ equitably, as a right. If they willingly forfeit anything and you mutually agree to it, accept it with respectability.

[4:5] Do not give to those orphans who lack self-restraint, the properties that God has entrusted with you as guardians. You shall provide for them from what you hold in trust or from your own means, and clothe them and treat them with kindness.⁵⁵

[4:6] You shall test the orphans when they reach maturity and are responsible enough for marriage. As soon as you find them responsible enough, give them their due inheritance. Do not consume it extravagantly to diminish their entitlement before they come of age to take charge.

⁵¹ **The initial** life form started from one single entity (a single cell) and from the single cell emerged many life forms that we see today, including homo sapiens, the present day human beings. See verse and footnote 36:82. See also verses 2:30; 6:135; 10:14; 27:62; 35:39.

⁵² **Orphan:** an orphan is a child both of whose parents are dead or have abandoned it permanently. Only a child who has lost *both* parents is called an orphan. There is no doubt that orphans are one of the most vulnerable groups in society. This is why great care must be taken to ensure that they suffer no injustice. A loving family atmosphere is the most nourishing environment for a child to grow up in. Many verses in the Quran decree justice and goodwill to orphans. See verse and footnote 33:5.

⁵³ **To encourage** and arrange marriage among single, divorced or widowed marriage prospects is a responsibility for all those who are in a position to undertake it. See also verse 24:34.

⁵⁴ **Mahr:** This is the groom's gift to the bride. See verse 2:236.

⁵⁵ **Lacking in self-restraint:** unreasonable, Intemperate, lacking in self-control, going beyond excesses. (Arabic: *safaha*. Root S'F'H). See verses 2:130.

Sura 5: The Feast (Al-Ma'idah)

In the name of God, Most Merciful, Most Beneficent

[5:1] O you who believe, you shall fulfil your promises. Permitted for you to eat are all livestock, except those specifically restricted in this guidance. You shall not permit the hunting of game, except as God decrees according to His laws.

CONSERVATION AND HUNTING

[5:2] O you who believe, do not violate the decrees instituted by God, the restricted months for hunting, the guidance about hunting, the indicators for hunting and the restrictions to maintain harmony in the Sanctioned System⁵⁶ as you seek the grace and approval of your Sustainer. When permitted, you may hunt.⁵⁷ Do not be provoked into enmity by those who try and prevent you from accepting the sanctions of the Submissions. You shall cooperate in matters of safeguarding your righteousness and sanctitude. Do not cooperate in matters that are wrongful and evil. You shall do your duty to God. God is strict in enforcing retribution.

ONLY FOUR MEATS RESTRICTED

[5:3] Restricted for you are animals that die of themselves, excess blood, the meat of pigs and food dedicated to other than God. Animals that die of themselves include those strangled, struck with an object, fallen from a height, gored, attacked by a wild animal, unless rescued before death and animals sacrificed for or consecrated to anyone other than God. Also restricted for you is any food associated with religious rituals; this is an abomination. Constantly, the disbelievers are in despair of those who follow the guidance of this Deen; do not fear them, instead fulfil your duty to Me. This day, I have perfected your Deen, the established Order, perfected My favours upon you and I have decreed for you harmony in the System of this Deen-Islam. If one is forced by circumstances to eat restricted food, without deliberate or willing transgression, then God is Protector, most Merciful.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ **Harmony** in the Sanctioned System, (Arabic: *aminal baytal-Harami*). The word *haram* means: restricted, prohibited or sanctioned, depending on the context. See also 2:144.

⁵⁷ **This section**, in Sura Al-Ma'idah, lays down the foundation for conservation of animal life. Conservation demands that certain controls be placed on hunting and these by-laws, the basis for which is found in this chapter, are to be enacted by the governing administration of the day. This verse 5:2 is about conservation and keeping an equilibrium in the environment. See verses 5:94-103.

⁵⁸ **Food**: Clearly meat slaughtered by 'people of the book' is also permitted. These people also accept God's guidance, His laws and Quranic values. It should be noted that no slaughter ritual is mentioned in the Quran. Read verses through 5:3-5 and see verses 2:168; 6:118; 16:115.

Sura 6: The Livestock (Al-An'am)

In the name of God, Most Merciful, Most Beneficent

[6:1] Praise be to God who created the heavens and the earth, allowed the depths of darkness and spread the brightness of enlightenment. Yet, those who disbelieve in this guidance from their Sustainer continue to deviate.

PRIMORDIAL CLAY: THE START OF LIFE

[6:2] He is the One who created you from clay,⁵⁹ then directed you, determined a specific period for you and set another period to follow. Yet, you continue to doubt.

[6:3] He is the One God in the heavens and the earth. He knows your secrets and your declarations and He knows everything you earn by your deeds.

[6:4] No matter what kind of proof comes to them from their Sustainer, they turn away from it in aversion.

[6:5] Since they reject the truth when it comes to them, they will soon learn the reality of their heedlessness.

[6:6] Have they not seen how many generations before them We have annihilated? We established them on earth more than We did for you and We gave them many favours, generously and We provided them with abundant rain. We then annihilated them because of their wrongdoing and We substituted other generations in their place.

[6:7] Even if We sent down to you a physical book written on paper and they touched it with their hands, those who disbelieve would have said, "This is no more than a clever illusion."

[6:8] They also said, "If only an angel could come down with him." Had We sent a malaika to accompany you, the whole matter would have been settled there and then and no respite would have been granted.⁶⁰

[6:9] If We did send a malaika, We would have sent him in the form of a man and they would be just as perplexed as they are now.

[6:10] Messengers before you have been ridiculed. It is those who mocked them who suffered the consequences of their ridiculing.

[6:11] Say: "Travel the world and note the consequences of those who reject this guidance."⁶¹

⁵⁹ **Primordial clay:** a substance in the primordial soup with self-replicating crystal catalyst sparking the first form of life billions of years ago. See verse and footnote 36:82.

⁶⁰ **Angel:** Those who have no proper knowledge believe the malaika to be female angels, the mythical winged creatures from religious traditions. In some selected verses the word '*malaika*' has been translated as 'angel' purely for illustrative purposes to show that while they say *malaika*, their expectation and belief is an angel. See verses and footnotes 2:30; 11:12; 12:31; 17:92; 25:7; 25:21; 45:14.

Sura 7: The Heights (Al-A'araf)

In the name of God, Most Merciful, Most Beneficent

[7:1] A. L. M. S.

[7:2] This guidance has been revealed to you, let there be no reservation in your heart that you may warn with it, and it provides a reminder for the believers.

[7:3] You shall all follow what is revealed in it from your Sustainer and do not accept any authority as equal to Him. Yet, rarely do people take heed.

[7:4] Many a community We annihilated; they incurred Our retribution while they were asleep or wide awake.

[7:5] Their utterance when Our retribution came to them was: "Indeed, we have been transgressors."

[7:6] We will certainly question those who received the message and We will question the messengers.

[7:7] We will inform them that We were never absent. We know for sure, while they may be unaware.

[7:8] The scales will be set on that day, equitably. Those whose weights are heavy will be the ones who have prospered.

[7:9] As for those who are undeveloped, they will be the ones who weakened their Self as a consequence of disregarding Our revealed guidance.⁶²

[7:10] We established you on earth and We have provided for you the means of support therein. Rarely are you appreciative.

THE ASSESSMENT BEGINS

[7:11] We created you, then We evolved and shaped you and We said to the malaika, "Yield yourself before Adam." They all surrendered, except Iblees; he was not with those who yielded themselves to Adam.⁶³

⁶¹ **Fear and turmoil** around the world is an obvious consequence of not following the harmonising System enshrined in the Quran: the Deen-Islam.

⁶² **Instantaneous** evaluation will show those who have a developed Self and can progress while the weak Self will struggle and face frustration, neither able to move forward nor able to return. Truly a state of hell for those who do not follow this guidance.

⁶³ **The malaika** are the energies that facilitate all things in the universe, including the activities within human beings. **Adam** is a generic name for all mankind and not an individual person or indeed the first human being. Commanding submission of the malaika to Adam is in fact putting all the forces of nature and natural resources under man's domain. See verse and footnote 36:82. **Iblees** is the personification of the malaika, the human psyche and an aspect of the Self, projecting the negative nature of the human conscience. Shaitan (satan) is a descriptive name of the same malaika that influences the human ego to perform regressive acts. Adam's shaitan is his egotistical Self. Read 7:11-30. See verses and footnote 2:30-39. **The malaika** are forces of energy that man

Sura 8: The Spoils of War (Al-Anfal)

In the name of God, Most Merciful, Most Beneficent

[8:1] They consult you about the spoils of war. Say: "The spoils of war belong to God, the messenger and those who lead the campaign" You shall observe God, exhort one another to be righteous and obey God and His messenger, if you are believers.⁶⁴

SINCERE BELIEVERS AND RELUCTANT BELIEVERS

[8:2] The true believers are those whose hearts tremble out of reverence when God is mentioned and when His guidance is shown to them their conviction is strengthened and they trust in the One who sustains them.

[8:3] They observe their commitments and from Our provisions to them they spend for the good of social welfare.⁶⁵

[8:4] Such are the true believers. They attain high ranks at their Sustainer as well as dignity, protection and generous provisions.

[8:5] Your Sustainer provides ways for you to leave your system when you discover the truth, but some of you are exposed as reluctant believers.⁶⁶

[8:6] They argued with you against the truth even after everything was explained to them. They acted as if they were being driven to certain death.

[8:7] Recall that God promised you victory over a certain group but you still wanted to face the weaker group. It was God's plan to establish the truth with His words and to defeat the disbelievers.

[8:8] For He has decreed that the truth shall prevail and all falsehood shall vanish, in spite of the evildoers.

VICTORY GUARANTEED FOR THE BELIEVERS

[8:9] Thus, when you implore your Sustainer to come to the rescue, He responds to you: "I support you in a multitude of ways in succession and motivate the energies within you."⁶⁷

can harness, the malaika submit to Adam by God's command, except Iblees. Everything in the heavens and the earth is in the service of mankind. See verse and footnote 31:20.

⁶⁴ **The original** text says 'God and the messenger.' Since the messenger is no longer around the spoils belong to those who lead: the administrators. It is for them to distribute and utilise the war booty and anything they acquire through war efforts for the benefit of the people. Of course God does not receive anything directly and His share is for the utility of the deserving people.

⁶⁵ **Social Welfare** and helping those in need is a duty for every individual. This spending on social welfare is not an act of charity but a right to be given to all those entitled to it. See verse 2:215 and footnote.

⁶⁶ **Everyone** follows a system of one kind or another, whether they are aware of this or not. God wants you to leave your system and enter His System, to fulfil a specific role and a higher purpose in life.

⁶⁷ **The malaika** are the energies mentioned in this verses. See verses 2:30; 11:12.

Sura 9: The Repentance (Tawbah)⁶⁸

[9:1] An ultimatum is issued here from God and His messenger to those who commit treason and serve authorities to rank with God, and to those who enter into a treaty with you:

[9:2] Move around freely for four fixed months as a cessation of hostilities, and know that you cannot escape from God, and that the disbelievers are humiliated through the ordinance of God.

HAJJ-I-AKBAR: THE GREAT CHALLENGE

[9:3] A proclamation is issued here from God and His messenger for all people to inform them of the Day of the Great Challenge⁶⁹ and to let them know that God and His messenger condemn the mushrikeen: the traitors who serve authorities to rank with Him. Thus, if the mushrikeen repent, it would be better for them. But if they turn away, then let them know that they can never escape from God. Promise those who reject this guidance a painful consequence.

[9:4] If the mushrikeen sign a peace treaty with you and do not violate it nor aid others against you, you shall fulfil your treaty with them until its term expires. God supports those who maintain good conduct.⁷⁰

[9:5] Once the restricted months of the treaty are over and the mushrikeen still refuse to make peace, you may then slay them wherever you encounter them, overcome and punish them and watch them carefully at every place.

⁶⁸ **This Sura** does not begin "In the name of God, Most Merciful, Most Beneficent." However, Sura 27 has two such invocations, the second one being in the letter from Solomon. This Sura is about war on treachery and terrorism and impeding the activities of traitors and terrorists.

⁶⁹ **Challenge**, confront, trial, test (Arabic: *haji*. Root H'J'I). The Day of the Great challenge is when a declaration is made to those mushrikeen who actively wage war against muslims. The muslims, the truth bearers, are the ones who believe and implement this guidance. They challenge the mushrikeen to renounce their treacherous and criminal activities and agree to make peace, giving them a four month period of grace - cessation of hostilities - thus allowing them time to reflect, before taking any action against them. Peace treaties when made, however, must be honoured. See verses and footnotes: 2:76; 9:73. **Peace at any price?** See footnote to 47:35.

⁷⁰ **Treachery**, treason. (Arabic: *shirk*. Root SH'R'K. Derivatives: *mushrik*, *mushrikeen*, *sharika*, *shareek*, *sharaka*, *ashraka*). Those who accept an authority to rival God are *mushrikeen*: the ones who commit *shirk*, an act of high treason, treachery against God and his laws. As this verse shows, only those who actively wage war against muslims can be killed, other *mushrikeen* are to be given protection, should they so wish. Furthermore, they cannot be compelled to accept Deen-Islam, but must abide by its laws if they live in a state where such an administration exists. See verses and footnotes: 2:22; 3:83; 3:85; 6:19; 6:22-23; 6:144; 6:121; 6:145; 6:159; 7:162; 7:185; 7:190; 12:106; 14:35; 16:56; 16:100; 24:54; 30:32-33; 42:42; 68:36-41. **Mushrikeen**: See footnote to verse 2:105. **Repentance**: what is it? See verse 9:112 & footnotes to 2:105 & 47:35.

Sura 10: Jonah (Younas)

In the name of God, Most Merciful, Most Beneficent

[10:1] A.L.R. These are the signs of this guidance, a book of knowledge and insight.

[10:2] Is it such a wonder for people that We inspired a man like them? He was commanded to warn people and give good news to those who believe that they have attained a position of prominence at their Sustainer. The disbelievers claimed, "This is a clever magician."

[10:3] Your only Sustainer is God. The One who created the heavens and the earth in six periods then assumed all authority. He creates and directs all matters and is in control of all things. There is no intercession except in accordance with His ordinance. Such is God, the one who sustains you. You shall serve Him. Will you not then heed this guidance?

[10:4] To Him is your ultimate return, for all of you. This is God's truthful promise. He initiates the creation then repeats it, in order to reward those who believe and lead a life of good work without bias and unfairness. As for those who disbelieve in this guidance, they are as if quenching their thirst with caustic drinks, and this is a painful punishment for disbelieving this guidance.

[10:5] He is the One who rendered the sun a resplendent star and the moon luminous and He designed its phases that you may learn to count the years, and made them calculating devices. God did not create all this, except for a specific purpose. He explains the revelations for people who observe and learn.⁷¹

[10:6] Surely, in the alternation of the night and the day and all things God has created in the heavens and the earth there are signs for people who seek the truth.⁷²

[10:7] Those who are not expecting to meet God and are preoccupied with this worldly life and are content with it and continue to neglect these revelations,

[10:8] they have damaged their Self and are surrounding themselves with an inferno, as a consequence of their own works.

[10:9] As for those who believe and do good things, their Sustainer guides them by virtue of their belief. They have earned coolness of character and harmony for the life yet to come.⁷³

⁷¹ **Why did God** create the universe and mankind? We can't answer this question with any certainty, but we can make an intelligent deduction. The nature of the Self is to be creative and express itself. God being the supreme Self does so not only by creating, but by creating the ultimate creation: a free willed being. **Intelligent design:** see verses 7:201; 68:52.

⁷² **Everything** in the universe works in a precise and ordered way. In these things, for people who study them, there is evidence of intelligent design, the implicit trademark of God's creations. See verses and footnotes 41:53; 54:49.

Sura 11: Hood (Hud)

In the name of God, Most Merciful, Most Beneficent

[11:1] A.L.R. This is a book with verses perfected and elucidated. It comes from the One who is Most Wise, fully aware of all things.

THE QURAN: THE ENDURING MESSAGE OF GOD

[11:2] Proclaim: "You shall not serve any authority as equal with God. I come to you from Him as a warner as well as a bearer of good news.

[11:3] "You shall seek your Sustainer's protection then repent to Him. You will then prosper abundantly in accordance with His ordinance. Those who deserve his grace attract it in abundance. If you turn away then I fear for you the retribution of an awesome day."⁷⁴

[11:4] To God is your ultimate return and He is All-powerful.

[11:5] Indeed, they hide their innermost thoughts, as if to keep Him from knowing them. In fact even if they cover themselves with their clothes, He knows all their secrets and declarations. He is aware of their most innermost thoughts.⁷⁵

[11:6] There is not a creation on earth whose sustenance does not depend on God's ordinance. And He knows its course during the aeons and its final conclusion. All are recorded in a profound record.⁷⁶

[11:7] He is the One who created the heavens and the earth in six periods and His earthly domain was completely covered with water, in order to establish an environment to develop your Self and to distinguish those among you who evolve and flourish through good work. Yet when you say "We will be resurrected after death," those who disbelieve this guidance say "This is clearly witchcraft."⁷⁷

[11:8] And if We delay the retribution they have incurred, for We reserve it for a specific period, they say, "What is keeping Him?" In fact, once it comes to them, nothing can stop it and what they scorn will come back to torment them.

⁷³ **Once individuals ignite their light** to seek the truth, through God's ordinance they attract those things that exalt them in character and makes them fit for the life yet to come.

⁷⁴ **Repentance:** what is it? See verse 9:112.

⁷⁵ **Disbelievers** cover themselves with clothes. See verse 71:7.

⁷⁶ **Life on earth** evolved from a unicellular organism to the numerous forms we know today. All life forms in their evolutionary history passed through different stages and God sustained them throughout all the phases and also He knows their destination. See verses 36:82; 71:17.

⁷⁷ **In the year** 1600 the Inquisition found Giordano Bruno guilty for supporting "the opinion of Copernicus that the earth did go round..." and he was burned at the stake in Rome. Now the orbit of planets is an undisputed fact. The things people don't understand are 'magic' or 'witchcraft'. Just a few hundred years ago who would have believed that it would be commonplace to transplant a heart, a kidney, or a lung. Is resurrection therefore too difficult for God?

Sura 12: Joseph (Yousaf)

In the name of God, Most Merciful, Most Beneficent

[12:1] A.L.R. These are the profound verses of this clear and distinct guidance.

[12:2] We have revealed it in an Arabic language that you may understand.⁷⁸

[12:3] We narrate to you the most accurate history through the revelation of this Quran. Before this, you were totally unaware.

[12:4] Recall that Joseph said to his father, "O my father, I saw eleven planets and the sun and the moon, and that they conceded before me."

[12:5] He said, "My son do not tell your brothers about your dream, lest they plot and scheme against you. Surely jealousy is man's worst enemy."

[12:6] "Your Sustainer has thus made you privileged and has given you good news⁷⁹ through inspiration. He has advanced you and the family of Jacob, as He did for your ancestors Abraham and Isaac before that. Your Sustainer is aware, Most Wise."

[12:7] In Joseph and his brothers' history there are lessons for those who seek guidance.

[12:8] They said, "Joseph and his brother are favoured by our father and there are more of us. Indeed, our father is unfair to us."⁸⁰

PLANS AGAINST JOSEPH

[12:9] "Let us kill Joseph or banish him that we may get some attention from our father. Afterwards, we can be righteous people."

[12:10] One of them said, "Do not kill Joseph. Let us throw him into the abyss of the well. Perhaps some caravan can pick him up, if this is what you decide to do."

[12:11] They said, "Our father, why do you not trust us with Joseph? We will take good care of him."

[12:12] "Send him with us tomorrow to enjoy and play. We will protect him."

[12:13] He said, "I worry lest you go away with him, then a wolf may devour him while you are not watching him."

[12:14] They said, "Indeed, if a wolf devours him with so many of us around, then we really are losers."

[12:15] When they went away with him and unanimously decided to throw him into a deep well. We inspired Joseph: "Someday, you will tell them about all this, while they have no idea."

⁷⁸ **The Quran:** literally the Recitation. (Root: Q'R). The Quran was revealed in Arabic as the original recipients of this message were Arabic speaking people. Now the Quran's message can be and should be translated to reach all the people. See verse 14:4. See verses and footnotes 41:44, 26:198 & 2:185.

⁷⁹ **News:** (Arabic: *hadith*). See verses and footnotes 4:42; 68:37.

⁸⁰ **It was Joseph's** half-brothers who were plotting.

THE QUINDEX

KEY WORDS IN THE QURAN

THE QUINDEX: KEY WORDS IN THE QURAN

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**FULL QUINDEX WITH
QURAN NEW MILLENNIUM
EXPOSITION.**

THE QURANIC CONCEPTS

*It is possible that mankind is on the threshold of a golden age;
but, if so, it will be necessary first to slay the dragon that
guards the door, and this dragon is religion.*

Bertrand Russell

**Tough world?
In reality it's your friend...**

No doubt in this life the odds are set against you.
But the obstacles are there not to frustrate you but
to bring out the best in you.

They are designed to put you on your mettle
and permit the indomitable spirit you possess
to reveal itself in all its glory.

You develop yourself in the course
of overcoming obstacles.

Frustration will force you to reconstruct your personality.
Rebuffs and set-backs toughen and harden you, and
by facing challenges you develop a mature personality.

So even at times when the world appears to be stern
and unkind, in the long run it turns out to be,
not your enemy, but your friend.

Development is a journey, not a destination.

Adapted from Islam: A challenge to religion
by G. A. Parwez

VALUES AND PRINCIPLES OF DEEN-ISLAM

Unlike religions enshrined in rituals and rites, the Deen-Islam is based on Absolute Laws and Permanent Values, and like any other system, the benefits and progress can be measured. This can be seen when fear and turmoil is replaced with peace and security resulting in not only the progress and welfare of society but also development of the Self. The ability to raise the status of the Self by human endeavour is of critical importance because it makes the Self fit for the life yet to come. Muslims understand this and apply the Quranic values. The following is not an exhaustive list but serves to illustrate some important aspects of Deen-Islam that every society needs in order to move forward.

- **Accountability to God.** This principle underpins everything. Disbelief in this means that we hold our own opinion, or that of someone else over and above that of God. Since one person's opinion is equal to that of another, then the individual with the most power can and will enforce his or her own opinion. In this case might is right. True justice and equity can only be achieved with external guidance, which we have in the Quran. There is no book in the world, other than the Quran, that gives a holistic set of laws and values: The Permanent Values and Absolute Laws.
- The law of Requitat: accountability and accepting responsibility for your own actions.
- Management of the world's resources.
- Spend from the things you love and be benefactors of society.
- Help maintain a Social Welfare Programme for the benefit of all citizens.
- Observe all commitments to yourself, family, relatives, neighbours and the community.
- Keep promises that are made.
- Persevere in times of hardship and adversity.
- Do not bear false witness.
- Honour and be dutiful to parents.
- Restrain anger and refrain from aggression.
- Do not profiteer, engage in bribery or exploitation.
- Do not devour the property of orphans and protect orphans.
- Do not consume one another's wealth unjustly.
- Do not mix the truth with falsehood.
- Judge with justice between people.
- Advocate good and prohibit the bad.
- Punish criminals justly - take responsibility for your own actions.
- Trade equitably, the right goods for the right price.
- Maintain a Social Welfare system for all citizens.
- Maintain equality and tolerance - but not peace at any price.
- Wage war against the corrupt and the criminal who create fear and turmoil.

These are just some of the values the Quran decrees for people to believe and implement to create communities and societies for a life of peace and security.

IN THE BEGINNING...

*Eat generously, as you please, but do not divide as the branches
like this tree creating a schism, lest you transgress and harm yourself.*

[Verse 2:25]

Religious leaders and their followers are forever proclaiming that they have *faith* in their religion, and only by having *faith* can you achieve salvation. Since *faith* is belief without proof, it's an odd way of securing a good result. If you can accept one doctrine without reasonable evidence, then why not another? Religions of all descriptions have a starting point; when their founder first became enlightened or started preaching his ideas about how best to be saved from the blight in this world to gain bliss in the next: prayer, pilgrimage, miracles, self-flagellation, asceticism, atonement and mercy being the main routes to heaven. What happens to the fate of those before their particular religion took off is anybody's guess. In the case of converts, how do they decide which religion, or indeed which sect they should join? Is it a choice between who has the best ritual or the best festivals?

The world is a place of plenty, enough for the needs of everyone. The differences arise when greed sets in and conflicting interests appear. Common values that ensure people look after each other's interests are instead trampled on in the rush to pick each other's pockets. Why should they do otherwise?

The Quran says that people develop by the measure of their endeavour - not by the practice of rites and rituals. However, this can only take place within a community, and a group of people can only be a community when they share values and goals. People with conflicting interests can never be a community, even if they live in the same place. For mankind, there is no other book that provides better guidance than the Quran.

The Deen-Islam, was not discovered by any founder but the principles that it advocates have always existed, the Absolute Laws and Permanent Values that each and every individual needs: values that are common to progress *all* humanity. Belief in God is simply belief in accountability to your Self, to your community and ultimately to God. This diminishes the need for different conflicting and competing religions and clearly shows that only *one* single social system with the optimal values is required. With accountability, the need to do good becomes imperative, and the desire to pick your fellow human's pocket less attractive.

These days groups like the humanists promote their tenets as if they had discovered them this morning in a eureka moment. Their efforts are to be commended, but they would do well to also study the Quran, then they will

have something much more insightful than just 'good ideas', something all-encompassing, complete, with substance and enduring value.

Leaving aside its inimitable style and structure, the Quran is a book of immense magnitude. Not only does it put human beings and all living things at the centre of moral outlook, it makes these things the very fabric of society. Individuals, communities and the world are the focus of its attention to progress and prosper life, and it encourages all men and women to develop their Self by facing the challenges that are the inevitable hurdles in this world.

The Quran draws attention to man's fantastic surroundings and the wonders within himself. It pushes man to search, discover and know his world, to harness and manage nature for his own benefit, and for the benefit of the world at large. To explore by science and reason is at the heart of all discovery and the Quran inspires man to stretch his mind and imagination.

Championing human rights is a duty, the Quran proclaims, even to the point of risking your life, because dying for a true and just cause is the ultimate sacrifice any being can make. Indeed all who are fit and able are not exempt from striving with their money *and* their lives. Promoting, flourishing and giving life to the natural environment and human system is an act of great virtue, the Quran stresses, time and time again.

But a good deed or any act of virtue is of no value if its worth is not realised, that is why the Quran underpins all activity with accountability. And this is what puts the Quran's Permanent Values and Absolute Laws over and above any other.

Only a few points have been alluded to here, but the Quran goes much deeper and wider than anything else the Humanist, the Religionist, or any human dares or has the ability to address. As it answers life's questions, it puts the kind of responsibility only a strong personality can undertake. And all this more than a thousand years before any modern day humanist was even born, with values that have been there since man first became aware of his conscience and recognised his ability to distinguish a good action from a bad one.

The Quran is the only book that is the complete moral and ethical code for all mankind and now influences more than one and a half billion people. The sad underlying fact being that while reading this profound book, they too barely understand its true value and the real impact it can have when properly applied.

THE QURAN & MUHAMMAD

The Quran - God's message to all mankind, is complete and detailed and does not need any outside source to explain it. It is a book that is genuinely unique. Even if at first it is perceived to be a 'religious' scripture, on careful study it reveals itself not as a religious doctrine but a work of tremendous insight into the meaning of life and how to develop one's Self.

The author guarantees that it will be preserved, so He made the words simple and weave into each other, the sentences seamlessly merge from one to the next, short and easy to remember. Thus its preservation is ensured for all times just as guaranteed: *"We have revealed this consummate reminder and absolutely We will safeguard it."* [Verse 15:9].

Also the composition of the Quran is sound and consistent; the self-reference is the 'self-checking' mechanism that is intrinsically woven into the Quran. To change the order of words in one place would cause the pattern, the Self-reference structure, to collapse. This alone shows that the book is a work of great magnitude. Who but the One who created all things could produce such a mathematically precise book without the aid of a computer, centuries before such equipment was even conceived? Furthermore, the Quran is practical at many levels. The information about our natural environment is accurate yet presented in a simple way that even the early readers understood it. Now those with advanced scientific knowledge can appreciate it even more. So confident is the author that this book is inimitable that He places a challenge before all those who doubt its source: [Verses 4:82; 17:88]. If it were from other than God, there would have been many contradictions in it and this confirms that no one can produce anything like it.

The holistic social order ordained by God was completed with the conclusion of the revelation of the Quran. In his wisdom God did not want to give any further information, decrees or laws etc. In sura 5:3 it says :

"...This day, I have completed your Deen, the Established Order, perfected My blessing upon you and I have decreed for you harmony in the System of this Deen-Islam..."

It is perfect, detailed and the only source of guidance for those who want to protect themselves from permanent harm.

The Quran is the complete and final law but others want to seize the right that belongs to God alone, even claiming that the Quran does not give details and it needs to be explained. For the sincere reader the Quran has sufficient details as guidance in all things for this life, and the explanations become clear by reading.

"It is God who compiled the Quran and it is He who will explain it. " [Verse 75:16-19].

The Quran is good news for those who want to promote the welfare and progress of society and it is a warning for the corrupt: those who seek to exploit society and further their own aims for power and financial gain. This is why Muhammad was often pressured to invent verses to suit the greed of these criminals, and had he complied with their wishes they would have considered him as a friend, but then God would have punished Muhammad severely. [Verses 7:203; 17:73; 69:38-52]. Had God not strengthened Muhammad, he was inclined to give in to the pressure - he was after all a human being like us. [17:90-96; 18:110; 41:6]. When called upon by his people to produce a miracle, such as a spring to gush out from the ground, date palms grown by magic, appearance of angels - Muhammad could not do it. His miracle, his only miracle, was the Quran that would transform these poor simple desert people into a rich and energetic civilisation - such as the world had not yet seen.

The reality was that his sole mission was to deliver the Quran and put belief into action. From a helpless orphan and refugee, he became a renowned leader as a commander of an army, a ruler and a statesman of his country. Muhammad was clearly an example and a role model to show how the application of God's guidance can change the lives of individuals and societies.

FUNDAMENTALISM AND MOHAMMADANISM

Fundamentalism is a word we often hear in the media being used against Islam and muslims. But few people know the origin, true meaning and implications of this word. According to the New Webster's dictionary fundamentalism means: "A belief that the Bible is to be accepted literally as an inerrant and infallible spiritual and historical document; an early 20th century protestant movement stressing this belief; any similar belief and movement".

In another dictionary (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English), Fundamentalism has been defined as: "Maintenance of the literal interpretation of the traditional belief of the Christian religion, such as accuracy of everything of the Bible'.

Thus, according to these definitions, fundamentalism is only applicable to Christians. The expansion of so called modernism and the consequential depreciation of moral values in the west called into question many of the teachings of the Bible.

To have strong (religious) conviction is considered by many to be narrow-minded, dogmatic, and even fanatic. In addition, other forces in Christianity like science, philosophy, secularism, and materialism played their roles in raising doubts and fostering scepticism about religion and God.

While coming across many schools of thought in Christianity, one can find that there exists controversy as to the exact text of the Bible. With this historical perspective, it becomes evident that the expression fundamentalism was evolved by Christians for Christians having strong religious convictions and belief in the literal meaning of the Bible. In contrast, there is no such doubt about the Quran - in spite of the fact that fringe movements have often tried to distort it to promote their own diverse beliefs.

The Quran was revealed to Muhammad. Upon receiving each revelation, Muhammad memorised it and recited it to his companions and scribes. All the chapters of the Quran were recorded in writing before Muhammad's death, and many muslims committed the Quran to memory. With this retrospective, it is obvious that fundamentalism is purely a Christian phenomenon having no relationship with muslims.

Western media started to use this word against muslims, particularly after the Islamic Revolution in Iran, because in recent history it was a major movement illustrating the influence of Islam. Some sections of the media continue to defame muslims and Islam, make false accusations against muslims and, by distorting the history, continue to give these impressions about muslims which are untenable and have no basis in

truth. The muslims on their part should treat this word as a calumny against muslims and a deplorable attempt of distorting their and others' view about Islam and the Quran.

It should be understood that this word has very serious and far-reaching implications; it may mean that there are muslims who doubt the infallibility of the Quran, when truthfully speaking there is none, for the muslims who believe in the one God and identify themselves with the true message sent by Him to mankind through His messengers. The continuity of belief in Him and the mode of current living with its challenges and influences is a repeated confirmation of His instructions and their universality for all times.

To those of us who use the expression of 'fundamentalism' for muslims, as a result of the influence of shallow norms of modern living and also of the media, it is a clear manifestation of deficient belief in God and His messages, and lack of knowledge and understanding of the teachings of the Quran.

At this stage, it is worth considering more deeply the understanding, or lack of it, when it comes to the role of Muhammad. This combined with the facts illustrated above contribute to a tradition of misinterpretation with regard to Islam. What is recognised now as Islam was once commonly known as Mohammadanism; a false term generated from the misconception that Muhammad himself was the founder, not simply a messenger. In tandem with this misappropriation of the founding of Islam, the term denies that the one God founded Islam and also implies that Muhammad alone was responsible for the creation of the Quran. Not only this, but the term Mohammadanism further suggests that Muhammad is an aspect of worship, whereas there is no verse in the Quran that supports this claim.

Firstly, there is the issue of misattributing Muhammad's role as a messenger. The term Mohammadanism is obsolete, and in truth was never an appropriate term.

More proof, were it needed, of the origin of Islam exists in a verse, which states: "I have brought guidance that is no different from what other messengers brought. I have no idea what will happen to me or to you. I only follow what is revealed to me. I am no more than a profound warner." [Verse 46:9].

This verse reveals that Muhammad was not even the first messenger to follow the way of life as specified in the Quran. It states that "other messengers" had come before Muhammad and followed the same Deen as he did. This is elaborated further in an earlier passage which reads: "He decreed for you the same Deen; the established Order, that He decreed for

Noah and what We reveal here to you and the same that We decreed for Abraham, Moses and Jesus." [Verse 42:13].

Also those who refer to Muhammad as a 'prophet' are also in error as this implies he 'prophesised' or foretold the future. There is sufficient evidence in the Quran to confirm this, not least the clear statement "...nor do I know the future." [Verse 6:50].

Muhammad's role was that of a 'profound warner', and the last in a line of many. The term Mohammadanism is thus proven to be obsolete as there is no support in the Quran of Muhammad as a deity or superior human being; rather he is a man, a messenger with a message. Similarly, the lineage including Jesus, Noah and Moses proves that the timeframe of the origin of Islam significantly predates that of Muhammad.

Such is the straightforwardness with which the lineage of God's messengers are set out and their role explained, so is the original text of the Quran in essence incorruptible. The perversion of the text by some translators and the exaggeration by the media may be prevalent misconceptions, but the text itself bears no relation to the tag of 'fundamentalism'. Just as Mohammadanism is an outmoded and archaic term, so is fundamentalism an equally incompatible term for Deen-Islam.

Radicalisation is also a term that has been wrongly applied to Islam by some sections of the media. While it is true that the concepts in the Quran are thorough and far reaching because they seek strict disciplinary measures to overturn corrupt and unjust ideas, it is wrong to say without evidence that they are cruel and oppressive. Radicalisation itself is not necessarily negative but when applied to Islam it is often with the intention of demonising it.

The Quran does instruct muslims to initiate sweeping changes, and these may indeed be radical in the sense that they are profound. However, these challenges are there to improve mankind's situation and move it forward to a better future.

FREE WILL AND BELIEF IN GOD

During a question and answer session after one of Chomsky's talks, a student asked: "Is there free will?"

"Did anyone compel you to ask this question?" Chomsky replied.

"No," said the student.

"There," Chomsky remarked, "you have your answer."

People throughout history have asked for proof of God's existence and the Quran details many of these demands. They have asked to be shown miracles, instant abundance of fruit, feasts to be spread out before them and even a book to be sent down from the sky so that they could touch and feel.⁸¹

Some people, even those who profess belief in Quran, continually say that there is no solid proof of God's existence and that they just believe because of faith and then bizarrely insist that this is the logical view. They say God cannot be proved or disproved. And they believe because of faith in the unseen, as logically the negative cannot be proved.

To believe out of faith (belief without proof) is a poor reason. An intelligent person will believe in God because of the profound guidance He reveals through his messengers. If a person believes because of faith, then one god or belief is good as another.⁸²

More importantly, those who insist that there is no solid proof of God, have missed the point. Yes, belief in God is essential to underpin accountability, but it is not the *purpose* of creation. This aspect is the key to understanding the *reason* for creation of man. If the *raison d'être* was to believe in God, it would have been made absolutely clear. But this is not the case. The Quran says that had God wanted, everyone on the earth would have believed. He could have forced acceptance.⁸³ Indeed the vast universe and all that is in it concedes to this, and operates under His direction, willingly or unwillingly.⁸⁴

If belief in God, His messengers and His guidance was the function, and He could have compelled belief, then the question is WHY didn't He? If this is so easy for God then WHY did he not do this? Why does God not just show himself and once and for all make people believe in Him?⁸⁵

⁸¹ **People** have always been looking for miracles and a saviour. To become fit and healthy you have to eat balanced diet and take regular exercise - no-one can do it for you. Similarly *YOU* have to do the virtuous works to develop your Self - no-one can do it for you. See verses 17:90-96.

⁸² **People** believe because of the profoundness of the guidance that God reveals. See verse 7:75.

⁸³ **Enforced** belief would have no value. See verses 10:99; 11:118.

⁸⁴ **The universe** operates under the ordinance of God - not 'free will'. See verses 3:83; 13:15.

⁸⁵ **When God appears** - everything is done and dusted - no time left. See verse 2:210.

To answer this question we need to ask why God created man, what is man's function on this earth?

The function of a plant is manifold, how it fulfils its purpose is by being what it is. Given the right condition an apple seed will grow into an apple tree and will produce a crop of apples. It has no choice but to follow its destiny (Arabic: *taqdir*). Should the conditions not be right: too windy, too cold, too hot, wrong kind of soil, too much rain, too little rain, and so on, it will not produce a good crop, if any at all. The conditions for a successful crop of apples are determined not by the apple tree, but by the natural laws; the ordinance of God. The seed has no choice, it simply develops (or not, as the case may be) according to external factors.

Birds and animals too have different functions in the system and they also have inherent behaviour directed by instinct. A robin builds a nest in much the same as any other robin and eats the same food as other robins. A lion too behaves in more or less the same way as lions have always done. There is very little a lion or a robin can do internally to influence its own life. They have never done that, and are never likely to. It is man who has reached the top of this tree and has come to dominate the world because of his acquired ability to do so. This is because man is different not only in degree but also in kind. His intelligence in range and capacity is far greater than any animal. His thinking ability supersedes all animals. Even given difficult or adverse conditions, the human can rise to the challenge in an innovative and original way.

While man was at one time, like all animals, subject to the forces of nature, now he has a great deal more control.⁸⁶ But this is means to an end and his real power, unlike plants and animals, is the 'free will' to choose his destiny, his *taqdir*. This is what allows him to achieve his true purpose in life; to develop his Self to a higher status and become fit for the next stage in evolution.

The human being has 'free will' and can choose, while other creations such as the solar system, the plants, the animals follow determined laws. God could have created people the same way. A belief that is forcibly imposed on an individual has no value for him or for the world at large.

For an individual to develop, it is essential to go through the proper process, and each Self must have the *free will* to do good or evil, because individuals develop or regress by the *choices* they make, and therefore *must* have the freedom to do so. *There is no value in forced belief*. This is why God does not compel people to believe.

⁸⁶ Verses 2:34; 15:30; 17:61. Man is given the power to harness all the forces of nature - except of course his Ego: Iblees, the shaitan, the 'free will' aspect of his Self which he needs to control though self-discipline and self-restraint by following guidance from God. See also verse 7:201.

WHY BELIEVE IN GOD?

To the monotheists, the atheist says, "You reject many gods and I only reject one." - but which god is it that he rejects?

Is it Thor, wielding a hammer and making thunder? Is he Zeus of Olympians? Can he be Hanuman, the god who is half human, half monkey, or even Jesus, the supposed human manifestation of God? These are just a few choices from the many dozens available.

It is understandable that intellectuals, academics and other thinking people turn away from belief in God. Gods that look like people (or indeed animals), have emotions, weaknesses, and die or commit suicide are poor candidates. Add to this their demands for blood sacrifice, pointless prayer and rituals, and the case against god and gods becomes stronger. It is not surprising, therefore, that the intelligent person is quick to discard the religious notion of God.

In many eastern countries to be openly atheist is almost impossible. Prominent atheists tend to be from the west, and as many have a Christian background, give little attention or credence to eastern literature such as the Quran. Coming from a religious background or growing up in a society that believes God is like a man, the son of God, born of a virgin mother, who is sacrificed by his father would deter any reasonable person.

But atheism has a problem. This position gives atheists a blind spot because they look at God through the prism of religion. They reject God when in reality they should be rejecting religion. It is religion that steals the identity of God and distorts it.

What then exactly is the nature of God? God's description in the Quran does not give Him shape, form or animate features but attributes. The word *Allah* in the Quran is not a name for God. It simply means the One God. Even the Arabic speaking Christians use *Allah* for God.

The short chapter in the Quran titled *Al-Ikhlaas* [Sura 112], meaning *The Absoluteness*, expresses these attributes in a most succinct manner, attributes that, as the Absolute Self, can belong only to God.

The first verse of this Sura emphasises the attributes of '*Ahadiyyah*' or Oneness: "Proclaim: He is the One and only God." The word 'One' (*Ahad*) is exceptionally rich in meaning. It connotes unity, uniqueness and wholeness. It identifies the implicit qualities of Self-identity, Self-consistency and peerless integrity. Nothing from outside can secure a lodgement in it. Its unity is not paralleled anywhere in the universe. Of course, only the ultimate Self possesses unity of this kind. A weak personality, with its ever-changing attitudes and whims, cannot lay claim to such oneness.

The second verse refers to the divine attribute of "*samadiyyah*" or Self-dependence. The term defines independence, Self-reliance and Self-sufficiency. "*Samad*" is the being which depends only on its own Self and on nothing else, a being that is eternally enduring and absolutely free.

The third verse, "He does not beget. Nor was He begotten." refers to another important divine attribute. God, as the Absolute Self, is Self-subsistent. God did not come into being through the process of procreation and does not have a spouse and therefore neither does He procreate. God exists and has always existed.

The fourth and last verse, "And there is none comparable with Him", shows that this divine Self is unique. No copy or replica of this Self can exist. In the realm of the divine Self, there is no room for duplication. No laws are applicable to this Self, which is a law unto itself; in fact, laws emanate from God.

This, in short, is the true description of God: unique, in every sense of the word. With this description in view, is it possible that the human being, who barely understands the world he lives in, a world which is like a grain of sand in the universe, can encompass the one who sustains all that is in the heavens and the earth? It would be like a fruit fly trying to understand Einstein.

However, this does not confront the difficult questions that the atheist seeks the answers to. One of the main arguments of atheists is that, if there is a God, He would not allow pain and suffering such as bone cancers and the existence of deadly creatures like worms that burrow into the eyes of children, making them go blind. This, the atheist says, is utterly unfair. Why should I, the atheist asks, respect such a capricious, mean minded, stupid god who creates a world so full of injustice and pain? The world is clearly created by a maniac, the atheist says, and we have to spend our lives on bended knees thanking him. God could easily have created a world in which these things did not exist. These things aren't the fault of humans, he says: so why do they have a place in the world? It is perfectly apparent, the atheist concludes, that God is monstrous, and deserves no respect whatsoever and the moment you banish Him, life becomes simpler, purer, cleaner and more worth living.

After reading this argument it may be quite easy to reject the idea of God as a beneficent and merciful being, but let's not stop here: there may be something else that needs attention.

We believe that, because of gravity, releasing a heavy object will make it fall, but we don't suddenly reject the force of gravity because we see an aeroplane that weighs at least 70 tonnes and carries hundreds of passengers, flying 30,000 feet above in the air. This is because we also

believe there are many other factors involved. Perhaps rejecting God along with religion may not be such a reasonable idea, especially as we now have the Quranic description of God before us.

Did God create evil or is evil the consequence of human wickedness? Rather than placing blame on God, perhaps we need to rethink our own contribution in this world.

There are many health hazards in the world which could easily be minimised by wealthy and influential people, as well as governments, who are keen to spend billions in the killing fields around the world but have never invested as much for the rice fields that would feed starving millions.

Social welfare is an act of immeasurable virtue and repeatedly emphasised in the Quran, so help would not go amiss to create environments that reduce the chances of children suffering from parasites, starvation and displacement that cause such misery to the most vulnerable people on earth.

It may come as a surprise to atheists who use the argument of an uncaring God, but there are many disasters that *are* the fault of human beings and they cause a great deal of misery. Humans left to their own devices are more likely to be greedy, avaricious and murderous.

The sinking of the Titanic killed more than 1500 people; how the 'unsinkable' ship sank is still a mystery. Questions have been raised as to the true nature of the 'accident', as some claim that it was the Olympic, its sister ship, that was sunk in an insurance scam by greedy men in a position to do so. This may not have been an 'act of God' after all.

Equally, who could we blame for the immeasurable misery caused by atomic bombs dropped onto Hiroshima and Nagasaki? What were the effects on the innocent children in these two devastated cities? What about the Bhopal disaster in India? How many people suffered? Should we blame God for these too? Is He the monster that caused these catastrophes? Or was it state and corporate greed for yet more profit and power?

An atheist says that God is selfish when he allows bad things to happen. Did God arrange the potato famine in Ireland (1845-1852), for which Prime Minister Tony Blair issued an apology in 1997, killing over one million men, women and children? Or was it the self-interested absentee English landlords and economic instability caused by English laws that changed dearth into disaster? Thalidomide, a lucrative drug of the fifties, caused at least 10,000 children to be severely disabled. Did God cause the disabilities or was it the greedy drug company, Chemie Grünenthal? Cancer and ill health can be caused by smoking. How does this affect the children who become, by default, passive smokers? Will the avaricious tobacco corporations and the tax-hungry governments put an end to this misery?

The atheist whines about the misery in the world, but what is he doing to bring to account the perpetrators he does know about?

Do people make this a life 'simpler, purer, cleaner and more worth living?' If the majority of people on earth are decent, good human beings, then why is the world not a better place? In reality it is the *human beings* that are most eager to exploit and profit from the very chaos that they create and the misery that befalls on their fellow human beings. This is because they can, and they can because they have the *choice* and the *freedom* to do so.

Should God stop all the bad things happening in the world? This is presuming that we all agree on what 'bad' means. Would people prefer that the world was liberated from all the pain, misery and disaster? There would be no pain of birth, no illness and no death. The world would have no animals that lived by hunting and no death caused by savage killing on a daily basis. Presumably we want a world such as the one where there are no meat eaters and no plant eaters - some Hindus don't even eat certain vegetables. No child would play in case they fell and grazed their knee, or could be hit by a ball in case they cried. No one would sit any exams in case they failed, and everyone would look the same in case someone felt inferior because of their looks.

God created everything in truth, to allow mankind to develop by his own endeavour. It is man's actions that give the consequence of evil. God gave man choice, and good or evil are the consequences of that choice.

The real monsters are around us and if we deem ourselves to be good, it is our incumbent duty to get rid of them. In the Quran we have a beacon to recognise who they are. It is the good examples that will be the real threat to these monsters, and the sooner we banish them, the sooner we will have a world free of turmoil and fear.

We live in a world where we grow, develop, both physically and mentally, and where our Self has the opportunity to flourish.

This may be a tough world but in reality it's our friend. In this life the odds are set against us, but the obstacles are there not to frustrate us but to bring out the best in us. They are designed to put us on our mettle and permit the indomitable spirit we possess to reveal itself in all its glory. We develop ourselves in the course of overcoming obstacles. Frustration forces us to reconstruct our personality. Rebuffs and set-backs toughen and harden us, and by facing challenges, we develop a mature personality, so even at times when the world appears to be cruel and unkind, in the long run it turns out to be not our enemy, but our friend.

The atheist does not believe in God because he says there is no proof. But he is quite happy to believe a scientist who says there are a billion stars and never thinks he should count them. He is happy to believe in Socrates,

Queen Victoria and Hitler, none of whom he has ever met, yet he accepts the books and films that tell us about them as if they were the whole truth. For most people the evidence of the lives of the rich and famous, whom most of us are never likely to meet, is inferential, just as is the evidence for God. But evidence for God is more than just inferential.

The assertion of the Quran is that it is the message from God, with God making a claim on ownership of your life. Would it not be an intelligent thing to check if this claim stands up? God speaks to us in the Quran and points to His signs, the evidence that is in the universe for us to discover. Yes, the most conclusive proof would be if He were to present Himself and perform a feat that only God could perform. But then, that would be the end of the matter. A person who sees God would be compelled to believe and to follow His guidance - then the atheist would cry foul and claim that he is robbed of his freedom of choice. In truth, enforced goodness has little value and cannot and does not enrich the Self.

How a person sees God depends on his or her upbringing. People generally see God as having human qualities but in more perfect form than their own. The earth, as we now know, is an oblate spheroid. Through time it did not change its shape but people, through discovery, changed from believing it to be flat to now accepting the truth. But does it matter, just now, if we believe or not? Even today millions don't know or care. You could no more prove that there is God than prove to the majority of people that the earth is round. As long as the earth does what it's supposed to do, most people don't care if it's flat or round.

When we demand proof we need to ensure it is relative. If DNA information was available 1000 years ago, would an atheist then be able to understand and accept it? Should we only accept evidence that we can see? People may not believe in life after death but a smart individual prepares for the next day because he expects to wake up. He may even have a nest egg investment to see him through the winter of his life. If this is not belief in a continuous future then what is?

"If there is no God, then all that exists is time and chance acting on matter. If this is true then the difference between your thoughts and mine correspond to the difference between shaking up a bottle of Pepsi and a bottle of Coke. You simply fizz atheistically and I fizz theistically. This means that you do not hold to atheism because it is true, but rather because of a series of chemical reactions. Morality, tragedy, and sorrow are equally evanescent. They are all empty sensations created by the chemical reactions of the brain, in turn created by too much pizza and beer the night before. If there is no God, then all abstractions are chemical epiphenomena, like swamp gas over putrid water. This means that we have no reason for assigning truth and falsity to the chemical fizz we call reasoning or right and wrong to the irrational reaction we call morality. If no God, mankind is a set of bi-pedal carbon units of mostly water. And nothing else." (Edited version from the original quote by Douglas Wilson).

To believe in God is not just to believe, it is to accept responsibility and ultimate accountability. The majority of people feign, to one degree or another, highly desirable qualities and attitudes that receive great approval, while in their private life such opinions belie their public statements. For example wars are waged for profit, not to fight against aggressors or to defend the oppressed that political statements imply.

Belief in God inspires us to be conscientious and to do things that are good. People who don't believe in God may be very decent, moral people, but for many, with no belief in God or accountability, might is right.

Those who take part in corruption are often intelligent, educated and wealthy. Why do their selfish desires prevail? Why do the laws not inhibit them? Without ultimate accountability, people *may* do good, but there is no real reason *why* they should.⁸⁷

In Deen-Islam the utmost importance is the focus of value in the development of the individual Self. Everything else is subordinate to this. The Quranic guidance is aimed at producing free good people who expend themselves for others of their own free will, because they realise that it is this action that strengthens their Self making it fit for the future. A potent belief in God, accountability and the life yet to come is a powerful incentive to generosity and selfless service to others. Those who believe in the life yet to come will naturally attach a far greater importance to values that they can carry over to a higher plane than to the material goods that have to be left behind after death.

The atheist can reject God but he cannot deny that we need order. To progress, we need rules and regulations. We need Permanent Values. Countries are consistently trying to move forward by applying common standards of measurements, common standards of trade laws and universal standards of human rights. We see this increasingly in Europe as well as worldwide.

The Quran gives absolute standards for the welfare and progress of mankind - for individuals and societies - without the need for any trial and error. Indeed, these permanent values in the Quran ensure that each individual is accountable to God through His Laws of Requit. The Deen-Islam, the Established Order, is a challenge to atheism as much as it is a challenge to religion because both extremes are wrong.

The real reason people don't believe in God is not that belief is not intellectually possible but because belief in God compels the thinking person to face the fact that he or she *will* be held accountable to the ultimate Reckoner: God.

⁸⁷ **If a man is a tyrant**, and wants to be a tyrant, and has the power to be a tyrant, why should he not continue to be a tyrant? Who has the motivation to stop him? See footnotes 3:158; 7:201.

CRITICISM OF THE QURAN

There are contradictions in the Quran, claim some critics. On close scrutiny however, it turns out they have never really understood the Quran and base their conclusions on poor translations. Their nitpicking is a mischievous way to be antagonistic and create doubt amongst those who are sincere but unfamiliar with the Quran.

The translations generally used lack clarity and are unhelpful in resolving issues raised by the scaremongers, this may lend some support to their otherwise shaky claims. Add to this the reliance on the spurious hadiths and the evidence sways in favour of the adversaries.

For example, in the verse 39:12 the messenger is commanded to "be one of the first to submit." As this is also said by other messengers, the question is then raised as to who really is the first to believe, since they cannot all be the first. What is perhaps deliberately overlooked is that this is just a turn of phrase to mean that they are *amongst* the *foremost* of believers.

The verses used as examples are cherry picked and used in isolation, often to shore up petty assertions. Other verses are also cobbled together making a perfectly reasonable decree seem horrifically medieval and brutal. One such verse that is frequently misquoted is 9:5 as follows:

"But when the forbidden months are past, then fight and slay the Pagans wherever ye find them, and seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem (of war); but if they repent, and establish regular prayers and practice regular charity, then open the way for them: for Allah is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful," *Yousaf Ali translation*.

This verse is used to denigrate muslims as violent and vicious warmongers who convert by the thrust of the sword. They take no prisoners and are commanded to kill any non-muslim on sight.

It has to be confessed that if this verse is misunderstood by some critics, some sympathy can be extended to them because Yousaf Ali's translation is quite inadequate. Here is the proper exposition of the verse:

Once the restricted months of the treaty are over and the mushrikeen still refuse to make peace, you may slay them wherever you encounter them; overcome and punish them and watch them carefully at every place. If they repent and observe their agreed commitments and keep them pure, then you shall give them freedom to move around. God is Protector, Most Merciful. *New Millennium Exposition*.

There are no pagans mentioned in the original Arabic text of this verse. The word used is 'mushrikeen' and to translate mushrikeen as pagans is like calling Guy Fawkes and his gang a group of entertainers putting on a fireworks display. Mushrik (singular) means traitor, an individual who commits high treason, and in this case those who are actively at war with the muslims.

Any community will, if they have the power, attack and kill their enemies; especially those who seek to slaughter them. So why should muslims wait like 'sitting ducks' to be wiped out? Good people defend themselves and always wage war on terror; countries are prepared to annihilate those who persistently threaten their peace and security. For example, the British government allegedly did this in Northern Ireland during the Troubles in Belfast. Years later BBC's Panorama programme reported ex-soldiers who said there was a 'shoot-to-kill' policy and IRA members were hunted down and executed, some of them unarmed. Many civilians are also said to have been killed in these incidents.

The verses in the Quran are about maintaining peace and security; they don't advocate an open season to kill innocent bystanders, but to eliminate only those who take part in active terrorism. The instruction in the verse is to declare open warfare against them. Whether carried out as a covert or overt operation depends on the situation - but not to 'cover up' the killings as the British death squads are suspected to have done in Northern Ireland.

Reading the next verse will reveal that even in this combat scenario, those mushrikeen that seek help should be given aid when they ask for it. Quite a contrast to the picture painted by critics who use this verse to portray muslims as barbaric cut-throats. To get the full picture, all the verses that relate to this decree must be read together and not in isolation.

There are numerous such proddings and pokings by the detractors. But it is apparent that in the absence of any real discrepancies, critics, in their zeal to show inconsistencies fall over themselves to construe things that are simply not there.

There are other claims that Muhammad copied from the Bible. Had he done so then at least some, if not many of the errors in the Bible would have crept into the Quran. This includes the creation of light, which is evident from Biblical narrations as having been created on the first day, before the stars that produce this light. What the Quran does is confirm the truth, and at times this coincides with what may be found in the Bible.

Furthermore, had Muhammad, as claimed by some, written the Quran he would have had to have accurate knowledge of natural phenomena and scientific discoveries that have only been corroborated in recent history. No man living at the time the Quran was revealed would even have had an inkling of such things - let alone describe them in a way that would be generally understood and then confirmed in detail centuries later.

THE SELF: THE HUMAN PERSONALITY

To say that man is nothing but an animal is to deny, by implication, that he has essential attributes other than those of all animals.... It is important to realise that the essence of his unique nature lies precisely in those characteristics that are not shared with any other animal. His place in nature and its supreme significance to man are not defined by his animality but his humanity. Man has certain basic diagnostic features which set him off most sharply from any other animal and which have involved other developments not only increasing this sharp distinction but also making it an absolute difference in kind and not only a relative difference of degree.

G.G. Simpson: The Meaning of Evolution.

The human being consists of physical and non-physical elements. Hair and nails are regularly cut and disposed of, body parts such as heart and lungs can be transplanted. The scientists now say that our cells are frequently renewed and over a seven year period we have a completely new body. However, the body may change but our personal identity is not affected. There is something that bodily changes cannot radically alter; something that continues to endure even if the limbs are amputated and even after the death of the whole body. There is something that remains constant in the changing body. Behind the body is something far more enduring and real. This is the Self, or the human personality, and is often referred to as the 'spirit' or the 'soul', but these are incomplete descriptions of the 'nafs' that is referred to in the Quran.

Life is continuous. We know that matter cannot be destroyed but changes into other matter or a different state. Energy too converts into different types of energy. So why do we think that the human Self cannot develop and change into another creation after death?

It's worth looking at a common natural event to understand this process.

After a caterpillar hatches it spends the next part of its life eating the leaves of the tree on which its life began. Then one day, the caterpillar stops eating, hangs upside down from a twig or a leaf and spins itself a silky cocoon or molts into a shiny chrysalis. Within this protective casing, the caterpillar radically transforms its body, eventually emerging as a butterfly. For someone who has never seen this transformation it is difficult to imagine how this can happen, but it does. To quote Richard Fuller: "*There is nothing in a caterpillar that tells you it's going to be a butterfly.*" Just as the caterpillar thought that life was over, it becomes a butterfly.

Similarly, with a human life, when the body 'dies', the Self emerges as a new creation. The Self is the latent personality that develops or regresses subject to the activities of the individual. It grows not by the subconscious intentions but through the deliberate and premeditated thoughts and acts that the human being performs, and not so much by the social influence to which the individual is exposed, but by the way in which he reacts to it.

Therefore, it is the duty of society to provide opportunities for Self development and it is the duty for individuals to realise such opportunities to their full potential.

Freedom is the indispensable condition of moral life. Morality is irrelevant to a being whose actions are determined by outside forces. This freedom, of course, has its stresses and limitations. Nevertheless, his actions are free in the sense that they are self-determined; choosing freely from the alternatives available. The individual feels free when his actions are in accord with the characteristics of his Self. However, these need to be disciplined and restricted and when these restrictions are imposed, it is for the sole purpose of turning them to the best account.

The self-imposed restrictions are not disparaging to his status as a free individual. Freedom properly channelled is the necessary condition of human development, both individual and social. A weak Self can easily deviate from the right path. Only a strong Self can forge ahead towards the goal of Self-realisation, survive death and take its place in the life yet to come. This is in essence the purpose of life and to achieve this goal, God provides His guidance in the Quran.

The Ego, named Iblees (shaitan) in the Quran, is an aspect of our psyche which is in fact our 'free will' and often manifests as the negative influence and a regressive factor. This is our 'demon' that we constantly have to fight against to progress and strengthen our Self. A 'strong willed' individual will have no problem overcoming this shaitan but the choice is yours whether you concede your negative desires or discipline yourself and face challenges to emerge as a Self fit for not only this life but the life yet to come.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ **The body** is a temporal capsule to house the Self and facilitate its development. Just as the caterpillar becomes a butterfly, the human journeys on to become a different, potentially better being. In Darb-e-Kalim, Iqbal describes this: *"Life is like a shell and the Self is the pearl drop (concretion) therein; what is the shell worth if it cannot transform the sand grain into a pearl. Through Self-knowledge, Self-restraint and Self-development, the Self can conquer even death."* This birth, life and transition is well illustrated by Carlo Collodi in his children's novel 'The adventures of Pinocchio'. Pinocchio, a marionette, is carved by Geppetto and longs to become a 'real boy'. He faces many challenges, learning to tell the truth and do good and eventually succeeds in attaining his dream. This very simplified story helps understand the development of the Self, that through overcoming obstacles how a person can change and become fit for the next life. Another story, 'The Strange case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde' by Robert Louis Stevenson, shows how the human psyche is in constant conflict with itself. Unless guided, the Self is in perpetual turmoil with shaitan (the 'free will' Ego aspect) seeking to influence it.

THE NEXT STEP IN EVOLUTION

There is nothing in a caterpillar that tells you it's going to be a butterfly.

Richard Fuller.

Charles Robert Darwin was born in 1809 in England, the son of Robert Waring Darwin, a doctor with the largest medical practice outside London. Even at a young age he was keen in collecting specimens and at 16 years old he attended Edinburgh University. Darwin's lack of interest in medicine disappointed his father, a Church of England member, who then sent him to the University of Cambridge to study divinity.

In August 1831, Darwin was invited to sail as an unpaid naturalist on HMS Beagle. The ship was to survey the east and west coasts of South America and continue to the Pacific islands to establish a chain of chronometric stations. The voyage lasted five years, instead of the planned two, during which Darwin kept meticulous notes and sent back geological and biological specimens.

In 1859, at a time when most people were deeply religious and believed that God created the world in seven days, Darwin published 'On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection'. The book was extremely controversial because the logical extension of Darwin's theory was that man was simply another form of animal. It made it seem possible that people might have evolved, quite possibly, from apes, and it destroyed the prevailing religious view on how the world was created. Darwin was vehemently attacked, particularly by the Church. However, his ideas soon gained favour and have now become widely accepted.

Theory and approach

During his voyage on the Beagle, Darwin read Lyell's 'Principles of Geology' which suggested that the fossils found in rocks were actually evidence of animals that had lived long ago.

These ideas were reinforced by Darwin's discoveries in the Galapagos Islands which lay west of South America. When he returned to England in 1836, Darwin tried to understand his observations and how species evolve. He proposed a theory of evolution which occurred by the process of natural selection. He said that the animals and plants best suited to their environments were more likely to survive and reproduce, passing on the characteristics which helped them survive to their offspring. Gradually, the species would change over time.

In psychology Charles Darwin's theory is considered as the Biological Approach, as it states that change takes place as a biological process, and it is based on the notion of the survival of the fittest. Darwin's Biological

Approach extended beyond perceiving the savagery of the animal world, noted by other scientists who had observed the lion killing the zebra.

Darwin discovered the competition between individuals of a single species. He saw that within a small population the individual with the sharper beak, the longer horn, or the brighter feather might have a better chance to survive and reproduce than other individuals. If such advantageous traits were passed on to new generations, they would eventually be predominant in future populations. Darwin focused his evolutionary analysis within species. Later, biologists came to understand variations within a species as variations in the genes of its individual members, and they explained evolution as the action of natural selection upon genes responsible for advantageous traits.

Keen to verify his approach and theory of natural selection, Darwin enlisted the help of animal breeders. With their experience of artificial selection he could determine how natural selection worked.

Although he still faced many difficulties, Darwin's theory of evolution solved many problems in anatomy, embryology and among other sciences. It also gave us a valuable insight into human evolution.

The next step in evolution

Darwin's theory can also be considered to be the basis of an approach in metapsychology – taking the evolutionary theory of natural selection to the next stage. It is now established that plants and animals are all affected by competitive stress in their environment. Living beings change not by choice, but in response to their environment. Only those who are fit to, pass on their advantageous genes to the next generation.

Even humans have physically changed from the early Homo Ergaster to the emergence of Homo Sapiens. They have evolved from other hominids, apes, placental mammals and even from single celled crystalloids in the primordial mud – all in the process of anthropogenesis.

According to evolutionary metapsychology, the physical maturity of the human body has arrived, and now the development is of a different kind. As the body benefits according to its activity and the quality of food individuals eat; nutritious food and regular exercise create better, healthier bodies. It is now the Self that seeks to advance in this stage of evolutionary development.

The Self is the human personality and it seeks to realise its potential for development. The Self does not come into being through the natural process of procreation but is activated by the spark of human action. It seeks and acquires an identity through an individual's actions. Good (munificent) actions progress its development and bad (regressive) actions

impede it. Only actions prompted by ethical choices affect it; other actions have no bearing on it.

Individuals who live by higher standards and values accelerate their development. For example, to an athlete following a strict regime of a good diet and training each day, the benefits become obvious. The athlete who does not is likely to be a loser.

Similarly, an individual who imposes 'value-orientated' restrictions on his/her Self does it for the sole purpose of turning things to the best account – i.e. to develop the Self. Discipline and restrictions do not detract humans from being free agents; the metapsychologist states that freedom, properly channelled, is the necessary condition for human Self-development.

A person who is consistent and has integrity and strength of character will have no problem in this progression. However, a weak personality, with its ever-changing attitudes, can never be a candidate for success in this evolutionary process.

According to the evolutionary metapsychologist, the body is disposable and interchangeable: nails can be clipped, hair can be cut, amputations occur and dead cells are replaced; also, heart transplants and kidney transplants are common. These are everyday practices in modern times. The body, they say, is only an ephemeral instrument in the evolutionary process that provides an environment for the Self to develop. Actions carried out by the physical body change the nature of the Self: they either develop it or it stagnates, in which case, for all practical purposes, it becomes extinct. However, the developed Self becomes resilient and survives what we call death, progressing to the next stage of life.

As such, the process of evolution that Charles Darwin discovered carries on, except that the present stage of evolution is not by natural selection but by self-determination. The individual has the opportunity to make choices (i.e. what action to take – progressive or regressive), and it is only when the choice is made that subsequent results become inevitable, as the laws of cause and effect take place.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ **The Self develops** successfully only in the right social environment and only with the correct attitude towards life. This is how evolution progresses, stage by stage and only the fittest, the developed Self can proceed to the next level of life. C.S. Lewis described this succinctly: *"It may be hard for an egg to turn into a bird: it would be harder for it to fly while it's still an egg. We are like eggs at present. And you can't go on forever being just an ordinary, decent egg. We must be hatched or go bad."* The developed Self will soar and the weak and feeble Self will wish it could.

PARENTS, CHILDREN AND FAMILY

The Quran is a book of equitable social standards defined as Permanent Values. These are the tenets that not only hold together individuals and society, but also push forward the progress of humanity in a matrix of harmony. To bring about a developed civilisation, the Quran lays down some basic requirements for those who want to protect themselves from lasting harm.

For example, parents and their children have some commitments to each other: the first of these obligations that parents have to their children is not to kill them, especially because of poverty, hardship or frustration.

This injunction is not as strange as it first seems; children are often victims because parents cannot afford to feed them, marry them off due to exorbitant dowry customs, or because they become embroiled in the drama of estranged parents where one parent murders his or her offspring rather than give them up to their spouse.⁹⁰

Parents have a duty to look after the welfare of their children. This includes that they provide adequate food and shelter. It also falls on them to ensure the health and safety of their children. They are required to maintain an environment where their children grow up feeling safe and secure. However, the extent of this responsibility is limited to the means parents have. They are not expected to burden themselves with debt to provide beyond the necessities - so luxuries are out, unless parents have the resources to provide them. In fact, it is a duty incumbent on parents to provide the best, but *not* to stretch beyond their means and undergo undue suffering.⁹¹

Parents have an obligation to write a will in the favour of their children, letting them inherit what is rightfully theirs. They are not permitted to cut out any offspring because of ill feeling towards them.

Apart from providing the material needs, parents are under strict obligation to provide guidance. This direction has to be based on Permanent Values that give children wholesome discipline yet allow freedom of expression. Parents are charged with the task of awakening the consciousness of their children, showing them that responsibility and accountability are the twin forces that define their character. It is critical that children grow up to be exemplary citizens and this can be done only by good role models which parents should be by the virtue of their position.

In the event that children deviate and get caught up in harmful social influences, then parents should not shoulder the blame or feel guilty, and if

⁹⁰ **Do not kill** your children for fear of poverty. See verse 17:31.

⁹¹ **God does not** impose any burden. See verse 65:7.

it becomes necessary they may disassociate themselves from their aberrant offspring. Conversely, parents ought not to indulge or be too proud of their children as it can create an illusion of supremacy, unrealistic expectations and inevitable disappointment. It is also worth remembering, when relationships disintegrate to an extreme level, children and parents can also become enemies of one another.

However, *shared* values create a strong, unbreakable bond between parents and children, so it is essential for parents to try and instil a sense of high moral and ethical standards in their children.

What about children? What are their commitments to their parents?

First and foremost children have an undeniable duty to *honour* their parents, each one individually and both together. As second only to God, this is the primary tenet for any child, young or old.⁹² Their mother carried them for nine months, gave birth arduously and looked after them when they could not do it themselves. They were weaned, cared for in sickness and in health. While they were young they were provided with nourishment and an environment which allowed them to flourish.

Honour is something which needs to be shown in practical ways. The remembrance of a birthday or an occasional visit is not enough. Neither is leaving them in a 'good' home for the elderly and infirm. *Unless honour manifests as something real and constructive, it is meaningless.*

Honouring your parents means not expressing annoyance or speak harshly to them. To honour means never to mistreat them. It is crucially important to understand this; just as parents should never abuse their children, children are prohibited from ill-treating their parents.⁹³

To honour your parents does not in any way imply that you must follow or support them in wrongful things, such as those things that would divert you from adhering to the Permanent Values. In a situation of a great conflict or irreconcilable difference, children should move away from their parent or parents, rather than speak to them unsympathetically or cruelly.

In preference to relatives, neighbours, friends or other people in the community, children should be good and do what is best, first for their parents and then for others. It is the right of parents to expect decent care and financial support when necessary over and above anyone else. When Joseph had the opportunity to raise his parents' position both in rank and wealth, he did so without hesitation, thus fulfilling his duty to his parents.⁹⁴

⁹² **Honour** your parents. See verses 2:83; 2:200; 17:23.

⁹³ **Always** treat your parents with kindness. See verses 17:23-25.

⁹⁴ **Support** your parents financially. See verses 2:215; 12:100.

Just as parents have a duty to write a will in favour of their children, children, too, have a responsibility to include their parents in their will. Any benefit to other relatives or indeed other people is secondary.

Children may ask about how to allocate their welfare spending. Welfare expenditure begins at home and that is why children are directed to give a portion of their income to their parents, before looking after the wants of other relatives or those in need.

Now it could be asked, what if the parents are financially comfortable and have their own income? Even if parents have their own earnings and enjoy a decent living standard, the obligation of the children does not diminish. Just as parents are expected to keep their children in the best manner within their means, children too are expected to maintain their parents in a manner according to their capacity. If that raises their parents' standard of living from good to better, then all the more reason to do so.

The inheritance law gives, in the absence of a will, more to the male than the female. This is simply because the financial responsibility to support, parents, spouse and children fundamentally falls on the male children.

During and before the period of maturity and earning capacity of children, parents pay a heavy price, albeit voluntarily, to ensure that children are well supported and looked after. This not only includes their general wellbeing but also the education and other opportunities afforded to them. The hardships some parents suffer can be unspeakable. Often children are never aware or informed of this. Therefore, for children to raise the status of their parents, both financially and socially, is an obligation and not a favour. It is a duty, not a charity.

No individual can claim to be self-made, no matter how successful he or she becomes. Can anyone rise without the foundation of family, community and society? The supporting hands that were there at the beginning remain for many years after. Throughout the developing stages of their children, and often beyond childhood and youthful years, parents give and they give - and still give more. The natural instinct of parents is self-sacrifice. It's also intrinsic love, hopefully mutual, and not only in the emotional sense but one that transpires as sincere care for the support and wellbeing of each other.

In the Quran, the obligations of both the parents and children are highlighted and, while in each case the individual family circumstances need to be considered, whatever the position, the principles should not change. Undoubtedly, the parent-child relationship is unique. It cannot be broken or discarded. It will always be there in some form or another, so both should be sincere well-wishers of each other.

Now the concluding question is this: what do children, when they become adults, do on an *ongoing* basis that has a positive and life-enhancing impact

on the lives of their parents? *The answer will tell us the real nature of the relationship between parents and their children.*

What is a family?

While individuals are distinct persons in their own right, they are also part of a family - but what is a family? A family is not just a group of people related by blood ties but are those individuals who form the fabric of each other's lives because they share the same values; they share the day-to-day activities that bond them together. This does not mean living in each other's pockets but taking part in simple things like eating together, having a chat about the day's events, doing some things together, cooking, gardening or even helping around the house. In short, spending time together enhances each other's lives by adding value every day.

An essential part of belonging to a family is sharing values that form the basis of how we live. This is the very foundation that binds the family together. For muslims it means fulfilling obligations and not just exercising your rights.

When you start to make excuses for not wanting to do things together, you know the problems have started. Where there's a will, there's a way.

While working and spending leisure time with friends is important, nothing can replace an enduring relationship with your family. As the saying goes: love your friends but don't forget to treat your family a little better.

You deserve success – but how much?

Successful and ambitious individuals may feel that the achievements they make are by his or her efforts alone. Is this true?

The main fallacy inherent in this argument is made evident when we look at the conditions on which success depends. There are four factors that contribute to success:

1. Physical and mental capacities.
2. Education and training.
3. Opportunities available.
4. Effort and hard work.

It is obvious that an individual can take credit for only the fourth factor, i.e. the work he puts in. A person's natural endowments are a gift of God. These are not acquired through individual efforts. For the education and training that is received, the debt is due to the community. The family (parents) have provided him with opportunities for producing wealth. It

follows that a person can justly claim only that portion which has been earned by the outcome of the labour that has been put in. The work that has been performed entitles him to a share in the wealth produced and not to the whole of it. The Quran puts it clearly:

“Every human being is responsible for his own works.” [Verse 53:39].

The proposition, “Only that survives which is for the benefit of all mankind”, together with its corollary, “only those survive who benefit all mankind”, are the fundamental principles of Self-development. *The law is not the ‘survival of the fittest’ but the ‘survival of the most munificent’.* In other words, according to the standard laid down by the Quran, *only the most munificent are the fittest to survive.* Those who have imbibed the true spirit of the Quran will steer clear of selfishness and will dedicate themselves to the service of humanity.

POLYGAMY, MARRIAGE, DOWRY & MAHR

Polygamy is generally understood to be the practice of simultaneously having more than one wife. The Quran does not forbid this practice but contrary to popular belief does not encourage it either.

In many countries it is socially acceptable and sometimes desirable for men to have more than one wife at the same time. Women often outnumber men, and in times of hardship, war and other difficult situations, especially if a woman is widowed or divorced and possibly with children, it may be convenient for a woman to accept a plural marriage.

However, for most women, sharing a husband is highly disagreeable for probably the same reasons why a man may not want to share his wife with another man as in the case of polyandry, the practice of one woman simultaneously married to more than one man. Psychologically, the tendency for men to share a wife is quite objectionable and polyandry has a major predicament as any of the husbands may not be able to determine if his shared wife's child is his, whereas in polygamy, this can never be the case. So to determine hereditary rights there can be no objection to polygamy but polyandry is forbidden as made clear in verse 4:24. Married women who have escaped mushrik husbands and thus by default annulled their marriage can re-marry. Even in this case a compensation (reimbursement of the mahr payment)⁹⁵ is due to the previous husband and must be paid where possible.

Women are also child-bearing and in the main child-caring partners in a marriage and because of this, have more arduous lives and their capacity to earn may also be limited. Therefore it is more practical for men, especially if they are wealthy, to take on the responsibility of more than one wife and the many children that they are likely to have. In a large household, perhaps in a joint or extended family, women can share their domestic duties too. Women can also more easily adapt to sharing a husband and often prefer to be looked after in a marriage than live as a single parent, which may have many difficulties of its own. The dignity provided by a marriage, even a polygamous marriage, is far better than promiscuous living that may arise from long term single status.

While there is nothing wrong with polygamous marriages, provided there is full consent of all partners concerned, the Quran does not explicitly encourage or forbid such arrangements.

The people who support polygamous marriage often quote verse 4:3 of the Quran as an open endorsement of the practice. It will therefore be

⁹⁵ **Mahr:** This is the groom's gift to the bride, a security in circumstances of widowhood or a means of support in case of divorce.

useful to look at the various ways this verse is translated. Comments are given after each translation.

Yousuf Ali Translation "If ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly with the orphans, marry women of your choice, two or three or four; but if ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one, or (a captive) that your right hands possess, that will be more suitable, to prevent you from doing injustice."

When Sura 4 is read from the beginning it is apparent that this section is about orphans. This verse begins with the mentioning of justice to orphans, so is it not strange that suddenly, mid-sentence, the translator conveys that this is now about men marrying multiple women of their choice? Ali goes on to say that if you can't deal with the prospect of more than one wife, you should marry only one captive woman, so according to him, the alternatives are: to marry up to four women or only one captive woman. What about men who may want to have monogamous marriage with a woman who is not a captive? This is a tangled and confusing translation.

Maududi Translation "If you fear that you might not treat the orphans justly, then marry the women that seem good to you: two, or three, or four. If you fear that you will not be able to treat them justly, then marry (only) one, or marry from among those whom your right hands possess. This will make it more likely that you will avoid injustice."

This is much the same as Yusuf's but without the option to marry captive women, although those "whom your right hands possess" are probably considered to be slave women. The subject matter here is also mangled with orphans, women, and marriage without any real continuity, and neither of these translations show how marrying up to four women of your choice does justice to orphans.

Most translations appear to be in the same vein as above, but there are two translations that have a somewhat different angle:

Rashad Translation "If you deem it best for the orphans, you may marry their mothers - you may marry two, three, or four. If you fear lest you become unfair, then you shall be content with only one, or with what you already have. Additionally, you are thus more likely to avoid financial hardship."

Like most of Rashad's work, at first it seems quite reasonable, but in reality there is something that is not quite right. The perceptive reader must surely ask the question: How on earth do you marry the mother of an orphan? An orphan is a child whose parents, including the mother, have died, so unless we accept necrophilia as an act permitted by God, under normal circumstances it would be impossible to marry the dead mother of an orphan, never mind two, three or four at any one time.

Reformist Translation "If you fear that you cannot be just to fatherless orphans, then marry those whom you see fit from the women, two, and three, and four. But if you fear you will not be fair then only one, or whom you already have contract with. So that you do not commit injustice and suffer hardship."

This is also an interesting one. According to standard dictionaries, an orphan is a child, both of whose parents are dead or have abandoned it permanently. Only a child who has lost both parents is called an orphan. The mother's condition is usually relevant only when referring to animals. If she has gone, the offspring is an orphan, regardless of the father's condition. Is God talking about animals or other non-human beings here? If not then why is the translator using words like "fatherless orphans"? Again, this is a hotchpotch translation, a piecing together of odd concepts to justify polygamy. It just isn't there, and any intelligent person will see that.

So what *does* this verse say? Well, let's get the meaning of the verse with a proper exposition:

New Millennium Exposition (NME) "When you deem it best for the orphans in your care, you may marry them off in twos, threes, or fours. If you fear lest you become unfair to any of them, then you shall arrange marriage for only one at a time, preferably with someone already within your acquaintance. Additionally, you are thus more likely to avoid financial hardship."

The verse is now clear: it's about *orphans* who are under the care and responsibility of considerate men. They must look after the orphans' interests and when the orphans come of age, *marry them off* in twos, threes or fours. If they cannot do this justice to all of them, then they should *marry them off* one at a time. Now the whole verse comes together and makes sense.

Allegations are frequently made against Muhammad for being a polygamist but it should be remembered that his first wife Khadijah was a widow when she married Muhammad, the messenger. During her lifetime, he had no other wife but her and was married to her for 25 years. He remained in a monogamous marriage until he was 50 years old. After her death, his other marriages were for political reasons or to support widows with children. To raise a family with one woman is far better for everyone, especially the children, and unless circumstances dictate, plural marriages are to be avoided.

In verse 4:129 it is clear that polygamy is strongly discouraged as a norm because it is difficult, if not impossible, to be fair to more than one wife. The only indication that polygamy is allowed comes from verse 4:23 that prohibits marriage to two sisters at the same time, the conclusion being that if one cannot be married to two sisters simultaneously then a man can be married to two women who are not sisters, at the same time.

If a marriage is not working then divorce is the answer. Often, in some communities, the man marries a second wife, but to be unhappily married without either partner having the opportunity to remarry is wrong. A man should not leave his wife in suspense while he gets married to a second wife. A woman who is unhappy in her marriage has an equal right to ask for divorce, as does a man.

So while polygamy is acceptable, it is essential to ensure that mutual consent must be obtained between all concerned. However, it should go without saying, as confirmed in verse 4:129, that it is objectionable to marry another woman to the detriment of an existing marriage.

Marriage: dowry and mahr

Traditionally a dowry is a gift of money or valuables given by the bride's family to that of the groom to permit their marriage. In societies where payment of dowry is common, unmarried women are seen to attract stigma and tarnish the household's reputation. So it is in the bride's family's interest to marry off their daughter as soon as she is eligible. In some areas where this is practiced, the size of the necessary dowry is directly proportional to the groom's social status, thus making it virtually impossible for lower class women to marry into upper class families. In some cases where a woman's family is too poor to afford any dowry whatsoever, she is either simply forbidden from marrying or becomes a concubine to a richer man who can afford to support a large household. Such an arrangement is not acceptable to those who live within Quranic values.

The tradition of giving dowries is today perhaps most well known in the Asian countries of China, Pakistan and India, where the practice is still very common, especially in rural areas, despite being prohibited by law. However, dowries have been a part of civil law in almost all countries, those in Europe included. Dowries were important social components of Roman marriages. Medieval Germans had the tradition of dowry, both working to give a start in life to the young couple, as well as to secure the bride's future. This German tradition was followed by most people in medieval and modern Europe. Only in the few recent centuries has the dowry disappeared from law in Europe.

The converse of dowry is the German morgengab - a sum paid by the bridegroom to the bride's parents or guardian. Its purpose was to secure the girl for such possibilities as widowhood or loss of other means to survive. There is no mention of any dowry payment or 'bride price' in the Quran and therefore any such practice is not Islamic.

Mahr is the groom's gift to the bride; a security to the bride in circumstances of widowhood or a means of support in case of divorce, although the Mahr is a kind of Germanic morgengab (the Persian equivalent is called *mahr-ieh*) and is an important part of a marriage. However, it is not the same as a traditional dowry or a morgengab, in that it is the husband-to-be who gives the gift to the bride. However, unlike a bride price or Germanic morgengab, the gift is given directly to the bride and not to her father or guardian. Although the gift can be, and often is,

money, it can be anything so long as it is agreed upon by both the bride and groom.

Nikah is a marriage contract between a man and a woman. This can only be valid when both parties consent and have reached puberty. Two witnesses are required and a public announcement should be made. This can be a ceremony where guests are invited to a reception following the wedding. A marriage certificate should be provided as a legal record of the event. No priest is needed to solemnize the marriage but someone to officiate the marriage should be in attendance, such as a registry officer employed by the local government.

The Quran lays down the following requirements before getting married: First of all, marriage has to be between believers. [Verse 2:221]. So, the first step is that muslims bring in themselves those qualities that are described in the Quran and match themselves with that description before getting married.

Both people should be adults (i.e. past puberty). The man should be a mature and responsible person, and able to make sound decisions in life and should have sufficient resources, a job for example, so as to support a family.

The man is allowed to select a partner of his choice, thus exercising his free will. Similarly, women cannot be forced into getting married - they also have to exercise their free will and choice. In Verse 4:21, it is stated that women have to take a contract (Arabic: *meesaq*) from men. A contract requires the free will of both parties. A contract in which a person is forced to do something against his/her will does not constitute a meesaq. If a man proposes to a woman directly, there is no harm in it. But secret marriages are not endorsed. Love affairs, open or secret, of any sort are also not allowed. Believing women cannot remain married to their husbands if they are unbelievers; the same goes for believing men. Marriage with a man or woman who commits adultery is forbidden to believers.

While marriage between people from different nations, cultures and races is allowed, marriage with non-muslims, that is disbelievers, is forbidden. The reason for this is simple. The Quran gives optimum values that harmonise, develop and prosper communities. These are the foundations for life. For a muslim to marry a person with conflicting and regressive values would be detrimental to family life and would impede Self development. Not only that but this also affect society in the long term.

Two people with different and conflicting outlooks cannot be successful marriage partners and therefore God forbids such unions. See verse 2:221.

DOMESTIC ABUSE: VIOLENCE AGAINST WIVES

One of the verses that causes great difficulty to the traditionalist is where the roles of men and women is defined. The reason for this is that due to poor and biased translation, generally to conform with some fabricated hadith or cultural custom, it has been wrongly interpreted.

First of all the verse is about the physical, psychological, and physiological differences in men and women, and as a consequence of these differences it describes their division of labour and roles in society.

Without taking into account any exceptions, under certain circumstances and conditions women cannot work; such as in pregnancy, and when they are lactating and breast feeding, it can be impractical. Some types of work they cannot do such as mining, frontline fighting in wars or sub-sea diving during gestation of their unborn child. So their important role as homemakers, wives and mothers is defined. The duty to provide for and maintain them falls on men. As does the duty to die for them, if necessary, when they need protecting in times of hardship and war.

As with men, women's ability to do certain kinds of work is defined, simply by the virtue of their being men or women, and young children need their mothers more than they need their fathers. The law on maternity leave supports this view, as it is important for women to have time off during pregnancy.

As head of the household - that's what the word husband means: one who manages the house, i.e. master of the household. As 'husbands' men also need to maintain discipline in the home and should this break down they must take action to return the home to order. However, whatever the situation there is no hint of any mental or physical abuse permitted against the wife. The instructions are to keep matters amicable. The threat of divorce arises only when the relationship has irretrievably broken down. Divorce can then be instigated by either the man or the woman.⁹⁶

Domestic violence is a real concern for many, and some justify it by saying that it is acceptable because it is permitted in the Quran. But is it? Generally people are inclined to say that while permitted, the 'beating' should be light. Here is the verse, translated traditionally, that causes some people difficulty: "Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient and guard in (the husband's) absence what Allah would have them guard. As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct,

⁹⁶ **Husband:** Old Norse word *husbondi*, meaning 'master of the house'. It also means 'man who has/manages land and stock'. As the master of the house was usually also a spouse, it encompasses all the household. So even in English, the word *husband* confirms that it is the man who has from early times been considered to be the maintainer and manager of the household.

admonish them (first), (next), refuse to share their beds, (and last) beat them (lightly); But if they return to obedience, seek not against them means (of annoyance): For Allah is Most High, Great (above you all).” [Verse 4:34]. **Abdullah Yusuf Ali Translation.**

Supposing a wife was guilty of some sort of ill-conduct, whatever that was, her husband is required to admonish her (*fa-’izu*) which means to ‘to fondly persuade’). However, if the sweet talk does not work, and she persisted in her bad ways, he then is to refuse intimacy with her. If this is not working either and she still persists in behaving badly, what would come next? According to this translation, it would be a beating for the wife. After this the next step would be divorce, made especially messy if domestic violence had been used.

God Himself describes divorce in His own words: “let her go amicably” [Verse 33:49]. “Go through with the separation equitably” [Verse 65:2]. “(Allow the divorced women to) leave amicably” [Verse 2:229].

It seems that something is not quite right; there appears to be an apparent confusion. One minute the wife is getting beaten and now there is gentleness with the following reassurances:

“If the couple must decide to part, God will provide for each of them from His bounties. God is Bounteous, Most Wise.” [Verse 4:130].

“You shall allow a divorced wife to live in the same home in which they lived with you and do not make life so miserable for them that they are compelled to leave on their own.” [Verse 65:6].

Going back and checking that controversial verse (and traditional translation), reveals that there is something that seems to be amiss: where did “beat them” come from? Traditionalists glean it from the root word ‘daraba’, which has been translated to mean anything from a tap on the shoulder to striking or beating.

However, more correctly it should be translated as “to set forth” or “to make a clear statement or proclamation”.

The root word ‘daraba’ has been used in the Quran in other verses, 58 times, and each time it should be correctly translated as cites, sets forth or advances as in the following verses:

“God thus cites analogies for the truth and falsehood.” [Verse 13:17].

“Do you not see that God sets forth the example...” [Verse 14:24].

“God thus advances the examples for all mankind...” [Verse 14:25].

“God thus sets forth parables for mankind...” [Verse 24:35].

“He cites for you herein an example from among yourselves...” [Verse 30:28].

“God cites as examples of those who disbelieved...” [Verse 66:10].

If the Quran permits you to beat your wife then reasonable people certainly missed it in their reading. All intelligent people come up with verses that ask for muslims to refrain from aggression and violence:

“Have you noted those who were told ‘You do not have to fight’...” [Verse 4:77].

"They suppress their anger and forgive people." [Verse 3:134].

There are also numerous verses in the Quran describing the beautiful relationship between husband and wife:

"...He placed in your heart love and care towards your spouses." [Verse 30:21].

"He gives every man an opportunity to find a mate as company and to harmonise with her." [Verse 7:189].

Men are told that they "...shall treat [women] in a pleasant manner." [Verse 4:19].

"The men are the protectors and maintainers of women..." [Verse 4:34]. "They are your companions and you are their companion." [Verse 2:187]. "If you loathe them, you may dislike something wherein God has placed a lot of good." [Verse 4:19].

There is also a verse to guide women who fear mistreatment from their husbands... "If a woman fears cruelty or desertion from her husband, the couple shall try to reconcile their differences for conciliation is best for them." [Verse 4:128].

In line with the Quranic values, the correct translation of verse 4:34 should be:

"The men are the protectors and maintainers of women and God has endowed them with qualities that define their duty as providers. Therefore the admirable women will accede to this arrangement and protect what God commands them to preserve; their chastity, property and honour, even during their husband's absence. If you experience ill-conduct from your wife you shall first talk to her, then if she still continues in bad behaviour stop sharing the marital bed. If she still persists in impropriety then **set forth** for her in clear terms and say: either return to principles of integrity or our relationship is terminated. If she returns to decent behaviour and good conduct then you are then not permitted to take any sanctions against her. Remember God is Most High and Supreme." [Verse 4:34].

Feminism: is it a concept within Quranic values?

Feminism, from the Latin 'femina' at one time meant 'having the qualities of a woman'. These days it is a theory, a conviction or a movement to free women from cultural, social and political shackles placed on them, the feminists say, by the traditions and rules of their fathers. Patriarchy and modern feminism are the opposite ends of the same rod; choose whichever end you wish to beat yourself with. Both do nothing good for the cause of women and neither give women the dignity they deserve or the true position in society which is their right.

Feminists call for women to reject conventional family life and be career driven. However, no feminist claim can change the fact that it is women who bear children. Perhaps this is why we don't see many women who are construction workers, road diggers and soldiers. In reality only a minority of women have a suitable academic education, the skills, the inclination or the ambition for a full time and lifelong career. Many want to realise their intrinsic worth not only as individuals but also as female beings.

For humanity to move forward and not to become extinct, should it be necessary for pregnant women and women with small children to expose

themselves to the same hardships as men? Or should it not be the case that all people give women the respect and honour they deserve for sustaining such an important and meaningful role as wives and mothers?

For a woman to be a *woman* is an admirable quality. Women who opt to become career homemakers, wives and mothers perform a duty of great merit. To displace the roles of men and women creates discord, conflict and instability; a potential for constant fear and turmoil throughout society.

The Quran has always put women on an equal status with men, as far as *righteousness* is concerned, but clearly states the fact that they are *different* - and not without reason. Both men and women are required to cooperate as companions and not work against each other as competitors. They both have different roles in family and community life, and accordingly they each have duties and responsibilities particular to their gender. Apart from the obvious physical differences, there are psychological and physiological differences that determine their diverse and particular roles, and consequently division of labour in society. Men and women are therefore complimentary companions to each other and not competitors as is often wrongly portrayed. It is equity that leads to equality.

You shall not covet the intrinsic worth bestowed upon each individual by God; the men enjoy certain qualities and fruits of their labour and the women enjoy certain qualities and the fruits of their labour. You may implore God to shower you with His grace. God is fully aware of all things. [Verse 4:32]. See also footnote to verse 10:109.

While women are perfect by design for the role of wives and mothers, this is not to say that a woman cannot choose to drive a bus, manage a business or become a rocket scientist. However, it does mean that if she chooses to become a mother, then where possible, her child should not be deprived of the care and attention that *only* a mother can give.

There are many verses in the Quran that show the special status that women have. Their role does not restrict them in the way traditionally believed. Their dress code has probably become a defining factor, but like most things it has been ludicrously taken out of context and changed into something totally different from what the Quran portrays. Restrictions and disciplines placed on men and women are for the benefit of an ordered and progressive society. When restrictions are imposed, it is for the sole purpose of turning them to the best account. The self-imposed restrictions are not disparaging to an individual's status as a free being: freedom properly channelled is the necessary condition of human development, both individual and social.

Every individual should be themselves, and behaving in a masculine or feminine way particular to their gender is an integral part of that being.

WOMEN AND MEN: DRESS CODE & BEARDS

The Quran notes that women are admired for their beauty. Now since women are an obvious attraction, they are required to behave in public with additional care, decorum, good taste and propriety. But before we see what the requirements are of a woman's dress code, let us see what Quran says about the 'best of dresses':

"O children of Adam, We have provided you with garments to cover your bodies, as well as for luxury. But the best armour is the safeguarding of your own righteousness. These are some of God's signs so that you may take heed." [Verse 7:26].

The above verse says that the best dress is the garment of righteousness. Therefore the starting point for any dress sense is to have a virtuous cloak of good deeds. Both women and men should first safeguard their armour of righteousness, as without it they will be vulnerable. See verse 7:27.

Now how should a women dress? Verse 24:31 gives clear instruction on the dress code to be observed both in public and private. God guides us in the Quran:

"...And instruct the believing women to subdue their eyes and maintain their chastity. They shall not reveal any parts of their bodies, except that which is necessary. They shall cover their bosoms and shall not relax this mode in the presence of other than their husbands, their fathers, the fathers of their husbands, their sons, the sons of their husbands, their brothers, the sons of their brothers, the sons of their sisters, other women, the male servants and employees whose sexual drive has been nullified or the children who have not reached puberty. They shall not walk in a manner so wanton and attract attention to themselves. All of you shall turn to God and, O you who believe, that you may succeed." [Verse 24:31].

Modest dress for women is described above. She is to cover herself sensibly in public, except those areas which are apparent. For example a shawl or a 'dupatta'; the simple length of material that is used by many Asian women to cover the head and upper part of their body.

"Our envoy, convey to your wives, your daughters and the women of the believers that when they go out they shall wrap around themselves their cloaks or shawls so that they may be recognised as righteous and modest women and avoid being stared at. God is Protector and the Most Merciful." [Verse 33:59].

Women are required to take additional care, dress modestly and not display their charms attracting unwanted attention when going about their business outside the home. This also means that their dress should be not so tight fitting that it accentuates the shape and features of their body or private parts. This also means that men's clothes should not be so tight as to outline the male organs, such as clothes worn during gym exercises etc.

"Women may relax and wear casual dress around their fathers, their sons, their brothers, the sons of their brothers, the sons of their sisters, and other women and their female servants. They shall keep their duty to God. God witnesses all things." [Verse: 33:55].

According to the Quran, the reason why muslim women should wear modest clothing and be sensibly covered when going out of their homes is

that they may be recognised as virtuous women and differentiated from women of a less moral character for whom unwanted attention is of no consequence, and even from prostitutes who use revealing clothes to display their wares and use sexual attraction as an advertisement to ply their trade.

Clothes, like uniforms, identify who we are and send messages of our intentions. Police and nurses uniforms tell us what we should expect from the people who wear them, in this case: protection and health care. Therefore, because of the special attraction women have, the clothes they wear should reflect their status and respectability in society. Righteous women want and need to be differentiated for very good reasons.

In the Quran the word *hijab* means curtain or barrier. Most people know it to mean a scarf-like head covering for women. This is the common use of the word 'hijaab' and is adopted from the Biblical teachings (Corinthians 1 11:15). The Quran does not suggest that women should be covered from head to toe in garments such as the *burka*, even veiled or kept apart from the world of men. On the contrary, the Quran is insistent on the full participation of women in society. Muslim women remained in mixed company with men until the late eleventh century. They received guests, held meetings and went to wars to help their fathers, brothers and husbands. They also defended their castles and bastions. It is part of the growing feeling on the part of some European Muslims that they no longer wish to identify with the West, and that reaffirmation of their identity as Muslims requires the kind of visible sign that adoption of conservative clothing implies. For these women the issue is not that they have to dress conservatively, but that they choose to do so.

In Iran, in the early 1980s, Imam Khomeini first insisted that women must wear the veil and *chador*. But in response to large demonstrations by women he modified his position and agreed that while the chador is not obligatory, modest dress is.

Morality of the Self and cleanliness of conscience are far better than the morality of the *purdah*. No goodness can come from pretence. Imposing the veil on women suggests that men suspect their mothers, sisters, wives and daughters of being potential traitors to them. How can Muslim men meet other women who are not veiled and treat them respectfully, and not accord the same respectful treatment to the women in their own community? To wear the *hijaab* or *niqab* is not an Islamic obligation on women and this can clearly be shown from the Quran.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, for example, is mentioned in the Quran as a pure woman and chosen as a role model above all women. There is no doubt from the Quran that she was a virtuous and righteous woman to deserve such a high accolade. In observing her behaviour as mentioned in

the Quran, we see that as she carries the young Jesus with her to her family and they immediately recognise her. Now had she been wearing a veil or a niqab, her family would not have identified her as quickly as they did. After all she had returned after a long absence. This reliably informs us that she was not covering her face, that she was not wearing a niqab. Mary's people recognising her quickly and with certainty plainly indicates that she was not wearing a niqab or any other covering to veil her face from being seen.

In the Quran there is further evidence which negates the practice of wearing the niqab. After God informed the messenger about the eligibility of marriage with certain relations, He continues:

"Beyond the categories described to you, you are not permitted to marry any other women nor can you substitute a new wife from the prohibited ones, no matter how much you desire them because of their beauty. You must be content with those already made lawful to you. God is watchful over all things." [Verse 33.52].

In this verse it is patently clear that Muhammad; the messenger, and other men, are also in a position to see the faces and beauty of women and this clearly establishes that women not related to him did not wear niqab or veils to cover their faces when they appeared in front of him, or indeed anyone else. Even today, in countries like Pakistan and India, muslim women do not generally wear the niqab or hijab. There has been much debate over the wearing of hijab and veil covering the full face, especially in European courts of law and other public places. There appears to be more difficulties in wearing a full veil or niqab as it creates a barrier. People need to be able to see faces when speaking to each other.

Traditional Jewish teachings promote the type of hijab (full-body garment exposing only eyes) that is worn today among some Eastern women. Do note that in the Quran we are also informed about some unbelievers who cover themselves up with garments: Can you identify these people?

"Indeed, they hide their innermost thoughts, as if to keep Him from knowing them. In fact even if they *cover themselves with their clothes*, He knows all their secrets and declarations. He is aware of their most innermost thoughts." [Verse 11:5], and Noah said "Whenever I invited them to be protected by You, they placed their fingers in their ears, *covered themselves with their clothes*, resisted and turned arrogant." [Verse 71:7].

From these verses it seems that it is the unbelievers who can be identified as those who cover themselves and not the believers.

Some sects prescribe certain forms of dress not only for their women but also for men. For example certain types of caps, turbans, loose fitting shirts, baggy pyjamas, jubas etc. labelling them as 'Islamic clothing'. Others insist that although trousers and western style suits may be worn, the trouser hem must rest above the ankle. Often these traditions are attributed to the messenger, and so considered a custom that must be followed out of reverence for him. This requirement is derived from the

6th. century Arabian culture in which it may have been essential to keep clothes off the muddy or dirty ground to keep them from soiling. However, these days in most cities it is unnecessary as the roads are paved and clean.

There is no clothing that can be termed as 'Islamic' or 'unIslamic'. The Quran does not promote any particular traditional or tribal clothing and allows freedom of dress in line with modesty that is decreed both for women and men.

Beards were, as they are now, common in times and cultures where they were fashionable or shaving was not a practical every day event. However, religious traditionalists today insist that to keep a beard is an act of piety that earns rewards and is a label of intent for Muslims so that they can be recognised as such. If this indeed was the case, then many native Americans, most Inuit in the Arctic and women would lose out on the virtues of keeping a beard as these groups of people do not have any androgenic hair. The Quran says all believing men and women are equal and it is only the acts of righteousness that define exalted characters. While they may add to your image, beards of any style, length or colour are therefore of no consequence in determining the sincerity or integrity of a muslim and are certainly not obligatory as an act of belief.

General behaviour

Finally there are lessons to be learned from the advice given to the messenger's wives: "O wives of the messenger, you are not the same as any other women; observe righteousness as you have a greater responsibility. Therefore, you shall be cautious and not speak too tenderly lest he in whose heart is a delusion, may develop mistaken desires; you shall speak only righteousness. You shall make your homes your foundation and do not return to the permissiveness and ignorance of earlier people. You shall observe your commitments and keep them pure and fulfil your duty to God and obey His messenger. God wishes to remove all impurity of the beliefs in your own ways and to purify you completely." [Verses 33:32-33].

This exemplifies how believing women should conduct themselves in the company of men. Yet, it is important to note that while meetings between men and women are not forbidden there are some necessary restrictions. It is impossible for most men and women in their everyday lives to speak from behind a separating curtain or barrier. However, there can be unseen barriers that help impede bad behaviour. It is important therefore, to engage with each other, especially those with whom marriage, and by implication sex, is not forbidden, in a reserved manner, not flirtatious, evocative or in any way that may be mistaken or misconstrued.

Also all women are encouraged to make their home the foundations of their life and are also encouraged to become homemakers. This does not preclude or prohibit them from having a career, but the priorities of a family life must come first.

HOMOSEXUALITY AND INCEST

History shows that homosexuality has always been around, so it is not a new phenomenon. But generally people have been apprehensive of, if not hostile to homosexuality. It is fashionable now for people from all walks of life to be open about their sexuality, but previously homosexuality was openly prevalent only amongst entertainers, actors, singers and other attention-seekers or those who paid no regard to social norms.

As far as the law is concerned, morality is not a permanent value but something that is changeable. For example, in England and Wales, the Sexual Offences Act 1967 decriminalised homosexual acts in private between two men over the age of 21. The Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 1980 provided the same freedom in Scotland. This attempt to liberalise the law was largely due to the increasing prosecution of homosexual men. The death penalty for homosexuals in Wales was only lifted in 1917. The Wolfenden Report (1957) was the findings of the Wolfenden Committee who came to the conclusion that criminal law could not credibly intervene in the private sexual affairs of consenting adults in the privacy of their homes.

Whether homosexuality is a case of nature over nurture will always remain an open debate as there is no conclusive proof that there is a 'gay gene', showing homosexuality as ingrained sexuality or as a sexual preference as opposed to sexual orientation. To find homosexuality's place in society we really have to look at a much more subtle aspect of evolution and the benefits of sex to social advancement. The underlying feature of such an enquiry must be based on Permanent Values that push the social procession forward and the part sex plays in this evolutionary mechanism. Before, homosexuals had much to fear (even now most countries outlaw acts of sodomy, or buggery as it is sometimes referred to) but in the politically correct world it is homophobia that is wicked. However, neither position needs to be as polarised or criticised so intensely.

The only goal worthy of human beings is Self-development. It means the full unfolding of the Self and the actualising of all its potentialities. The aim of the moral endeavour is to move nearer to this goal. To be realised, the latent excellence needs a proper environment that only a society based on Permanent Values can bring about. All good actions lead to the development of the Self and all bad actions hamper and impede the process of Self-development. This is the criterion by which we can judge the worth of our actions. Does homosexuality progress or regress our Self-development and by consequence create a better or worse society for all of us?

The theory of evolution accepts that the competition is to survive and live forever. Plants do this by ensuring that the most widespread pollination takes place and their seeds are dispersed as pollination extensively as

possible by animals, insects and winds. The environment does the rest. For some in the animal kingdom, survival is ensured by having a great many young, and also by adapting to the changing conditions. Humans, too, live through their children and seek partners to ensure that their kind have the best chances of continued existence. How does homosexuality contribute to this endeavour?

It can be argued that in this day and age it is not necessary for everyone to produce children. Yes, it's true. There are millions of orphans that need to be looked after but for this we all have a responsibility to adopt or at least foster those children in need. But we do not need to be homosexual to take part in this effort.

Under normal circumstances it takes a man and a woman to produce a child, and for its physical and mental wellbeing it proves better to have *both* a *father* and a *mother* who care for it as it grows to maturity. For example, breastfeeding has many health advantages for both the mother and her child. Family structure studies based on large numbers taking into account the full range of socio-economic groups find that children with married heterosexual parents succeed far better than those living with same-sex partners. Smaller studies of white, well educated, wealthy gay and lesbian guardians and their adopted children just cannot reveal the full picture. It's apparent that unless there are circumstances where children cannot live with their parents, the best place is with their parents and not with anyone else.

It was the Wolfenden Committee that concluded criminal law could not credibly intervene in the private sexual affairs of consenting adults in the privacy of their own homes. If this is the case, does this apply *only* to homosexual acts? Is it not then wrong for criminal law to interfere in *any* private sexual affairs of consenting adults in the privacy of their home? What about sex between father and son, mother and son, siblings or even grandparent and grandchild? Should we now fight to change the law in favour of incestuous relationships between *all* consenting adults?

Cleopatra's first marriage was to her brother, and she too was the result of a brother/sister marriage. Is this a good option of how society should produce offspring and prosper? If not, where then do we draw the line? Even in free liberal democratic societies there are some things that still do not attract popular appeal. Whether the state law permits or forbids some sexual act, or even if a society accepts something previously outlawed, it does not make it right or morally correct. As with homosexuality, while sexual attraction to a close blood relative (philconsanguineous relationships) cannot be controlled, incest, the sexual act is forbidden.

A Permanent Law is something which is applicable irrespective of society or lawmakers' wishes. The Permanent Law's only concern is to create an

environment, a society where the Self can grow and develop and realise its full potential. This means discipline and restraint to bring out the best in an individual's personality. Just as a civilised adult male lusting after a pre-pubescent child bridles himself, so must an adult contain his or her passion for a lesbian, gay man or an incestuous act of sexual gratification.

God decrees that the act of having sex with a same-sex partner is the result of a choice. It is inconceivable that God made people homosexuals then declared it a crime and proscribed it. To accept such a proposition is to accept that God is unjust.

Inclinations can exist within humans for a variety of natural and unnatural acts, from hebephilia to fornication and rape, and from necrophilia to bestiality. In fact, in Germany, Denmark and Norway, people can legally pay to have sex with animals. In Germany, the 1969 law banning sex with animals was repealed and the Animal Protection Law was introduced, but it failed to include a specific ban on zoophilia which meant that it is perfectly legal to have sex with horses and other animals. Visitors to these 'Barnyard Brothels' term it as a 'lifestyle' choice. Most people will find this repulsive but for some it is acceptable and just a matter of preference.

Such inclinations may come from peer-group suggestions or even from social fashions of the day. Human beings are not like robots who only do what they are programmed to do. Humans choose and God holds them responsible for their choices. Were homosexuality a product of genetic destiny, it would be unfair for God to criminalise those who practice it. Currently, some people are even claiming that murder is of genetic origin. To accept that would mean to excuse murderers and tolerate them.

In the West, today, homosexuality and lesbianism have both been dubbed alternative lifestyles. Where homosexuality was once considered a crime, and even an illness, it is now homophobia that is frowned upon in western countries. Consequently, Islam and Muslims are considered intolerant and narrow-minded due to their opposition to homosexuality.

The Quran establishes the guidelines on how a society should live – guidelines for all time through Permanent Values. The scope of the Quran could not be greater. It contains rules that will be productive to any society. The Quran does not censure homosexuals, but condemns the sexual act of same-sex partners as a perverse and unnatural act. The Quran objects to the homosexual act on the basis that it is unproductive and does not complete our biological functions and therefore does not add value to life. Every society requires the new life that a heterosexual marriage is expected to produce. Otherwise a society will become unbalanced and extinct. This is why a productive heterosexual relationship is endorsed. The Quran says that marriage must take place between a man and a woman.

Therefore, the Deen-Islam: the social order, is not in accord with homosexual relationships or a homosexual couple raising a child. However, the Quran does not demonise homosexuals, but condemns the sexual act. Those who have no interest in a heterosexual relationship are not banished from society, neither are they forced to conform nor forced into marrying a member of the opposite sex. Indeed, the requirements for marriage stated in the Quran would forbid this. In line with proper sexual conduct God also forbids incestuous relationships.

If there is no decree in the Quran to kill those who practice homosexuality why then was Lot's community annihilated? First of all it should be noted that these licentious people had gone beyond all bounds of morality and transgression. Their behaviour was decadent and regressive to society as a whole. The history of Lot's people is about depraved people seeking to satisfy such dissipated lusts and are thus condemned by God. This event describes people who are aggressive in their will to commit this atrocious crime - the intent was violent anal rape, Lot's visitors did not invite them for casual sex (even that would have been abhorrent) - and therefore their actions warrant destruction.

So provided that society is not corrupted by such actions, the balance that the Quran recommends is to promote heterosexual relationships without alienating homosexuals, hermaphrodites, transgender and discriminating people on the basis of their sexual orientation.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ <http://www.frc.org/whats-wrong-with-letting-same-sex-couples-marry>

FOOD: HALAL AND HARAM

Halal: permitted - Haram: restricted

We all love food. No matter how absorbed we may be in our work and play, we have to stop and eat. Religions generally forbid certain foods; such as the Hindu will not eat beef because he worships the cow. Muslims, however have much more freedom in their choice of food than is generally believed. There are some restrictions, but these are only sensible precautions and nothing to do with mindless beliefs. For the muslim, the rule is that if it's not forbidden in the Quran, then God has seen fit to give people the freedom to make their own decision.

Arabs are not overly concerned about food issues, but Muslims from the Indian subcontinent seem to be obsessed with *halal*. The word *halal* means 'permissible' and in the culinary context conveys anything that is permitted as food according to the Quran, the book all muslims believe to be the criterion revealed by God. It should be noted that the Quran does not list *halal* items, instead it forbids (decrees as 'haram') only four types of food: animals that die of themselves, running blood, the meat of pigs or anything consecrated to other than God. If one is driven out of necessity, not willing transgression, then any of these can be consumed. It is generally assumed that an animal has to be ritually slaughtered before it becomes *halal*, but this is a tradition and not mentioned in the Quran.

Traditional Muslims would be repulsed at meat from an animal that was not slaughtered in a manner they believe to be prescribed by their religion. A lifetime of indoctrination has embedded a psychological fear of touching or eating such meats. However, their mistaken beliefs have no basis in the Quran.

We can understand the concerns of the sincere yet credulous, but there are many unscrupulous people who may do other explicitly forbidden (*haram*) things without batting an eyelid, yet would appear shocked at a muslim eating a Big Mac. With their double standards and sanctimonious appearances they look down on others who eat food other than the one they class as *halal* or permitted.

Nevertheless, for muslims, the Quran is the only criterion. God said that he has left nothing out of the Quran, so all our information must come from it and not any other source. [Verses 6:38; 6:114].

As far as food is concerned, to list all permissible things would be very lengthy, so instead God has listed things that are restricted. The word God uses for forbidden or restricted is 'haram'. Anything that is not haram is permissible - or *halal* in Arabic.

"Say: 'Did you note how God sends down to you all kinds of provisions, then you render some of them unlawful and some lawful?' Say: 'Did God give you permission to do this? Or do you fabricate lies and attribute them to God?'" [Verse 10:59].

This verse from the Quran warns against forbidding things which God has not and those who fabricate prohibitions do wrong not only against themselves, but also against the people they lead astray. This includes those who gain financially from the 'halal food industry': butchers, suppliers, retailers and middlemen.

"Were you witnesses when God decreed such prohibitions for you? Who is more evil than those who invent such lies and attribute them to God? They thus mislead the people without knowledge. God does not guide such evil people." [Verse 6:144].

Note that this is also a warning: be well informed, and you will not be hoodwinked. God warns: "You shall not invent rules according to your own opinions stating: 'This is lawful and this is unlawful,' and fabricate doctrine and attribute it to God. Surely, those who fabricate lies and attribute them to God will never succeed." [Verse 16:116].

Without proof, no-one has authority to classify a food as forbidden. This right is reserved for God alone. To accept another person's ruling (such as a religious decree) would be committing 'shirk' which means to assign equal authority to someone along with God, a monstrous transgression.

As mentioned before, the haram list is quite short: "Restricted for you are animals that die of themselves, excess blood, the meat of pigs and any food dedicated to other than God. Animals that die of themselves include those strangled, struck with an object, fallen from a height, gored, attacked by a wild animal, unless rescued before death, and animals sacrificed for or dedicated to those other than God." There is, however, a concluding provision: "If one is forced by circumstances to eat restricted food, without deliberate or willing transgression, then God is Protector, Most Merciful." [Verse: 5:3].

God reiterates this and commands His messenger to say: "'I do not find in the guidance given to me any food that is restricted for any eater except: carrion; animals that die of themselves, excess blood, the meat of pigs and any food consecrated in a name other than God's'. If one is compelled to eat these, without deliberate or willing transgression, then your Sustainer is Protector, Most Merciful." [Verse 6:145].

As stated in Verse 6:119, God has *detailed* everything that is haram. No other authority can add to this list. These injunctions from God are as valid today just as they were on the day they were revealed. It is quite common for many people to dedicate food (both meat and other consumables) to saints, and to mention Muhammad's name conjoined with God while slaughtering an animal. Both of these practices are against the Quranic injunction that forbids food consecrated in a name other than God's.

Now, let's look at what is halal. "They consult you concerning what is permitted for them; say 'Lawful for you are all good things including what your trained dogs and falcons catch for you.' You train them according to God's teachings. You may eat what they catch for you and mention God's name thereupon. You shall observe God's law. God is most efficient in reckoning." [Verse 5:4]. "All water game is made lawful for you to eat." [Verse 5:96]. "O people, eat from all that is lawful and good." [Verse 2:168]. "Do not eat from that upon which the name of God has not been mentioned, for it is an abomination." [Verse 6:121].

While the above verses capture the essence of all that is permitted, there are some points which need to be elaborated. God, in His infinite wisdom,

has given people the freedom to choose. That is why the Quran says: "O you who believe, eat from the good things We provided for you and be thankful to God if you do serve Him alone." [Verse 2:172].

We should be appreciative to God for providing us with an amazing diversity of things to eat. We can eat from all that is *lawful* and *good*. This would include *everything* not in the haram category of verses 5:3 and 6:145. But what about deciding what is good? This would depend on what is available. You can eat *anything* that you think is good, so long as you stay within the limits given in the Quran.

Haram foods are listed in verses 5:3, 6:121, and 6:145. The verses which give details of *halal* foods are 5:4, 5:96, and 2:168. From these verses it can be concluded that there are three conditions for something to be *halal*:

1. It has to be lawful according to the Quran and the Quran alone. This means that it should not be in the haram category. Therefore *anything* that is not in this list is halal. However, this does not mean that it is mandatory to eat everything in this list. What we eat should be appealing and lawful. This flexibility allows people of different regions to eat according to availability and taste.

2. God's name has to be mentioned before eating. This is generally accepted, except when meat is in question. The misconception is that a 'mantra' also has to be said at time of slaughter, but there is no mention of this in the Quran. When you see how impractical this is, you realise why God has not made it a pre-condition. Unless you slaughter the animal yourself you could *never* be absolutely sure that this ritual has been carried out and in reality it's impossible to know. Can anyone seriously imagine this taking place in a modern commercial abattoir where hundreds of animals are slaughtered each hour? Anyone who is familiar with the meat industry knows this. In verse 5:3 God says that he has perfected his Deen, and verse 5:5 says that the food of those given previous guidance is permitted for you. Did they change their practice of the slaughter ritual when this verse was revealed?

However, there is one exception. When an animal is offered as a sacrifice (the meat to be mainly distributed to the needy as part of Social Welfare actions), as part of 'shariallah' (God's decree), then God's name must to be mentioned *while the animal is prepared and ready for slaughter* - not dead or being slaughtered. [Verse 22:36]. Under normal circumstances, God does not require His name to be mentioned *at time of slaughter* but Muslims must not eat food without mentioning His name. This we can do, because the responsibility lies with us at time of eating.

3. It has to be good. What is good? This decision is left entirely to the individual. Different people find different things good. What one person considers a delicacy, the other may feel appalled by. This applies not just to

sheep's brain, or ox tongue. Some people enjoy locusts and grasshoppers. Others like frog legs in garlic sauce. The Amazonians eat capybara, and the desert dwellers yearn for roast lizard. Aborigines have been eating squirrels and monkeys for centuries. All are good for people who eat them, and they are all *halal*. As long as it is not forbidden in the Quran, anything that you consider good can be eaten.

The Quran is good news for the believers because it removes the shackles of mental bondage that enslaves people to beliefs without foundation. The Quran warns those who refuse to apply their common sense. Only the corrupt and the ignorant insist on slaughter rituals.

Many people working in the 'halal food' industry rely on the perpetuation of the 'religious' doctrine. This is now a multi-billion pound industry. For people to accept that they can buy meat from any supermarket would diminish the 'halal food' business; instead, this information is suppressed. The Quran says: "Those who conceal God's revelations in this scripture, in exchange for a cheap material gain, consume fire into their bellies." [Verse 2:174].

They follow authorities who decree for them laws in their deen that were never authorised by God. If it were not for a decision consistent with His ordinance, they would have been judged immediately. Indeed, the transgressors have incurred a painful retribution. [Verse 42:21]

For the masses, rituals (such as eating *halal*) are a show of piety and kinship. Following the Quran means discarding their inherited beliefs and can mean isolation from their families and friends. "When they are told, 'Follow God's guidance as revealed in this book,' they say, 'We follow only what we found our parents doing'. What if their parents do not appreciate this and are not guided?" [Verse 2:170].

God's bounties are countless. He wills no hardship, that's why His restrictions are few and make good sense: "O you who believe, do not prohibit good things that are made lawful by God and do not aggress; God dislikes the aggressors." [Verse 5:87].

God also says: "You commit nothing wrong by eating together in groups or as individuals." [Verse 24:61]. The same verse details the homes of family members you can eat from, without feeling that you are imposing on them. Such is the wisdom of God, most gracious. He gives us the details wherever He deems fit.

Is it not significant that he has *not* detailed any slaughter ritual? Had God wanted, could He not have done so? Forgetfulness is certainly not one of God's attributes. Accepting God's decrees in the Quran is submitting to His laws. Those who do that don't just *profess* to be muslims but *are* muslims.

DRINK AND DRUGS

A common misconception is that muslims are not permitted to touch alcohol, but the truth behind it is very different. To say that alcohol cannot be used on the basis that the Quran forbids it is wrong.

These commonly held beliefs are purely traditional and based on customary jurisprudence - but have no foundation in Quranic prohibitions.

The first point to note is that the Quran is the final authority for muslims and the source of all Islamic law. This is confirmed in verse 6:114: "Shall I seek other than God as the authority of law, when He has revealed to you this book fully detailed?" And also 5.44, which says: "Those who do not rule in accordance with God's guidance are disbelievers."

To understand this, the key words to note are 'forbidden' and 'alcohol'. The word 'alcohol' is not in the Quran. The word used is '*khamar*' which means intoxicant. This includes alcohol, but can mean any substance such as a drug or depressant that alters a person's state of mind or body. The Quran says about *khamar*: "...there is gross harm and some benefits for all people. But their potential to cause harm is greater than their benefit." [Verse 2:219]. The good is obviously in its sensible use for medical purposes and the harm is from abuse of an otherwise useful substance.

The word 'forbidden' (Arabic: *haram*) is never applied for *khamar* in the Quran. If it was, then drugs such as morphine and preparations which contain alcohol can also not be used. However, the Quran strongly advises only against the abuse of *khamar*. Considering that its abuse can cause great harm, this guidance is necessary. But this is not prescriptive or law - it's only guidance. Had God wanted to prohibit *khamar*, or even specifically *alcohol*, could He not have done so? Then surely God would have used the word *haram* which means to forbid, as He has done elsewhere, for example verses 6:145 and 7:33. The words *khamar* and *alcohol* are both Arabic, words which God surely knows. We know from verse 20:52 that God does not forget or make mistakes. Had God explicitly wanted to forbid or restrict *alcohol*, He would have done so directly and without beating about the bush, as some people imply.

Looking back in history, it was the muslims who introduced vineyards and wine into Sicily and while not a significant force in the wine market today, as recently as the 1950s Algeria exported more wine than France, Italy and Spain put together. Even now, Tunisia and other Muslim North African countries produce a popular range of wines sold around the world.

Wine and oil in plenty are signs of a flourishing community. As a mark of prosperity God's messenger Joseph announced that in his Misr oil and wine will flow. It is apparent that people in Joseph's time enjoyed drinking wine and it was not forbidden. Some descriptions in the Quran of a heavenly life

are of course allegorical illustrations. What exactly will the superlative pleasures be, we don't really know, but metaphorical descriptions of pleasures mean that it is a comparison with something already known in this life. Among the delights in heaven are intoxicating drinks (*khamr*), if intoxicating drinks are forbidden in this life, then how can the metaphor be an encouraging aspiration? In verse 4:43 believers are instructed not to go about their daily tasks while inebriated. Why would this be necessary if intoxicants are forbidden? Furthermore, the Quran says that this is the same *deen* as before and that God's way does not change, therefore we must accept that no gradual changes were made, concluding in the prohibition of intoxicants.⁹⁸

Along with other Muslim countries such as Egypt, Turkey and Malaysia, Pakistan also produces alcoholic beverages; mainly beer and spirits for local consumption. Established in 1860, The Murree Brewing Company, now one of the top companies in Pakistan, produces world class prize-winning whisky. It's also no secret that many of the elite from these and other Muslim countries are no teetotalers.

In the late 1970's, the largest wholesale supplier of alcoholic beverages in Scotland was a Muslim, and this trade continues to be plied by Muslims throughout the United Kingdom. There are hundreds, if not thousands of Muslim retailers who earn or have earned their living selling alcohol as part of their business. Many of the mosques in Britain were built partly with money from alcohol sales, with donations of money provided by Muslim shopkeepers and restaurateurs. Imams from local mosques continue to accept and indeed encourage donations from local businessmen who deal in alcohol, money which now provides, as it has always done, their wages and the upkeep of the mosques they administer. While they publicly condemn alcohol, they continue to benefit from it indirectly and surreptitiously. Indeed it is going to be a struggle to stop Muslim shopkeepers from selling alcohol or contributing their money to local mosques. Without a doubt, as the Quran says, there is harm in *khamar*, but would it not be better to be realistic and accept the that the Quran does not make alcohol *haram* than to be hypocritical about its everyday use?

Finally, a verse from the Quran: "*Say: 'Do you note how God sends down to you all kinds of provisions, then you render some of them unlawful and some lawful?' Say: 'Did God give you permission to do this? Or, do you fabricate lies and attribute them to God?'*" [Verse 10:59].

⁹⁸ **Intoxicants:** (Arabic: *khamr*). See verses and footnotes 2:219; 4:43; 5:90; 12:36; 12:41; 12:49; 16:67; 47:15. See verses 33:62; 42:13; 46:9.

SAWM - THE SELF-RESTRAINT

Fasting means to abstain from eating and drinking all or certain foods, especially as a religious observance. Cruden's remarks in his Bible Concordance, that fasting in all nations was resorted to in times of mourning, sorrow and affliction are borne out by historical events.

Among the Jews fasting was observed as a sign of grief or mourning. David is mentioned as fasting for seven days during the illness of his infant son (II Sam. 12:16,18.) and as a sign of mourning, fasting is mentioned in I Sam 31:13 and elsewhere. As well as this, the Day of Atonement, which was prescribed by the Mosaic Law as a day of fasting (Lev.16:29), required people to afflict their souls while a priest made an atonement for them to cleanse them of their sins. The notion that fasting was an act of penitence seems to have developed from this.

However, Moses' fast was said to be preparatory to receiving a revelation. Christ's words in the Bible that his disciples would fast more often when he was taken away from their midst only lends support to the Jewish conception of the fast as connected with national grief or mourning. Christianity did not introduce any new meaning to the fast.

It was in the traditional religion of Muslims that the practice developed a new significance. It rejected the idea of appeasing divine wrath or exciting divine compassion and introduced regular obligatory fasting during the month of Ramadan in the Al-Hijri calendar. Fasting here is made into a spiritual, moral and physical discipline by changing both its form and motive. By making the institution permanent, all ideas of distress, affliction and sin are dissociated from it.

However, contrary to popular practice, ritual fasting is *not* prescribed in the Quran. 'Sawm', the word mistranslated as fasting is in fact *Self-discipline* in harmony with Quranic values. The traditional meaning of sawm is thus at odds with that of the Quran. It can certainly mean abstinence from food, drinking and eating - but not exclusively so.

This divergence can be shown through the errors in interpreting the Quran. For example, in the story of Mary, after she has given birth to her son Jesus, the traditional translation of verse 19:26 by Abdullah Yusuf Ali reads:

"So eat and drink and cool (thine) eye. And if thou dost see any man, say, 'I have vowed a fast to (Allah) Most Gracious, and this day will I enter into no talk with any human being'".

Here 'sawm' is translated incorrectly as 'fast', rather than in reference to Mary's vow of silence. The correct exposition of the verse is:

"She ate the dates and drank the water and was consoled. When she met anyone, she signified her self-discipline and abstinence from speaking; that she had made a vow of silence to the One Most Gracious; and did not talk to anyone about the event of that day." [Verse 19:26].

If sawm meant fasting (abstinence from food and drink), then Mary would be eating and drinking, and then deceptively pledging to have fasted: which is hardly an act of a righteous woman. Would a lactating mother abstain from eating and drinking to the detriment of her child? This would not be a wise choice, and surely God would not decree such a punishment on a woman he exalts and then extend it to her innocent newborn child.

Properly understood, sawm here means the discipline of silence, and in the context of the above verse, it means abstaining from speaking about a specific matter. Sawm can mean fasting but attaching *only* this meaning gives the wrong impression that sawm means ritual fasting or fasting alone, when in fact it means more than that.

During Ramadan, the ninth month of the traditional Islamic lunar calendar, Muslims will not eat or drink from daybreak to sunset. This also includes abstaining from chewing gum, drinking and even smoking. While this practice claims to be an important religious sacrament, its motives and outcomes prove it is less so; flying both in the face of morality and science.

For example, nutritionists explain the biological process of fasting as using up your body's energy reserves. During the summer, after 12 hours of fasting, people may feel a headache, light-headed and lethargic. Research also links fasting with changes in mood, such as increased irritability.

Furthermore, studies into athletes who fasted during Ramadan have discovered that performance deteriorates as the month goes on. This is due to disturbed sleeping cycles, dehydration and the new pattern of eating. This runs counter to the popular assumption that fasting over a lengthy period brings health benefits.

However, there may be slight benefits to long term fasting, such as improving concentration by disturbing your natural routine. According to some this helps those who fast short-term to think more clearly. Despite this, there are many reasons that long-term fasting is both illogical and counterproductive to its aims.

One of the reasons for the month-long fast is to tighten the purse strings and be more economical. Yet, according to dieticians, binge-eating means that typically people eat richer food, and more of it in one month than they would normally eat in that period. How can it be claimed to be a more economically efficient month when there is rampant overspending?

Additionally, retailers increase their prices to take advantage of the surge of this sanctimonious euphoria. By doing so, they are acting against Quranic values by profiteering and by raking in money in times when many cannot even afford to maintain their basic needs.

Furthermore, this fasting ritual is intended by the pious to share the pain felt by the poor. If they increase their expenditure to indulge during the

hours of darkness, and sleep when most of the poor are working, how can they claim to be feeling the pain of those who have little or nothing?

In fact the overspending during Ramadan means the poor, who are the majority in most Muslim countries, are priced out of everyday necessities due to the subsequent rise in the cost of food. Rather than bringing the well-off closer to the poor, the traditional practice of fasting has the effect of furthering the suffering of those in need.

During this month, Muslim charities have a field day too. The push for donations increases as many will feel an obligation to give. Charities undoubtedly take advantage of this, and yet even with more than a billion people feeling extra generous, this doesn't seem to have resolved the problem of poverty in any Muslim country.

There are those who believe that the time of Ramadan itself is a time of salvation. This includes the fallacy that God keeps Satan chained during the month, curtailing any misdeeds from Muslims. The assumption that one month of the year leads to increased piety in one's life is simply untrue. Where corruption and transgression exist, it continues unabated regardless of whether the month is considered holy or not.

Lastly, there remains the issue of national productivity. It cannot be denied that Muslim countries suffer decreased productivity due to their inhabitants having reduced energy levels. This means that Muslims will work shorter days, and many businesses also suffer as a result.

Thus the positive psychological effects of fasting are heavily outweighed by its negative impact on health, the economy and the needy, as well as further perpetuating misconceptions about Deen-Islam. Ritual fasting is simply another detrimental facet of 'religion'.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ *The Quran was revealed in an intense period to provide guidance for all people, with clear teachings in this statute book as the criterion. Those of you who witness such times shall undertake Self-discipline. Those who are ill or on unavoidable duties may substitute the same number of other days. God wishes for you convenience, not hardship, that you may fulfil your obligations and to exalt God for guiding you and to express your appreciation. [Verse 2:185].*

This is the verse traditionally said to decree fasting: the ritual abstinence of food and drink during the month of *Ramadhan* in the traditional religious calendar. However, when properly understood, *sawm* means undertaking a Self-discipline or Self-restraint in a manner similar to that which Mary undertook after the birth of her son, Jesus. [Verse 19:26]. The word *ramadhan* means intense or scorching heat. To name a month '*Ramadhan*' (meaning intense or hot) in a lunar calendar where the months rotate can be confusing and to alternate the months in this manner is also forbidden in the Quran. [Verse 9:37]. **Intense/hot** (Arabic: *ramadhan*. Root: R'M'Z). According to Lane's Lexicon it signifies intense heat. From this it can be seen that it means a volatile state of affairs: an intense period. Witnessing a MONTH does not make much sense. It is when you witness a situation, particularly an extreme one, that you need *sawm*, Self-discipline; the measures that we need to take, so as to extract ourselves from such a condition. Extreme circumstances call for extreme measures. Indeed, the guidance; the Quran was revealed during such a period of intense fear and turmoil.

HYPOCRITE: THE SELFISH INDIVIDUAL

KAFIR: THE DISBELIEVER

The Arabic word '*munafiq*' is translated as hypocrite simply because the lack of a more appropriate word. There is no single word in the English language that comes close to its proper meaning.

The human body survives by taking air, food drink etc. By its very nature the human being is greedy, selfish, gluttonous and avaricious. It not only takes what it needs, it also hoards.

The Self fights an ongoing battle in its desire to be munificent and realise its potential by developing itself; it seeks to be benevolent, philanthropic, generous, giving and eager to self-sacrifice.

The hypocrites feign these highly desirable qualities and attitudes that receive great approval, while in their private life such opinions belie their public statements. It is these people who are *munafiq*, those that are stingy and grudging when it comes to self-sacrifice and *expending* their Self for the good of others. The *munafiq* holds back in everything except that which is in their self-interest. See verse and footnote 2:8.

The disbeliever, (Arabic: *kafir*) is the one who not only openly denies and rejects the truth but conceals it, perhaps preventing others from its benefit. What then exactly does the *kafir* disbelieve in?

First and foremost it is a denial of God, His sovereignty and ultimate accountability to Him. By denying God's sovereignty, the *kafir* is setting up an authority other than God. It may be another individual, a religion or some system other than God's Deen-Islam. It may even be his own ego.

By rejecting accountability to God, the *kafir* rejects responsibility for his own actions. If he does not accept responsibility and accountability to God, then who does he concede to, if not to another authority?

As a consequence of rejecting God, the *kafir* also rejects the Quran's guidance and the Permanent Values it contains. He may say that he still believes in justice, equality and kindness to his fellow humans and is against all the bad things that happen in the world, but what worth is a good deed if its full and absolute value is not realised?

The Quran tells us that each human being has immense latent potential and by implementing the optimum values, the Permanent Values underpinned by accountability, the human being can raise his status and make his Self fit for the next stage in life.

The *kafir* in actual fact denies the very purpose and meaning of his life; the impending exaltation of his very being and the ability to raise the measure of his own being by his *own* endeavour. See verses 109:1-6.

SHIRK & MUSHRIKEEN: TREASON

Shirk: to set up or accept an authority equal or to rival God.

Shirk: to make or accept laws, decrees or doctrines as equal to the Quran

Mushrik (singular), mushrikeen/mushriks (plural): those who commit shirk.

God is the One who created and directed the laws of the universe, and He is sustainer of the heavens and the earth and all that is between. He is the sovereign and needs no partner or ally in His domain. He is over and above all that they ascribe to Him and ultimately all will be held accountable to Him.

Once this statement has been accepted, it becomes insupportable to accept any other authority as equal or to rival God. Of course, this does not mean that there can be no other authority besides Him; we need governments and administrators to implement and enforce the laws and values that God has given us. Also, we need legislators to make by-laws, within the parameters of the Quranic injunctions, to suit the needs and situations of the time.

While sovereignty of nations can be, and is often, shared, as in the United Nations, European Union etc. and in dealings amongst such organisations, and under other situations that require cooperation. However, God's sovereignty cannot be shared under any circumstances.¹⁰⁰ We therefore should not assent to or accept any laws that conflict with Quranic decrees as given by God, the Sovereign lawmaker. Should we do this, then we would commit shirk: high treason; the unforgivable offence. Not only this, the Quran states that mushrikeen who actively fight against muslims and Deen-Islam should be killed. Why is this?

Are mushrikeen idol worshippers?

First we need to understand the meaning of 'mushrik'. To translate the word 'mushrikeen' (plural of mushrik) as idol-worshippers is like calling a gang of marauding Vikings a group of beach revellers. A mushrik is a person who commits 'shirk', the act of giving someone (or a body) authority to equal or to compete with God. This also means obeying the laws and values that conflict with the laws of God as enshrined in the Quran. People generally label polytheists, idolaters or pagans as mushrikeen, but this is not entirely correct. Anyone who accepts any law or value that is in conflict with God's law is a mushrik, such as those who give equal authority to others as God which is the same as associating partners with God. Also those who accept others as lawgivers; those who attempt to

¹⁰⁰ **Some people** erroneously consider man as 'God's representative on Earth' - see verse and footnote 2:30.

seize a share in God's sovereignty such as legislators, leaders, priests etc. who make laws in contradiction to God's laws are mushrikeen. In fact, any person who threatens the peace and security of muslims, is a mushrik. A mushrik is an active enemy, a traitor, and a person who commits high treason. And what happened to such traitors in Britain?

Under the law of the United Kingdom, high treason is the crime of disloyalty to the crown. Offences constituting high treason include plotting the murder of the sovereign; committing adultery with the sovereign's consort, with the sovereign's eldest unmarried daughter, or with the wife of the heir to the throne; levying war against the sovereign and adhering to the sovereign's enemies, giving them aid or comfort; and attempting to undermine the lawfully established line of succession. Several other crimes have historically been categorised as high treason, including counterfeiting money and being a Catholic priest. High treason is today often referred to simply as treason. Considered to be the most serious of offences, high treason was often met with extraordinary punishment, because it threatened the security of the state. Hanging, drawing and quartering was often employed. The last treason trial was that of William Joyce, who was executed in 1946.

Traitors may no longer be hanged, but 1946 was not exactly a million years ago. In fact, it's recent history. Under English law even someone having sex with the King's wife or the wife of the heir was considered to be treason and could be killed. Giving help of any sort to the enemy of the Crown is treason; giving them comfort is treason; being a Catholic priest was treasonous - and treason was punishable by death: being hanged, drawn and quartered. So why is it considered strange when the Quran advocates that people *actively* fighting against the muslims, those threatening their peace and security, should be killed? Why is it thought too brutal when muslims are commanded to kill traitors (the mushrikeen) acting against God and His just laws?

Even today English law does not require its leaders to wait for an attack before retaliating. In fact, controversially in September 2015, British Prime Minister David Cameron authorised the killing of two British men in Syria who the government believed were a threat to the United Kingdom. All this was carried out without any due legal process.

Also in 1985, in Philadelphia USA, the police (presumably with government authorisation) bombed a house inhabited by an African American liberation group. They destroyed the area devastating the lives of 250 people, killing 11, including 5 children. All because they were believed to be a threat. What threat the children could have posed is still an unanswered question.

Every community and every nation defends itself against those who threaten their way of life, but it is in the Quran that aggression is forbidden and justice advocated.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ **When interviewed** by Emily Maitlis on BBC's Newsnight and talking about the insurgent group ISIS. Gen John Allen said: 'We should attack ISIS wherever we find it'. General John Allen, was a

The exposition of verses 9:5-6 gives a clear picture of the position that should be taken in order to bring about peace and security:

"Once the restricted months of the treaty are over and the mushrikeen still refuse to make peace, you may slay them wherever you encounter them; overcome and punish them and watch them carefully at every place. If they repent and observe their agreed commitments and keep them pure, then you shall give them freedom to move around. God is Protector, Most Merciful. If any of these seek help from you, you shall protect them, so that they can hear the guidance of God, then send them back to their place of safety. That is because they are people who do not know."

Verses 9:5-6. Read verses 9:1-7 for a more complete picture.

The killing and the besieging is only of mushrikeen who are enemies, traitors and actively fighting against muslims. The Quran advocates protection and safe passage for the mushrikeen who seek help, and there is not a hint of forced conversion to be a muslim. Simply, because Islam is a social order, people living under it would be subject to the laws of that system, that is, the laws of God as stated in the Quran. Anyone who commits treachery would be dealt with appropriately, as they would be in any country.

Deen-Islam is established for the peace and security of people and those who, like the mushrikeen, cause displacement by creating fear and turmoil, must be punished, as would happen in any law-abiding country with the will and the power to enforce their laws.

It is a duty of muslims to apply and enforce God's law - as found in the Quran - and not according to the priest or politician, or those who legislate for their own self-interest. However, this should be done by consensus: elect people into administration who apply God's law and are prepared to implement it and live and act according to it.

Apostasy

Apostasy is to abandon one's faith or religion. Since Islam is not a religion there is no act of apostasy described in the Quran, instead God states that He will not protect nor guide the people who disbelieve after believing. Those who abandon God's guidance and accept an authority to rival God are traitors (Arabic: *mushrik*, *mushrikeen*). People who are not guided are already on the road to turmoil and will face retribution through God's ordinance. Freedom of belief is a right of every individual, and God allows this. Muslims are instructed to be tolerant and understanding. See verses 9:6; 13:40; 16:125; 18:29; 41:34; 60:8; 73:10

commander of US forces in Afghanistan and President Obama's special envoy to the counter-ISIS coalition. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0xRUC2mvPOE> (February 2016).

SECTS & RELIGION

People of similar beliefs are often said to be a branch of the same religion especially if they had a common origin. This is now often applied to Islam. For example it is said that Shias are a branch of Islam and Sunnis are also a branch of Islam. In reality this is not true. Although originating from the same source, they are now both totally different religions from each other and it is impossible to reconcile the two. While professing belief in the Quran, the doctrines of both these religions are also in severe conflict with many Quranic fundamental decrees.

Primarily religion and Deen-Islam are two parallels that can never meet, so Sunnism, a religion, cannot be a *branch* of Islam and neither can Shiaism. To understand this you first have to understand the comparative difference between religion and deen.

Deen is a word with no English equivalent but in the Quranic context can be translated as the living social order: the System of God. Religion is a subjective experience shaped by the susceptibilities and prejudices of individuals, while *Deen* is an objective reality concerned with the progress and welfare of not only individuals but mankind as a whole.

Science, like social systems, can have branches such as astronomy, geology and mathematics etc. All science disciplines are distinct yet connected and one does not contradict the other. The facts of chemistry are true, as are the facts of physics, and without being in conflict with each other, one helps us to understand the other. Is this true of religions or any of their respective sects? To be a devotee of one religion you have to deny all others. For example the Protestant faith and Catholicism are in conflict with each other because of their doctrines, as are Shiaism and Sunnism. None can be reconciled with each other or with any other religion, and they will always be in conflict with each other.

While Sunnism and Shiaism are traditionally considered the two main 'branches' of Islam, Sunnism rejects the core doctrines of Shiaism as Shiaism rejects the core doctrine of Sunnism. And though both say they accept the Quran as word of God, neither applies it in practice. Similarly, each of their sub-sects rejects the doctrines of each other, and on occasions rejects even the canon of the main sect to which they subscribe to, and neither do any of the sects share a common interpretation of the 'hadith and sunna', the traditions they erroneously attribute to Muhammad, and on which their sharia and hudud laws are based.

The more extreme adherents of these sects are constantly at loggerheads and frequently attack and kill each other. If they consider one another as belonging to Islam, then why do they do this? Is this not a contradiction of the Quran that says:

'No believer kills another believer, except by mistake ...' [Verse 4:92].

Since killing each other is something they do often, they are either making many mistakes or they are not believers.

The real reason that they are at war with each is because both are the products of political and nationalistic struggles and all have created religions, loosely based on Islam, to match their own agendas. They have diverged from a dynamic social system and created *religions* that are a means to political ends.

Their attachment to Islam is by name only and by this threadbare link they mistakenly conclude that they are branches of this dynamic deen.

Islam is a *deen*, a social system wholly contained in the Quran. As a social system it can be compared to other systems such as Capitalism, Socialism, Democracy, Monarchy etc. - but not with religions.

Islam is a deen that encompasses all aspects of life, and it is the Quran that gives key values covering family, adoption, marriage, divorce, science, food, conservation, social etiquette, social welfare, governance, financial contracts, crime and punishment among many other central aspects for a life of peace and security for all people and all nations. It is the framework for a social order for all mankind. The whole process of Islam is the universal harmonisation of mankind. There are many *facets* of Islam but there can be NO branches or sects.

Every individual can remove fear and turmoil to harmonise life. This can only be fully and properly done by implementing the Absolute Laws and Permanent Values that are found in the Quran and the Quran alone. Anything else is not Deen-Islam.

Islam is an Arabic word, but to be Islamic you do not have to label it Islamic. Permanent Values and Absolute Laws create peace and security whatever you call them. The deed is far greater than the word.

Therefore, people can belong to different countries and each can be part of the Islamic society, culturally different, but their principal values remaining true to the Quran. Groups of people with conflicting aims and ideologies cannot belong to the same social system and cannot be called a society, even if they live in the same area, speak the same language, eat the same food but have goals and values that are in with conflict with each others'.

God's ordinance excludes from protection anyone who rejects the Quranic values: "Anyone who seeks to follow other than Deen-Islam as a way of life, will never be accepted by Him, and in the life yet to come he will be among the losers." [Verse 3:85].

The Quran also states: "Those who separate themselves from this Deen-Islam and form conflicting sects do not belong with you. Their judgment rests with God then He will inform them of everything they had done." [Verse 6:159].

When societies split into sects, there can be nothing but disharmony: "We sent to Thamoud their brother Saleh, saying, "You shall serve God." But they turned into two feuding sects. He said, "O my people, why do you hasten to commit evil instead of good works? If only you implore God for protection from wrongdoing, you may attain mercy." [Verse 27:45-46].

Furthermore the Quran says: "Ironically, they broke up into sects only after the knowledge had come to them, due to jealousy and resentment among themselves. If it were not for a decision from your Sustainer to respite them according to His ordinance, they would have been judged immediately. Indeed, the later generations who inherit this guidance are also full of doubts." [Verse 42:14].

God gives clear and explicit instructions: "Do not be like those who divide this Deen-Islam into sects: each party rejoicing with what they have." Verse 30:32. So those who separate into sects of one kind or another are clearly going against Quranic injunctions not to divide into differing parties. Religions, sects and their splinter sects are nothing but detrimental to the welfare and progress of society.

God commands that:

"You shall hold fast in unity to this guidance from God, all of you and do not be divided. Recall God's blessings upon you, you used to be enemies and He reconciled your hearts. By His grace you became as brothers. You were at the brink of catastrophe and He saved you from this. God thus explains His revelations for you that you may be guided. Let there be a community of you who invite to what is good, advocate righteousness and forbid all that is evil. These are the ones who prosper. *Do not be like those who became divided and disputed, despite clear proofs that were given to them.* For these have incurred a terrible retribution. [Verses 3:103-105].

The Quran is the criterion for judging and reconciling disputes. Any belief or system that conflicts with the Quran is not Islam. As clearly set out in verse 3:85 any other than Deen-Islam is not acceptable to God. All the conflicting sects and splinter groups are not different branches of Deen-Islam, they are to all effects and purposes different religions that conflict with *Deen-illah*, God's System. Therefore all such religions are not different versions of Islam, and by implication all religions are not different paths to God, they are different versions of wrong.¹⁰²

¹⁰² **The story** of 'the Blind Men and the Elephant' as told by John Godfrey Saxe is an excellent poem that shows that religions based on subjective experiences which while true in some aspects, are not absolutely so. In the tale, a group of blind men (or men in the dark) touch an elephant to learn what it is like. Each one feels a different part, but only one part, such as the side, the leg or the tail. When they compare their experiences they learn that they are in complete disagreement. Similarly, religions and religious experiences are based on the susceptibilities of men and cannot be flawless. Through time disagreements cause religions to change with innovations and diverge further into sects and subsets. With Deen-Islam, people may move away, but the source, the Quran, is always there to check and reinstate the Absolute Laws and the Permanent Values.

USURY, GAMBLING, DEBTORS & SLAVERY ECONOMIC EXPLOITATION, CHARITY AND SOCIAL WELFARE

The measure of a nation is how it treats the weakest and the most vulnerable members of its society.

Usury (Arabic: *riba*), is profiteering or economic oppression of any kind. Usury is forbidden in the Quran in the strongest terms because it creates untold misery, usually to those who are the most vulnerable. This system of iniquity is practiced in many societies including feudal and capitalist economies. This type of economic subjugation can lead to excesses which leave the less able, and those trapped in poverty, in a perpetual state of hardship. This is because, despite regulation and laws, the bottom line for these businesses is money.

In the less-developed countries where some form of feudalism still operates, landowners and brokers not only lend money at exorbitant rates, but also take advantage of borrowers' families as additional labourers and their women for personal gratification. This is cruel and oppressive and deserves to be condemned.

Since the late 19th Century, low income families were enticed, through necessity into high-interest personal loans such as Provident vouchers in the UK. Recent decades have seen growth in this area of legalised usury when companies lend relatively small amounts of money (e.g. Pay Day Loans) to the poor for interest rates of around 4,000%. Capitalism may have encouraged a free market economy but it is at the expense of those who can ill-afford it.

'Islamic Banking' also illustrates how religion can be used to delude people into thinking that they are doing the right thing, when in fact they have become victims of a usurious system. In housing loans (mortgages) there is little difference between the 'Islamic' bank and the conventional 'high street' bank. The conventional bank charges 'interest' whereas the 'Islamic' bank charges 'profit margin'. If the borrower fails to pay, both banks will repossess the borrower's property. Not only that, but the 'Islamic' system also has a different way of dealing with early prepayments. If the borrower were to come into a windfall and wants to pay off his loan, the conventional bank will ask him to pay only the principal sum and discount the interest that is not yet due. The 'Islamic' bank however may ask the borrower to pay the principal sum plus all the 'profit margin' for the future periods. The 'profit' is not always discounted. This does not seem to match well with the concept of fairness and justice.

The difference between profit and profiteering is greed. While profit (e.g. wages or the price of a product or service charged by a business) is the legitimate reward for one's labour, after taking away the costs incurred, profiteering is the excess earned over and above that. While we can accept that sometimes the line between the two can be subjective, we can usually recognise when we are being ripped off. This can happen when, for example, people become attracted by designer labels - often manufactured by slave labour and retailed at inflated prices. Also, purchases are sometimes made because of stress, when a bargain is struck in times of weakness or hardship. Under this pressure a usurious contract can easily occur and also in times of shortages, the price of goods goes up. While this can be justified because traders may need a minimum income to survive, in many cases the price is just hiked up to line the pockets of those in a position of advantage. This is also usury.

Gambling is to play games of chance to win money or another specified prize. Are games of chance forbidden in the Quran? The verses normally considered to mention gambling are 2:219 and 5:90. However, gambling is not mentioned in either verse. It is the word '*maysir*' that is usually wrongly translated to mean gambling. If we, for argument's sake, take the usual understanding that it means gambling then how would we translate the same word which also appears in verse 2:280? The translation of this verse would then wrongly become: "If the debtor is in difficulty, then wait for a gambling (*maysira*)". The correct translation of this verse is, of course: "If the debtor is in difficulty, then wait for an easier time (*maysira*)". In other words, if someone is unable to pay a debt, then allow additional time to help the debtor.

There is mention of 'divination' (fortune telling, predictions, betting on sports results etc.) in verse 5:90. This does not mean it's forbidden - decreed as *haram* - but the clear instruction is to avoid it due to the devastation it can cause, not only to the individual who takes part, but also to the family concerned. However, to decree all speculative ventures as *haram* would mean that 'calculated business risk' would also be forbidden and many transactions based on future stock (such as crops) could not take place.

We can elaborate the use of '*maysira*' further. The word '*maysira*' means additional or extra time. The origin of this word means 'excess time'. To corroborate this we can look at verse 2:280 where the same word is used: 'If the debtor is in difficulty, then wait for an easier time (*maysira*).' And also: "In [free time] there is gross harm and some benefits for the people. But their potential to cause harm is greater than their benefit." [Verse 2:219]. When there is too much time on a person's hands this could lead to mischief. An English idiom aptly says "The devil makes work for idle

hands". What this means is when someone is not busy, or gainfully employed, trouble is bound to follow.

Slavery is being bound in servitude as the property of a slaveholder or a household. In modern times there appears to be no country that has a law that advocates or condones slavery, but religions such as Hinduism still practice servilism. There is also bonded labour in some developing countries and slave labour exists in many western countries, albeit underground. Also, many nations on the economic cusp, while reproachful of open slavery, turn a blind eye to conditions in their factories and farms which are, in reality, operated by slave labour.

So even in these times when we think that slavery is from a bygone age, we may be benefitting from slavery; whether it's the food we eat or the clothes we wear. Abject misery is also created in human trafficking. It is reported that children are brought from African counties to be sacrificed in religious rituals; women are imported to be employed as sex workers and other people to work in the black economy. Slavery may be legally abolished but slaves are still alive and existing in misery. The Quran does not condone slavery and decrees to free the slaves. This can only be done by creating a good and equitable economy, where employers pay a fair wage for a fair day's work and, as a consequence, customers are prepared to pay fair prices too.

Economic exploitation, Charity and Social Welfare

Usury or economic exploitation is condemned in the most serious terms but social welfare is encouraged at all times. Those who genuinely need a helping hand from society should see it as a right and those in a position to help are under an obligation to relieve the suffering of those less well off or need aid due to sickness or injury. The call is for a social commitment to be fulfilled: give dignity not charity.

Throughout the 19th. century, destitute people in Western Europe unable to pay their debt were put in debtors' prison, which was similar to locked workhouses. They worked there to pay for their incarceration costs and accrued debt. The Quran however decreed leniency for debtors and advocated expenditure for Social Welfare for the less well-off centuries before this. Verse 2:280 clearly says:

"If the debtor is in difficulty, then wait for an easier time. If you do this with sincerity, it will be better for you, if you only knew."

People in financial difficulty should not be burdened but should be helped. In recent years short term loan companies have preyed on people who are already in great difficulty. While profit in business is condoned, the Quran condemns profiteering. See verses 2:275; 3:130; 4:161.

There are almost 200,000 registered charities in the UK. Many of even the well known ones have been involved in fundraising scandals, targeting the vulnerable and attempting contact with people who have recently died, distressing their relatives. Other operating practices considered disgraceful are that while their main objective appears to be helping the poor and needy, large amounts of donations are spent on wages and fundraising activities. Donors are giving their money to causes but charities spend it mostly on executive salaries and administrative costs. Some charities are totally funded by the government. This, many believe, inhibits them from criticising flawed policies and helps the government evade their social responsibilities. Charities, they say, don't bite the hand that feeds them.

Should people not purify themselves by keeping away from charities and instead demand that the government of the day do the job they are elected to do? Social welfare should be central to government responsibility and not any other body, be it a charity or another organisation.

It may seem striking at first, but we should not be surprised to learn that there is no charity decreed in the Quran. As always there is a very good reason for omitting something that on face value seems good but in actual fact is detrimental. Charity is the occasional voluntary donation of residual income or goods to the needy. It can be an act of pity to temporarily relieve the hardship of someone and makes the giver feel as if they have done something worthwhile. The Quran's decree is a more permanent solution with far-reaching effects. It propagates a social welfare system to help those in genuine need.

The Quranic concept of *ehsan* is to balance society and close the gaps created by the disparity of poor distribution of wealth. This is why it says that people should expend of their money for social welfare. Those in a position to do so must contribute a fixed amount from their disposable income. The word the Quran uses to describe this expenditure is *anfaq*. This can be a portion of your money set aside for helping those in need or it may be an amount of taxation levied by the government to establish and maintain a social welfare system. Practically it needs to be both; a portion reserved and given first to parents, then to family and those in need known to you, while the state system should be there to provide for those who have no other means of support and need help.

This is not charity but the implementation of a social welfare system to help those less well-off in society due to no fault of their own. They also have the right to a decent standard of living. The idea is to raise the standard of living for all people and give them their right. This also gives the receiver dignity and respect, not pity and charity, which degrades the human Self. The adage that says, *give a man a fish, feed him for a day, show*

a man how to fish, feed him for life is a good illustration of the 'expenditure' people are expected to make for social welfare.

Verse 2:177 clearly says "*...be benevolent and selflessly expend your money, despite your love for it, to become benefactors of society.*" and verse 51:19 says that a portion of an individual's money is set aside for the destitute and the needy. This money should go "*first to your parents and then your relatives, the orphans, the poor and the refugees.*" states verse 2:215. And how much of your money should be set aside? For each person it is different so no percentage is fixed: "*The excess part of your disposable income or goods.*" as noted in verse 2:219.

When giving items other than money, it is not acceptable to "*...pick out the inferior to give away when you yourselves would not accept it unless your eyes are closed.*" Verse 2:267 also reminds: "*You shall spend for good of social welfare of your community from the good things you possess and from what We have produced for you from the earth.*" And also "*Those who spend their money in the cause of God, then do not follow their expenditure with reproach or insult will receive their recompense from the One who sustains them; they have nothing to fear nor will they grieve.*"

Any expenditure you make for the good of social welfare is ultimately for your own good. This welfare expenditure shall be for the cause of God and will be repaid to you without the least injustice. [Verse 2:272]. The example of those who give their money seeking God's pleasure, out of sincere conviction is that of cultured land on high fertile soil; when heavy rain falls it gives twice as much crop. If heavy rain is not available a shower will suffice. God is Seer of all that you do. [Verse 2:265].

Furthermore, you cannot attain honour until you spend your money for the good of social welfare from the possessions you love. Whatever you expend for the welfare of society, God is fully aware of all things. [Verse 3:92].

Citizen's Income

Social welfare referred to throughout the Quran is an important duty incumbent on all members of society and for the benefit of every individual in the community.

As mentioned before, the Quran advocates not charity but dignity. It's not just an important personal obligation but also something that has to be put in place by the government of the day. One way this can operate is to establish a Citizen's Income. That is a basic wage paid to every person in the country funded by the taxes paid by businesses and working people. This would mean higher taxes but everyone would benefit. Every individual would be paid regardless of their age, working status or financial position. This also removes the stigma of receiving benefits often seen as state 'charitable' handouts. The amount paid would depend on age, and in Britain it would replace the benefits system and streamline it, whether it's currently means tested or not. This would ensure that everyone had financial security throughout their life. People could express themselves and help other members of society without having to worry about basic needs. This social welfare system has been discussed for the past few decades and is now increasingly seen as viable option. Where this

has been tried, a Citizen's Income shows increased economic activity and further studies are being carried out.

Social Welfare is a duty of every muslim, and indeed everyone, to ensure that there is no undue suffering of people in their community. Special attention should be given to parents, relatives, the orphans, the poor and needy and the refugees in the community. So important is looking after the vulnerable members of our society that throughout the Quran there are continuous reminders of this central responsibility. This spending on social welfare is not an act of charity but a right to be given to all those entitled to it. See also verse 2:215.

Social welfare seeks to redress the imbalance in the standards of living in society. Those who give accomplish honour and integrity, while those who receive achieve self-respect and dignity that charity and charitable acts do not offer.

Equity and Equality - what is the distinction?

Although the terms equality and equity are often used interchangeably, this can lead to some confusion because while these concepts are related, there are also important distinctions between them. Equity involves giving people *what they need* to enjoy a happy and full life. Equality by contrast, aims to ensure that everyone *gets the same things* in order to enjoy the same standard of a full and healthy life. The aim of equality is to promote fairness and justice, but it can only work if everyone starts from *the same place* and needs *the same things*.

To show the distinction between equity and equality we can look at the health care system in the United Kingdom which is based on the concept of equality. It is designed to ensure that everyone has the same access to health care services regardless of their ability to pay for the health services they receive. On the face of it this seems fair. But it is limited in promoting a fair and just service because it ignores other important factors – such as language, place of residence, sex of the individuals – that can also act as barriers to receiving proper care. At the same time, ensuring the same access to care for everyone assumes that everyone has similar health issues and similar health care needs. This is not always the case. Many people live with social, political and economic disadvantages that contribute to poor health. For example, people who live in poverty frequently have more health issues than those with more money. As a result, they may need additional or special services rather than just the standard ones, to counter the force, for example, of substandard housing, limited access to fresh, nutritious foods, and exposure to unsafe environments.

Equity means to make sure that they have *what they need* to achieve and maintain good health and well-being. Once everyone enjoys a similar level of health and well-being, the focus can then be placed on preserving fairness by giving everyone *the same things*: this is *equality*.

Equality is the outcome, equity is levelling the field so that equality can be achieved. In the Quran this concept is known as *ehsan*. This means to balance society and close the gaps created by any disparity caused by *zulm*, the displacement of values. This ultimately results in peace and security.

Are men and women equal?

The Quran makes a true and proper distinction between the differences among men and women and takes into account their needs, rights and responsibilities within the constructs of fair and just society. Their unique roles are natural and inherent, but the outcome of their belief and actions, determined by the Law of Requit, is equality that is strengthened with equity: fairness and justice. Understanding the differences between equity and equality therefore helps us to recognise and accept the differences in not only the sexes, but also among people in general. More importantly, it can guide us to do something about the situation to improve it.

Equality is sameness - everyone getting the same thing, and equity is fairness - ensuring everyone not only gets the same opportunities but the same rewards for the same work or good deeds. True equality is the result of equity. See verse and footnote 33:35. See also 27:11; 65:11.

SOLAA: COMMITMENTS AND OBLIGATIONS

Worship in one form or another is part of religious ritual and for the traditional Muslim, the five obligatory prayers are key components of their creed. These can be supplemented with many other compulsory or voluntary offerings called *sunnat*, *nafal*, *tuhajad*, *taraweeh*, *kusoof* etc. but the five remain the core ritual prayers of the regular cycle of worship. In their eyes, to be a Muslim, you must believe in and perform the ritual prayers that are commonly known as *salat*.

Of course, millions of Muslims do not perform these daily ritual prayers and may only join a congregation once a week for the Friday ritual, *tarweh* prayers in Ramadan and on festival days such as Eid. Whether you pray or not, it remains an obligatory tenet of faith. To deny the ritual prayers, as with other pillars of faith, is to render oneself, in the eyes of the self-appointed 'guardians of faith' a non-believer.

In the hadith books there are scattered remnants that can be pulled together to form a prayer of sorts. These disjointed incidents do not form the rituals of prayer that we see today. In fact, in the whole canon of hadith literature, the full liturgy of the ritual prayer, known as *salat*, cannot be found. This is probably why different sects have formulated their own versions of prayer with varying words and genuflections following the teachings of their own particular imams.

The individual who understands human nature will realise that prayer at best is a passive act. While it may give some self-satisfaction and a sense of a duty performed, it yields nothing constructive. Ritual prayer is a religious duty and since no real results are produced by prayers, then we must accept ritual prayer as a fruitless activity designed to keep the devout busy and shackled in devotion. This keeps the masses perpetually and uselessly active and unable to widen their scope of thought and activity. All rituals are constructed to have this effect in one way or another.

However, there is a distinction between *salat*, which can be considered the Arabic for ritual prayers, and *solaa* the Quranic word for obligation or commitment. Some researchers express the word *solaa* to mean 'to link' or to 'connect.' Lane's Lexicon states that *solaa* means 'to follow something closely'. Is this not what a person does when he or she is committed to something? The most compelling evidence that '*solaa*' means 'committed' is that when this word is transposed for all appearances (and its derivatives) of the word '*solaa*' in the Quran. The verses then start to make sense. On the other hand if we insist that '*solaa*' means 'ritual prayer' we face significant problems.

Supplications (Arabic: *dua*) to God can help a person to focus on particular challenges he or she may be facing, supplications, often

demonstrated in the Quran by messengers, are an affirmation of your desires and goals and God's law of attraction fulfils them. Ritual prayers can do nothing for the individual and they certainly do nothing for God. Ritual prayers of any description have no practical purpose in an individual's life.

To deem that *solaa* and its derivatives mean ritual prayer (*salat*) is a weak assertion and as shown here throws up many problems. Should we transpose the words 'ritual prayer' throughout the Quran onto the word *solaa* or any of its derivatives then many verses become confusing. Yet this is exactly what traditionalist translators have done. In order to show that *solaa* means ritual prayer they struggle and wrongly interpret some verses to make the word fit. For example:

1. The commandments for ritual prayers (*salat*) are said to have been given to Muhammad. However, the Jews [Verse 2:43; 5:12], Moses [Verse 20:14] and Jesus, as a child, [Verse 19:31] were among the people engaged in *solaa*. If this *solaa* means ritual prayer, how could they know about it before it was decreed? Furthermore Abraham was a muslim [verse 22:78] and Muhammad was commanded to follow him [Verse 3:95], and the *deen* given to mankind in the Quran is the same as given to all the previous messengers [Verse 42:13]. So how could all the previous messengers and communities be *muslim* without performing the five ritual prayers and yet people these days people cannot?
2. God's messenger Shuaib said *solaa* can change the economic system. Despite an increasing number of people engaged in ritual prayers, we cannot see any improvement in the prosperity of any Muslim nation. [Verse 11:87].
3. God's creatures, such as birds are engaged in *solaa*. How do they perform the liturgy of prayer, if *solaa* indeed means ritual prayer? [Verse 24:41].
4. Can Muslims pray with disbelievers? Would disbelievers perform prayers with Muslims, while they remain disbelievers? Yet the Quran says that *solaa* can be made with disbelievers. How is this possible? [Verses 4:101-102].
5. Then there is the *solaa* of God upon his creations. If *solaa* means ritual prayer then how does God pray? God revealed the Quran as guidance for people to apply it in their lives. This is so that each individual Self can develop through meaningful activity. So how can chanting His guidance back to Him (in prayers) be of benefit to anyone? [Verses 2:157; 33:43; 33:56].

To complicate matters further, the advocates of 'salat' have translated the word *solaa* in many contradictory ways. This is because ritual prayer does not fit all the situations so changes to the meaning are made to try and fit square pegs into round holes. For example the word has been translated as, prayer, blessings, connect, place of worship, people who pray and oratories. Check the various traditional translation to verify this.

It is obvious to anyone with even a basic understanding of the Quranic Arabic that words with the same root and all its derivatives do not change meaning. This Arabic is a language like no other. Because of its consistent rules it makes it an incisive language; the meanings of the words with the same root are therefore also consistent.

When we substitute the correct meaning of *commitment* or *obligation* for *solaa*, we see the meaning becomes clear:

1. The Jews, Jesus, Isaac and Jacob, as well as others established *solaa*; they were *committed* and fulfilled their *obligations* to God and to their communities. [Verses 2:43; 3:39; 5:12; 20:14; 19:31]
2. Shuaib wanted his people to establish *solaa*, that is to establish their *commitments* in trade and commerce. It is easy to see how fulfilling *obligations* in ethical trading standards would have made his community prosperous. [Verse 11:87].
3. God's creatures, as well as birds know their *solaa*. That is they perform their *commitments* through instinct and act only according to the ordinance of God. [Verse 24:41].
4. All muslims can *commit* themselves to agreements and treaties with disbelievers; that means to establish their *solaa* with them. They can also ask them to witness their legal obligations such as wills. This is evident in modern life. [Verses 4:101-102].
5. *Solaa* by God? Yes, God also performs *solaa*, as the sustainer of everything, God has *obligated* himself to send sustenance to His creatures and He has *committed* himself to send relief from turmoil (through His ordinance) to those who follow His guidance. [Verse 2:157]. *Solaa* is undertaken not only by God but also by the malaika, as confirmed by verses 33:43 and 33 56.

As a muslim an individual is obliged to observe his or her virtuous commitments, even in times of hardship. *Solaa* is the *commitment* to observe the prescribed covenants. This encompasses the whole of God's commandments in the Quran. It covers all obligations including relationships, agreements, promises, one's obligations to oneself, family, parenting, business and so on.

By fulfilling these obligations an individual purifies his or her Self and the Self becomes stronger.

Life throws many challenges and sometimes these can be harrowing and unpleasant. Our commitment to God's commandments is tested by them. However, these obstacles are not our enemies. By overcoming them, we bring out the best in ourselves in preparation for the life yet to come. But, let's not forget that heaven begins here. Even in this life, man becomes a better human not in solitude but in the hurly burly of life - by facing challenges and fulfilling his commitments.

It is apparent that there is no ritual prayer in the Quran. The instruction to establish *solaa* is to establish *commitments* and fulfil our *obligations* to ourselves, our family, communities and everyone else - just as the messengers did. Indeed God and the malaika establish *solaa* and all his creations fulfil their commitments too,

To pray (as ritual worship for forgiveness of sins or to get relief from an illness etc.) is to ask that the laws of the universe be annulled on behalf of a single petitioner who is confessedly unworthy. God is implicit in everything. He does not need or want our rituals or lip-service glorifications.

The message in the Quran is a call to belief, action and ultimate accountability to God. Belief is impressing our Self with the divine blueprint; actions is the manifestation of the belief and accountability is showing responsibility for our actions. Being virtuous is overcoming our regressive egotistic Self - the Iblees in us. It is virtuous deeds - the action - that overcome the hurdles, the challenges of life, not passive prayer. It is in religion that individuals seek mercy and grace through a saviour. In Deen-Islam it is the good deeds that glorify God [verse 21:20], and God dignifies mankind by giving the opportunities for Self development and *raising their own* eminence. See verse and footnote 90:4 and 94:5.

So does this mean that we cannot even make any kind of prayer or praise God? No, this is not the case. In verse 10:10 an example of the ultimate praise to God is given but the true glorification of God is when we enjoy the good things He has gifted to us and develop our Self to raise our status and become fit for a higher existence. God knows everything - all our secrets and declarations, so we don't need to establish any *rituals* like prayer. Our service to God is everything. Hands that serve are better than lips that pray. Action speaks louder than words and this is what the verses 107:1-7 in the Quran tells us. There are many instances shown in the Quran when the messengers make supplications to God. So yes we can make supplications to Him. There are also many examples in the Quran of what to say in our supplications, such as the '*dua*' in verse 2:286. As mentioned earlier, these help us to focus and *affirm* our own aspirations, goals and desires and God's law of attraction fulfils them.

Some verses where the word *solaa* and its derivatives appear.

Solaa (Root S'L): commitment, obligation, steadfastness.

1. Solaa (of Shu'aib's community) can change economic system. Verse 11:87.
2. Solaa of the Jews. Verse 2:43.
3. Solaa of the child Jesus. Verse 19:31.
4. Solaa of Isaac and Jacob. Verse 21:23. 5. Solaa of birds. Verses 24:41.
6. Solaa with possible strangers after witnessing a will. Verse 5:106.
7. Solaa with disbelievers and mushriks. Verses 9:4-6.
8. People (hypocritical) of the deen, who are obliged (to do good deeds) but are heedless of their commitments. Verses 107:1-7.
9. Solaa (commitments) with disbelievers Verses. 4:101,102; 5:58.
10. Solaa of Moses, his brother and their people. Verse 10:87.
11. Solaa of the Children of Israel: God will be with them as long as they keep their commitments and keep them pure. Verses 5:12-13.
12. Observance of Solaa. Verses 2:238; 24:58.
13. Solaa of your Sustainer: verse 2:157; 33:43.
14. Solaa of God and the malaika with the messenger. Verse 33:56.

Solaa derivatives:

faSolaa 87:15.	solaa-tuhum 8:35.
faSolee 108:2.	solaa-tukka 11:87.
musollan 70:22-34, 74:43; 107:4 and 2:125.	solaa-waattee 9:99, 2:238, 23:9.
solaa 75:31, 96:10.	solaa-waaton 22:40.
solaa ta - 46 times.	solee 9:103.
solaa tahu 24:41.	solluu 33:56.
solaa taka 9:103.	tuSolee 9:84; 108:2.
solaa te 20 times.	yuSilla 4:90, 6:136, 11:70, 11:81, 13:21, 8:35.
solaa tehim 6:92, 23:2, 70:23, 70:34, 107:5.	yuSolaa 2:27, 13:21, 13:25.
solaa teka 17:110.	yusolee 3:39, 33:43.
solaa tu 62:10.	yuSollu 33:56, 4:10

The different ways the word *solaa* and its derivatives have been translated in traditional translations: *ritual prayer, connect, supplicate, blessed, honour, place of worship, churches, oratories*. This is one of the most abused and contorted words. The mistranslation of this one word alone is sufficient to show how a word can be manipulated to mean anything to baffle those who don't know the Quran. However, since we have the original it is easy to check and revert back to the correct meaning. **Is there** any need for ritual prayer? God responds, without the need for ritual prayer, to any caller who calls to Him, while following His guidance: Verse 40:60. **Seek help** through steadfast and observing your commitments. Verses 2:45-46. **By doing** good works people keep their duty to Him. In fact it is through good works, not ritual prayer, that God can be glorified. See verses 2:3; 2:30; 21:19-20; 57:1; 59:24. **The intelligent** remember God whether standing, sitting or lying down. Verse 3:190-191. **In fulfilling** our commitments and obligations we glorify God. Verses 62:1; 24:41; 17:44. **Had God wanted** people to worship him through a ritual prayer, He would have made it clear. He has given details of eating, social etiquette, washing etc. so why not give details of something as important as the ritual prayer? The introduction of the ritual prayer was to remove people from the dynamic system of Deen-Islam: hands that work are better than lips that pray: it's actions that change people and societies, not rituals. Verse 2:177. **Another word** traditionally mistranslated is **dua**: the correct meaning is: call, invite or supplicate i.e. a call to God. (Arabic: *Dua*. Irregular Root: D'A. Derivatives: *du'wani, dawaa, duwa, da'wataka, uduw'ila, ud'aw*). God responds to supplications: 2:186. Responding to God's call: 14:44. Invite to your sustainer: 16:125. Those with affected deafness cannot hear the call: 21:45. God says call on me and I will answer your call: 40:60. See verse and footnote 2:3. Invite to God: 12:108

HAJJ - THE CHALLENGES OF LIFE

For all individuals, without a doubt, the odds in this life are against them. But the obstacles are there not to frustrate, but to bring out the best in you. They are designed to put you on your mettle and permit the indomitable Self you possess to reveal itself in all its glory. You develop yourself in the course of overcoming obstacles. Frustration will force you to reconstruct your personality. Rebuffs and set-backs toughen and harden you and by facing *challenges* you develop a mature personality. So even at times when the world appears to be stern and unkind, in the long run it turns out to be not your enemy, but your friend. This is why the concept of *challenge* is important: the concept of *hajj*. Hajj means to challenge or confront.

In verse 2:196 the Quran decrees that you "shall take the *challenge* to promote the living system in the name of God. If you are restricted in any way, you shall strive to do what you can. If you are ill or suffering an injury you shall expiate by Self-discipline, as an act of sincerity or some other form of work for the good of society. Be practical when facing the *challenges* for promoting the living system. Self-discipline is required for three days and then a further seven to make a ten day period to complete this. Self-sacrifice is necessary to uphold the Sanctioned Submissions especially when you are at a distance from home. You shall fulfil your duty to God and know that God is strict in enforcing retribution."

This challenge described above is for everyone to take part and promote the practical values and standards of God's system in the living world. Take a fixed number of days to give your time and money for the promotion of Deen-Islam. You must take up this challenge to make your neighbourhood, city, country and the world a place of peace and security by removing fear and turmoil from around us. You do this when you promote this Deen-Islam and implement this guidance. Quranic values offer long term benefits both to individuals and societies. They nurture the strength of the Self to help face the *challenges* that life inevitably throws at the human being.

Those who reject the guidance in the Quran will face other challenges: "As they **confront each other in the inferno** (Arabic: *hajj-i-finaar*) of their deeds, the supporters will say to their leaders, "We used to be your followers, can you spare us any part of this hell?" The leaders will say, "We are all in this together. God has judged the people." [Verses 40:47-48].

In traditional translations 'hajj' is wrongly translated as pilgrimage, and in some verses as dispute or argue. According to the root structures of the Arabic language hajj means 'challenge or confront'. If the word 'hajj' means 'pilgrimage', then the verse 40:47 would read: '*making a pilgrimage to the inferno*' instead of the true meaning "*confront each other in the inferno*". Those condemned to hell confront each other, especially the followers who plead with those who led them to now save them from this punishment. But judgement has been passed and there they must stay. Other verses also negate that idea that 'hajj' means pilgrimage.

Note that the Quran states [Verse 40:47-48] these companions did not 'argue in the inferno' but that they 'confront' each other. See verse and

footnote: 2:76. For the word argue, dispute and debate: See also verse and footnote 2:197.

The rite of pilgrimage is one of the most damaging ideas in any religion. For a journey to a supposed 'holy' place, millions of people gather to perform trite rituals with the single egotistical aim of attaining salvation only for themselves. Many hope to die there, as hundreds of pilgrims do each year, in the hope of 'martyrdom' and a first class ticket to heaven. Nothing could be more selfish.

On the annual pilgrimage to Mecca each person spends a liberal amount of money; the most he or she can afford. This vast pool of money funds the cost of travel, accommodation, food, holy gifts, barbers for the hair cutting ceremony, and so on. It fills the pockets of governments, travel agents, mediators and other operators. In 2015 the annual pilgrimage industry was worth more than £8.4 billion, including the non-obligatory lesser pilgrimages undertaken throughout the year. In the same year the total Saudi tourist industry was worth almost £16 billion. The figures are mind boggling and are set to increase each year as more emphasis is placed on pilgrimages because the oil revenue is said to be declining. For the locals the pilgrimage is a major source of income as in any major tourist industry. Many barbers, for the essential hair cutting ceremony, can triple their price and ensure that they don't lose out on any seasonal *profiteering* that has become customary at this time for all trades.

Because of the mistaken belief that the pilgrimage is decreed by God, people consider it an act of ultimate piety and use their life savings despite the poor living conditions in the home countries of the respective pilgrims. One year's income from pilgrimage trade could alone change the lives of all the citizens in any one country each year. For example, Bangladesh is frequently devastated by floods. The poverty in some areas is unimaginable with dire living conditions, crude sanitation and no running water or electricity - truly a life of hell.

When God speaks about social welfare, he means the concept of *ehsan*, to balance society and close the gaps created by the disparity of poor distribution of wealth, not only locally but also globally, that is why it says that people should *expend* their money for social welfare.

Going on a lavish or even a basic pilgrimage does not in reality fulfil any duty to God. With all the money spent on pilgrimages, if diverted in the *service* of God, muslims with one stroke could wipe out a poor nation's debt, raise the living standards and create a society that has dignity, respect and strength.

Money spent on a pilgrimage may satisfy one's inner desire and give some emotional comfort to the individual, but this is a false hope because according to the Quran it is the act of facing and overcoming life's real challenges that develop the Self and not such selfish acts of fulfilling

contrived rituals in order to gain a passage to heaven. In reality rituals such as pilgrimages are an economic exploitation of society.

We just need to look around us to see the heart wrenching situations that grip people in many parts of the world. Most people are poor, hungry and lack even the basic reading and writing skills. Millions don't have proper homes, those that do have somewhere they can call home, the standard is so poor it can barely be called survival. Poor sanitation, no running water, gas, electric or enough food to eat. They have no health care to speak of and children grow up in conditions we would be ashamed to keep our dogs in. In some Asian countries, due to ignorance and poverty, mothers kill their baby girls fearing the burden of a dowry payment. Each day millions face economic oppression and are weighed down by exorbitant loans, leading many to take their own lives.

These are the people that need their standard brought up to a decent level of living for human beings. These are the ones that can be helped by money, money that many wrongly believe guarantees them a ticket to heaven.

The money spent on pilgrimages and mosques can be better spent on building hospitals, schools, universities, libraries and community health care. The countries that send the most pilgrims are probably the ones that need these facilities the most.

The Quranic concept of *ehsan* is to balance society and that is why the concept of social welfare is important. Those in a position to do so are obligated to contribute from their income. The word the Quran uses to describe this expenditure is *anfaq*. This can be a portion of your money set aside for directly helping those in need and also tax paid to central government for the maintenance of a national welfare system .

When we see the billions of pounds spent on religious rites as a gateway to heaven, which only those with money can afford, while other people: poor people, millions of men, women and children suffer daily, die daily because of lack of care that this money can easily buy, the situation begs the question: did God *really* ordain such a ritual? Are people so heartless as to trample over the rights of the needy to make for themselves a pathway heaven?

To expend yourself and your money (from what God has bestowed upon you) and to stamp out poverty, hunger and poor living standards is the *challenge* that you really need to undertake. To stop slavery, dowry and oppression is what people should strive for. To fight against aggression and injustice around the world is the *challenge* people should stand up for.

Now that would be taking on a real *challenge*.

That is hajj, according to the Quran.

ZAKAA - PURITY IN CHARACTER

The Quranic meaning of *zakaa* is 'pure'. Throughout the Quran *zakaa* is frequently used alongside *solaa*, as for example in verse 2:43: "You shall observe your commitments (*solaa*) and keep them pure (*zakaa*) ..."

Purity is an essential condition to help an individual grow, develop and progress. Therefore keeping your commitments and obligations pure and uncontaminated is an important part of life because genuine sincerity cannot exist when mixed with polluted ideas.

Moses' task was to go to Fir'awn who is oppressing his people and convince Fir'awn to stop this transgression and purify his Self of wrongdoing. [Verse 79:17-18]. When an individual moves forward on the straight and balanced path his good actions purify his Self. In other verses such as 92:7-9, God states that he created the Self and revealed how to safeguard it from the effects of evil, and by their good action the righteous purify it; those who do so are the successful ones. Purity also strengthens the Self making it fit for the life yet to come.

"Those who believe, lead a righteous life and observe their commitments and keep them pure, receive their recompense from God; they will have nothing to fear, nor will they grieve." [Verse 2:277].

Other verses show the importance of purity in character: because of John's righteousness, he was endowed with purity. [Verse 19:13]. Jesus was pure in character [Verse 19:19] and his mother Mary was pure and chosen above all women in the world as an exemplary person. There are many other such verses which show that people of good character fulfil their commitments and keep them *pure* - sincere and untainted by corruption from outside sources, and the Quran advocates all people to do this. See verse 2:42 for further references.

In traditional translations confusion is perpetuated when as in verse 58:13 both *sadaqah* and *zakaa* are translated as charity, while in verse 19:19 *zakaa* is translated as holy and in 19:13 it is translated as purity. Also in verse 79:17-18 reads: "Go thou to Pharaoh, for he had indeed transgressed all bounds. And say to him, wouldst thou that thou shouldst be purified *tazakki* (from sin)?" If *zakaa* (and its derivatives) mean charity, how can it be translated as purity or holy? See Yousaf Ali translation.

The fact is that the traditional translators have mistakenly misconstrued different meanings for the word *zakaa*. The roots of the words define that *zakaa* means pure, purity etc and *sadaqah* means sincere, true. etc.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ **Pure:** (Arabic: *zakaa*. from the root Z'K'W). Purity is an essential condition to help an individual grow, develop and progress. Therefore, keeping your commitments and obligations pure and unadulterated is an important part of life because genuine sincerity cannot exist when mixed with polluted ideas. See verses 2:83; 2:129; 2:151; 2:277; 9:102-3; 18:81; 19:13; 19:19; 19:31; 22:78; 24:21; 35:18; 58:12,13; 79:17-18; 91:1-9.

CREATION FROM CLAY

Why did God create everything? This is not a question that we can answer with any degree of certainty, but we can make an intelligent comment. It is in the nature of a 'Self' to express itself. God being a 'super Self' or 'super ego' expresses Himself by creating not only the physical world but by creating a 'free will', which He endowed on the human being. Scientists, by trying to create 'artificial intelligence', are in fact trying to replicate what God has already created. After art, architecture, and rapid advances in technology the human 'Self' is trying to express itself in a 'godlike' manner.

"God did not create the invisible world and visible world, including the human being, except to serve him in the order of creation." [Verse 51:56].

"O people, fulfil your duty to the One who sustains you; the One who created everything from one Self, a single entity and created from it its mate, then evolved from the two many creations." [Verse 4:1].

"He is the One who perfected everything He created and initiated the life of mankind from clay." [Verse 32:7].

When people are told that human beings were created from clay, creationists often imagine that God created man with the command 'Be' that instantly turned a mound of clay into a man (Adam) in the final finished form and then from his rib He created a woman (Eve) and they both reproduced and became the first parents of the whole of mankind.

This cannot be true, as evolutionary biology paints a completely different picture, and the Quran's statement that God created humans from clay is consistent with this. However, we are not talking about the clay we see today, the clay that's commonly used to make pots and other such things. The clay that life first started from is primordial, chemical-rich clay and the process took many billions of years. From this 'clay' emerged the first form of 'life' that started the evolutionary process of all living beings; animals as well as humans. God creates and directs his creation, but only within laws - all God's creations are a *process* of His ordinance

Scottish chemist Alexander Cairns-Smith, in his study on how biological life first started, began by asking the question: What is one of the central qualities that defines life? For him, the answer was the ability to reproduce, or self-replicate. It is usually considered that the original self-replicator is DNA. Is it possible that there were self-replicating genes before DNA that would not have been so susceptible to damage by the early environment on earth? ¹⁰⁴

What was needed were genes that could acquire and retain information and use that information to interact with their environment. Cairns-Smith

¹⁰⁴ **Alexander Graham Cairns-Smith** an organic chemist and molecular biologist at the University of Glasgow, Scotland. He is most famous for his book, *Seven Clues to the Origin of Life*.

posed the question: was there something even simpler than DNA that possessed all these abilities? The answer was yes; that something was crystals. After further study, the theory was proposed that there was a crystalline form that not only interacted with its environment in a complex and ordered way but also possessed an innate tendency to evolve. That crystalline form was the colloidal suspension of quartz particles in water, more commonly known as *clay*. This type of clay is a fine-grained substance probably consisted of aluminum silicate, quartz and organic fragments.

What generated the 'spark' of life? Piezoelectricity is the ability of some materials, notably crystals, to generate an electrical potential in response to applied mechanical stress. The word is derived from the Greek *piezo* or *piezein*, which means to squeeze or press. The pressure some crystals may have experienced induced the necessary stress required to create the first 'life', in the crystals suspended in the clay. This colloidal suspension is the 'primordial soup' or 'clay' from which that first spark of life came. So the Quran's statement that God created the human being from a clay is correct, albeit the process of evolution was over a very long period. The Quran gives the essence of this life-giving aspects of clay and it is the scientists who will discover the details. See verse and footnote 36:82.

CARBON - THE KEY TO LIFE

Carbon is one of the most abundant elements in the universe and it is present in all forms of carbon-based life. In the human body carbon is the second most abundant element, almost a fifth of the body mass. Carbon also forms soft graphite as used in pencils and diamonds, one of the hardest substances in the world. The abundance of carbon, together with the unique diversity of organic compounds and their unusual polymer-forming property at the temperatures commonly encountered on Earth, make this element the chemical basis of all known life. Carbon also forms many different kinds of bonds and essential compounds. The carbon cycle shows how carbon moves through the living and non-living parts of the environment.

In verses 36:78-80 of the Quran a question of some significance is asked: "Who can resurrect our bones after they have decomposed?" This rhetorical question is answered by God and He says: "The One who initiated them in the first place will resurrect them." Then the example to illustrate this also comes from God: "He is the One who creates for you from the green trees, fuel which you burn for light." Further in verses 17:49-52 it is said: They questioned, "After we turn into bones and fragments, we get resurrected anew?" Say: "Yes. Even if you turn into rocks or iron."

Someone who has little or no knowledge of this important element of life, carbon, might think that the example of bones has no link with that of trees, rocks or iron. But, the link is easily established and science shows that the link is carbon.

A carbon atom that today exists in a rock may once have formed part of a bone or a leaf, and in the future, may once again find its way into living matter. The carbon atom is stable even if that bone or leaf is reduced to burnt down ash.

Is life after death possible? Science tells us that nothing is destroyed, but changes from one form or another; this also applies to energy, not just matter. This is why the human Self does not die but continues to live after death in a weaker or stronger state - depending on the development undertaken through the challenges of life. Some carbon compounds even act as data banks and one - DNA, the master databank itself - passes on information from one generation to the next. That discovery takes us to the last two verses 75:3-4. "Does the human being think that We are unable to reconstruct his bones?"

According to God He can assemble man's '*ba-neneh*'. This word has often been translated as 'fingertips', but, 'genetic print' is a much more accurate translation of *ba-neneh*, a unique word in the Quran that appears only once. It is interesting that *ba-neneh* is used only one time in the Quran, perhaps to demonstrate the uniqueness of each individual Self.

DOES INTERCESSION WORK?

An intercessor is a mediator or arbitrator (Arabic: *shafeeh*), that looks after the interests of someone. In this sense the Quran too is *shafeeh* because, through its guidance, it looks after the interests of mankind and society. However, in the religious sense it is a person who intervenes on behalf of another, especially by prayer. The Quran rejects the notion that an intercessor is needed to appeal to God, because every individual will be judged by his or her deeds and given a status that is rightfully theirs.¹⁰⁵

Intercession in religious terms is undeserved favouritism. This is where criminals can ask influential people, in this case a messenger of God such as Muhammad, on the 'day of judgement' to intercede and ask God for absolution and forgiveness to avoid the penalties for their ill deeds. However, in reality this is not so and no intercession is accepted by God. What you plant, so must you reap.

The Quran mentions *shafa'at*: looking after each other's interests. In an ordered society that follows the Deen-Islam every individual should be a 'shafeeh' – someone who is aware of the affect of their actions on other people's affairs and interests and therefore acts in a positive manner. There will be no *shafeeh* to look after the interests of the wrongdoers - simply because it is a mistake to support the corrupt. Furthermore, in verses 21:27-29, God makes clear His messengers...

*"...never convey anything of their own whim and they strictly follow His commands. He knows their future and their past. **They, His messengers, need not intercede on behalf of anyone, those who send forth their good deeds are already honoured by Him.** The messengers worry about their own future. If any one of them claims to be an authority equal or rival to God, We punish him with the torment of hell; We thus rebuke the wicked."*

If the messengers cannot intercede, what right have priests, saints and other 'holy' men?

The basic meaning of *shafa'at* is to act as a community and to look after each other's interests. The main goal of the Quran is to establish a socio-economic system that helps mankind develop as a whole. For this purpose, the Quran advocates a system of collective living rather than individualism because mankind can develop only as a whole in a healthy and stable society. Social systems that promote or encourage selfishness, greed and exploitation of fellow humans where the individual's interests prevail over collective interests conflict with the Quranic values.

Social systems in which the very rich do not care for the poor - in spite of improved resources - suppress human potential. Such a system produces

¹⁰⁵ **Mediator**, arbitrator, benefactor, intercessor: providing justice and by consequence ensuring peace and security, looking after the interests of another. (Arabic: *shafeeh*). **The Quran** is *shafeeh* because it looks after the interest of mankind through its guidance. See verses 16:69; 17:82; 41:44. Quran as a mercy to mankind: verse 21:106.

corrupt and characterless individuals and creates severe imbalances in all spheres of that society.

In a muslim society that follows the Quranic deen every individual should be a *shafeeh* – someone who is aware of the affect of their actions on other people's affairs and interests. A *shafeeh* will make every effort to achieve collective objectives. The administrators of an Islamic state are *shafeeh* of their fellow citizens. Their primary responsibility is to ensure protection for every citizen and not allow any of the citizens to feel neglected in respect of their individual rights and basic needs. This sort of *shafeeh* among muslims is not limited to them, but indeed extends to other nations.

Our commitment to God is to make His 'system of economy' successful and useful for the whole of humankind. For this purpose they are encouraged to cooperate with other nations in all works that are carried out according to the divine laws for the welfare, peace, stability and strength of humankind. They are prohibited from cooperation with those who act against the interests of humankind. They must not make plans that create division, rifts and disunity among the people and to not sap their energies and vigour, and leave them unsubstantial.

Accordingly the Quran says: "Whoever contributes to a good deed receives a share of the resulting reward and whoever takes part in any evil work incurs a share of the retribution. God holds to account all things." [Verse 4:85]. This is the Quranic concept of shafa'at.

Now, compare this with the traditional notion: it is believed that on the Day of Judgement, God will condemn the criminals and sinners to hell. Then the pious, the saints and the 'holy' men – especially the messengers, and Muhammad in particular – will come forward for the defence of criminals and request a general amnesty. God will pardon them on the request of the holy and pious men and send the criminals from hell to heaven. This is called intercession. Obviously, this definition of intercession is not what is meant in the Quran – rather, it demolishes the whole edifice of Islam that is firmly established on the principle of accountability.

The Quran says that on the day of Accountability everyone will be shown the exact effect of everything that they had thought, said or done in this life of probation, however they may have concealed or misinterpreted it in this life. Everything will be taken into account and the account shall convince even the persons themselves. It will be done openly and transparently.

It seems that the popular concept of intercession (patronage of criminals) originated during the era of despot kings when the Quranic value system was put aside and the principles of fairness, justice and accountability were ignored. Influential men in the royal courts interceded to protect criminals.

This concept may have gained credence from the Christian idea of atonement. According to this idea Jesus will intercede for all sinners among

his believers on the Day of Judgement. It was a strong argument used by Christians in an attempt to give the impression of superiority over other religions. Therefore, it may have inspired the Arab religion to contrive similar beliefs about Muhammad. They concocted a hadith claiming that on the Day of Judgement when God sentences the sinners to hell Muhammad will fall in prostration before God and will not raise his head until God forgives all sinners and sends them to heaven.

These falsehoods may have led to a perceived superiority by Muslims over Christians but at the same time proved fatal due to Islam's firm foundation on the principle of accountability. This hadith attributed to Mohammad regarding intercession is obviously false and in fact did great harm to muslims' morality. The Quran does not advocate such intercession as it states explicitly: "Beware of the day when no person can help another, no intercession will be accepted, no ransom can be paid, nor can anyone be helped." [Verse 2:48]. In other words this is a strict warning: be on your guard, do not think that special favours exempt you from the personal responsibility of each Self.

Some advocates of intercession conclude that God, in His wisdom, may grade his creatures and give superiority to one person over another. Then by His will and permission such a person may intercede or help. And as such Muhammad will intercede for Muslims by the will and permission of God. This conclusion is absolutely wrong as Muhammad cannot intercede on behalf of anyone.

Our thoughts and actions produce results simultaneously but often we cannot see or perceive them until they mature and become visible. There is a well-measured period for the maturity of each act to produce visible results. For some of our acts this period is so short that we can see the results in our lifetime but for the others it is so long that in order to see the results we must wait for the 'Final Day'. In order to understand it better, we can classify the phenomena of human activity as concrete realities and latent realities. The former we face in our lifetimes and the latter we face in the life yet to come – there is a built-in system of reward and punishment in the Divine Laws. God does not need help or advocacy of anyone whatsoever.

The Quran explains the process of reward and punishment figuratively so that human minds can grasp it easily. The 'Day of Judgement' presents a similar allegorical scenario like those we often see in judicial courts. For example, the criminal is brought to the court with witnesses. All are present and listen to the judgements. Similarly, the Quran says:

"You come back to us as individuals, just as We created you the first time ... We do not see with you the intercessors that you idolized or authorities that you set up as equals to Me and those who claimed that they will help you. All ties among you have been severed; the idols you set up have abandoned you." [Verse 6:94].

Traditional meanings of 'shafeeh' are misleading. The Quran does not use the word 'shafeeh' for Mohammad. It uses witness, (Arabic: *shahid*) for Muhammad [Verse 16:89]. On the day of accountability, those deluded with intercession will lament:

"The intercession of those whom We honoured will never help us." [Verse 74:48]. "...Warn them about the imminent day, when the hearts will be terrified and many will be remorseful. The transgressors will have no friend or an intercessor to speak on their behalf." [Verse 40:18].

And again, "Say: 'Shall I seek other than God as my sustainer when He is the sustainer of all things?' No Self benefits except from its own works and none bears the burden of another. Ultimately, you return to your God then He informs you of the truth regarding all your disputes." Verse 6:164.

With their roots in tradition and culture, beliefs in intercession are held by nations that have lost the will and energy to work hard. They have become idle and look for easy shortcuts to success. Could you imagine how easy it would be to get paradise through intercession? You are simply required to profess in the messengership of Mohammad and subscribe to a religion associated with him. When a person's prayer appears to be answered it is often assumed that intercession has worked, when in fact it was no more than a coincidence with events in accordance with God's ordinance.

In our world *shafeeh* means to stand with someone in order to help, advocate for, and support him. If this support is for a good cause, the *shafeeh* will be rewarded but if the support is for bad cause he will share part of the punishment along with the criminal. In reality, God does not need advocacy of anyone. To intercede for criminals or to favour someone undeservedly is against the teachings of the Quran. Therefore, this sort of belief in intercession is wrong. We cannot rely upon any power or person other than God to help us.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ **Being a *shahfeeh*** clearly shows 'team mindset'. A group of intelligent people using planning and cooperation to their personal and community's advantage. They progress as a society as well as individuals and are constantly looking after each others' interests. They face and overcome the challenges of life and attract success and achieve harmony as their God-given right. Development through facing challenges: see verses 11:7; 11:114; 19:87; 94:5-8 also 3:185; 32:9. **Social welfare** and Citizen's income: see verse 21:112. Equity and equality: see verse 10:109. **Salvation without accountability**. In contrast, religions have a 'herd mentality', the blind following of each other without any critical thinking. Religious people are always waiting for a saviour to lead them out of their misery or hoping that an intercessor will show them pity or favour and they will be raised in status without fulfilling their commitments to themselves, their family or their society. This would be very much like being given a secure, easy and well paid job without having the qualifications, experience or the competence to perform it. The taint of cronyism, in fact. See verses and footnotes 2:177; 17:23- 39; 107:1-7. **In complete contradiction** to the Quran there is a Bukhari hadith that says 70,000 people will go to heaven *without* being held to account for their actions, and in the Bible it says that people are saved *not* by their good deeds but by the grace of God. Sahih-al-Bukhari 6059 and the Bible: Titus 3.5. Authentic Bukhari is the Sunni corpus of hadith literature. Hadith: 4:42; 68:37; 77:50.

THE TRADITIONS OF HADITH

Among the majority of people there are those who uphold profane hadith, and thus mislead many from the path of God without knowledge, and make themselves doomed to failure. These have incurred a shameful retribution. [Verse 31:6]

Besides believing in the Quran, the *traditions* also require Muslims to believe in other supplementary works called the 'hadith'. The word hadith in this context means narration. These hadith traditionally relate only to the deeds and utterances attributed to the messenger Muhammad; his speech, a report or an account of his deeds and words.

It is important to emphasise that the Quran uses this word 28 times without ever attributing it to the messenger, but warns against 'profane hadith' as noted in verse 31:6.

The hadith of the traditionalists are divided into two groups. The first is 'Hadith Qudsi'. These are considered as 'sacred hadith' - additional revelations from God, apart from the Quran. The second group is 'Hadith Sharif' or 'Noble Hadith' and are attributed to the messenger Muhammad himself. Few people realise, however, that the most binding precedents, rituals, rites, laws and customs were originated not by God Almighty, nor Muhammad but instead by imams such as Bukhari, Muslim, Tirmidhi, Daud, Nasa'ai and Ibn Maja who assembled the numerous books of hadith literature.

There are also the small collection of Forty Hadith of Nawawi considered by hadith advocates to be of the greatest importance and the essential minimum education for a Sunni. The Bukhari and Muslim collections were compiled about two centuries after Muhammad and their authenticity 'proved' by the criterion of 'isnad' - the chain that details the reporters supporting a hadith. This method was based on the assumption that it was unthinkable for God-fearing men to lie about matters which they held sacred. The Shias call hadith by another name: 'Khabar', which means news. For them the authenticity of a hadith is guaranteed not by isnad, which begins with the companions of Muhammad (known as the *sahaba*), but its authority comes through Ali, the messenger Muhammad's son-in-law, and the Imams of Shiaism. The Shia collections which were made during the Buyid period are considerably larger than the Sunni ones and contain references to the Imams not found in the Sunni collections.

Following on from isnad, the chain of transmitters, the advocates of hadith of later times added another standard by which hadiths could be measured. This standard was a judgment of verisimilitude in the eyes of a growing community who were deeply religious but uneducated. As a result of this, there grew up a corpus of hadith which were clearly impossible historically and yet were repeatedly quoted and rarely questioned. They

had an 'authenticity of spirit' about them and therefore were not challenged. This consensus of silence was in fact an acceptance, even though the hadith could not be traced back to the messenger. To the informed mind this may appear as a major incongruity which reflects little credit on Islam's intellectual integrity. To question these hadith would call into question the faith of believers, yet this is exactly what the Quran does.

Scholars have often conceded that some hadiths have been invented in order to justify some legal opinion or school of thought. This is undoubtedly true and even the early compilers rejected large numbers of hadith as fabricated. The hadiths range from the ones which are patently, or pointlessly false, to the ones which blatantly contradict the Quran, despite clear statements in the Quran that nothing can abrogate God's word. There are also polemical hadiths which were invented as propaganda to support one or another party in dynastic and political struggles, and other hadiths which have nothing objectionable in their content, but which the messenger could not have uttered for historical reasons. A hadith may be true in the sense that it is a narrative wholly consistent with the message of Islam, but to ascribe it as a 'quotation' of the messenger Muhammad, simply to add authority is a gross blasphemy. The messenger may well have manifested all the values given in the Quran by act, thought, speech or gesture, but it is inconceivable that all the possibilities should be discoverable in the received canon of hadith.

Much research has been carried out on the hadiths, especially by orientalists, in an attempt to recover history from the hadiths. They almost unanimously find that one can recover some history of the second and the third century but almost nothing of the first. The logical conclusion of these findings is that the 'links' which spread over the eight generations succeeding the death of Muhammad were concocted. Therefore, the so-called 'science of isnad' – the touchstone of hadith authenticity – has some tremendous flaws in it.

How then can we go on giving credence to something that was not written down and yet which some 200 years after the fact, a man called Bukhari supposedly managed to trace back to its source (i.e. the messenger) by establishing all the links in a chain which cannot possibly have been genuinely reconstructed?

The other criteria to which Bukhari decided to subject his work sought to establish that the transmitters were honest persons in terms of their outward observance of Islam, and that each had a sound memory. This he did by apparently collecting the biography of each of the transmitters. How he managed to do this without written records, bridging a gap of about eight generations, and simultaneously establishing not only biographical

data but also a compelling analysis of the mental faculties of his subjects defies belief.

An example is called for: in a large number of hadiths Abu Huraira is taken as the last link in the chain of narration. He was not – even according to Bukhari's extraordinary method of compilation – assigned a good memory, however, even this unnecessary inconvenience was not a problem for Bukhari who found an explanation:

Bukhari (Hadith no. 4:841): Narrated Abu Huraira: I said, "O God's Apostle! I hear many narrations from you but I forget them." He said, "Spread your covering sheet." I spread my sheet and he moved both his hands as if scooping something and emptied it in the sheet and said, "Wrap it." I wrapped it round my body, and since then I have never forgotten a single hadith.

A most ingenious explanation, indeed.

Another criterion of Bukhari is the overall agreement within the hadith as a whole. It means that any one hadith should comply with similar hadiths which give the same sort of story and that this should be seen as a basis for accepting it as authentic. In modern parlance, it means that the various stories should 'hang together', that one account should not conflict with another, and if there is no conflict, we should assume that the story is, therefore, true. The intelligent and attentive reader who takes the time to read a moderate number of even so-called 'sahih' or authentic hadiths on any subject will not need to go far before he finds a distinct failing on even this count.

The traditional clergy expends great energy trying to account for these inconsistencies and contradictions. Their answers to common-sense observations may involve various choices of words, yet the thrust can broadly be summarised thus: *in order to understand the hadith you have to be very learned. There seems to be contradictions in the hadith to you because you are not learned. They - the clergy - are learned. Therefore, they do not see these contradictions. When you are learned like them, you too will not see contradictions. Until you are as learned as they you cannot contend with them on this (or any) subject. The fact that you fail to perceive any of this only testifies to your own ignorance.*

Such is their convoluted logic. It should be noted that these are the *sahih* or authentic hadith. There are other grades of hadith which are viewed with varying degrees of suspicion even by those who accept the *sahih* versions. One can find many hadiths which not only contradict the Quran but also clearly do damage to the Messenger's good name.

Stoning for adultery or fornication. The Quranic law on this is absolutely clear. The Quran makes no distinction between adultery and fornication. The Arabic word for adultery or fornication is *zina*. In English law adultery is specifically 'sex between a man and a woman where one or both are married but not to each other.' In English law, sex outside

marriage where neither of the parties is married is not adultery. Also, in this law, if a married person has sex with an unmarried person, only the married person has committed adultery. The English law does, therefore, make the distinction between adultery and fornication, but Quranic law does not. The Quran actually makes this law very clear: the punishment for proven *zina* (sex outside marriage or between a man and a woman where either or both parties are unmarried) is 100 lashes. Also, four witnesses who can testify to the relationship are required before the case can be judged proven.

This does not mean that it must have been witnessed by four people at the same time, but rather four people must be able to testify that the accused has committed an act of sexual immorality, and in this case *zina*.

Also the Quran dictates that in order to avoid punishing the innocent, if a husband accuses his wife without witnesses, he is required to take an oath four times to confirm his accusation and the fifth oath to invoke God's condemnation if he is lying. But significantly, the woman too may take advantage of the same procedure and deny the claim to avoid any punishment. Furthermore, where the accuser has failed to produce four witnesses, he is to be punished with 80 lashes. In such a case, the courts cannot punish women but those who commit perjury face justice. The Quran's decrees are clearly just, yet we find the so-called 'Islamic states' stoning people to death on the strength of a ruling drawn from what the Bukhari hadith has to say, and not judging cases according to the Quranic law. See verse: 24:2-9.

The hadiths rule that the woman should be buried up to her neck and then killed by stoning her on her head. The man is to be buried up to the waist and then stoned. It is a barbaric practice and the media takes this opportunity to denigrate Islam when in fact the act is not at all Islamic. Sadly, Bukhari has a large number of hadiths to support this act and the ruling shows the messenger in a very poor light. Unfortunately, most people do not know what the Quran has to say on this matter. Here a straightforward case where the Quranic law is absolutely clear, yet the Quran is completely ignored and the hadith accepted unquestioningly.

Like many doctrines found in the hadith, the punishment of stoning to death for adultery has its origin in the Old Testament. This law has been copied by all six collectors of hadiths who stress their claims that the messenger practiced it. Large portions of the canon of hadith literature is derived not only from Biblical law (the Old and New Testaments) but also from the Mishnah and the Gemarah; the oral and written traditions of the Talmud. Here are the two hadith from Sahih Bukhari:

Bukhari (No. 8.816) : Umar said, "I am afraid that after a long time has passed, people may say, 'We do not find the verse of rajam (stoning to death) in the Holy Book,' and consequently they

may go astray by leaving an obligation that God has revealed. Lo! I confirm that the penalty of rajam be inflicted on him who commits illegal intercourse if he is already married and the crime is proved by witnesses or pregnancy or confession." Sufyan added, "I have memorised this narration in this way". Umar added "Surely God's messenger carried out the penalty of Rajam, and so did we after him."

Bukhari (No. 3.885): A Bedouin came to God's messenger and said, "O God's Messenger! I ask you by God to judge my case according to God's Laws". His opponent, who was more learned than he, said "Yes, judge between us according to God's Laws, and allow me to speak." God's Messenger said, "Speak." He said, "my son was working as a labourer for this man and he committed illegal sexual intercourse with his wife. The people told me that it was obligatory that my son should be stoned to death, so in lieu of that I ransomed my son by paying one hundred sheep and a slave-girl. Then I asked the religious scholars about it. They informed me that my son must be lashed one hundred times, and be exiled for one year, and the wife of this (man) must be stoned to death." God's Messenger said, "By Him in whose hands my soul is, I shall judge between you according to God's Laws. The slave-girl and the sheep are to be returned to you, your son is to receive a hundred lashes and be exiled for one year. You, Unais go to the wife of this man and if she confesses her guilt, stone her to death" Unais went to the woman next morning and she confessed. God's Messenger ordered that she be stoned to death.

Both of these hadiths disregard the Quranic verses. The verses from the Quran show how in the eyes of true Islamic law the treatment given to women is absolute justice and equal for both for men and women.

Why are people not following the Quran? In fact, when one reads these hadiths, one gets the feeling that there must have been some kind of concerted plan at work. Dr. Abdul Wadud, in his book *'Conspiracies against the Quran'*, explores this question. He gives the following explanation: the Arabs defeated the Persians in war but the Persians were far more advanced in political intrigue than the Arabs. Therefore, they used their superiority in an attempt to corrupt Islam from the inside. The Deen-Islam cannot be corrupted because the Quran is there, and as long as people follow the Quran there is no problem. But the question was, how to make people deviate from the Quran? The answer: by creating another, additional body of writing and ascribing it to the messenger, and then persuading people that this is ordained by Muhammad as supplementary explanation to the Quran.

This approach has been most effective. In fact, we see that once the name of Muhammad is invoked people accept anything as the truth and follow it blindly, and the fact that it may be in total conflict with God's decree in the Quran seems to be of no consequences. As the saying goes; once in a while everyone gets knocked down by the truth; but most people get up, dust themselves and walk on as if nothing had ever happened.

At this stage it also important to mention the well-known historian Abu Jafar Muhammad bin Jareer at-Tabari who died in 933 C.E. during a period very close to when the hadith were written and completed. Tabari wrote 30 volumes of *Tareekh-e-Tafsir* (historical commentary) on the Quran, based on the hadith. Later on he wrote a history of Islam in 13 volumes based on his tafsir derived from the same hadith. Therefore, his tafsir rests on

hadith, as does his history. The Quran, too, is drawn through the prism of these hadith. Thus, all his books supposedly derive their credentials from the Quran, even though they are not based on the Quran. They are based on the hadith – a spurious, later body of work.

Today, no-one dares challenge Tabari in any of his views, since that would amount to challenging the hadith which, in the minds of the simple Muslims, have been accepted as factual accounts of the messenger's utterances. Tabari's work has become one of the main reference works used by Muslims who use it without ever questioning its authenticity.

Here is another important issue to show how the hadiths clearly contradict the Quran. This example from Sahih Bukhari (Book of Nikah) is the recurring accusation that the messenger was a paedophile, as he supposedly married Aisha when she was six years old and consummated this marriage when she was nine years old. Some hadith also accuse him of sexual depravity because he had more than one wife.

None of this is true and the Quran clearly emphasises his exemplary character, while the fabricated hadiths sadly confirm these contemptible assertions.

Such fabricated narratives are difficult, if not impossible to defend and no intelligent person would stoop to do so. Hadith advocates however, rather than reject this profane hadith, do defend it. Even the celebrated medical doctor turned televangelist preacher, Dr. Zakir Naik, agrees with the hadith that Aisha was nine years old at the time of consummation, but he contends nine year old girls at that time were menstruating and mature enough to have sexual intercourse.¹⁰⁷

It is true that even younger girls have been known to become pregnant, however, these are exceptions, and to shamelessly say that a 6 year old child is able to consent to marriage and three years later is fit, both physically and mentally to bear children is a gross indecency, irrespective of culture or time. The idea that 9 year old girls are sexually prime is perverted and cannot be supported by anyone who believes in Quranic values. The Muslim population around the world is mainly illiterate and ignorant, so when someone of Dr. Naik's ilk speaks with apparent knowledge, he is readily believed. In the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king.

The Quran was revealed by God as a guidance to take people out of ignorance and to not keep people immersed in depravity. The real reason the traditionalists defend such hadith is that to reject them would mean to reject the very foundation on which their beliefs rests. This verse is explicit in describing the situation:

¹⁰⁷ **Dr. Zakir Naik:** Aisha married at young age: www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qf6mfM3_02U

When they are told, "Follow God's guidance as revealed in this book," they say, "We follow only what we found our parents doing." What if their parents are not aware of this and are not guided? The example of such people is that of a parrot who repeats what it hears without understanding. Deaf, dumb and blind; they do not comprehend. [Verse 2:170-171]

In the days when there were no birth records and people hardly knew the year they were born, who would know Aisha's date of birth 200 years after the event when the hadith were compiled? The most reasonable explanation is that Aisha was much older than it says in the spurious hadith. It is no secret that the hadith are contradictory and often wrong in even simple matters, and this is most likely the explanation. Muhammad, the messenger, would never have done anything that conflicted with the Quran, especially marrying a pre-pubescent child.

The Quran only condones marriage between physically and mentally mature and consenting adults. Muhammad would never have strayed from Quranic guidance and it must be remembered that while he did marry more than once, he was married to the same one woman for most of his life, and it is only in the latter years, for political alliances, that he married more than one woman.

These are only three of many well known hadiths quoted here, and there are volumes more. You only have to read a few in the collection and it becomes clear that the hadith are much like the stories in the Bible; a mixture of anecdotes, parables, myths and indecencies.

Much has been wrongly attributed to the messenger and by using the 'hadith' to add weight to their personal interpretations, and satisfy their own vain desires and lusts, the advocates of hadith have defiled Islam. By using Muhammad's name, the 'Muslims' have transformed his purpose and diverted the people into following many false traditions and customs, instead of studying and applying the teachings of the Quran. Had God wanted to give Muhammad quotes any importance He would not have said don't linger around Muhammad waiting for a hadith. See verse 33:53.

In conclusion here is a hadith that demolishes all hadith attributed to the good messenger: *"Do not write down anything I say except the Quran. Whoever has written something other than the Quran let him destroy it."* Ahmed ibn Hanbal, Vol 1, page 171 & Sahih Muslim, Book 42, No. 7147.

A hadith that says don't write down hadith? Proof, if further proof is needed, that these hadith fabrications are as contradicting and confusing as they are unreliable.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ **Follow Bukhari**, even if it means that you end up looking like a clown, say TV evangelist Dr. Zakir Naik as he equates not following Bukhari's hadith of wearing your trouser hem high with committing shirk, i.e. treachery. See video: www.youtube.com/watch?v=FCyMko6Zmik
Shaykh Hassan Farhan al Maliki: priority to the Quran or hadith? See also the following videos:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=_xhriUVQNpQ&app
www.youtube.com/watch?v=-VKMb7r6WNA#t=17

POLITICAL SYSTEMS

WHY DO WE NEED ABSOLUTE LAWS AND PERMANENT VALUES?

Consider the treatment of humanity: for millennia the world's religious, atheist and secular leaders and governments have applied their collective genius to the riddle of statehood. The results have been corruption, secret sex societies, cultic obsession by the elite with child sex, secrecy, aggression, state sponsored homicide and genocide, war, famine, infanticide, slavery, control, exploitation, manipulation and abuse of the masses in a variety of ways so scary that it defies description.

The need for the Quranic order arises from the fact that in the absence of a universal way of life, mankind must remain divided into mutually hostile groups. Under such conditions, there can be no enduring peace, no permanent security for the individual and no prosperity and happiness in the world. The Quran, for this reason, constantly draws attention to the unity of mankind, although conflict cannot be eliminated immediately.

The urgent need for a political organisation which would embrace all humanity cannot be denied. The existing political systems only divide mankind into warring camps. Each group has devised a system that serves its own interests and gives support to its own ambitions. Each of the political ideologies is suited only to its authors, but fails to serve others. The supremacy of a single group, racial or cultural, is either implied or expressly affirmed in these ideologies. Nazism and Fascism defend the right of the stronger race to exploit the weaker one. Communism theoretically asserts the supremacy of the workers but practically places political power in the hands of the party elite. Democracy inculcates belief in the cultural superiority of the people of one state, and seeks to make them prosperous even at the expense of peoples of other countries.

The Quran alone offers the system for the equitable welfare of all individuals and communities. Human equality and human worth are its cornerstones. Its goal is the uplift and unification of all mankind. It counters all attempts to break up mankind into groups. It dismisses the physical differences among men as of no consequence and treats as important what is basic in them, and therefore, common to all men. This is why the Quran speaks of God as the *Rabb (Sustainer) of the universe*. (Verse 1:1), of the *message* as "as a mercy from Us towards the whole world." [Verse 21:107] and as a *reminder* for mankind. [Verses 12:104; 38:87].

We can briefly look at some popular political ideologies before describing the Deen-Islam as found in the Quran.

Capitalism: also called free market economy, or free enterprise economy, the economic system dominant in the Western world since the breakup of feudalism, in which most of the means of production are privately owned and production is guided and income distributed largely through the operation of markets. This type of economic system can lead to

excesses which leave the less able and those trapped in poverty in a perpetual state of hardship. This is because, despite regulation and laws, the bottom line is money. This can also lead to superficial growth and a temporary boom in the economy as seen in the west in the nineties. Irresponsible lending led to the collapse of some banks. Even countries such as Greece, Ireland and Spain faced hardship not seen for a long time. No doubt some people did benefit from this chaos, but most people suffered. The post boom era also saw the growth of legalised usury when companies loaned relatively small amounts of money (i.e. Pay Day Loans) to the poor for interest rates of around 4,000%. This is legalised economic oppression. Capitalism may encourage a free market economy but it is at the expense of those who can ill-afford it.

Communism: the political and economic doctrine that aims to replace private property and a profit-based economy with public ownership and communal control of at least the major means of production (e.g., mines, factories and crops) and the natural resources of a nation. Communism is thus a form of socialism, a higher and more advanced form, according to its advocates. Exactly how communism differs from socialism has long been a matter of debate, but the distinction rests largely on the communists' adherence to the revolutionary socialism of Karl Marx.

Democracy: this is now generally regarded as the best form of government. It developed chiefly in the west, but people in Asia and Africa also regard it as the last word in political wisdom. How far is the praise showered upon it justified? Democracy has been defined as the government of the people, by the people, for the people. It is mainly the second factor in this definition that calls for comment. It means that in a democratic state there is no distinction between the rulers and the ruled. The people are supposed to rule themselves. They cannot do so directly, so they elect their representatives. These representatives, in turn, select the ministers who actually run the government. The laws and policies of the state and the principal measures adopted by the government do indeed reflect the will of the people, not of the whole people but of the majority of them. This is how democracy is perceived, the reality is in fact different.

In a single sentence, democracy is two wolves and a lamb voting on what to have for dinner. Yet, there is no doubt that this is the best system man has been able so far to evolve for himself. The basic concept on which it rests, namely, that nobody has a right to rule over another, is ideal. But the question is whether it has achieved, or is capable of achieving the aim it has laid before itself. The west has been the cradle of democracy, so we may ask what the thinkers here have to say about it.

One thinker, Rene Guenon, in his book *The Crisis of the Modern World* describes it. The relevant passage deserves to be quoted in full:

If the word 'democracy' is defined as the government of the people by themselves, it expresses an absolute impossibility and cannot even have a mere de facto existence in our time any more than in any other. It is contradictory to say that the same persons can be, at the same time, rulers and ruled, because, to use the Aristotelian phraseology, the same being cannot be 'in act' and 'in potency' at the same time and in the same circle of relations. The relationship of the ruler and ruled necessitates the joint presence of two terms; there could be no ruled if there were not also rulers, even though those be illegitimate and have no other title to power than their own pretensions; but the great ability of those who are in control in the modern world lies in making the people believe that they are governing themselves, and the people are the more inclined to believe this as they are flattered by it and as they are in any case, incapable of sufficient reflection to see its impossibility. It was to create this illusion that 'universal suffrage' was invented. The law is supposed to be made by the opinion of the majority but what is overlooked is that this opinion is something that can very easily be guided and modified; it is always possible by means of suitable suggestions to arouse in it currents moving in this or that direction as desired.

Many writers have taken pains to show that the belief in democracy, sovereignty or the absolute and unrestricted right of law-making belongs to the people, has no basis in fact. It has been supposed that the law enacted by the majority vote of the representatives of the people embodies the unanimous decision of all the citizens of the state and that, therefore, it is based on justice. This assumption is the chief cause of the decline of democracy in the present day.

Yes, democracy may be the best political system devised by Man, but, in practice, it can lead to the worst excesses of power in the state. This was especially proven true when Adolf Hitler, a dictator, came into power, in Germany before the second world war. In 2003, the democratically elected Prime Minister of Britain Tony Blair, on the basis of a fabricated dossier, waged war to remove Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. This was despite overwhelming public opposition in the United Kingdom to such a war. Even in a democratic state the politician fears no restraints such as ultimate accountability to God. Democracy is based on two fundamental suppositions: the first is that sovereignty is vested in the people and the second is that the decisions arrived at by the majority are always right. However, the latter is neither logical nor true. The fact that a majority of people consent to an act which is wrong, does not make it any less wrong. Collective wisdom is as imperfect and fallible as individual wisdom.

Ad-deen: (The Deen) is the Social Order or System, in the Quran: the Deen-Islam. A system of laws and values based on the Absolute Laws and Permanent Values given in the Quran. All people are encouraged to follow the example of Abraham and Jacob who were exemplary in applying the laws and principles of this Deen:

Who would forsake the creed of Abraham as an example, except the one who is intemperate with his own Self? We have given him high regard in this world and in the future he will be among the righteous. When the One who sustains him said, "Submit," he said, "I submit to the One who sustains the universe." Moreover, Abraham exhorted his children to do the same, and as did Jacob: "O my children, God has pointed out for you this Deen-Islam; the established order, so do

not die except as submitters to this Deen." Had you witnessed Jacob on his death bed; he said to his children, "Who will you serve after I die?" They said, "We will serve your God; the God of your fathers Abraham, Ismail and Isaac; the One God. To Him we are submitters." [Verses 2:130-133],

Deen-illah the system or the (social) system of God: As mentioned there are many systems but the only system acceptable to God is Deen-illah, the System of God: Deen-Islam, the harmonious order. The social system that God has defined is based on Permanent Values and only this is acceptable to God: Anyone who seeks to follow other than Deen-Islam as a way of life, will never be accepted by Him, and in the life yet to come he will be among the losers. [Verse 3.85].

God is the sovereign lawmaker, and anyone who harmonises with His laws will live in peace and security. For example, God's law is that fire burns. You can use it for light and heat but if you abuse it you will suffer. Similarly there are laws for moral guidance. Anyone who goes against these values will too suffer the consequences. The principles given in the Quran are minimum, the essence and foundation of a legal system. A large number of rules and regulations can be stifling and restrictive. "The more corrupt the state, the more numerous the laws", as Tacitus said. Laws founded on a few sound and basic principles are far better than hefty legal tomes micro-managing people like a nanny state or worse, like a police state.

Islamic government, God's system: a system of government that is in fact a 'benevolent authority', based on Islamic 'deen'. Islamic government works only for the progress and welfare of Mankind. Only immutable, external laws, which are not man-made, can give us the standard for absolute accountability (to God). This is ensured when the Islamic government adheres to the Absolute Laws and Permanent Values enshrined in the Quran. The elected administration is free to make by-laws according to the needs of time and location, but these must remain within the Quranic principles, values and laws. It is the state's responsibility to establish an environment in which an individual can pursue these absolute values. The government is thus enabled to establish a principle of progress in society that is also a standard of measurement to assess the relative worth of different societies. [Verses 2:177; 103:1-3].

God's will or God's ordinance are laws determined by God. Absolute Laws that operate the universe and are being enforced, whether we are aware of them or not. God's law (His will) determines that every action will have a consequence. We are free to make a choice but once the choice is made we cannot control the outcome. The result is according to God's Laws of Requital.

We generally understand a law to be a rule or body of rules made by a government. But a law can also be a law of nature; for example, the laws that govern the physical world. These laws are stable and always work given certain conditions. That's why we can make an airplane fly, or a ship sail, because we know these laws always work. In the same way, there is

another law. This law, the Law of Requit, states that every action of man has consequences which he has to bear whether he likes it or not. More important than the external effect of the action is the action's effect on the personality of the perpetrator. All actions however do not modify personality. An action which has been performed inadvertently or carelessly has little influence on man's Self. But an action performed deliberately for a set purpose or with a high degree of ego-involvement, changes personality for better or worse. It strengthens or weakens the moral fibre. The Law of Requit is in its purest form in the moral sphere. A person may continuously commit offences without being aware of the gradual harm that he is doing to his own personality. The man who is morally sensitive can perceive this effect coming about and check himself, before irretrievable damage is done. See verse 1:5 and footnote.

For a political system to operate for the welfare and progress of all the people without bias, needs to be based on Permanent Values - the universal set of rules which hold true regardless of time or location. Any political party that wants to establish such a system must necessarily operate within the parameters given in the Quran. As the Quran, which in verse 42:38 advocates rule by consensus, a voting system to decide the party that will implement the Quranic laws, even a vote to elect the leader for the party is not only acceptable, but a requirement. The only condition for any political party to form a prospective government is that it should adhere to the Quran and Quran alone for its values, principles and absolute laws. This does not deny the freedom to make and apply any other laws within the stricture of the Quran.

It should be pointed out that the idea of a *khilafat* or an Islamic State is not in the Quran, neither is a sultanate or a republic. These are innovations and not referred to in the Quran. Muslim leaders after the messenger created their political structures based on the principles of Permanent Values and Absolute Laws; values, rights, obligations, justice and truth as defined in the Quran. Therefore the ideal should be NOT an Islamic State but the *state of islam*, i.e. a *state of harmony*: peace and security.

A nation that bases its constitution on the Quran and a political party that bases its manifesto on Quranic values is still free to form other laws within its boundaries. Such an administration is a *Benevolent Authority* and reflects unchanging principles in and for changing times: permanence and change; Absolute Laws and Permanent Values from the Quran with other laws made and applied according to the changing times and needs of the community or nation. See verses and footnotes 3:159; 42:38.

PERMANENT VALUES

How often do we hear people say that Islam is not a religion but a way of life? Christianity too is a way of life, as is Sikhism, Hinduism and sheep farming. Using a cliché to describe Islam is woefully inadequate. All religions have rites, rituals, worship and commandments or tenets that forbid bad things such as stealing and telling lies and encourage other things such as charity, helping others and being kind to one another.

Religions are like chameleons that change with the environment, and despite the separation of church and state, religions, or at least the people who run them, are often in bed with politicians to ensure people's compliance through doctrines and dogmas that benefit the rich and powerful. Through time religions evolve and morph to fit in with the needs of the ruling elite and indeed the priest.

The Bible condemns homosexuality and at one time it was illegal in Britain, but now there are openly gay priests and it is frowned upon to consider gays and lesbians as sexual deviants. The caste system has been an integral part of Hinduism for centuries but now in India it is made illegal although still practised by the devout. The Bible forbids women to preach, but in modern Christianity women priests are commonly ordained.

There is no permanence in these values or rules. The satirical novella 'Animal Farm' by George Orwell depicts this excellently to show how rules change with the changing demands of those in power.

We know from the Quran that Islam is not a religion, but a holistic social system: the Deen-Islam. What then is the unique distinguishing factor that other social systems or indeed religions do not have?

While Deen-Islam may share some aspects with other social structures, the inimitable features of Deen-Islam lie in its exceptional set of Permanent Values that are underpinned by ultimate accountability to God: unchanging principles for changing times. A code of life for all people in all times.

It is the Permanent Values that guard us from inflicting damage to our moral Self. Living by these values produces measurable results that benefit the individual as well as the community. This is the mechanism that tells us something is harming our moral wellbeing. Permanent Values, like the laws of nature, are absolute. But we can only adopt these values by choice; there is no automated screening to prevent us from any distress that might follow should we make the wrong choice. Once a choice has been made, we have to live by the consequences; the law of requital ensures that.

The Quran clearly tells us that the human Self develops and advances according to its deeds, the positive action that raises the measure of human value by developing the Self, making it fit for this life and the life yet to come. This development can be made by *anyone* who aligns his or her

values with the Permanent Values found in the Quran, and the Quran alone, with ultimate accountability to the One God, and to God alone.¹⁰⁹

Unlike religion, where the process of salvation is liberation from sin and rescue from evil, the Quran confirms that salvation for those who follow this guidance is not the regaining of a state of bliss which was forfeited through the 'original sin', but a positive achievement; the acquisition of a new value. Each individual creates a new paradise by realising his or her potentialities. The reward of salvation is not a well-earned rest but a greater zeal for action and renewed outlook to an ambition, which is the life yet to come. To achieve salvation is to prove one's fitness for entering on a higher plane of existence in the next life.

Only a developed Self is truly free and attains this salvation. Salvation is the positive content of an individual's achievement. It is encapsulated in the sense of fulfilment, the feeling of realisation and the thrill of expansion. Man is endowed with a number of potentialities. By Self-discipline and conquering his ego a person develops his personality. By developing this he can reach his full stature and qualify for still higher stages that await him. The underlying message appears to be: most things still remain to be done; what a glorious future!

According to Christian belief everyone is born sinful. This doctrine of the Original Sin is an important Augustine doctrine within the Roman Catholic Church and means that people are born with a built-in urge to do bad things and to disobey God. The Quran negates this concept of the original sin and tells us that each person is responsible for their own crimes and no Self bears the wrongs of another. Each person is responsible for their own reckoning and each community is responsible for what they earn. The Quran declares that non-one can take your sins, you must pay for your own wrongdoings.¹¹⁰

While looking at the Permanent Values it is important to also understand some basic concepts from the Quran which are shown below along with

¹⁰⁹ **The Quran** states unequivocally that anyone who does good will be rewarded and each individual creates a heaven or hell according to their own deeds. Peace and security in this life and the life yet to come, the Quran says, is a right of those who do good. They do not need pity, grace or intercession, they are already honoured by their deeds. [Verse 21:28]. However, the Bible that says that a person is saved not by works of righteousness but according to mercy [Titus 3:5] and that you are saved by grace and not of yourselves. [Ephesians 2:8]. This is in contrast with the Quran which tells us that each individual can raise the esteem of his or her Self by the measure of *their own* endeavour. We do the deed and the Self progresses or regresses accordingly. This shows that the aim and the focus of a religion, such as Christianity, not only contradicts itself, but different religions are also in conflict with each other. To accept one religion is to be in conflict with all others. See verses and footnotes 71:28, and 2:183; 11:52; 57:10; 63:11; 73:20; 75:40.

¹¹⁰ **Original Sin:** See verses and footnotes . 2:134; 6:52 ; 11:35. 29:12; 35:18.

the list of Permanent Values. This is not an exhaustive listing so it is important to read the Quran: it not only gives the complete Absolute Laws and all the Permanent Values, it also puts them into context of developing the Self, which should really be the goal of each individual and all societies.

- **God:** The concept of God as revealed in the Quran is an external objective standard for us to follow as far as it relates to the development of the human Self. *"Do not be like those who forgot God, so He made them forget themselves..."* [Verses 59:19; 112:1-4].
- **Equality as a human being** (unity in humanity): At birth we are equal and it is how we respond to the world around us that changes our Self. The Quran declares: *"All of the mankind used to be one community..."* [Verse 2:213].
- **Respect as a human being:** Every human being possesses a Self which has the attribute of free will. This entitles every human being to equal respect, so that there can be no discrimination due to reasons of family, tribe, race, community, nationality, religion, gender, colour, language, culture, tradition: *"We have honoured the children of Adam ..."* [Verse 17:70].
- **Freedom:** Since every human being is born free, then he or she should remain free. According to the Quran, freedom means that no-one can extort obedience from another human being. Only the Quranic Values should be followed as it is only by operating within the confines of these Values that the Self can develop. [Verses 2:256; 4:137; 9:115; 10:99; 11:118; 13:40; 18:29; 109:1-6].
- **Freedom to choose** (no compulsion): Responsibility for the act of a human being is determined by his own volition and intent. It is our choices in life which define us. The Quran invites us to use the power of our intellect and reasoning to acquire evidence to then make informed decisions. *'When reminded of their Sustainer's guidance, they never react to it as if they are deaf and blind..'* [Verse 25:73].
- **Righteousness as a criterion:** The level of development of the self and individual conduct should be the criterion for higher responsibility within a society. The Quran declares: *"O people, We created you from the same male and female and rendered you distinct peoples and cultures, that you may recognise one another, but the best among you in the sight of God is the most righteous. God is all-knowing and aware of all things."* [Verse 49:13].
- **Tolerance:** Freedom to choose means that we need to be tolerant and accept the choices made by others in their lives. The Quran

asks us to understand this at a fundamental level i.e. by being in possession of a Self with freedom to choose, we need to recognise this state exists in others and accept it. [Verses 17:53; 29:46; 42:37; 16:125; 73:10; 6:108; 109:1-6; 18:29; 25:63; 7:199; 3:90; 4:137; 41:34; 60:8].

- **Existence of the human Self:** We all have a strong sense of identity and are aware of our existence. We have self-consciousness and the ability to make decisions. Our inner attributes of emotions, thinking, memory etc. help us to live our lives and in the process we gain experiences which help to develop our Self-concept [Verse 39:41].
- **Responsibility cannot be shared at the level of the Self:** At an individual level each one of us is a complete unit therefore none can share our responsibility at this level. The Quran asks us to follow this value in our interactions as well [Verse 53:38].
- **Free will:** The use of this value is up to us as individuals to use by exercising our freedom to choose. However our choices have consequences and we are accountable for these. The Quran tells us that this is your world and you can live your life as you wish. *"....do what you will: verily He sees what you do."* [Verse 41:40].
- **Warning/admonition:** We need to warn each other about the consequences of what we think, say and do in our lives. The Quran asks us to think of the consequences of every action we take in our lives both in the short term and the long term. The Quran calls its message a warning to mankind - to be accepted or rejected and then to live with the consequences of those choices: *"To warn those who are alive and to expose those who reject this guidance."* [Verse 36:70]. See also verse 6:70, 7:51. The Quran asks us to keep reminding each other about the purpose of life [Verses 103:1-3].
- **Justice:** When dispensing justice, no distinction is allowed between friend and foe, us and them: *"Do not be provoked by your conflicts with some people into committing injustice. You shall be completely equitable because it safeguards your righteousness. You shall follow God's guidance. God is fully aware of everything you do."* [Verse 5:8]. See also verses 2:283; 4:135; 4:105; 4:135]. The changing of Allah's laws is declared to be injustice by the Quran [Verse 50:29].
- **Good deeds replace the effects of bad deeds:** The Quran declares: *"...The good works rescind the evil works. This is a reminder for those who take heed. ..."* [Verse 11:114] *'Therefore, prevent their*

evil works with integrity and justice; We are fully aware of their claims." [Verse 23:96].

- **What is good for mankind remains on earth:** *"...while that which benefits the people prospers the earth ..."* [Verse 13:17].
- **Knowledge:** The Quran has referred to both perceptual and conceptual knowledge and encourages mankind to explore both the visible and the invisible worlds to understand the truth and the purpose behind human creation. *"He teaches man what he never knew."* [Verse 96:5] *'He gave Adam the ability to distinguish all things'.* [Verse 2:31].
- **Science:** The Quran directs us to make efforts to discover both the visible and the unseen worlds and bring them into use for the good of mankind at large: *"...He committed in your service everything in the heavens and the earth; all are bounties from Him. These are signs for people who reflect."* [Verse 45:13].
- **Aesthetic sense:** As human beings we have an aesthetic sense, an appreciation for beauty. The Quran acknowledges and respects this and considers it as a necessary element in the growth and development of human personality: *"Say: 'Who prohibited the beautiful things God has created for His creatures and the good provisions?..."* [Verse 7:32]. However, the pursuit of the aesthetic sense should be within the confines of the Permanent Values.
- **History as a model:** The Quran asks mankind to study history and the rise and fall of civilisations with a view to learning lessons. This helps us to study the Permanent Values and see that violations of these values leads to wars and conflicts and leads to a waste of valuable human time. *"Have they not travelled the earth and noted the consequences for those who preceded you? They used to be greater in number, greater in power and possessed a greater legacy on earth than you. Yet, all their achievements did not help them in the least."* [Verse 40:82, 10:39].
- **Subsistence:** Basic necessities¹¹¹ for all human beings must be met and an environment should be created for the development of the human Self. Meeting the physical needs of the human body is essential before intellectual reasoning and creative activity can be brought into play. This is the reason why the Quran declares that the aim is to establish an economic system (social welfare) in which there is no accumulation of wealth: *"They also ask you what*

¹¹¹ **Basic necessities** will include food, shelter, security, medical treatment, education, job, freedom of expression, freedom to practice religion, etc.

they should give in expenditure for the welfare of society, say, "Be clement and give the excess part of your disposable income or goods." God thus clarifies this guidance for you, that you may reflect." [Verse 2:219].

- **Reward is for the work and not the capital:** This value defines the economic system proposed by the Quran. The capital must remain in continuous flow and must not be accumulated. Reward for work must meet the necessities of life. [Verses 6:141; 53:39; 59:7].
- **Patience and perseverance:** Since the Self takes time to develop, as it has to gain knowledge and overcome the challenges of life, it therefore needs time to build up its inner conviction and strength. It needs guidance as an external criterion of reference to signpost its progress towards its development: *"...Follow what is revealed to you and be patient until God issues His judgment; He is the best of evaluators.."* [Verse 10:109]. An analogy of this is that the Self is like a seed which needs to be nurtured to grow to its full potential.
- **No restriction on human movement:** The world belongs to each and every one of us and should be available for the use by anyone within the remit of the Permanent Values. No human being owns this world – the fact that with death we leave it all behind proves this. The world is 'loaned' to human beings to use it for a short time only: we are its custodians - not owners. The Quran declares: *"(God) The One who made the earth habitable for you and the sky a structure. He sends down from the sky water, to produce all kinds of fruits for your sustenance. You shall not accept any authority to equal or rival God, now that you know."* [Verses 2:22, 29:56, 39:10]
- **Relationships:** Human beings need the presence of other human beings within individual relationships and at the level of community in order to function, grow and develop the Self. All people used to be one community, but they fragmented. [Verse 10:19]. This is why hermitism and monasticism is forbidden. [Verse 57:27].
- **Marriage:** This is primarily a contract between two equal individuals (male and female) to live their lives within the confines of the Permanent Values [Verse 2:221]. Chastity is one of the permanent values within this context and the Quran demands observance from both men and women [Verse 24:30-31]. Although there is no encouragement of polygamy, men are permitted to marry more than one woman, but not to the

detriment of a previous relationship. There are specific conditions for all relationships between men and women.

- **Freedom from fear:** For free will to operate effectively, there has to be freedom from fear as this constrains it. The Quran declares that living within the Permanent Values will eliminate all fears [Verse 2:38].
- **Freedom from grief:** Grief is caused by events affecting human beings within a society. Most events causing grief can be linked directly or indirectly to human actions e.g. economy, wars, oppression, exploitation, slavery etc. The Quran recognises this and refers to it in many verses [Verses 2:38, 3:138; 15:77].
- **Death:** This is a deadline to remind us that we have a finite time to live in this life and our conduct here in this world will define the status of our next life after death. When we consider the event of death at the level of the Self, the Quran declares: *"...Every Self will taste death, then to Us you will be ultimately returned."* [Verse 29:57].
- **Hereafter:** The life of the 'emerged' human Self continues beyond death and into the life yet to come. The 'emerged' human Self is one that has reached a minimum threshold according to the Quran, when on balance the effects of the good deeds exceed those of the deeds that have negative effects: *"...O you who believe, you shall uphold your duty to God and let every Self examine what it has sent ahead for tomorrow..."* [Verse 59:18]. *'...Every Self will find out what caused it to advance and what caused it to regress.'* [Verse 82:5].
- **Enjoin what is just and forbid what is wrong:** The Quran has repeatedly directed us to keep doing this to remind people about their conduct. This is part of righteousness which *mu'mineen* [49:15] are expected to display through their conduct. See for example [Verses 3:104; 3:110; 3:114; 31:17].
- **Do Not Say That Which You Don't Do:** Deeds should be commensurate words: *"O you who believe, why do you say what you do not do? Most abominable in the sight of God is that you say what you do not do."* [Verse 61:2-3].

And finally...

Accountability (the Law of Requit): Human beings possess free will, emotions, and the ability to critically think - even to think about thinking, and memory. Our thinking, decisions and actions leave an impact on our

Self i.e. it changes our personality and the way we think and act. The Quran declares that every cause has an effect in the everyday life of human being. This is called the Law of Requit that does not leave any of our deeds unaccountable and none of us is dealt with unjustly [Verse 3:162; 4:95; 6:50; 32:18; 45:21; 47:14]. The purpose of every human being, *the very meaning of life*, is to turn our good deeds to the development of our Self and make it fit for the life ahead; both in this world and in the state of being yet to come. Only progressive action enriches the Self and only the developed Self can move forward and enjoy a better life.

The Quran, the only book to contain the Permanent Values, says that every action produces a result and those who give up the good for the great - a lower value for a higher value - are fully recompensed, and no one suffers injustice. Those who, after receiving the profound guidance, understand this will experience that the measure and esteem of their Self increases with the goodness of their actions, and this makes them fit for the life yet to come.¹¹²

What worth is a deed if its true value is not fully realised?

Every individual can, through his or her own free will, realise the measure of his or her endeavour. This is what makes Deen-Islam better over and above any other social system, or indeed any religion.

¹¹² **The Quran** contains optimum standards of good conduct: the Permanent Values and Absolute laws. Unchanging principles for changing times. According to traditionalists a Muslim's 'faith' is not complete without pilgrimage, fasting and other such rituals. But the Quran says this is the same deen as given to Abraham, Moses and Jesus [Verse 42:13]. The messenger also said that this guidance (the Quran) is no different to what previous messengers brought [Verse 46:9]. If a person cannot be a Muslim without believing in and performing these rituals, how then could the earlier messengers and all the people have been muslims who did not perform these rituals?

EAT NOW OR FEAST LATER?

As long as the general population is passive, apathetic, diverted to consumerism or hatred of the vulnerable, then the powerful can do as they please, and those who survive will be left to contemplate the outcome.

Noam Chomsky

Given the option to eat now or feast later, most people will probably choose to eat now. Will people accept this guidance to 'tighten their belts' for a disciplined life now to secure a much better future later? Not necessarily.

Clearly the majority of people are unlikely to be swayed by the Quran, no matter how convincing the argument or how clear the proof may be. It's not in the nature of human beings to easily accept good advice, or any advice for that matter, especially if it is about a future they cannot envisage. They are largely unconcerned with anything unless motivated by pain or hunger. This is why most people are satisfied with food, shelter and the diversions of entertainment; they enjoy creature comforts and are unlikely to risk anything that disturbs this.

The majority go with the flow: they want to do what they see their friends, family and neighbours do. This is why religions are so successful with the masses. The traditions and the rituals give the feel of belonging and the security of 'kinship' it brings. They passionately defend their faith, even a regressive one, with violence if necessary. Truth is harder to accept. As Voltaire said "It's difficult to free fools from the chains they revere."

Medical experts agree that there are no health benefits in smoking tobacco, either to the smoker or to those around them. Warnings with graphic pictures appear on cigarette packets, quit-smoking schemes are promoted in clinics around the country, yet millions still smoke, heedless of the long term harm they do to themselves, their family, friends work colleagues and even people they don't know. The attraction to the pleasure of smoking is so great, that no matter how much evidence is provided, people continue to smoke. The smokers even justify their habit as a great benefit to society in the taxes that they pay and the jobs they help maintain.

People are generally sedentary and unwilling to be motivated by what will happen tomorrow, let alone the distant future. This is why the intelligent who understand this guidance have a duty to take action and promote the Permanent Values in the Quran for the benefit and welfare of society as a whole, if only ultimately to protect their own future.

As mentioned in verse 8:25, when good people take no action to stop bad things from happening, not only will the corrupt and the criminals suffer, but society as a whole will be affected. We all have freedom to choose to believe or not. However, the effects of not implementing a *complete* working social system can be witnessed around us. The majority of people

around the world are living in turmoil and fear. They are, for all to witness, already in hell. Unless the *root causes* of the problems are eradicated no amount of tinkering can resolve the dilemma mankind now faces.

People have choices. While people are free to make a choice, once the choice is made they are not free from the consequences of that choice. That is God's Law of Requitil - whether you believe in it or not.

The Quran is good news for those who want to reform society for the welfare and progress of mankind. It is also a warning to the corrupt and the criminals in society. Furthermore, people who ignore guidance in the Quran, and do nothing to stop bad things from happening, will also continue to suffer from the effects of corruption and exploitation, not only on a global level, but also the fear and turmoil closer to home, their community and their family.

It is not enough for people to want change. People must want *to* change. As it clearly says in the Quran: In accordance with God's ordinance the circumstances of any people does not change unless they make changes in their own Self. [Verse 8:53].

So in answer to the question: will people accept this guidance? The majority of people may not agree with the laws and values given in the Quran. There are also people who don't agree with the state laws. Those who take action to show their disagreement often end up in prison, but that does not necessarily make them invalid. Similarly, the Quran offers guidance and people are free to accept or reject it, but they too will have to face the consequences of their decision.

However, taking everything into consideration, it is the intelligent person who may well want to know something beyond the question: what's for lunch?

THE QURAN : GOD'S MESSAGE TO MANKIND

The guardians will ask, "Did you not receive messengers who delivered to you clear guidance?" They will reply, "Yes we did."

Most assuredly, We will give victory to Our messengers and to those who believe in this guidance, both in this world and on the day when you witness your accountability. On that day, the apologies of the ones who rejected this guidance will be of no benefit. The disbelievers have incurred condemnation, they have incurred a terrible ending.

[Verses 40:50-52]

If anyone thinks that God cannot sustain him in this life and in the life yet to come, let him turn completely to his Creator by following this guidance and sever his dependence on anyone else for such direction. He will then see that this plan eliminates anything that troubles him. We have thus revealed clear guidance in here, then anyone who ignites his own initiative is guided according to God's ordinance.

[Verses 22:15-16]

**Wisdom without power is preaching.
Power without wisdom is barbarism.**

The Quran is a message of guidance specifically for individuals; to build communities and societies in order to ultimately develop their own Self and realise their full potential and raise the measure of their endeavour. But there are hurdles, the challenges of life. To achieve their goal, those who believe in this guidance have a duty to oppose all that is evil. But to create a movement to do this is foolish and unnecessary. It could be infiltrated, bought off and diverted all too easily. Why play by the enemy's rules? Opposition, said Anthony Hutton, should be individual in character. It should take a thousand or a million forms until it becomes a tsunami that overwhelms the enemy; the unjust and oppressive rulers and operators of the modern world.

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Alhamdulillah rabbilalamin

Praise be to God, Sustainer of the Universe.