

ISLAMIC WORLDVIEW

an introduction



MCAS

Muslim Converts' Association of Singapore
(Darul Arqam Singapore)

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Its friendly programmes and harmonious events involve social gatherings in celebration of Islamic events, dissemination of books and magazines to build Islamic awareness, and assistance for the community through counselling, financial aids, and other welfare services. Also affectionately known as Darul Arqam Singapore, it has flourished since 1980, with the confidence and continued support of its members, volunteers and donors.

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ISBN: 978-981-08-0302-5

This pocket-sized version first published in 2015.
Printed in 2016 and 2017.

Muslim Converts' Association of Singapore
(Darul Arqam Singapore)
32 Onan Road, The Galaxy,
Singapore 424484
Tel: 6348 8344
Fax: 6440 6724
Website: www.mcas.sg
E-mail: info1@mcas.sg

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Permission was granted by the author of *Islam The Natural Way*, Abdul Wahid Hamid, for Darul Arqam to reproduce the first chapter, *Face to Face with Reality*, as part of its free publications, entitled *Islamic Worldview - An Introduction*.

Previous version published in 2001.

Reprinted in 2003, 2006, 2009, 2010, and 2012.

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ISLAMIC WORLDVIEW

- *an introduction* -

Like countless millions before you, you must have asked yourself such questions as: Who am I? Where do I come from? How did the world and the universe come into being? What am I doing in this world? Can I do what I want to, how I want to, when I want to? Where do I go from here, from this seemingly earth-bound existence? Where do we all go from here?

These are questions about life and about the meaning and purpose of life. These are questions about the universe and our place in it.



Worldviews

The answers you give to these questions help to shape your worldview. A worldview is the way in which a person sees and explains the world and his place in it. Your worldview not only affects the way you think. It also affects the way you act or behave. Your worldview shapes the quality of your life.

In the long history of mankind there have been many different ways of explaining the world, how it came about, how it works and what is man's place in it.

Some people have seen the world as a mysterious place, with dark and evil forces at work. In such a worldview, a person's life is ruled by superstition and fear.

Others have seen the world as a bright, rich and beautiful place. They do not show concern about how it came about or about what will happen to it. They are happy

"to make the most of it", to eat, drink and enjoy life. If they do think of life and death at all, they might just say, "We live and die and nothing causes our death except time."

Some people have seen the universe as a battleground of good and evil, of light and darkness, of positive and negative. Among some Chinese, for example, there are ideas of *yin* and *yang*. *Yang* is light and heat and goodness. *Yin* is dark and cold and damp and bad. In some forms of the Zoroastrian religion, there is *Ahura Mazda*, the force of good, battling with *Angra Mainyu*, the force of evil, for control of the world.

Some people get their worldview from religions which hold that there is a creator or maker of the universe or a supreme being. Religions differ about the nature of this supreme being. Some say this being has absolute power - he can do

whatever he wishes and no other has a share in his power. Others associate this being with other gods, demons and spirits.

Nowadays, many people have turned away from religions and a belief in God. Many feel that the idea of God and of a creator is an invention of man's imagination anyway. They feel that man has the power and the right to decide what is best for him. Such people are called atheists, agnostics or humanists. An atheist is one who denies the existence of God. An agnostic is one who says that he does not know whether God exists or not. He may even go further and say that he does not care. He is really quite close to the atheist. A humanist (who may be an atheist or an agnostic) insists that human beings alone must decide what is best for them for there is no such thing as Divine Laws.

At the same time as they turn to humanism, many now turn to 'science' and the

scientific method for their understanding of the world and man's place in it. They may have a notion of science as something exact and precise and regard the scientific method - of gathering data, experimentation, observation and deduction - as the only way of gaining knowledge, of determining what is true and what is false.

Some people pick and choose to form their own worldview. For some questions they may turn to a religion, especially in times of distress. For other answers they may turn to an astrologer, the horoscope in their daily or weekly newspaper, a popular guru, or a fashionable ideology like Marxism. For certain questions they would invoke the name of science. And so on.

False and True

From this brief look at various worldviews, it would seem that human beings as a whole are totally mixed up and confused without any hope of finding out what is right or true. It may seem that we are groping in the dark, not really knowing where we are, from where we came and where we are going. In this situation we

may well wonder if there is any way of knowing what is true from what is false.

Clearly, all the ways of looking at the world cannot all be true. Some appear to have some things in common but each is different from the other in important ways.

Of any worldview, we may ask:

- ❖ Does it portray the truth and is it at least reasonable? We should not be content with a worldview that is false and that is not supported by reason and logic.
- ❖ Is it capable of explaining reality as a whole? We should not be contented with a worldview that can only explain or furnish knowledge on a part of reality.
- ❖ So far as human beings are concerned, does the worldview cater for and can it satisfy human needs and potentials?
- ❖ Does it provide proper values to live by and valid goals to strive for? Which of the worldviews that have shaped human lives can thus be described as valid and reasonable, complete and logically satisfying?

Science – A Limited Worldview

No single person on his own, no matter how clever he is, can give complete, valid and satisfying answers to the questions about the origins of the world and man's place in it, about life and destiny. No group of persons can do so either.

For example, all the knowledge of the world and the universe amassed by scientists throughout the ages is knowledge of only a small part of reality. However much scientist in the future may come to know, there will always be a point where they must say, "We do not know."

From the standpoint of science, the universe is like an old book, the first and last pages of which have been lost. Neither the beginning nor the end is known. Thus, the worldview of science is a knowledge of the part, not of the whole.

Science, as the word is now widely understood, acquaints us with the situation of some parts of the universe; it cannot explain the essential character of the whole universe, its origin or its destiny.

The scientist's worldview is like the knowledge about the elephant gained by those who touched it in the dark. The one who felt the elephant's ear supposed the animal to be shaped like a fan; the one who felt its leg supposed it to be shaped like a column; and the one who felt its back supposed it to be shaped like a throne. Science, it has been said, is like the powerful searchlight in the long winter night. Lighting up a small area in its beam but unable to shed light beyond its border. This is not to pronounce on its usefulness or otherwise; it is only to say that it is limited.

The Power of Reason

Fortunately, in our quest for a true and valid worldview, human beings do have a special gift of power - the power of reason and logic. Of course, we must realise that this power is in itself limited: it is like a precision balance which you might use for weighing gold, but you would be vain and foolish to think of using it to weigh mountains. Still, if reason is properly used, it could point to some of the real answers about our place in this world. At the very least, this power of reason could be used to show which theory or which worldview is false or inadequate.

We shall thus try to use reason to answer the most important of the questions listed at the very beginning of this section, which is: Where do we come from?





Where do we come from?

For everything, like man, that has a beginning in time, there can be only three ways of trying to explain how it came to be.

1. Either, it was made, or created, or caused by nothing at all. In other words, it came out of nothing.
2. Or, it created itself.
3. Or, it has a creator, cause, or maker outside itself.

The first and second explanations are obviously impossible. It is inconceivable for something that has a beginning in time to come out of or be made of nothing at all. It is also inconceivable that it should bring itself into being. The universe and all that is in it, therefore, could not have created itself nor did it come about by chance.

What is the Nature of the Creator?

The conclusion then is clear. The universe and all that is in it owe its existence to a Creator or Maker outside itself. You, as a human being, as part of the universe, owe your existence to such a Creator.

To say, as many do, that human beings came from or evolved from other creatures or that they originated from water, or that there was a big bang and everything just happened to fall in place, does not really answer the question about the origin of the universe and all that is in it, including human beings.

We can therefore conclude that any worldview that denies or does not accept the existence of a Creator of the universe is a false worldview.

The Creator must be of a different nature from all that have been created. This is because if He is of the same nature as they are, He will need to have a beginning in time and will therefore need a maker. One word for “to have a beginning in time” is “temporal”.

If the Maker or Creator is not temporal, He must be eternal. Eternal means to have no beginning or end in time. If the Maker 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. Self-sufficient means that he does not depend on anyone or anything to exist.

And if he does not depend on anything to exist, then his existence can have no end. The Creator is therefore eternal and everlasting.

If the Creator is eternal and everlasting, then all His qualities must be eternal and everlasting.

This means, for example, that if He is powerful, He must always be powerful. He cannot cease to be powerful. If He is all-knowing, He must always be all-knowing. If He is wise, He must always be

wise. If He is kind and just, He must always be kind and just.

The Creator then does not lose or get any new qualities. Qualities that do not change and that last forever are absolute qualities. Another name for qualities is attributes.

THE NOMAD

A desert nomad was asked about the existence of God.

He said:

"Camel droppings point to the existence of a camel. Footprints on the sand tell of a traveller. The heavens with its stars, the earth with its mountains and valleys, and the sea with its waves – don't they point to the Maker, all Powerful, Knowing, Wise and Caring?"

THE ATHEIST

A conversation took place between the leader and scholar, Ja'far As-Saadiq, and an avowed atheist. Ja'far asked the person:

"Have you ever travelled on the sea?"

"Yes."

"Have you experienced its terrors?"

"Yes, indeed! One day while we were out at sea, a terrible hurricane blew up and smashed our ship. Several sailors perished. I clung to a rafter of the ship but it was soon snatched away. I was thrown about in the stormy sea but eventually was tossed up on the shore."

When the storm broke, Ja'far commented, *"perhaps you first relied on the ship and the sailors for your safety and then on the rafter which saved you for a while. But when all these went, did you resign yourself to death or did you still hope for safety?"*

"I hoped for safety."

"On whom did you hope for safety?"

The man was silent and Ja'far said:

"The Creator is the one on whom you placed your hopes at that time. And He is the one who delivered you from drowning."

After this conversation the atheist was no longer an atheist.

THE MULBERRY TREE

The famous jurist, Ash-Shaafi', was asked:
"What is the proof for the existence of God?"

He replied:

"The leaf of the mulberry tree, its colour, smell, taste and everything about it seem one and the same to you. But a caterpillar eats it and it comes out as fine silken thread. A bee feeds on it and it comes out as honey. A sheep eats it and it comes out as dung. Gazelles chew on it and it congeals to produce the fragrance of musk. Who has made all these different things come from the same type of leaf?"

THE FORTRESS

Another famous jurist, Ahmad ibn Hanbal, was also asked the same question and he said:

"There is this strong, smooth fortress. It is completely enclosed. It has neither door nor window. It looks like white silver on the outside and like pure gold on the inside. While it is in this state, suddenly its walls begin to crack and crumble and out comes something alive which can hear and see. It looks beautiful and gives off a pleasing sound."

(He was of course speaking of an egg and birth of a chick.)

Can there be more than one Creator with such absolute attributes? Can there for example be two absolutely powerful creators? This is not possible. Why?

If a Maker is absolutely powerful, it follows that he is absolutely free to do whatever he likes. But if another Maker with similar powers exists and they differ over the making of something, then one of two things can happen. Either, one will overcome the other, in which case the latter cannot be absolutely powerful. Or, they will neutralise each other, in which case the powers of both are limited.

Even if we assume that the two powers agree on everything or complement each other, they cannot both be absolutely powerful because in doing anything one at least will need to assume that the other will not interfere or is not capable of interfering. In other words, one will need to assume that

the function of the other is redundant, or that the power of the other is limited.

The Creator then must be One. There cannot be any other like Him so He must be Unique. The Creator must be all Powerful and must be able to do whatever He wills.

From the above, it is valid and reasonable to assert that the Creator must be Eternal and Everlasting, Self-Sufficient and All Powerful, One and Unique. These are some of the qualities or attributes of the Creator that we must have in mind when we use the word God. We must also remember that His attributes or qualities are absolute and do not change.

There must then be a clear separation between the Creator and the created. It follows that no man can be God. God cannot have a mother or a father. He cannot have a son or a daughter. The sun, the moon or the stars or any heavenly bodies cannot be God.

No part of creation whether it be a mountain, a tree or a fire can be God and does not deserve to be worshipped as God.

Any religion or any worldview which regards any human being or any part of creation as God or part of God must be a false religion or worldview.

Also, any religion or any worldview which regards God as having human characteristics, for example having a human shape and suffering from tiredness and needing rest and sleep, must be a false religion or worldview.

DECLARATION OF GOD'S PERFECTION

*Say: He is the One God;
God is Eternal, the
Everlasting, the
Independent
He begets not and neither is
He begotten
And there is none
comparable unto Him.*

(The Qur'an, 112:1-4)

Natural to acknowledge the Creator

From what we have said and from what we shall detail later, it is reasonable and natural for man to acknowledge the existence and power of the Creator. It is natural and reasonable for man to acknowledge that all creations are preserved through God's will

and grace – what I call in English “providence”. If for an instance this providence were to be withdrawn from this world, it would cease to be. It is therefore natural and reasonable for the human being to give thanks or show gratitude to the Creator for all the favours of life.

ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

“God – there is no god but He; the One who knows all that is beyond the reach of a created being's perception, as well as that can be witnessed by a creature's senses or mind. He is the most Gracious, the most Merciful.

God - there is no god but He; the Sovereign Supreme, the Holy, the One with whom all the salvation rests, the Giver of Faith, the One who determines what is true and what is false, the Almighty, the One who subdues wrong and restores right, the One to whom all greatness belongs.

Glory be to God for He is remote from all that men may associate as partners, unto Him!

He is God, the Creator the Maker who shapes all forms and

appearances! His (Alone) are the attributes of perfection. All that is in the heaven and on earth extols His limitless glory: for He alone is Almighty, truly Wise."

(The Qur'an, 59:22-24)

"God - there is no god but He, the Ever-Living, the Self-Subsisting Source of all being. Neither slumber overtakes him nor sleep. His is all that in the heavens and all that is on earth. Who is there that can intercede with Him, unless it be by His permission?"

He knows all that lies open before men and all that is hidden from them, whereas they cannot attain to any of His Knowledge except that which He wills (them to attain).

His eternal power overspreads the heavens and the earth, and their upholding wearies Him not. And He alone is truly Exalted, Mighty."

(The Qu'ran, 2:255)

It is unreasonable and unnatural for the human being to think of himself as totally independent and self-sufficient. If a person thinks in this manner, he becomes proud and vain. He is thus inclined to be ungrateful for the bounties he enjoys - the air he breathes and the

food he eats to sustain him, the wondrous eyes and ears he uses to perceive the world about him, the subtle tongue and lips he uses to express his wants and needs. And being ungrateful, he is inclined to forget or to reject the truth of the existence of God.

Natural Or Innate Values

We shall deal with creation in greater detail later. Here, we state that all creations have been created according to a measure and function according to certain in-built laws and norms. The human being is endowed by the creator with inborn or innate knowledge and values. We say that these innate values form a natural moral sense, which makes a person recognise what is good and beautiful such as telling the truth, keeping promises and being grateful.

This moral sense also makes a person recognise what is bad and morally ugly such as telling lies, deceit and arrogance. A child who says to another, "Come on, you promised", or a person who challenges a bully, "How'd you like it if someone did the same to you?" are both appealing to values and standards of behaviour – in these cases, honesty and justice, which

people the world over will recognise because everyone is born with these natural values.

The natural moral sense is one way in which the Creator has provided for the guidance of human beings. He has granted us a conscience, which registers right and wrong, and a mind which has the ability to reason. He made the whole universe a natural book full of signs that lead a thinking person to the existence of God, His power and bounty.



Revelation And Prophethood

However, to make matters clearer, to give man more detailed knowledge of God, and to show him in a more specific way how to relate to Him, God has, since the creation of Mankind, sent messages through persons chosen and inspired by Him. Such persons have been the real leaders of mankind. They are called Prophets or Messengers of God.

How do we know this? How do we know who these persons are? How do we know that these persons are true and what they said are true and not invented by themselves or others? And since many people have claimed and some still claim to be prophets, how do we know a true prophet from an impostor or a charlatan? Even if we can establish that a prophet is true, how can we

be sure that the message he brought is preserved exactly as he brought it and has not been changed or distorted in any way? At this stage, we need to take a dip into history.

It is a fact that there exists many books in the world which are sometimes described as "holy". Various people derive their worldview from these writings or scriptures. There are the *Vedas* and the *Bhagawat Gita* among Hindus. There is the *Avesta* and it's various parts among the Zoroastrians. There is the Bible and various versions of it used by Christians and partly by the Jews. There are the *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki* of the Shinto religion in Japan. There is the Qu'ran. Closer to our own times are such writings as the *Adi-Granth* of the Sikhs or the Book of

Mormon of the Church of Christ of Latter-Day Saints in the United States.

Some of these writings or scriptures are regarded as the messages or the words of a Supreme Being, or at least inspired by this Being and transmitted by prophets or people chosen by God.



Criteria for a True Scripture

We could try to use reason and logic to find out which of the existing messages or scriptures may be considered as being inspired by the true God. In doing so, we must remember the attributes of God are absolute, that He is and must be the One and Unique, all-Powerful, all-Knowing Creator of the universe.

For a scripture to be true and not false and for it to be God's Message or inspired by God, it must logically meet certain standards or criteria:

1. The scripture should not attribute to God anything which goes against His unique Nature. It should not say, for example, that God was ever a man or that there existed other gods or goddesses with him, or that there is an evil being which has power equal to His.
2. It should not attribute to any created being anything which pertains only to God. It should not say for example that any person knows or can know everything or that any person has the power to do anything and everything.
3. It should completely deny to anyone or anything, apart from the Creator, the right to be worshipped and obeyed.
4. No part of the scripture should contradict another part.
5. The scripture should not attribute major sins or vices to the persons whom God chose for the task of conveying His guidance because this would be just like saying that the message conveyed was not worthy enough to be followed or that God was ignorant or stupid in choosing such a person.
6. The person claiming to have received the scripture should be a person of whom no evil or sin is known and who is completely honest and truthful. He must be a person who claims no reward or benefit for himself from people.

Most scriptures do not meet these standards. They contain many statements and stories which speak of God, man and the universe often in quite fantastic terms. Here is not the place to go into the details of the scriptures we have mentioned and others too. However, it can be safely said that the Qur'an is the only Scripture existing which meets these standards. This will be shown as we go along.

Why do other scriptures not meet or fall short of these standards? How do we account for the fantastic statement and stories about God and his creations in these 'holy' scriptures? Is it because they belong to an earlier, more primitive stage in man's history when man might have been ignorant and searching about on his own for an explanation about life and the universe?

The Qur'an itself mentions that from the beginning mankind has been given knowledge and guidance from God.

It mentioned that when God created the first man, Adam, He *"taught Adam the names of all things"* (The Qur'an, 2:31). It also states that the most Gracious God *"created man and imparted unto him articulate thought and speech"* (The Qur'an, 55:3-4).



Primitive Religion?

It is therefore not right to think of the first human being as ignorant and primitive, as worshipping the sun and trees and natural objects and that only as time passed and people allegedly became wiser they abandoned such beliefs and progressed to the belief in monotheism or in a "single High God".

The only way in which early people could be said to be primitive was in the skills they possessed and the tools they used for living and survival. Modern man may be developed in the skills he possesses and the tools he uses but his worldview and beliefs could be and are often ignorant, limited and misguided and far removed from the pure state in which he is created.

What is the most important about an individual at any time is not whether he lives in a cave or at the

top of a glass-steel-and-concrete tower, whether he uses a sickle or a combined harvester to gather his grain, whether he uses firewood or a microwave oven for cooking, or whether he uses a bow and arrow or a laser beam as a weapon. What is important, as we shall see, is whether he preserves his pure and original state by living in accordance with his natural moral sense and whether he acknowledges the Creator and follows His Guidance.



Knowledge and Human History

To return to the question of true and false scriptures: From the Qu'ran, which fulfils the criteria for a true scripture or revelation, we learn that the first man was Adam and he was a Prophet. He had a correct knowledge of God and creation in as much as he was taught directly by God. He was not ignorant. His descendants make up the human race. Some descendants of Adam followed the guidance that he brought from God.

Some did not. Some added new things, some changed the original guidance. Some later went into the worship of the sun or idols they themselves had made. Some went against the natural moral sense and inclined towards obscenity, injustice and cruelty to others. God in His mercy continued to send prophets to guide these people back to the straight path and to correct their errant beliefs and ways.

To every people, we are told in the Qu'ran, God sent a guide, a messenger or a prophet. They were the genuine leaders of mankind. All prophets taught the same message, the need to believe in the Oneness of God. It was their followers and later generations who changed or distorted this message.

It is possible, for example, that Zoroaster was a true prophet but his teachings have been so corrupted that they cannot be recognised in the mixture of myths and legends that now form part of the Zoroastrian scriptures. In the case of Jesus, he was undoubtedly a true prophet but his teachings have been so falsified by later Christians that his original message is unrecognisable. No doubt there are still elements of good in it, but totally false teachings (such as Jesus is God or that Jesus is the son of God) make the Bible unfit to be regarded as a true scripture.

Among the prophets mentioned in the Qur'an are Adam, Abraham, Noah, Moses, David, Jesus and Muhammad (*peace be upon them*). The last of these prophets was Muhammad and the message revealed to him is the Qur'an. It still exists in the form it was revealed and remains the only true and authentic expression of God's Guidance for mankind.

Realising that our view of human history is part of our worldview, we can say from the above that history is not mainly a progression from simple and primitive to more developed and complex tools, skills, or life styles. History must be viewed mainly in relation to a constant straight path.

This path involves, in essence, acknowledging the Creator and living according to the natural moral sense with which man is endowed. People may stick to this straight path. Some may deviate and go astray

but eventually come back to the straight path. Some may deviate and not only go astray but get lost altogether.

The role of prophets and those who follow them has been to call people back to the straight path, to the belief in and worship of the One God - in other words, to the right belief and right action according to that belief. The most instructive way to look at man and the history of mankind therefore is in relation to this natural moral constant or straight path. To look at the history of mankind from purely materialistic angles such as changes in tools and modes of production is fascinating but less meaningful.



QUR'ANIC WORLDVIEW

We can now proceed to get some idea of the guidance and the worldview offered by the Qur'an. A simple way to do this is to turn to the opening chapter of the Qur'an. It is made up of seven short verses and is the most repeated part of the Qur'an. ("Verses" in the Qur'an are called "ayat" and the verses here, its "signs" or "messages" point to the Oneness of the Creator and the purpose of His creation).

The surah is composed of three parts: The first part – verses 1-4 – describes the truth about God. He is the Maker, Owner, Lord and Sustainer of all creation. With all His Might and Glory, God is above all, Good and Kind, full of Grace and Mercy to His creation.

He is also the Master of the Day of Judgement which points to a part of reality which is beyond man's present perception. This day points to an existence beyond this present life. It

also points to the fact that man has been created with a purpose and that he must answer to God for his life on earth. It also points to the absolute fairness and justice of the Creator.

For all these attributes and bounties, only God is worthy of all praise and thanks.

Alhamdulillah – all praises and thanks are due to God alone.

The second part – verse 5 – follows logically from the first part and describes the only proper and acceptable relationship between man, the creature, and God, the Creator. It is the relationship between the servants and the Served. Only God may be worshiped or served:

"You alone do we worship and you alone do we ask for help."

Everyone who utters these words must abandon the worship of all false gods,



including his own desires and inclinations if these go against the will of God.

The third part – verses 6 and 7 – registers man's need for guidance and help from his Maker and Sustainer and ends with a plea and a supplication:

"Guide us to the Straight Way".

The rest of the Qur'an is an answer to this prayer. The way of the Qur'an is an answer to this prayer. The way of the Qur'an is *the Straight Way*.

SURAH AL-FATIHAH

1. “In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful
2. All praises and thanks are due to God
The Lord and Sustainer of all the Worlds
3. Most Gracious, Most Merciful
4. Master of the Day of Judgement
5. You Alone do we worship
And You Alone do we ask for help
6. Guide us to the Straight Way
7. The way of those whom You have favoured
Not of those who deserve Your Anger
Nor of those who go astray”

ABOUT AL-FATIHAH

The opening chapter of the Qur'an is called Surah Al-Fatihah in Arabic. It is described as "*Umm al-Qur'an*" or the Essence of the Qur'an. It is known as "*Al-Kanz*" or "The Treasure" and "*Al-Kaafiyah*" or "The Sufficient" because it is sufficient and complete as a description of reality and as a prayer.

It is also called "*Al-Asaas*" or "The Foundation" on the basis of a saying of the Prophet Muhammad: "There is foundation for everything ... and the foundation of the Qur'an is the Fatihah and the foundation of the Fatihah is "*Bismillaa hirrahmaa nirrahiim* – In the Name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful."

Purpose and Content of the Qur'an

The Qur'an presents itself as a "guidance for mankind" as a whole. It is not for any one race or class of people. It is not for any one place or period in time. It is addressed to all people. In particular, it is for "those who are conscious of God, who believe in the existence of that which is beyond the reach of human perception". From the beginning it puts man face to face with reality as a whole.

Yet the Qur'an does not require people to believe blindly. It is addressed to "people who think", who think about what they can see and hear and observe about themselves and the world about them; about the earth and mountains, clouds and sky, the sun, the moon and planets in their orbits, the alternation of night and day, or the parched earth brought to life after a shower of rain.

It asks us to reflect on the beginning of our own life – from a drop of sperm mingled with an ovum, the clinging of the fertilised egg to the wall of the mother's womb, the growth of this embryo, the formation of the bones, the clothing of the bones with flesh and after an appointed time, the birth of this new being. It asks us to reflect on the growth of this new being to maturity and strength and then its decline into old age, weakness and death. It asks us to watch and think about our eyes, our tongue, our lips.

It asks us to think about the seeds we sow, the water we drink, the food we eat, the fire we light, and all the other innumerable "Signs" of creation and the innumerable instances of the Creator's Grace and Bounty.

"FOR PEOPLE WHO USE THEIR REASON"

"Your god is One God;
 there is no God but He;
 The all – Merciful, the all-Compassionate
 Behold in the creation
 of the heavens and the earth;
 in the alternation
 of night and day;
 in the sailing of ships
 through the ocean
 for the profit of mankind;
 in the rain which God
 sends down from the skies,
 and the life He gives therewith
 to an earth that is dead;
 in the creatures of all kinds
 that He causes to multiply
 through the earth;
 in the change of the winds,
 and the clouds which
 run their appointed courses
 between the sky and earth;
 in all these are signs indeed
 for people who use their reason."

(The Qur'an, 2:164)

"Have you watched the seeds which you sow?" (56:63),
 "the water you drink..." (56:68),
 "...the fire you light" (56:71).

Again and again, we are asked to observe and think and question: Why should man believe in a single Creator who is Eternal, Beneficent, Compassionate, Loving, Just? Why shouldn't it be one or several of the many other Gods in which people believe? Why shouldn't the arguments of the materialists and those who deny the existence of God not be correct? Almost the whole of the Qur'an is addressed to these questions.

Throughout, the Qur'an stresses knowledge and reason as the valid way to faith and God-consciousness. It says only those of the servants of God who possess knowledge are the ones who truly stand in awe of Him. (The Qur'an, 35:28)



God And His Creation

We know that creation is amazingly vast and intricate. From the tiniest and invisible protons and neutrons to the vast galaxies, it inspires wonder and awe. It is not only vast, it is well ordered.

However, Reality according to the Qur'an is not made up only of matter, of the things we can see, hear, smell, feel or taste. It is not only made up of the vast observable universe. There are parts of God's creation which is beyond the knowledge and experience of any human being. The Qur'an mentions the seven heavens, periods in time when man was not even a thing mentioned. It speaks of angels created from light and jinns made from fire. It speaks of another world - the Aakhirah - which is better and more lasting than this world. To disbelieve or reject the existence of all these simply because we

cannot perceive them now is to doubt the creative power of the Creator. It is like looking down a single street and denying that anything exists around the street corners simply because that is outside our field of vision.

Creation is also not a one-off thing. God did not just create the world and go to rest or to sleep. He would not be God if He did so. God continues to sustain His creation and He has the power to bring to an end or to cause new life or creation as He wills.

The Qur'an speaks of everything in the universe as being created according to a measure which is set by the Creator. The sun moves in a path of its own and "may not overtake the moon". All heavenly bodies float through space according to the laws set by God. Plants need sunlight to grow and flourish. Birds and bees have been inspired by the

Creator with amazing sense of direction to enable them to obtain food. People need oxygen to survive. Each creation follows or obeys the special laws or norms built into it. A bee cannot live in the sea. A fish cannot live on land. Each lives according to the laws set by the Creator. Each lives in a state of submission. This is precisely the meaning of the Arabic word "Islam". Anything which follows the laws measured out for it by the Creator lives in a state of submission or Islam and is thus a "Muslim" which literally means "one who submits".

We may use the word Islam with a small "i" to denote the state of submission of all creation and the word "Muslim" with a small "m" to refer to all creation submitting, as they must, to the laws by which each was created.

Every created being, whether it is the sun with its life-giving light and warmth or the moon in its orbit, daffodils shooting up in the spring, golden leaves falling in the autumn to merge in the earth once more, a Christian, a Jew, a Hindu, a Buddhist, a Muslim or any other person breathing air – each in a fundamental sense, is a Muslim, that is one who submits to the laws and norms of God.

Human beings however are different from other creation in one respect. While they must obey natural laws relating to birth, life, and death, they have been given the power of intellect, which gives them the capacity to understand the universe and to shape their environment. More than that, they have been given the freedom to choose, whether to acknowledge the Creator and follow the Guidance He has provided or whether to

go against their inherently good nature and the purpose for which they were created.

If human beings use this freedom to acknowledge God and follow His Guidance, hence they live consciously in a state of Islam. They are no longer just passive Muslims like the rest of creation, but conscious Muslims as well.

When we speak of Islam, with a capital "I", we refer to the worldview described by the Qur'an in the first instance and the totality of guidance it contains. A Muslim (with a capital "M") is one who consciously accepts this worldview and follows the guidance it contains.

The Most Important Quality of a Person

Here we come to the most important quality or characteristic of an individual.

For many people in today's world, the most important characteristic of a person is the colour of his skin, whether he is black, white or brown. For others it is his economic, social or political situation - whether he is rich or poor, whether he is the ruler or the ruled, the oppressor or the oppressed.

For some people, the most important fact about a person is his place of birth and the language he speaks, his nation or his "tribe".

For others, a person's main characteristic is his social standing - whether he is regarded as an aristocrat, a middle-class bourgeois, or a working class individual.

The most important characteristic of a person, however, is none of these. In Islam a person's language or colour, for example has no social, economic or political significance. They are merely signs of the creative power of God to enable people to recognise one another.

The most important characteristic of a person is whether he is a believer in God or not.

Confronted with the full reality of existence, a person in complete knowledge and awareness acknowledges his dependence on the Creator for life and guidance. Such a person is described as a believer in God.

The Arabic word for belief is "*Iman*". It literally means "to know", "to believe", "to be convinced beyond the shadow of doubt". It does not mean blind irrational belief.

The Arabic word for a believer is "*Mu'min*". A *Mu'min* is one who knows and reposes unshakeable belief in the unity of God, in His attributes, in His law and guidance revealed to the prophets and in the Divine code of just recompense, of reward and punishment. Without *Iman* there can be no true and complete Islam.

On the other hand, a person who refuses to acknowledge his dependence on the Creator or indeed the existence of a Creator is described as a disbeliever.

The word for disbelief in Arabic is "*Kufr*", which literally means "to cover" or "to conceal".

A person who denies God is called a "*kafir*" (concealer) because he conceals by his disbelief what is inherent in his nature.

A *kafir* also implies one who is ungrateful, one who refuses to acknowledge the favours of his Lord and Creator.

To disbelieve is therefore to be unnatural and unreasonable.

All these lead us to the most important statement in Islam and in the life of a believer – the *Shahadah*.

The Shahadah

The word “*Shahadah*” in Arabic means “witness” or “testimony”. The first part of the *Shahadah* is expressed in just four words in Arabic: “*Lailaha illallah*” which means “There is no god except Allah”.

Lailaha illallah is a very simple, but very profound and far-reaching declaration. It is perhaps the most oft-repeated sentence in any language that has ever been spoken. It consists of two parts: one a negation, the other an affirmation.

The first part – *lailaha* (there is no other God) – negates the existence of each and any false god and condemns false worship. The word “*ila*” means “God” or whatever is worshipped and could refer to any being, person, matter or concept which is taken as an object of adoration or worship whether this is done out of love or fear.

In disobedience and ignorance, people have taken the sun, the moon, trees, stones, fire, rulers, prophets, priests, rabbis, saints and other men to be Gods.

But “*ila*”, as the Qur’an cautions us (25:43), could also refer to our whims and desires. To succumb or surrender totally to whims and passions is in effect to worship them and take them as Gods. The feeling of pride and vanity for example could become our “God” driving us to do totally selfish acts and causing us to trample on or destroy our natural moral inclinations and responsibilities.

The Qur’an speaks of “*shirk*” - equating or worshipping any other with/than God as the most atrocious act, “a tremendous wrong” and “a great sin” which will not be forgiven. The Prophet Muhammad was asked which is the gravest sin in the sight of God and he replied, “That

you should associate a partner with God (despite the fact) that He has created you.” This suggests that ingratitude to God is one of the reasons why *shirk* is such a grave sin.

The second part of the *Shahadah* - *illallah* - stresses that only Allah, the Arabic name for the One and Only God, the Creator and Sustainer of all beings, deserves to be worshipped and His Guidance followed.

One of Prophet Muhammad's companions, Shaddaad ibn Aws, saw his noble face filled with sadness and wondered why.

"I am afraid," said the Prophet, "of one thing for my community – *shirk* (which means worshipping others with God)!"

"Would your community commit *shirk* after you, Messenger of God?" asked Shaddaad.

"Shaddaad, they will not worship a sun or an idol or a stone but they would show off their deeds to people."

"Is this ostentation or pride (a form of) worshipping others besides God?" enquired Shaddaad.

"Yes," replied the Prophet who went on to warn people of this type of *shirk* because "it is more imperceptible than the crawling of an ant," he said.

Tawhid

One word in Arabic for “saying or affirming that God is One” is the word *Tawhid*. *Tawhid* is the affirmation that there is only One Creator who deserves our praise and gratitude and whose guidance needs to be followed for our own good and benefit. *Tawhid* has two main parts:

1. to believe in and affirm that there is only One Creator and Sustainer of the universe;
2. to affirm that only the One Creator deserves to be worshipped and obeyed.

Tawhid is the basis of the worldview of a conscious Muslim. It is the only reasonable, sound, correct and natural position for any person to adopt.

Tawhid ushers the individual

into a haven of freedom, contentment and harmony that stems from total submission to the Creator who is Beneficent, Compassionate, Loving, Forgiving, Mighty, Just and Worthy of all Praises.

Tawhid is also a powerful liberating force.

Tawhid liberates Mankind from the worship of false Gods.

Tawhid liberates man from the tyranny and oppression of other men, in as much as there is no obedience due to another creature which involves disobedience to the Creator.

Tawhid, by establishing a direct link between God and man, liberates man from the power of priests and clerical intermediaries and such acts as the worship of saints.

Tawhid liberates the human mind and conscience from all superstition and fancy, from



the grip of horoscopes and fortune-tellers, from magic and the sinister grip of occult practices.

Tawhid liberates a person from self-conceit, pride and the arrogance of self-sufficiency.

Tawhid therefore creates a unique blend of submission to God and individual freedom and dignity.

The Last Messenger

We now come to the second part of the *Shahadah* or the Muslim's testimony.

This is to declare that Muhammad is the Messenger of God. What does this declaration really mean and why is it so important for mankind?

This declaration affirms the historical fact that:

1. someone called Muhammad, who lived in the sixth-seventh century after the Prophet Jesus, was chosen by God to provide guidance to people;
2. he was not just one in the line of God's prophets chosen to guide people but that he was the last in this line of prophets;
3. his mission was for all mankind.

There will be no other prophet after Muhammad because the message or the revelation given to him – the Qur'an – is Divine Guidance completed. There is the stated guarantee that it will be preserved in the form it was revealed; it will not be changed or corrupted like previous Scriptures.

The Qur'an has been preserved just as it was revealed. It will continue to be man's only source of authentic guidance to truth and his existing link with reality.

To declare that Muhammad is the Messenger of God is to declare all these and more. It is to state that Islam as a system and way of life is both a message and a method of implementing this message.

Whereas the Qur'an is the final expression of God's message and guidance

to mankind, the life and example of Muhammad as the last Prophet of God to humanity represents the way or method in which God's message has been and can be implemented.

The importance of the Prophet's example has been stressed in the Qur'an:

"Verily in the Messenger of God, you will find an excellent example for whoever hopes for God and the Last Day."

"Whatever the Messenger (Muhammad) has brought for you, adopt it; and from whatever he has prohibited you, keep away from it."

And the Prophet himself said shortly before he died:

"I am leaving behind two things which if you hold fast onto them, you will never go astray – the Book of God (the Qur'an) and my example (Sunnah)."

Where the Qur'an is

essentially the Message of God, the *Sunnah* or example of the Prophet is collated as “Hadiths” which includes what he did, said (or was reported to have said), agreed to, and it represents the method of implementing the Message of the Qur’an.



Message and Method

Some of the major concerns of the mission and method of the Prophet are eloquently presented in a speech which one of his companions, Ja'far ibn Abii Taalib, made to the ruler of Abyssinia in Africa. Ja'far was the spokesman of a group of Muslims who has sailed across the Red Sea and sought refuge in Abyssinia from the persecution of the pagan Makkans:

"O King," he said, "We were a people of ignorance, worshipping idols, eating the flesh of dead animals, committing abominations, neglecting our relations, doing evil to our neighbours, and the strong among us would oppress the weak.

We were in this state when God sent to us a Messenger from among us, whose descent and sincerity, trustworthiness and honesty were known to us.

He summoned us to worship the One True God and to divest ourselves of the stones and idols we and our fathers had been worshipping in addition to God.

He ordered us to be truthful of speech, to fulfill all that entrusted to us, to care for our relatives, to be kind to our neighbours, to refrain from unlawful food and the consumption of blood.

He forbade us to engage in shameful acts and false speech. He commanded us to worship God alone and to assign no partners unto Him, to pray, to pay the purifying tax and to fast.

We deemed him truthful and we believed him and we followed the Message he brought to us from God..."

From Ja'far's speech on the mission and method of the Prophet, we see that the first thing he stressed was the

worldview of Tawhid. To be on the straight and natural way, man's first duty is to gain or regain a correct knowledge of and belief in God. From this knowledge he will come to accept the Wisdom and Authority of God. From this will spring correct action.

As an indication of this method of the Prophet, peace be upon him, his wife 'Aa'ishah is reported as saying that the Prophet did not start by telling people not to drink wine and commit fornication. He started by telling them about God and the Hereafter until they had firm belief in them. It is only then he told them not to drink or commit adultery and they obeyed him. *"Had he started by telling them not to drink wine or commit adultery, they would have said, we will never abandon them."*

From Ja'far's speech, we learn that the Prophet encouraged all the natural, in-built moral virtues such as truth,

kindness, generosity, and justice. And he condemned all the naturally repugnant vices such as false speech, shamelessness, ignorance, and oppression.

There is also the testimony of Ja'far on the truthfulness of the Prophet. Both before and after he became a Prophet, Muhammad had the unchallenged reputation of man who was always truthful and trustworthy. For this he was known as *As-Sadiq* and *Al-Amin* respectively.

In fact, mission and method fused in the Prophet since we are told by 'Aa'ishah, his wife: "His character was the Qur'an." To reject the Prophet is to reject the Qur'an and to reject the Qur'an is to reject Man's only authentic source of Divine Guidance.

Prophet Muhammad

"Never has a man set for himself, voluntarily or involuntarily, a more sublime aim, since this aim was superhuman: to subvert superstitions which had been interposed between man and his Creator, to render God unto man and man unto God; to restore the rational and sacred idea of divinity amidst the chaos of the material and disfigured gods of idolatry, then existing."

"Never has a man undertaken a work so far beyond human power with so feeble means, for he (Muhammad) had in the conception as well as in the execution of such a great design no other instrument than himself, and no other aid, except a handful of men living in a corner of the desert. Finally, never has a man accomplished such a huge and lasting revolution in the world..."

"If greatness of purpose, smallness of means, and astounding results are the true criteria of human genius, who could dare to compare any great man in modern history with Muhammad? The most famous men created arms, laws, and empires only. They founded, if anything at all, no more than material powers which often crumbled away from their eyes. This man moved out not only armies, legislation's, empires, peoples and dynasties, but also millions of men in one third of the inhabited world, and more than that, he moved the altars, the gods, the religions, the ideas, the beliefs, and the souls. On the basis of a Book, every letter of which has become law, he created a

spiritual nationality which blended together people of every tongue and of every race. He has left us – as the indelible characteristics of this Muslim nationality – the hatred of false gods and the passion for the One and immaterial God. The conquest of one-third of the earth to his dogma was his miracle; rather it was not the miracle of a man but that of reason.”

“His life, his meditations, his heroic revilings against the superstitions of his country, and his boldness in defying the furies of idolatry, his firmness in enduring them for thirteen years at Makkah, his acceptance of the role of public scorn and almost of being a victim of his fellow countrymen: all these and finally, his migration, his incessant preaching, his wars against odds, his faith in his success and his superhuman security in misfortune, his forbearance in victory, his ambition, which was entirely devoted to one idea and in no manner striving for an empire, his endless prayers, his mystic conversations with God, his death and his triumph after death – all these (served) to affirm conviction which gave him the power to restore a creed...”

“Philosopher, orator, apostle, legislator, warrior, conqueror of ideas, restorer of rational dogmas, of a cult without images; the founder of twenty terrestrial empires and of one spiritual empire, that is Muhammad. As regards all standards by which human greatness may be measured, we may well ask: Is there any man greater than he?”

(Lamartine, “Histoire de la Turquie”, Paris, 1854)

We now have some idea of the importance of the Qur'an and the example of the Prophet Muhammad in forming a valid and satisfying worldview for man in whatever time or place he may live. Since the Qur'an is the final and complete Message of God to humanity and since there will be no prophet after Muhammad, it is especially important for people everywhere to discover or rediscover the meaning and relevance of the Qur'an to their lives.

Whether you live in the north or the south, the east or the west, whether you live in the so-called developed and advanced world or the under-developed and impoverished world, whether you are a male or female, young or old, the Qur'an has a message for you. In fact, it is the Message for you.

We have only had a glimpse of the content of the Qur'an and its purpose for man. We have seen that it stresses the Oneness of God and man's duty to acknowledge and worship God alone. We now want to look a little more closely at what the Qur'an says about the nature of man, the purpose of his life and the various choices and destinies open to him. In other words: Who are we? What are we doing here on earth? And where do we go from here?

Human Nature

According to the Qur'anic or Islamic worldview, the human being - man and woman - is created by God in a naturally good and pure state, free from sin. This is called the state of *fitrah*. A baby at birth is totally innocent. He does not bear the sin or guilt of his parents or his ancestors. He starts off with a clean state.

"And so, set your face steadfastly towards the (one) ever-true faith, turning away from all that is false, in accordance with the natural disposition (fitrah) which God has instilled into man, (for) not to allow any change to corrupt what God has thus created – this is the purpose of the ever-true faith, but most people know it not."

(The Qur'an, 30:30)

"Each child is born in a natural state of goodness (fitrah). It is only his parents that later turn him into a Jew, a Christian or a Magian."

(Hadith or Saying of the Prophet Muhammad)

Note: The term "parents" in the above hadith has the wider meaning of "social influences" or "environment". The religions named were the ones best known at the time of the Prophet but refer to any religion or worldview which takes a person away from his natural disposition.

Good and Evil

The human being, as we mentioned earlier, was created with an in-built moral sense which allows him to recognize what is true and good from what is false and evil. "Good" may be defined as whatever is pleasing to God and therefore beneficial to man. "Evil" may be defined as whatever incurs the anger of God and is therefore harmful to man. Although God created mankind in a naturally good state,

He also created him with the capacity or power to do both good and evil. He gave him the freedom to choose between doing good and doing evil. The existence of good and evil therefore is closely connected with man's freedom of choice and responsibility for his actions. Evil comes from the intentions and actions of man. Evil does not come from God and God is not responsible for evil.

To preserve the pure and sinless state in which he was born, one of man's main tasks is to keep away from or ward off evil. This is why *taqwa*, which is repeatedly stressed in the Qur'an, is the most important quality a person could develop in relation to good and evil.

Taqwa means to be conscious of God and to be careful of not overstepping the limits set by God. It is a defence against evil and temptation. It keeps man within the boundaries of his natural state. It is often difficult to remain within these limits because man, as we have mentioned, has the capacity or the power to go against his naturally good nature. He has a certain weakness from which all his major ills spring. This weakness is described in the Qur'an as *da'f* which also connotes "pettiness" and "narrowness of mind".

Man, if he is sensible, ought to follow his good nature and confirm this good nature with good intentions and actions. But he is often foolish and, encouraged sometimes by other foolish creatures, succumbs to his weakness and narrow mindedness. This will be expressed in pride, selfishness, hatred of others and other forms of evil. This in turn gives rise to greed, plunder, destruction, rapacious wars and other forms of injustice.

The more a person indulges in evil the more “rust” he accumulates on his pure heart until it may even become “sealed” and impenetrable to good influence. Before this state is reached, a person may still have the opportunity to “return” to his original good nature by repentance and good deeds. This is what the Qur’anic term “*tawbah*” signifies – to return to one’s original good state. Make “*tawbah*”, is the standard Islamic advice given to one who has erred.



Freedom and Responsibility

We can see then that Man was not created to be selfish and destructive. He was not created in vain to live in hopelessness and despair. He was created with the noble and natural purpose of acknowledging and worshipping God. God favoured man with the power of intellect and honoured him by making him His "*Khalifah*" or steward on earth. Man thus enjoys an essential nobility and greatness over other creation. Being God's *Khalifah*, he has a special role and responsibility to creation. Everything in the heavens and on earth has been put at the disposal of man as a trust or "*Amanah*".

This trust required man to live in harmony with the will of the Creator, in harmony with his own natural self and with the needs of the rest of creation. When man works for this universal harmony, he is a Muslim in

the complete sense of the word. He is virtuous. On the other hand, when man works against this natural order, he creates discord, injustice and evil. He is vicious.

By virtue of the intellect and the freedom of choice given to him, man is thus responsible for whatever he does.

The Future Life

It is unreasonable to expect that the virtuous and the vicious in this world should be treated in the same manner by the Wise, Just and Merciful Creator.

This is why it is reasonable and natural to believe in life after death and the Day of Judgement where all will be called to account for their deeds.

Man's responsibility and accountability is thus a major theme of the *Qu'ran*.

The *Qu'ran* asserts that a future life is both desirable and possible. If there is no future life in which the virtuous are rewarded and the vicious punished, there would be no justice and there would be no purpose in creating men with a sense of responsibility and in sending prophets to them to remind them of their responsibilities.

God says in the *Qu'ran*:

"What, does man reckon he shall be left to roam at will?"

"What, did you think that We created you only for sport and that you would not be returned to Us?"

On the possibility of future life and of resurrection, the *Qur'an* argues that if it is God who created man in the first place why should it be impossible for Him to recreate man after he dies. Life after death is therefore an important part of the worldview of Islam.

From this brief description, we can therefore see that the *Qu'ran* presents an

integrated and harmonious view of reality. It describes the Nature of God, the nature of the universe and the nature of man.

It sets out the various choices and destinies open to man.

It deals with the nature of good and evil. It deals with the causes of an individual's happiness and discontent. It deals with treatments of societies and civilization and points to the real reasons for their rise, decline and fall.

Over and over, it encourages man to be mindful of his nature and his responsibilities and holds out the promise of eternal peace and satisfaction. Equally it warns of pain and punishment for those who transgress the limits set by God.

The Qur'an is not content merely to ask people to do good and eschew evil in a general way.

It specifies the ways in which people can do good for their spiritual, physical, social, political and economic good.

It specifies the ways in which they bring loss and destruction to their individual and collective existence.

This is what gives Islam a certain stability. Its Ethical and Legal Code or *Shari'ah* contains not only detailed laws but fixed principles which define what is lawful and what is prohibited.

All that the *Shari'ah* prohibits can be shown to be injurious to man and society and his environment. People are not left forever groping and experimenting.

Islam is capable of solving many of the problems that afflict individuals and humanity today. However, it is not just a set of solutions for problems but *the Natural Way* to all that is good in this world and the Hereafter.

It is the way open and available to all men at all times who wish to learn the truth and shape all aspects of their lives by it.

*"For to God belong
the east and the
west and His
Mercy is near to
all who call upon
Him."*

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## NOTES

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**ISBN 978-981-08-0302-5**