



Chapter 1

Fundamental Beliefs in Islam

Islam identifies the following set of beliefs as its articles of faith:

1. The belief in the existence and oneness of God. A Muslim should believe in the existence of one God. He is the sole creator and He has absolute control over His creation. He has no partners and He is unique in His attributes. He alone deserves to be worshiped, and to Him alone we look for help and support. «Say: "He is God, the One and Only; God, the eternal, Absolute; He begets not, nor is He begotten; And there is none like Him"». [112:1- 4]. «Say: "Shall I take for my protector any other than God, the Creator of the heavens and earth? And He it is that feeds but is not fed"». «Say: "No, but I am commanded to be the first of those who bow to God (in Islam), and be not of the company of those who join gods with God"». [6: 14]. «Say: "Truly, my prayer and my rites, my life and my death; are all for God, the Lord of the worlds. No partner has He; this I have been commanded, and I am the first of those who bow to His will"». «Say: "Shall I seek for my Lord other than God, when He is the Lord of all things that exist ?"». [6:162- 164]
2. The belief in all messengers of God. God chose these men from among mankind to deliver His message to the people, to call them to believe in God, and to exhort them do righteous deeds.

3. The belief in the angels. The angels are God's ambassadors who conveyed His revelation to His messengers.
4. The belief in all revealed Scriptures. These are the scriptures which contain God's message to mankind.
5. The belief in the hereafter. God's message assures us of resurrection after death and of a Day of Judgment where we will be held accountable for our deeds on earth.

Pronouncing the Confession of Faith (Asshahada) Summarizes the Creed and the Fundamentals of the Law:

Pronouncing the confession of faith (Asshahada) is the key to becoming a Muslim. The minute a person pronounces, «I bear witness that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is His messenger» that person becomes a Muslim.

The belief in the oneness of God implies the belief in God as the Lord and the Deity. The word «Lord» refers to the attribute of God as the Creator and the Guardian of his creation, while the word «Deity» refers to God's right to be worshiped by His creation.

The belief in Muhammad as the messenger of God entails belief in the angels, in the revealed books, in all messengers of God, in the Day of Judgment, as well as in the laws and injunctions that he brought forward as part of the message. The Quran says: «The Apostle believes in what has been revealed to him from His Lord, as do the men of faith. Each one of them believes in God, His Angels, His Books, and His Apostles. We make no distinction between one and another of His Apostles». [2:285]. «It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards East or West; but it is righteousness to believe in God and the

Last day, and the Angels, and the Book, and the prophets.....».
[2:177].

The Criterion of Islám:

The criterion that differentiates between Muslims and non-Muslims is the belief in the existence, oneness, and uniqueness of God. A person who does not believe in the existence, oneness, and uniqueness of God, or associates partners with God, or does not believe in the Message that was delivered to the Messengers in the revealed Books brought down by the Angels, or believes in one prophet and does not believe in the other, or does not believe in the Day of Judgment, or does not believe in the laws that God has decreed and which show what is lawful and what is forbidden, is not considered a Muslim. This person cannot be treated as a Muslim during his life.

However, this does not mean that this person is considered by God to be a kafir whose eternal abode is hell fire. Only those who receive the message in its pure form and believe in its truth but choose to reject it for one reason or another (e.g. arrogance, stubbornness, fear of losing power or money, peer pressure) are classified as such. Thus, God does not consider a person who seeks the truth but has no access to the message, received it in a distorted way, was not able to comprehend it, or was not able to grasp its truth, a kafir that deserves to remain forever in hell fire. Only those who reject the belief in God because of their arrogance and stubbornness are not forgiven by God: «And they rejected those signs in iniquity and arrogance, though their souls were convinced thereof». [27:14].

The Way to Islam:

Islam recognizes that true faith cannot be acquired under duress. The Quran states «There is no compulsion in religion» [2:256]. Furthermore, God addresses the prophet in the Quran by saying: «If it had been your Lord's will, all who are on earth would have believed. Will you then compel mankind, against their will, to believe». [10:99].

Nor does Islam depend on magic or physical miracles to overwhelm people and force them into becoming believers without rationale thought, reflection and free choice. God says: «If such was Our will, We could have sent down to them from the sky a sign, to which they would bend their necks in humility». [26:4]. This verse affirms that God's will is for people to believe based on their free choice.

The way to Islam, then, is through rational thought as well as natural feelings. One should consider and reflect upon the signs and logical arguments that are mentioned in the Quran, such as those supporting the existence, oneness, and perfection of God.

Rational Reflection:

One of the main themes in the Quran is God's request that man reflect upon the creation of the universe and the delicate balance between its components. The Quran then develops the thesis that the creation and the control of the universe necessitate the existence of one God. Only the Lord, who has comprehensive knowledge, mighty power and extreme wisdom could have created this vast and intricate universe and the laws that maintain its balance and harmony. The universe runs according to the will of God until an appointed hour is reached,

at which time the universe will cease to be and the Hereafter will begin. Several verses have been cited in the Quran affirming this. «When the sky is rent asunder; And obeys its Lord and it must do so; And when the earth is flattened out; and casts forth what is within it and becomes empty». [84:1- 4]. «When the sky is cleft asunder; When the stars are scattered; When the oceans are suffered to burst forth; When the graves are turned upside down; (Then) shall each soul know what it has sent forward and (what it has) kept back». [82:1- 5]. «When the sun is folded up; When the stars are made to lose its luster; When the mountains are made to pass away; When the she- camels are left untended; When the wild beasts are herded together; When the oceans boil over with a swell; When the souls are sorted out; When the female (infant) buried alive, is questioned for what crime she was killed; When the scrolls are laid open; When the sky is unveiled; When the blazing Fire is kindled to fierce heat; And when the garden is brought near; (Then) shall each soul know what it has put forward». [81: 1-14]. All of these verses point to one fact, a creation of this magnitude and delicate balance could not have been achieved by chance.

The Quran urges man to reflect on God's signs in the universe: «Surely, in the creation of the heavens and earth; and the alternation of night and day; and the ships that sail through the oceans for the benefit of mankind; and the rain which God sends down from the sky; and the life which He gives therewith to an earth that has died; and the beasts of all kinds that He scatters through the earth; and the change of the winds ; and the clouds which trail like their slaves between the sky and the earth; are signs for people who understand» [2:164]. «And in the earth are tracts side by side, and gardens of grapes, corn, and palm

trees having one root and others having distinct roots- they watered with the same water, yet some of them We make more excellent than others to eat. Behold, surely in these things are signs for people who understand».[13:4]. «With power and skill did We built the Firmament, for it is We who have vast power. And We have spread out the earth; how excellently have We spread it out; And of every thing We have created pairs; that you may reflect».[51:47- 49]

Natural Inclination:

The Quran alludes to the natural human inclination that guides us to the existence and oneness of God. Deep down in the conscience of each individual, lies dormant the concept of the existence of the Creator. One can discover this fact only when he is able to shed the chains of bondage of this material life. This may happen when man objectively faces the simple question: who created this universe? Alternatively, it may happen when a calamity befalls him and he realizes that there is no way out of the adversity without the help of God. This concept is explained in the following verses: «If you were to question them: who created the heavens and the earth?, they would surely respond: "they were created by Him Who is exalted in power, full of knowledge"». [43:9]

«When We bestow favors on man, he turns away, and gets himself remote on his side; and when evil seizes him, he comes with prolonged prayers» [41:51]. «When a wave covers them like the canopy, they call to God, offering Him sincere devotion. But when He has delivered them safely to land, there are among them those that falter between (right and wrong). But none rejects Our Signs except the ungrateful wretch». [31:32]. «He it

is Who enables you to traverse through land and sea till you are aboard ships; and they sail in a favorable wind; and they rejoice thereat; then comes a stormy wind and the waves come to them from all sides; and they think they are being overwhelmed. They pray to God; sincere to Him in obedience, saying "If You do deliver us from this; we shall truly show our gratitude"»[10:22]

The Quran also describes a repenting Pharaoh, seeking forgiveness and declaring his belief in one God, once he realized that he could not escape from the fate of drowning in the sea. However, his repentance came too late: «We took the children of Israel across the sea. Pharaoh and his hosts followed them in insolence and spite. At length, when overwhelmed by the flood, he said: "I believe that there is no god except Him Whom the Children of Israel believe in; I am of those who submit to God". (It was said to him): "Ah now! But a little while before, you were in rebellion- and you did mischief. This day shall We save you in the body, that you may be a sign to those who come after you!" But surely, many among mankind are heedless of Our signs» [10:90-92].

Belief in the Angels, the Books, the Messengers, and the Hereafter:

The Quran uses the miracle of the universe's creation as a logical argument to guide mankind to the belief in the existence and oneness of God. The Quran itself is the lasting miracle that guides man to the belief in the Angels, the Books, the Messengers and the Hereafter. Based on the arguments that we have discussed earlier, one reaches the conclusion that the Quran is a revelation from God. As such, one should believe in its truth. «And you did not recite a Book before this, nor did you

transcribe one with your right hand; for then, indeed, would the talkers of vanity have doubted. No, here are signs self-evident in the hearts of those endowed with knowledge, and none but the unjust rejects Our signs. Yet they say: "Why are not signs sent down to him from his Lord?", Say: "The signs are indeed with God, and I am indeed a clear Warner". And is it not enough for them that We have sent down to you the Book which is rehearsed to them? Surely, in it is Mercy and a Reminder to those who believe». [29:48-51].

God's Attributes:

The Quran mentions the names that God (SWT) chose to describe Himself. These names represent God's attributes and describe His characteristics. Among these attributes are: the One, the Sanctuary, the Holy, the Omniscient, the Dominating, the Absolute, the First, the Last, the Creator, the Originator, the Fashioner, the Superb, the Potent, the Vanquisher, the Protector, the Maintainer, the Merciful, the Compassionate, the Ruthful, the Benevolent, the Subtile, the Clement, the Donor of Livelihood, and the Bestower. These attributes show the perfection and uniqueness of God. The name that encompasses all attributes in one is the word «Allah». Accordingly, Muslims refer to the word «Allah» as the «majestical word».

These are the names that a Muslim should use when calling upon his Lord. Reflection on these names allows the Muslim to understand the supreme qualities of God, and calling upon Him often using these names brings the Muslim nearer to his Lord. «Say: Call upon God, or call upon Rahman, by whatever name you call upon Him, (it is well), for to Him belong the most beautiful names». [17:110]. Moreover, these are the only names that a Muslim is allowed to use when calling upon his Lord. As

God knows best how we should call upon Him, we should not add to or alter any of these names. «The most beautiful names belong to God; so call on Him using these names; but shun those who violate the sanctity of His names». [7:180].

The Essence of God:

The Quran states that the essence of God is beyond man's comprehension. The way to recognize God is by contemplating His attributes and the manifestations thereof. These manifestations can only be those of a sublime and perfect being. God is unique, and cannot be incarnated or united with any other being. «That is God, your Lord, there is no god but He, the creator of all things; then worship Him; and He has power to dispose of all affairs. No vision can grasp Him, but His grasp is over (all) vision; He is Knower of subtleties, the All-Cognizant». [6:102-103]

That God's essence is beyond our comprehension is alluded to in the story of prophet Moses. Moses requested God to give him the ability to see Him. «God said: "By no means can you see Me (directly); but look upon the Mount; if it remains firm in its place, then will you see Me". When his Lord manifested Himself on to the Mount, He made it crumble and Moses fell down in a swoon; when he recovered his senses, he said: "Glory be to You, to You I turn in repentance, and I am the first to believe". God said: "O" Moses, I have chosen you above (other men) with My mission and the words I have spoken to you; take then (the revelation) which I give you, and be of those who are grateful"». [7:143:144].

It is a fundamental belief in Islam that God's nature is beyond

the grasp of human intelligence. The ability of the human mind is limited and thus cannot comprehend the question of the nature of God. Man can only discover God through reflecting upon His creation and through one's natural instinct.

The Oneness of God:

Islam is based on the concept of the oneness of God: the Guardian-Lord and the Deity. As a Guardian-Lord, He is the Creator. He alone runs and controls the affairs of the universe. As a Deity, it is only He who deserves to be worshiped and only He whose help should be sought. These two aspects are interrelated and in many cases are inseparable. «O you people! Worship your Guardian-Lord, who created you and those who came before you, that you may become righteous. Who has made the earth a resting place for you, and the heavens your canopy; and sent down rain from the heavens; and brought forth therewith fruits for your sustenance; then set not up equals unto God while you know». [2:21-22]. «Those whom they invoke besides God create nothing and are themselves created. They are dead, lifeless, and they know not when they will be raised up; Your God is One God». [16:20-22]

Islam is against Polytheism:

Islam condemned those who believe in polytheism as well as those who worshiped created objects like the sun, the moon, or man made idols. In the Quran, mankind is challenged to justify the existence of more than one God. «Say: "If there had been (other) gods with Him, as they say, then certainly they would have sought out a way to the Lord of the Throne"». [17:42]. «If there had been in the heavens and the earth gods besides God, they would both have certainly been in a state of disorder. But

glory be to God, the Lord of the Throne. He is high above what they attribute to Him».[21:22]. «No son did God beget, nor is there any god along with Him; (if there were many gods), then each god would have taken away what he has created; and some would have overpowered the others! Glory be to God (He is free) from what they attribute to Him. He knows the unseen and the seen; He is exalted above what they associate with Him» [23:91]. «Say: "O" people of the Book! Come to a just agreement between us and you: That we worship none but God; that we associate no partners with Him; we take not from among ourselves, lords other than God"». [3:64]. «I have set my face, firmly and truly, towards Him, Who created the heavens and the earth, and never shall I associate partners with God».[6:79]

The Unseen World: The Angels:

Belief in the angels is the second article of faith, coming after the belief in God (SWT). The Quran states that the angels are part of the unseen world. Their nature is different from the materialistic nature of mankind. «Say: "Had there been angles on earth walking in peace and quiet, We would certainly have sent down to them from heavens an angel as an apostle"».[17:95]. The Quran also states that the angels are «honored worshippers, they do not precede Him in speech and they act only according to His commands». [21:26-27]

The angels are given different tasks which deal with the spiritual aspects of human life. Some angels are entrusted with the task of relaying God's orders and revelation to His messengers. «And surely this is a revelation from the Lord of the worlds. The Faithful Spirit has descended with it upon your heart, that you may be a Warner».[26:192-194]. Some are given

the task of supporting the prophets and helping the believers to be steadfast. «We gave clear signs to Isa son of Marium, and strengthened him with the Holy Spirit».[2:253]. «When your Lord inspired the angels: "I am with you, therefore, help the believers to stand firm"».[8:12]. And some are asked to bring glad tidings of excellent rewards to the believers who did righteous deeds and followed God's commandments. «As for those who say: "Our Lord is God, then continued on the straight path", the angels descend upon them from time to time, saying: "Fear not, nor grieve and receive the good news of the Garden which you were promised"».[41:30]. Some angels have the task of repossessing the souls of people at the time of death. «Say: "the angel of death, put in charge of you, will take your souls"».[32:11]. «Those whom the angels cause to die in a good state, saying: "Peace be on you, enter the Garden for what you did"».[16:32]. «When the angels take the souls of those who die in sin».[4:97]. Some angels are entrusted with the duty of recording the deeds of people during their lives. These records will be presented to the people on the Day of Judgment. «But surely, over you are appointed angels to protect you, honorable recorders, they know what you do».[82:10-12].

These are some of the tasks that the angels have been created to fulfill, all of which belong to the spiritual realm of human life.

The Quran also describes the angels as messengers who have power and wings. «God chooses messengers from among the angels and from among men».[22:75]. «All praise is due to God, the Originator of the heavens and the earth. The Maker of the angels messengers with wings, two, or three or four. He adds to His creation what He wishes; surely God has power over all things».[35:1].

Muslims rely on the Quran as the only source of belief in the unseen. They realize that believing in the angels is one of the articles of faith. They also realize that, there is no need to go beyond the unequivocal statements, contained in the Quran, about the angels. For example, there is no need to indulge in speculation about the nature of their creation, their characteristics, nor what they look like. The angels are part of the unseen world – one with boundaries that have been sealed and are impenetrable by man. We believe that the angels are obedient to God and they are His ambassadors to the creation.

The Unseen World: The Jinn

The Quran tells about another kind of creation that inhabits the world of the unseen: the Jinn. The Jinn are portrayed as having different characteristics, thus setting them apart from the angels. While the Quran is silent about the matter from which angels are created, it states explicitly that the Jinn are created out of fire. «And the Jinn We created before, of intensely hot fire». [15:27]. «And He created the Jinn of a smoke less of fire». [55:15].

The angels are described as honored servants. They do not disobey God in the least and they do as they are commanded. However, among the Jinn, there are the righteous and there are also those who transgress. «Those who submit, they aim at the right way. And as for those who deviate, they are the fuel of hell». [72: 14-15].

Furthermore, while the angels are the ambassadors who communicate God's revelation to the prophets and the messengers, the Jinn are among those who receive the revelation

through the prophets and the messengers. «Behold, We turned towards you a party of the Jinn listening to the Quran. When they stood in the presence thereof, they said: "listen in silence". When the reading was finished, they returned to their people, to warn them. They said: "O our people, we have heard a Book revealed after Moses, confirming what came before it, it guides to the truth and to the straight path. O" our people, respond to the one who invites to God, and believe in Him. He will forgive your sins and deliver you from a grievous chastisement"». [46:29-31].

The Jinn receive the revelation through the prophets. They are able to comprehend it and have the ability to believe and call their people to the guidance. They bring glad tidings to those who obey, and they warn those who chose to disobey. These characteristics are quite different from those attributed to the angels. Thus, while the angels are not given the responsibility associated with having free will, the Jinn, together with mankind, are given this responsibility. This is further affirmed by the Quranic mention of the fact that, on the Day of Judgment, God will address both Jinn and mankind. «And on the day when He shall gather them all together: "O assembly of Jinn! You took away a great part of mankind". And their friends from among the men shall say: "Our Lord! Some of us profited by others and we have reached our appointed term which you did appoint for us". He shall say: "The fire is your abode for ever, except as may be the will of God"». [6:128]. «O assembly of jinn and men! "Did there not come to you Messengers from among you, reciting to you My verses and warning you of the meeting of this day of yours ?"». [6:130]

Throughout Chapter 55 in the Quran, titled «the Beneficent»,

Jinn and mankind are portrayed as two groups who belong to the same category. They are addressed together using the same statements. «He created man from dry clay like the clay of pottery, and He created jinn from a flame of fire. Which then of the blessings of your Lord will you deny ?» [55:14-15]. «We shall attend to you. O you two hosts. Which then of the blessings of you Lord will you deny? O assembly of jinn and men if you are able to pass through the regions of the heavens and earth, then pass through; you will not be able to pass through except with authority». [55:31-34]

Quran tends to attach angels to the lofty and spiritual side of human life, while Jinn are depicted as having similar characteristics as those which mankind enjoy. Both are capable of committing evil deeds. One of the short chapters of Quran commands man to seek refuge with God from the evil of both Jinn and mankind. «Say: "I seek refuge with the Lord of mankind, the King of mankind, the God of mankind, from the evil of the whisperer, who whispers (the devil that whispers evil) in the breasts of mankind of jinn and mankind"». [114:1-6].

It is also clear that, while the belief in the angels, as a creation of God and as His ambassadors to the messengers is a basic component of the Islamic creed, the belief in the Jinn is not. Quran simply mentions Jinn as a part of the creation of God.

Muslims also should believe that the angels are entrusted with certain duties which are closely associated with the intended function of the religion. It is their duty to guide man to the right path, and strengthen man in his pursuit of excellence in this life. Jinn, on the other hand, bear a striking resemblance to mankind in that they both need guidance.

The Quran describes these metaphysical creatures but does not provide any proof for their existence. Therefore, believing in the existence of these creatures is based on our belief in the truthfulness of the Quranic account.

The Spirit:

The Quran did not elaborate on the nature of the spirit or the soul of man. The only reference to the spirit is that it is something that God breathes into the human body to give it life. Life ends when the spirit departs the body. «And when I have formed him (Adam) fully and breathed into him of My spirit, fall down before him in prostration».[15:29]. «Why, then when (the last breath) comes up to the throat (of a dying man) the while you are (helplessly) looking on».[56:83-84]. Nothing in the Qur'an precludes against embarking on a scientific investigation to explore the nature of the spirit.

The concept of the soul or the spirit as the essence of life should not be confused with the word "spirit" which has been used in the Quran to describe the divine inspiration (or the Quran itself). «And thus, too (O Muhammad) have We revealed to you a «spirit» (a life-giving message) at our behest». [42:52]. The Quran tells us that the nature of this inspiration is beyond human intelligence. «And they ask you about the spirit (the divine inspiration). Say: "This inspiration comes at my Lord's behest; and (you cannot understand its nature, O men since) you have been granted very little knowledge"». [17:85].

Evidence from the Quran and the tradition of the prophet (mpbuh) indicates that after death, the spirit of a person enjoys either bliss or hell. «But do not think of those that have been

slain in God's cause as dead. Nay, they are alive! With their Sustainer have they their sustenance. Exulting in that (martyrdom) which God has bestowed upon them out of His bounty». [3:169-170]

Belief in the Messengers

Guidance was communicated to mankind through two links: the angels formed the link between God and the Messenger, and the prophets formed the link between the angels and mankind. Given that prophets were meant to be emulated and so that they may be understood clearly by mankind, it was necessary that prophets be human beings themselves. They had to be especially chosen and prepared by God for this highly spiritual and demanding task. They had to be able to receive, memorize, deliver and act upon the revelation that was communicated to them. They had to act as leaders who provided living examples for people in applying God's message. They had to be infallible in communicating the message. «And (even) before your time, (O Muhammad,) We never sent (as apostles) any but (mortal) men, whom We have inspired: and if you have not (yet) realized this, ask the followers of (earlier) revelation. (They will tell you that their prophets, too, were but mortal men, whom we had endowed) with all evidence of the truth and with books of divine wisdom. And We have bestowed upon you, from on high, this reminder so that you might make clear to mankind all that has ever been thus bestowed on them and that they might reflect». [16: 43-44].

Oneness of the Message

God created man to play a central role on Earth. Man was created with the propensity to both good and evil. God's message

came down to strengthen man's inclination towards good and to help him manage his affairs wisely. God's message was delivered through a succession of prophets to ensure that guidance was available to the successive generations of mankind.

«For there never was any community but a Warner has gone among them». [35:24].

The successive messages came with the same objective: to guide man to the path of pursuit of perfection. The basic underpinnings of all these messages were exactly the same. «He has ordained for you that which He had enjoined upon Noah-and into which We gave you insight through revelation- as well as that which We had enjoined upon Abraham, Moses, and Jesus: "be steadfast in upholding the faith and do not break up your unity therein"». [42:13]. In explaining the roles of the previous messengers, Prophet Muhammad gave the following simile: the prophets are like a group of builders who were entrusted with establishing a building. They came one after the other, each adding to the building until it was completed. They had a covenant with God to establish the building. «And Lo, God accepted, through the prophets this solemn covenant: if after all the revelation and the wisdom which I have vouchsafed unto you, there comes to you an apostle confirming the truth already in your possession, you must believe in him and aid him. Do you - said He- "acknowledge and accept My bond on this condition?" They answered: "We acknowledge it". Said He: "Then bear witness thereto and I should be your witness"». [3:81]

Belief in All Prophets

A cornerstone of the Islamic creed is to believe equally in all prophets of God. «...And who believe in that which was revealed to you and that which was revealed before your time». [2:4]. «Say: "We believe in God, and in the revelation given to us, and to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the tribes, and that given to Moses, and Jesus, and that given to (all) prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and it is unto Him we submit"». [2:136]

Those who believe in one prophet and reject another are outside the bounds of Islam. The Qur'an rebukes those who do this. «Verily, those who deny God and His apostles by endeavoring to separate between God and His apostles, and who say: "We believe in one but we deny the other", and want to pursue a path in between, it is they who are truly denying the truth, and for those who deny the truth We have prepared shameful suffering». [4:150:151]

As for those who believe in all prophets, the Quran promises a great reward. «To those who believe in God and His apostles and make no distinction between any of them, We shall soon give their (due) reward; for God is oft forgiving, Most Merciful». [4:152]

Muhammad is the Final Prophet

Muslims believe in Muhammad (pbuh) as the seal of the prophets and the messengers of God. His message came to guide man in his pursuit of perfection. This message opens the doors for material and spiritual fulfillment to mankind. «Muhammad is not the father of any one of your men, but is God's apostle and the seal of all prophets». [33:40]. «Today I have completed your

religion and have completed My favor upon you and have chosen for you Islam as your religion». [5:3]

The Universality of the Message

The Quran states that the last message that was revealed to Muhammad, the seal of the prophets, is a universal message. The message was sent to all people, in all places and at all times.

«Say (O Muhammad): "O mankind verily, I am sent to you all as the Messenger of God"». [7:158]

«This Quran has been revealed to me that I may therewith warn you and whomsoever it may reach». [6:19]. «And We have sent you (O Muhammad) not but as a mercy for all creatures». [22:107]. «And We have not sent you (O Muhammad) but as a giver of glad tidings and a Warner to all mankind, but most of men know not». [34:28]

In contrast, Quran states that the prophets before Muhammad were sent each to his people. «Indeed We sent Noah to his people». [7:59]. «And to the people of Ad, We sent their brother Hud. He said: "O my people! Worship God, you have no God but Him"». [7:65]. «And to the people of Thamud, We sent their brother Salih. He said: "O my people! Worship God, you have no God but Him"». [7:73]. «And (remember) Lot, when he said to his people ...» [7:80]. «And to the people of Median, (WE sent) their brother Shuaib». [7:85]. «Then after them, We sent Moses with Our signs to Pharaoh and his chiefs». [7:103]. Jesus was described as a «Messenger to the children of Israel». [3:49]

The Mandate of the Messengers

The Quran is very specific about the mandate of the messengers. The messengers were sent to guide and educate people through the revelation. They provide spiritual leadership for the people. However, they have power neither to bestow benefit nor inflict harm on any one, including themselves. «Say (O Muhammad): "I possess no power over benefit or hurt to myself except as God wills. If I had the knowledge of the unseen, I should have secured for myself an abundance of wealth, and no evil should have touched me. I am but a Warner, and a bringer of glad tidings to people who believe"». [7:188]. «So remind them (O Muhammad) you are only one who reminds. You are not a dictator over them». [88:21-22]. «Say: I am not a guardian over you». [6:66]. «We have not sent you (O Muhammad) as a guardian over them». [17:54]

The Human Nature of the Messengers:

Several verses in the Quran affirm the human nature of the messengers. The fact that they were chosen by God to deliver His message does not change the reality that they were mortals. Infallibility extends to the Prophets only in communicating the message as it was revealed to them. «Say (O Muhammad): "I am only a man like you. It has been revealed to me that your God is one God"». [18:110] «And indeed We have sent Messengers before you (O Muhammad) and made for them wives and offspring». [14:38]. «We sent not (as our messengers) before you (O Muhammad) any but men, whom We sent revelation». [16:43]

Outside the realm of the revelation, the messengers are ordinary human beings. Sometimes, they even make mistakes.

God has reproached the prophet when he made personal decisions that proved to be wrong. «(The prophet) frowned and turned away. Because there came to him the blind man. And how can you know perhaps he might become pure, or he might receive admonition, and the admonition might profit him. As for him who thinks himself self-sufficient to him you attend. What does it matter to you, if he will not become pure. But as to him who came to you running and is afraid, of him you are neglectful». [80:1-10]

The Concept of God's Friends (Auliya) in Quran

The word «Auliya» means friends, supporters or helpers. It is used in the Quran to describe a group of people who endeavor to persevere in the way of God to become nearer to Him. They are His worshippers who are «Muttaqun», those who are God-conscious. The Quran stresses that they are ordinary human beings. They do not deserve to be associated with God in worship, nor should they be asked to intercede on behalf of people with God for the forgiveness of sins. «Say (O Muhammad): "Call upon those - besides God - whom you pretend. They have neither the power to remove the adversity from you, nor even to, shift it to another person"». [17:56]

The Quran does not recognize the concept of Sainthood that exists in other religions. Quran affirms that the «Auliya», as they are described in the Quran, are not saints and they have no supernatural powers that give them the right to forgive sins. «No doubt! Verily, the Auliya of God no fear shall come upon them nor shall they grieve. Those who believe and used to fear Allah Much». [10:62-63]

The «Auliya» are those who follow the revelations communicated by the messengers and endeavor to approach God through their obedience to Him.

The Myth of the Sainthood of the Auliya

A myth that found its way into the belief of some Muslims, as may have happened to the followers of other religions, is the idea that the «Auliya» are a category of people on whom God bestowed special privileges. They have special powers that allow them to change the natural laws of the universe, to grant favors, and to intercede on behalf of people. Some people took it upon themselves to decorate the graves of these «Auliya». They added special domes to the graves, so that people may recognize them. People who believe in such myths flock to visit the graves, they light candles, they pay money to the custodian of the grave, and they ask for favors from the dead «Auliya». This myth has found a number of followers among the Muslims as it has among the followers of other religions. Islam abhors this practice, as do all the revealed messages of God. This is affirmed by the verses addressed to prophet Muhammad: «Say (O Muhammad): "I possess no power over benefit or hurt to myself except as God wills. If I had the knowledge of the unseen, I should have secured for myself an abundance of wealth, and no evil should have touched me. I am but a Warner, and a bringer of glad tidings to people who believe"». [7:188]

Belief in the Books

The belief in the message is a necessary product of the belief in the angels, who brought the message to the messengers, and the belief in the messengers, who conveyed the message to the people. Since, these messages are included in the revealed books,

it is an integral part of the Islamic creed to believe in the revealed books. These books delineate the articles of faith, the acts of worship as well as the basis of what is lawful and prohibited. The revealed books include that which was revealed to Muhammad as well as those which were revealed to the previous messengers. So the belief in Abraham and the scrolls, in Moses and the Torah, in Jesus and the Gospels, in Muhammad and the Quran, and in all the other revealed books, is a fundamental element of the Islamic creed.

Since it was Muhammad, the seal of the prophets, who delivered the Quran, the Quran is the last revealed book. The Quran presents an account of the fundamentals of the creed as well as guidance for model human behavior. It provides guidelines for day-to-day affairs that ensure harmony within human societies. These guidelines guarantee personal freedom for individuals on the basis of justice and maintain a delicate balance of the basic rights of individuals as well as for the society as a whole.

The Quran did not attempt to provide an explanation of the natural phenomena or the secrets of creation but it encouraged people to observe, reflect upon and investigate these phenomena. It urged humans to conduct scientific research to investigate the laws that govern the universe and to explore new ways to improve life on earth. It did not set any constraints on human thought and scholarship. Islam did not impose restrictions on scientific inquiry; on the contrary, Islam encouraged it and provided an incentive for those who embarked on it. Islam indicated that knowledge in general provides a way for enhancing the belief in God.

Belief in the Last Day:

The fifth element of the Islamic creed is the belief in the day of reckoning. The Quran refers to the day of reckoning as the Last Day. This is the end of man's journey on earth. It is the goal that man has to strive towards. «And that man can have nothing but what he does (good or bad). And that his deeds will be seen. Then he will be recompensed with a full and the best recompense. And to your Lord is the End (return of everything)».[54: 39 - 42]. On that day, man's destiny in the hereafter will be decided, pleasure or pain, bliss or hell, depending on the choices he made in his first life. This is the day of reckoning. «And whoever is blind in this world (i.e. does not see God's signs and believes not in Him) will be blind in the Hereafter» [17:72]. «So whosoever does good equal to the weight of an atom shall see it. And whosoever does evil equal to the weight of an atom shall see it». [99: 7 - 8]

The Quran refers to the bliss and hell of the Last Day as the paradise and the fire. The belief in the Last Day and the desire to attain the supreme status with God should be important incentives for man to lead a virtuous life on earth.

Bliss and Chastisement in the Hereafter:

The Quran speaks repeatedly about the bliss and the chastisement of man in the Hereafter. The bliss and chastisement are usually described using words and images that are familiar to man in his life on earth. However, Islamic sources emphasize that life in the Hereafter will be completely different from the earthly life we know. The core of our belief is that the Hereafter is either a place of bliss or a place of pain. Names that are familiar to us in this world may be used to describe the

Hereafter, but the characteristics of the Hereafter are entirely unique. The Hereafter is the last phase of human life.

Quran describes the bliss as: «The description of Paradise which the Muttaqun (the pious) have been promised: Underneath it rivers flow; its provision is eternal and so is its shade»;[13:35].

«But for him who fears the standing before his Lord, there are two gardens. Then which of the blessings of your Lord will you both deny? With spreading branches. Then which of the blessings of your Lord will you both deny? In them will be two springs flowing. Then which of the blessings of your Lord will you both deny? In them will be every kind of fruit in pairs. Then which of the blessings of your Lord will you both deny? Reclining upon the couches lined with silk brocade, and the fruits of the two Gardens will be near at hand. Then which of the blessings of your Lord will you both deny?» [55:46 - 55]

The chastisement in the Hereafter is described as: «In fierce hot wind and boiling water; And shadow of black smoke, neither cool nor pleasant».[56:42- 44]. «Nay! Verily! He will be thrown into the crushing fire. And what will make you know what the crushing fire is? The fire that God kindled, which leaps up over the hearts».[104:4-7].

These images provide an incentive for man to believe and to act righteously.

Eternity of Paradise:

A Muslim should have neither doubt nor pause in believing that Paradise will last forever. A Muslim should also believe that

those who deny the religion of God because of arrogance and stubbornness are destined to Hellfire. But will the chastisement and Hellfire last forever as will the bliss and paradise? Early Muslim scholars spent a great deal of time and effort trying to resolve this issue. The result is a number of extensive studies and differing opinions.

Eternity of Hellfire:

The Quran does not provide unequivocal evidence that Hellfire will be eternal. It only indicates that the unbelievers will last in the Hellfire for as long as it lasts. That does not indicate that Hellfire is eternal. Our knowledge of the Last Day can only be derived from the explicit verses of the Quran and the authentic sayings of the prophet.

Commonality of the Creed in all Revealed Religions:

In the previous sections, we discussed the basic beliefs of Islam. Islam affirms that these beliefs are common to all God revealed religions. This set of beliefs can then be used as a criterion to differentiate true religions from man made religions. Islam rejects atheism as it rejects associating partners with God. It does not approve of those who do not believe in the angels, the revealed books and the last day. Islam invites all people to the belief in its creed on the basis of rationale thinking.

Islam and Non- Muslims:

Islam affirms that people of different faiths should not use this difference as a legitimate reason for spreading animosity and hatred between themselves. This difference should not even be a reason to stop them from collaborating or living in peace all together. «Say (O Muhammad): "O Al-Kafirun (disbelievers in

God, in His oneness, in His angels, in His Books, in His Messengers, in the Day of Resurrection), I worship not that which you worship, Nor will you worship that which I worship. And I shall not worship that which you worship, Nor will you worship that which I worship. To you be your religion and to me my religion"».[109:1-6]. «So unto this (religion of Islam) then invite (people) (O Muhammad), and stand firm as you are commanded, and follow not their desires but say: "I believe in whatsoever God has sent down of Books and I am commanded to do justice among you. God is our Lord and your Lord. For us our deeds and for you your deeds. There is no dispute between us and you. God will assemble us (all), and to Him is the final return"».[42:15]. «God does not forbid you to deal justly and kindly with those who fought not against you on account of your religion nor drove you out of your homes. Verily, God loves those who deal with equity. It is only as regards those who fought against you on account of religion, and have driven you out of your homes, and helped to drive you out, that God forbids you to befriend them. And whosoever will befriend them, then such are the wrongdoers».[60:8-9]

God commanded man to treat his parents kindly, and deal with them nicely even if they associated partners with God and even if they urged him to follow their suit. «And We have enjoined on man to be dutiful and good to his parents. ... But if they strive with you to make you join in worship with Me others that of which you have no knowledge, then obey them not; but attend to them in this life kindly».[31:14-15]

While the prophet's uncle, Abu Talib, never became a believer, he continued to play a major role in mediating between

the prophet and his enemies. He also protected the prophet from his enemies.

Treaties Between Muslims and Non-Muslims

Islam allows Muslims to negotiate and sign different kinds of treaties with non-Muslims as long as conditions of the treaties do not infringe on the fundamentals of religion or the rights of Muslims. In this respect, one can cite the following verse: «Except those of the Mushrikeen with whom you have a treaty, and who have not subsequently failed you in aught, nor have supported anyone against you. So fulfill their treaty to them to the end of their term. Surely, God loves the pious».[9:4]

Marriage into other Faiths

Islam allows Muslim men to take Christian and Jewish women in wedlock. Islam did not only give those wives the right to keep their original faiths, but it also gave them the right and the freedom to practice their faiths. Quran says: «Made lawful to you this day are all the good things, which God has made lawful. The food of those who have been given the Scripture is lawful for you and yours is lawful for them. And the chaste from among the believing women and the chaste women from among those who have been given the Scripture before you».[5:5]

This is a special permit that applies only to the people of the Book (Christians and Jews). This rule is not extended to those who worship idols, as affirmed by the following verse: «And do not marry the idolatresses until they believe, and certainly a believing maid is better than an idolatress woman, even though she should please you; and do not give (believing women) in marriage to idolaters until they believe, and certainly a believing

servant is better than an idolater, even though he should please you»; [3:221]

Agency of Humanity

God chose human beings to be His agents on earth. Man's mandate is to develop the land and promote a thriving and flourishing life on earth, thus actualizing as a reality the mercy and blessings of God upon His creation. Quran testifies to the fact that God honored human beings and favored them over many of His creatures. God gave them a great and unique gift: the mind. With the mind, man became responsible for his deeds. The mind is the tool that humans can use to reason and think and differentiate between good and evil. Quran conveys God's request for man to use his mind to explore the secrets of the creation and the laws that govern the universe. To develop the spiritual as well as the material sides of human life. Human life can only be perfected by combining the joy of faith and knowledge with the material and physical pleasure. «It is he Who created for you all that are in the earth»,[2:29]. «Do you not see that God has made what is in the heavens and what is in the earth subservient to you, and perfected to you His favors inwardly and outwardly?» [31:20]. «God is He Who made subservient to you the sea that the ships may run therein by His command, and that you may seek of His grace, and that you May give thanks. And He has made subservient to you whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth, all from Himself; most surely there are signs in this for a people who reflect».[45:12-13]

Economic Resources

Quran also made reference to the economic resources that

will help man in the development of life on earth. «And He created the cattle for you; you have in them warm clothing and (many) benefits, and of them you eat».[16:5]. «And He it is Who produces gardens (of vine), trellised and untrellised, and palms and seed-produce of which the fruits are of various sorts, and olives and pomegranates, like and unlike; eat of its fruit when it bears fruit, and pay the due of it on the day of its reaping, and do not act extravagantly; surely He does not like the extravagant».[6:141]

«And it is He Who made the sea subservient that you may eat fresh flesh from it and bring forth from it ornaments which you wear, and you see the ships cleaving through it, and that you might seek of His bounty and that you may give thanks».[16:14]. «and in the mountains are streaks, white and red, of various hues and (others) intensely black?»[35:27]

This is how Quran describes man's role on earth and his relation to the rest of the creation. Man is a master that reflects, uses and develops available resources for the spiritual as well as the material benefit of mankind.

Man's Propensity for Good and Evil:

Islam confirms that God created man with a propensity for both good and evil. Man is free to make the choice to be happy or unhappy. Good deeds makes man happy, they benefit his community, and they gain him the pleasure of God in the Hereafter. Evil makes him miserable in this life and gains him the wrath of God in the Hereafter. «And shown him the two ways (good and evil)»[90:10]. «Verily! We showed him the way, whether he be grateful or ungrateful».[76:3]

Thus, man has the ability to choose whether to come nearer to God or to go further away from Him. This is determined by how he uses his rational thinking to decide what kind of life he wants to lead. God's revelation was sent to help man make the right decisions and to protect him from the vagaries of his self. All people were created with this ability. Islam does not differentiate between people on the basis of gender or color. All are equal in front of God. All have the responsibility to believe and to follow God's law. The nearness of God is for that who is most pious. Islam places no constraints on people to reflect, to work, and to benefit from the results of their work. Belief, sincerity and good deeds are the ingredients of happiness. «Whoever does good whether male or female while he is a believer, We will most certainly make him live a happy life, and We will most certainly give them their reward for the best of what they did».[16:97]

Free Will:

It is clear from the previous section that human beings were created with the free will to choose between good and evil. If man chooses freely to do good, he will be rewarded. If he chooses freely to do evil he will be punished. God gave humans free will, and sent His messengers to guide them to the right path, then left them to choose for themselves. God does not enforce an external authority to influence each human being's decision. If God willed, He could have created humans with a propensity only for good, with no knowledge of evil; or He could have created them with a propensity only to evil, with no knowledge of good. However, such a creature is not qualified to be God's agent on earth. The agent of God on earth is a human being with the free will to choose in this life, and he will be recompensed accordingly in the Hereafter. «Shall they be

rewarded except for what they have done?»[7:147]. «And the soul and Him Who made it perfect. Then He inspired it to understand what is right and wrong for it. He will indeed be successful who purifies it. And he will indeed fail who corrupts it».[91:7-10]

Many similar verses in the Quran show that humans have free will and that they are not forced to either do good or commit evil.

Fate and Divine Predestination:

God created the universe according to a general system. This system embodies the laws that govern the universe and regulates the relationship between cause and effect. Quran refers to this system as «Kadaa and Kadar» fate and divine predestination. The laws of that system are the eternal laws of the cosmos. The free will of man is one of these laws.

In the old times, the idolaters claimed that the will of God forced them to worship idols. Quran refutes their claim. «Those who are polytheist will say: If God had wished we would not have associated (aught with Him) nor our fathers, nor would we have forbidden (to ourselves) anything (against His will); even so did those before them reject until they tasted Our punishment. Say: Have you any knowledge that you should produce before us? You only follow a conjecture and you only tell lies. Say: Then God's is the conclusive argument; had He willed, He would certainly have guided you all».[6:148-149].

This means that it was God's will to leave them to choose freely for themselves.

God knows, because of the comprehensiveness of His knowledge, what everyone will choose for himself. This knowledge does not influence the choices we make. We should not apologize for our mistakes in the name of fate and divine predestination. If we allow this claim to stand, then how can we be responsible for our actions. Certainly, there would be no reason for God to send His Messengers with His Books to guide people to the right path. There would be no rationale for reward or punishment. This defies the wisdom and the mercy of the creator.