

BASICS OF ISLAM

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BASICS OF ISLAM

This Booklet is compiled as level one information for those who are seeking basic knowledge about Islam. Please check page 31 for more booklets on Islam.

Editor: Evelyn (Havva) Figueroa Kurter

Publication Committee:

Suleyman Kurter
Robert Miranda (Dawud Ali Selam)
Fethullah Canpolat
Ibraheem Abdullah
Annamaria Abdullah
Nafiz Efe
Imran Kurter
Jacob (Ya'qub) Herod

In The Name of God the Most Gracious, the Most
Merciful

SECTION I

OVERVIEW OF ISLAM

Islam and Muslim

Islam is an Arabic word which means submission to the will of God. As a religion, Islam calls for complete acceptance and commitment of the teachings and guidance of God.

A Muslim is one who freely and willingly accepts the supreme power of God and strives to organize his life in total accord with the teachings of God. He also works for building social institutions that reflect the guidance of God. "Muhammadanism" is a misnomer for Islam and offends its very spirit since the Prophet Muhammad was a messenger of God, and not a divine being worshipped by Muslims.

Muslims use the word "Allah" for the English word "God." The understanding of Deity in Islam differs from some of the connotations in the English word, God. For the convenience of English speaking readers, the word God is used in this booklet except when the word "Allah" is in the quotations from the Qur'an.

Continuity of the Message

Islam is not a new religion. It is, in essence, the same message and guidance, which God revealed to all His previous messengers. *"Say: We believe in Allah and that which was revealed to us, and that which*

was revealed to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes and that which was given to Moses and Jesus and to the Prophets from their Lord; we make no distinction between any of them, and to Him we submit". (Qur'an 3:84)

The message which was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) is Islam in its comprehensive, complete and final form.

The Five Pillars of Islam

Every action done with the awareness that it fulfill the Will of God is considered an act of worship in Islam. But it is the specific acts of worship termed the Pillars of Islam which provide the framework of Muslim spiritual life. These are given below:

1. The declaration of faith. "I bear witness that there is no one worthy of worship except God (Allah), and that Muhammad is His servant and messenger."The Prophethood of Muhammad obligated Muslims to follow his exemplary life in every respect.
2. Prayers are prescribed five times a day as a duty towards God. Prayer strengthens and enlivens belief in God and inspires man to higher morality. It purifies the heart and controls, temptation, wrongdoing, and evil.
3. Fasting during the month of Ramadan. This means abstention from food, beverages and sex (within marriage) from dawn to sunset, and curbing evil intentions and desires. It teaches love, sincerity and devotion. It develops patience, unselfishness, social conscience, and will power to bear hardship.

4. Zakah is a proportionately fixed contribution collected from the wealth and earning of the well to do and rich. It is spent on the poor and needy in particular and the welfare of the society in general. The payment of Zakah purifies ones income and wealth and helps to establish economic balance and social justice in the society.

5. Hajj, or pilgrimage to the Ka'bah in Makkah, once in a lifetime, provided one has the means to undertake the journey.

Oneness of God

Islam enjoins faith in the oneness and sovereignty of God, which creates an awareness of the unity and meaningfulness of the universe and of man's place in it. This belief frees him from all fears and superstitions by making him conscious of the presence of the Almighty God and of man's obligations to Him. But this realization must be expressed and tested in action. Faith alone is not enough. Belief in one God requires that we look upon all humanity as one family under the universal omnipotence of God-the Creator and Nourisher of all. Islam rejects the idea that there is a "chosen people" making pure intention, faith in God, and good deeds the only way to heaven. Thus a direct relationship is established with God, open to all alike, without any discrimination or intercession.

(The concept of God is discussed further in Section 4.)

The Qur'an and Hadith

The Qur'an is the last revealed word of God and the basic source of Islamic teachings and laws. It deals

with a variety of subjects including the basic beliefs of Islam, morality, worship, knowledge, wisdom, God-and-man relationship and relations among human beings. Comprehensive teachings on which sound systems of social justice, politics, economics, legislation, jurisprudence, law and international relations can be built from an important part of the Holy Qur'an.

Though Prophet Muhammad did not receive a formal education, the Qur'an, as soon as it was revealed to him in the spoken word, was committed to writing by his secretaries. In this way every word was written down and preserved during his lifetime by his companions. The original and complete text of the Qur'an is in Arabic and translations of its meaning in most known languages are available in major libraries and bookstores. (You can obtain an English copy of The Holy Qur'an from The Nur Institute of America by referring to the address at the back of the booklet.)

Hadith, the teachings, sayings and actions of Prophet Muhammad, accurately reported and collected by his devoted companions, explain and elaborate the Qur'anic verses.

Concept of Worship

Islam does not teach ritualism. It places great emphasis on intention and action. To worship God is to love Him and to act upon His commands in every aspect of life, to enjoin goodness and forbid wrong doing and oppression, to practice charity and justice and to serve Him by serving mankind. The Qur'an presents this sublime concept in the following manner:

"It is not righteousness that you turn your faces to the East or the West, but righteous is he who believes in Allah and the Last Day and the Angels and the Book and the Prophets; and gives his wealth for love to Him to kinsfolk and to orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and to those who ask, and sets slaves free; and observes proper worship and pays the Zakah. And those who keep their treaty when they make one, and the patient in tribulation and adversity and time of stress; such are those who are sincere. Such are the God-fearing". (Qur'an 2:177)

Man, a Free Agent

Man is the highest creation of God and he has a free will to make his own decisions. God has shown him the right path, and the life of Prophet Muhammad provides a perfect example for achieving success and salvation. Islam stands for the sanctity of human personality and confers equal rights on all without distinction of race, nationality or sex.

The law of God sent down in the Qur'an and exemplified in the life of the Prophet is supreme in all cases. It applies equally to the prince and the pauper, the ruler and the ruled, the saint and the sinner.

Mens' Accountability to God

Mens' life is not limited to the short span of earthly existence. On the Day of Judgment the entire human race will be resurrected; everyone will appear before the Almighty God and face the consequences of his deeds in this life. Thus, life in the Hereafter is a continuation of the earthy life.

Belief in man's accountability to God gives a sense and meaning to life and differentiates human beings from animals and inanimate objects. It serves as a reminder against crime, corruption, immorality and injustice.

Human Rights

Islam protects all noble values and human rights. Freedom, equality, justice, and the right to life, liberty and security of a person are of prime concern in Islamic law.

"Whosoever kills a human being for other than manslaughter or corruption in the earth, it shall be as if he had killed all mankind, and whosoever saves the life of one, it shall be as if he had saved the life of all mankind..."
Qur'an 5:32)

"There is no compulsion in religion." (Qur'an 2:256)
Islam places great emphasis on social justice. It opposes all those who exploit, oppress and deal unjustly with people.

"O you who believe: Be steadfast witnesses for Allah in equity and let not hatred of any people seduce you that you deal not justly. Be just; that is nearer to piety".
(Qur'an 5:8)

Science and Technology

Islam encourages the use of science and the scientific method. Acquisition of knowledge is obligatory on every Muslim, male and female. In Islam, science and technology should be used for moral ends and

serve all legitimate needs of mankind. Moreover, both are viewed as yet another means to understand and see the power and glory of God.

"He it is Who created for you all that is on the earth."
(Qur'an 2:29)

"It is your Lord, the Most Bounteous, Who taught by the pen, taught man that which he knew not..."
(Qur'an 96:2-5)

"We shall show them Our Signs on the horizons and within themselves until it will be manifest unto them that it is the Truth..."
(Qur'an 41:53)

Islam: The Cure for Modern Ills

Racism is a major problem in many materially advanced countries. Prejudice and discrimination against racial groups is a common phenomenon even today. For 1400 years Islam has shown in practice how racism can be ended. The Islamic social scene, particularly during the Hajj, is a unique example of the brotherhood of men of all races and nations under One God.

Similarly, the family, the basic unit of civilization has also become something of a problem in the West. It is in visible decay. The family system of Islam brings the rights of the husband, wife, children, and relatives into a fine equilibrium. Islam nourishes generosity in the family and holds it together under the clear Qur'anic laws and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him).

Some Misconceptions about Islam

It is unfortunate that the image of Islam has been distorted and misrepresented in the Western world. The main distortions relate to the status of women, marriage and divorce, Jihad or the so-called "holy war", the authenticity of the Prophethood of Muhammad (Peace be upon him), and the distinction between the Qur'an and Hadith.

Anti-Islamic propaganda and the western media have used terms such as "Jihadist, Terrorist and Islamic-Fascists" as buzzwords to demonize Muslims and advance the neo-conservative and religious right agenda. Historically, similar propaganda was used to justify the Crusades in the Holy Land and the Inquisition in Spain, which targeted Muslims and Jews alike. This same propaganda by some misguided Christian churches justified the enslavement, dehumanization and the mass murder of millions of Africans and Native Americans in the New World.

We advise readers not to fall for such concealed deceptions. Careful thought is necessary to examine Islam objectively and learn the factual teachings of Islam from authentic Islamic sources.

SECTION II

WHO IS JESUS?

Jesus (Peace be upon him) taught the same eternal message that was taught by all the Messengers of God, from Adam, on through Noah, Abraham, Moses

and ending with the mission of God's last Guidepost to humanity, Muhammad (Peace be on them all), whose coming was foretold by Jesus himself.

Some people say he was a prophet; others call him a god, while others say he was a very wise man. But whatever your idea is, one thing remains certain: he was not your ordinary man.

Jesus lived about 2,000 years ago in ancient Palestine when the Roman Empire was at its zenith. He was not conceived in the usual way, but was implanted in the womb of a young woman named Mary. God simply commanded, "Be" and he was. In this sense, he was "a word" of God and a special sign for humanity. In fact, he was the last in a long line of religious guides sent to the Jews.

Mary the Blessed

Mary was a righteous woman. Her mother dedicated her to God's service even before she was born. As a child, she lived a life marked by health and righteousness, which others pointed to in admiration. She was raised by the wise Zechariah, who instilled in her, a beautiful sense of faith in God. When she had become a young woman, Mary sought to purify herself further before her Lord. Knowing that the hustle of life in the towns was distracting, she withdrew from her people to a sanctuary in the East. There she could meditate in seclusion and peace. Suddenly, on a day that seemed no different from the rest, an angel of God visited her, disguised in the likeness of a human. Afraid of so strange a sight, Mary prayed for protection, but the strange being reassured her and declared that he was a messenger from the Lord to announce the glad-tidings of a faultless son. Mary,

astounded, asked how this was possible seeing that no man had ever touched her. But the angel replied, "*Your Lord says, it is easy for Me...*" But when she felt the little child within her, she fled her sanctuary out of fear of what her family would do or say when they heard the news. Mary, however, was not to face hardship. When in her despair she cried out to God for oblivion, a voice soothed her and she found shade and a cool spring. Under a date palm in the warmth of the late summer, she made her dwelling and there bore the child unlike any other in human history. Shortly thereafter, Mary returned to her community carrying the child who was to be called Messiah, Jesus, and son of Mary. When her people saw her with the baby in her arms they couldn't believe their eyes, let alone accept her word. They refused to believe when she told of an angel who came and told her she was chosen above all other women to carry this burden. They accused her of infidelity and implied that she had ruined the family name. Mary being overwhelmed simply motioned toward the child meekly.

The Miraculous Life of Jesus

Now the child was the product of a miracle and consequently, miraculous things began to happen. In defense of his mother and of the truth, the infant Jesus spoke saying, "I am a servant of God. He has given me Scripture and has made me a Prophet. He has blessed me wherever I may be and has made prayer and charity my duty as long as I live." This put the detractors to rest.

Throughout his youth, Jesus remained dutiful to his mother and developed quickly in intelligence, wisdom, and piety. He dumbfounded the learned and

was greatly admired by those around him who appreciated his talents. He claimed to be a sign of God and a Messenger to the Israelites.

His people had strayed from the spirit of truth and placed their trust in legalism, thereby burying their sense of mercy beneath dusty scrolls and rituals. Finally, when he came of age, Jesus began to travel and preach throughout the land of Palestine about a return to the truth of the old revelations and a rejection of all that man had added. In his task he was supported by the spirit of truth, the angel Gabriel.

The Gospel His Message

He taught that love and mercy overcome hate and anger and that only a true and sincere faith in the Creator and obedience to His will can bring a person salvation in this life as well as in the next.

To reinforce his message, which was called "Injeel" (Good News), God granted him the performance of miracles. He healed the sick, uplifted the distressed and revived the dead. All these things he did with the permission of God, never taking credit for them himself.

He led a simple and pious life. Soon he attracted an inner-circle of devoted followers who listened to his teachings with fervor and humility. These disciples, among them Peter, Barnabas, and John helped him carry the message of Divine Love to the people. They helped him in his mission.

A Test of Wills

But no righteous man of God is without trial and tribulation. As the message of Jesus began to gain wider

acceptance, a small clique of hypocrites and evil men began to plot against him. They were the priests and leaders of the Jews whose position and wealth depended upon their place as the sole interpreters of religion to the masses. They pursued him and his followers and eventually captured him. Though they abused him, he never renounced his faith in the one God. So in their anger they plotted to crucify him on a Roman cross.

But Jesus slipped from their grip at the last moment, and all the while they thought they had succeeded. They were sure they had killed him but God answered Jesus' prayer and saved him from their schemes. Confusion overtook the mob and they might have killed the man who betrayed Jesus instead. In any case, Jesus escaped from their grasp. Then God removed Jesus from this world into another dimension, to a place with Him, not to return until a later time. With their teacher gone, the devoted followers of Jesus tried to maintain the purity and simplicity of his teachings. But they were soon besieged and overtaken by a flood of Roman and Greek influences, which eventually so buried and distorted the message of Jesus that only a little of its truth now remains. Strange doctrines of Jesus being a man-god, of God dying, of saint worship and of God being made up of different parts came into vogue and were accepted by many of those who took the name "Christians" centuries after Jesus.

The only records that have come down to us concerning Jesus are some sketchy biographical material, poorly researched and compiled, which can in no way

be representative of the full and accurate Message of Jesus, the Son of Mary. The time of the final and incorruptible Message was not yet at hand. It would be left to the last prophet of God, Muhammad (Peace be upon him), to clarify the truth from man's additions and deletions.

Jesus taught the same eternal message that was taught by all the Messengers of God, from Adam, on through Noah, Abraham, Moses and ending with the mission of God's last Guidepost to humanity, Muhammad (Peace be on them all), whose coming was foretold by Jesus himself.

Every nation and every people, from the Aztecs to the Greeks, have received a Prophet or a Messenger from God. Jesus was the last of a series of Messengers sent to the Israelites, but they consistently strayed from the path of surrender to God.

Each of the many Messengers spoke a different language and followed varied customs. Yet the core faith taught by each was the same: surrender your imperfect and fickle will to the perfect will of the Power that is greater than you. You will then find the peace and freedom that only the Creator of all things can provide. Then you must do what is right and good to your fellow creatures. This way of life is called Islam (surrender to God and find peace).

(If you wish to gain more information about Jesus, you may obtain a booklet, Jesus in the Qur'an, from The Nur Institute of America; you can refer to the back of the booklet for the address).

SECTION III

MUHAMMAD (PBUH) IN THE BIBLE

Biblical Prophecies of Muhammad's Coming

Abraham is extensively considered the Patriarch of monotheism and the common father of the Jews, Christians and Muslims. By means of his second son, Isaac, all Israeli prophets including outstanding figures like Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, Solomon and Jesus descended. Peace and blessings to all of them. The coming of all these illustrious prophets was the fulfillment of God's promise to bless all of Abraham's descendants to the nations of the land (Genesis 12:2-3). Such fulfillment is totally accepted by Muslims as they consider themselves to believe in all these prophets as articles of their faith.

Blessings to Ishmael and Isaac

Was Abraham's first son (Ishmael) and his descendants included in the contract and God's promise?

Several verses in the Bible will clarify this question.

- 1) Genesis 12:2-3 explains about God's promise to Abraham and his descendants before Abraham had children.
- 2) Genesis 17:4 God repeats his promise to Abraham after Ishmael was born and before Isaac was born.
- 3) In Genesis 21 Isaac is blessed specifically but Ishmael also is blessed specifically and God promises him to be one great nation especially in Genesis 21:13, 18.

4) According to Deuteronomy 21:15-17 traditional rights and the first born son's privileges will not be affected by the social standing of the mother (being Sara, Abraham's wife, a free woman, and Isaac's mother, and Hagar, also Abraham's wife, a slave and Ishmael's mother).

5) Ishmael has complete legitimacy as the son of Abraham; Hagar, his mother, has complete legitimacy as the wife of Abraham. Both facts are clearly established in Genesis 21:13 and 16:3.

Allah promised that after Jesus, the latter prophet would be from the lineage of Ishmael and his descendants. In less than 600 years after Jesus, the last messenger of Allah arrived, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). God's blessing to both descendants of Abraham's family was complete. But is there additional evidence that corroborates that the Bible prophesied the coming of Prophet Muhammad?

Muhammad: The Prophet Like Moses

Long after Abraham, God's promise to send the awaited messenger, was repeated again with Moses' words. *In Deuteronomy 18:18 Moses talks about the prophet that God will send to be:

From among his "brothers"; This is a reference to Moses, his Israelite cousins, since Ishmael was the other son of Abraham and the one that was clearly promised to him to be a "great nation".

It's unlikely that there were two prophets more similar than Moses and Muhammad were. Both were given comprehensive laws or codes to live by, both faced

their enemy and succeeded by miracles; they were both accepted as prophets, they were both plotted to be murdered and both emigrated.

Analogies between Moses and Jesus do not solely ignore the aforementioned similarities, but also more conclusive similarities (i.e. natural birth, family life, Moses' and Muhammad's death but not of Jesus' - as he was considered by his followers as the son of God and not exclusively God's messenger, Muslims believe that Jesus was a messenger of God in the same way as Moses and Muhammad.

The Waited for Prophet would come from Arabia

Deuteronomy 11:1-2 combines references of Moses, Jesus and Muhammad. It talks about God (i.e. According to Genesis 21:21 Parán's desert was the place where Ishmael lived (i.e. Arabia; specifically in Mecca).

In certain versions of the Bible it mentions certain pilgrims crossing into the Baca Valley (another name for Mecca). Psalms 84:4-6.

Isaiah 42:1-13 talks about the love of God. His chosen messenger as he will bring a law expected by the islands and he "will not get tired, neither lose heart until he put judgment at the land". The verse makes the connection of the chosen one to Kedar's descendants. Who is Kedar? According to Genesis 25:13, Kedar was Ishmael's second son, Muhammad's forefather.

Muhammad's Migration from Mecca to Medina: Was it prophesied in the Bible?

Habacuc 3:3 talks about God's coming (help from God) from Teman (according to the Dictionary of the Bible

by J. Hasting, this is an oasis north of Medina) and the Saint (his coming) from the north of Parán. The Saint, under persecution, emigrated from Parán (Mecca) and was received excitedly in Medina, was none other than the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). The incident of migration of the Prophet and his followers is clearly defined in Isaiah 21:13-17. This part prophesied the battle of Badr in which some believers with few weapons miraculously defeated the "glory" of Kedar who looked for the destruction of Islam to frighten his own people that already had been converted to Islam.

Is the Qur'an prophesied in the Bible?

For 23 years the words of God (The Qur'an) were put into the mouth of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). The Qur'an was dictated to him by the Angel Gabriel who asked him, Muhammad, to simply repeat the words of the Qur'an according to what he heard. These words were committed to memory and written during Prophet Muhammad's (pbuh) life and written under his supervision.

Was it only coincidence that the prophet "like Moses" of his Israelite brothers (of the Ishmaelites) was also defined like that one which God will put words in his mouth on and will talk in the name of God (Deuteronomy 18:18-20)?

Is it also coincidence that the *Paraclete* (i.e. the Advisor that Jesus prophesied would come after him), was defined in short that "he will not talk about himself, rather he will talk about everything that he hears ..." (John 16:13)?

Would it be another coincidence that Isaiah demonstrate a relation between the prophet in relation to Kedar does he make a (written contract in a new tongue) that will be counted to the Lord (Isaiah 42:10-11)? Even more explicit, Isaiah's prophecy says "because in a stuturer's tongue, and in foreign tongue will speak to this town (Isaiah 28:11). This verse explains stuturer's tongue of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) reflecting his state of tension and concentration during the hour of revelation. Another related aspect is that the Qur'an was developed in sections during a time of twenty-three years. It is interesting to compare this to Isaiah 28:10 that mention the same thing.

That Prophet- *The Paraclete*- Muhammad

Up to the days of Jesus (May peace be with him), the Israelites still waited for a prophet preceded in Deuteronomy 18:18 who would be like Moses. When John the Baptist came, they asked him if he was the Christ and he said no. They asked him if he was the Elijah and he answered no. Then, apparently in regard to Deuteronomy 18:18, they asked him "Are you the Prophet? And he answered, no" (John 1:19-21).

According to John (15:26, 27) Jesus spoke of a *Paraclete* or Counselor that would come after him and who the envoy for the Father will be like other *Paracletes*, and which will teach something new that Jesus' contemporaries would not be able to take. Although the *Paraclete* is defined as the spirit in reality (this description looks like Prophet Muhammad's (pbuh) famous title - *Al-Amin*; The reliable), also he is identified in another verse like the Holy Ghost (John 14:26). Such description is incon-

sistent with this *Paraclete's* profile. In the words of the Biblical Dictionary, (Ed.J.Mckenzie), "These articles, should be admitted, does not describe a coherent picture".

The history of the first Christians' does not indicate if they understood that the *Paraclete* would be a man and not a spirit. This explains why certain followers answered to those that were complaining without satisfying the criteria stipulated by Jesus, for the *Paraclete* they were waiting for.

Prophet Muhammed (pbuh) was the Prophet that was the *Paraclete*, Counselor, assistant, and reprehender sent after Jesus by God. He attested to Jesus, he taught new things as they could not be taught during Jesus' time, he spoke of what he heard (revelations), and lives in the faithful (according to his preserved teachings). Such teachings will remain forever because he was the last of God's messengers, and he is the only Universal Prophet that joined all humanity under God and on the road of the preserved truth. He spoke about, in much detail, what was going to pass - the criteria that Moses gave to distinguish between the true or false prophets (Deuteronomy 18:22). He reprehended the world of sin, of honesty and judgment (John 16:8-11).

Was there prophesy about the change in Religious Leadership?

After the rejection of Jesus, the last Israelite prophet, it was time to complete God's promise to make Ishmael a great nation come true (Genesis 21:13, 18). In Matthew 21:19-21, Jesus talks about a fig tree without fruits (a Biblical symbol of the inheritance of a

prophet) that it will be purified after being given once an opportunity to give fruit for three years (the duration of Jesus' ministry). In another verse of this chapter, Jesus said: Therefore I tell you, that God's kingdom will have been taken from you and given to a people that make the fruits thereof (Matthew 21:43). The nation of the descendants of Ishmael's (the stone discarded in Matthew 21:43) was victorious against all power of his times according to Jesus' prophesy. "And the fact that he fall on this stone, he will be broken; and on who this shall fall, he will crumble" (Matthew 21:44).

Is it Coincidence or out of Context?

All of these verses so far strongly indicate the coming of Prophet Muhammad(pbuh) after Jesus. Some people may question that this is coincidence or out of context but all these verses show that the coming prophet will change the course of human history and he will be similar to Prophet Moses. Thus, Prophet Muhammad(pbuh) fits this perfectly. If someone is still considering or believing that this is a coincidence, here is another sign of the coming of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh).

One of the signs of the prophet is to come from Parán (Mecca) and that he will come with ten thousand saints (Deuteronomy 33:2). This was the faithful's quantity that accompanied Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) to Parán (Mecca) without bloodshed and a victorious return to his birthplace to destroy the remaining symbols of idolatry in the Kaa'ba. God says (according to Moses):

"He will be more, than anyone who does not hear my words that he speak in my name, I will demand it of him (Deuteronomy 18:19).

"Those who follow the Messenger, The unlettered Prophet, whom they find mentioned in their own (Scriptures-In the Law and the Gospel-) For he commands them what is just and forbids them what is evil; he allows them as lawful what is good (and pure) and prohibits them from what is bad (and impure); He releases them from their heavy burdens and from the yokes that are upon them. So it is those who believe in him, honor him, help him, and follow the Light which is sent down to him--It is they who will prosper".

(Qur'an 7:157)

(We recommend "What the Bible says about Prophet Muhammad, by Ahmed Deedat, you can request a copy from The Nur Institute of America).

SECTION IV

THE CONCEPT OF GOD IN ISLAM

In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious,
the Most Merciful

"Say: He is Allah, the One; Allah, the Eternal, Absolute; He begetteth not, nor is He begotten, and there is none like unto Him." (Qur'an 112: 1-4)

It is a known fact that every language has one or more terms that are used in reference to God and sometimes to lesser deities. This is not the case with the word "Allah". Allah is the personal name of the One True God. Nothing else can be called Allah. The

term has no plural or gender. This shows its exclusivity when compared to the word 'god' which can be made plural, i.e. 'gods' or feminine, i.e. 'goddess'. It is interesting to note that Allah is the personal name of God in Aramaic, the language of Jesus (peace be upon him) and a sister language of Arabic. (Note: Christians in the Middle East call God, Allah).

The One true God is a reflection of the unique concept that Islam associates with God. To a Muslim, Allah is the Almighty, Creator and Sustainer of the universe, who is similar to none and nothing is comparable to Him. The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was asked by his contemporaries about Allah. The answer came directly from God Himself in the form of a short chapter of the Qur'an that is considered the essence of the Unity of God or the motto of monotheism. *"Say: He is Allah, the One; Allah, the Eternal, Absolute; He begetteth not, nor is He begotten, and there is none like Him."*

(Qur'an 112:1-4)

Some non-Muslims allege that the concept of God in Islam is that of a stern and cruel God who demands to be obeyed fully. He is not loving and kind. Nothing can be farther from the truth than this allegation. It is enough to know that with the exception of one, each of the 114 chapters of the Qur'an begins with the verse: "In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful" In one of the sayings of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) we are told: "God is more loving and kinder than a mother to her dear child."

Besides being Merciful, God is just too. Hence evildoers and sinners must have their share of punish-

ment and the virtuous their rightful reward. Actually, God's attribute of Mercy has full manifestation in His attribute of Justice. People suffering throughout their lives for His sake and people oppressing and exploiting other people all their lives should not receive similar treatment from their Lord. Expecting similar treatment for them will amount to negating the very belief in the accountability in the Hereafter and thereby negating all the incentives for a moral and virtuous life in this world.

Islam rejects characterizing God in any human form or depicting him as favoring certain individuals or nations on the basis of wealth, power or race. He created the human beings as equals. They may distinguish themselves and earn His favor through virtue and piety alone.

Understanding the True Essence of God

The concept that God rested on the seventh day of creation, that God wrestled with one of His soldiers, that God is an envious plotter against mankind, or that God is incarnate in any human being are considered blasphemy from the Islamic point of view. The unique usage of Allah as the personal name of God is a reflection of Islam's emphasis on the purity of the belief in God. This belief in the Unity of God is the essence of the message of all the Prophets of God. Because of this, Islam considers associating any deity or personality with God as a grave sin that God will never forgive if the person dies without repenting.

The Creator must be of a different nature from the things created because if He is of the same nature as

they are, He will be temporal and will therefore need a maker. It follows that nothing is like Him. If the maker is not temporal, then He must be eternal.

But if he is eternal, He cannot be caused, and if nothing caused Him to come into existence, nothing outside Him causes Him to continue to exist, which means that He must be self-sufficient. And if He does not depend on anything for the continuance of His own existence, then this existence can have no end. The Creator is therefore eternal: *"He is the First and the Last, the Evident and the Immament: and He has full knowledge of all things."* (Al-Qur'an 57:3)

He is self-sufficient or self-subsistent or, to use a Qur'anic term, He is Al-Qayyum. The Creator does not create only in the sense of bringing things into existence and is the ultimate cause of whatever happens to them.

"Allah is the Creator of all things, and He is the Guardian and Disposer of all affairs. To Him belong the keys of the heavens and the earth: and those who reject the Signs of Allah, -it is they who will be in loss."
(Al-Qur'an 39:62-63)

"There is no moving creature on earth but its sustenance dependeth on Allah: He knoweth the time and place of its definite abode and its temporary deposit: All is in a clear Record." (Al-Qur'an 11:6)

God's Attributes

If the Creator is Eternal and Everlasting, then His attributes must also be Eternal and Everlasting. He should not lose any of His attributes nor acquire new ones. If this is so, then His attributes are absolute.

Can there be for example, two absolutely powerful Creators? A moment's thought shows that this is not feasible. The Qur'an summarizes this argument in the following verses:

"No son did Allah beget, nor is there any god along with Him: (if there were many gods), behold, each god would have taken away what he had created, and some would have lorded it over others! Glory to Allah! (He is free) from the (sort of) things they attribute to Him!"
(Al-Qur'an 23:91)

The Oneness of God

The Qur'an reminds us of the falsity of all alleged gods. To the worshippers of man-made objects it asks: "Worship ye that which ye have (yourselves) carved? But Allah has created you and your handwork."
(Al-Qur'an 37:95-96)

"Say: 'Do ye then take (for worship) protectors other than Him, such as have no power either for good or for harm to themselves?'" (Al-Qur'an 13:16)

To the worshippers of heavenly bodies it cites the story of Abraham: *"When the night covered him over, He saw a star: He said: 'This is my Lord.' But when it set, He said: 'I love not those that set.' When he saw the moon rising in splendor, he said: 'This is my Lord.' But when the moon set, He said: 'unless my Lord guide me, I shall surely be among those who go astray'. When he saw the sun rising in splendor, he said: 'This is my Lord; this is the greatest (of all).'* But when the sun set, he said: *'O my people! I am indeed free from your (guilt) of giving partners to Allah. For me, I have set my face, firmly and truly, towards Him Who cre-*

ated of the heavens and the earth, and never shall I give partners to Allah." (Al-Qur'an 6: 76-79)

The Believers Attitude

In order to be a Muslim (i.e., to submit oneself to God), it is necessary to believe in the Oneness of God, in the sense of His being the only Creator, Preserver, Nourisher, etc. But this belief, later on called Tawhid Ar-Rububiyyah, is not enough. Many of the idolaters knew and believed that only the Supreme God could do all this. To acquire Tawhid Ar-Rububiyyah one must add Tawhid Al-Uluhiyyah, i.e. one acknowledges the fact that it is God alone who deserved to be worshiped, and thus abstains from worshipping any other thing or being.

Having achieved this knowledge of the One True God, man should constantly have faith in Him, and should allow nothing to induce him to deny the truth. When true faith enters a person's heart, it impacts the person's outlook and behavior. The Prophet said, "Faith is that which resides firmly in the heart and which is proved by deeds". One of the striking results of faith is the feeling of gratitude towards God, which could be said to be the essence of Ibada (worship). The feeling of gratitude is so important that anyone denying the Truth is called Kafir, 'one who is ungrateful'. A believer loves, and is grateful to God for the bounties. He bestowed upon him. He is aware of the fact that his good deeds are far from being commensurate with Divine favors, and therefore he is always anxious to please God. He remembers God often. The Qur'an promotes this feeling of gratitude by repeating the attributes of God very frequently.

"Allah! There is no god but He, the Living, the Self-subsisting, Eternal. No slumber can seize Him or sleep. His are all things in the heavens and on earth. Who is there can intercede in His presence except as He permitteth? He knoweth what (appeareth to His creatures as) before or after or behind them. Nor shall they compass aught of His knowledge except as He willeth. His Throne doth extend over the heavens and the earth, and He feeleth no fatigue in guarding and preserving them for He is the Most High, the Supreme (in glory)."
(Al-Qur'an 2:255)

"O People of the Book! Commit no excesses in your religion: Nor say of Allah aught but the truth. Christ Jesus the son of Mary was (no more than) a messenger of Allah, and His Word, which He bestowed on Mary, and a spirit proceeding from Him: so believe in Allah and His messengers. Say no 'Trinity': desist: it will be better for you: for Allah is one Allah: Glory be to Him: (far exalted is He) above having a son. To Him belong all things in the heavens and on earth. And enough is Allah as the Disposer of affairs."
(Al-Qur'an 4:171)

If you wish further information, we recommend the following book which you can obtain from The Nur Institute of America, TAWHEED (The Oneness of God) and SHIRK (Associating Others with God).

NOTE:

The Qur'anic Ayats in English are quoted from The Yusuf Ali Translation and Verses of the Bible are quoted from The King James Bible.

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Nur Institute of America

www.risaleusa.com

Emal: risaleusa@gmail.com

NUR INSTITUTE OF AMERICA

www.risaleusa.com

Email: risaleusa@gmail.com

Milwaukee, WI. USA