

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

اسْمُكَ يَا الْعَالَمِينَ

# WHAT IS ISLAM AND WHY?

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Ghazi bin Muhammad

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لَسِيَّ  
رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

أَسْلَمْتُ لِرَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

*I have surrendered to  
the Lord of the Worlds.*

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The Holy Qur'an,  
*Al-Baqarah*, 2:131

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M<sup>ع</sup>BDA

*English Monograph Series*

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# FOREWORD

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*'What is Islam?'* is a question that has been asked by countless people of late. Unfortunately, few adequate answers have been given that are short enough to fulfill the modern need for brevity, but long enough to satisfy the demands of the question. Here is a book to change that. Written in lucid English by a scholar of the East and West, *What is Islam and Why?* answers that question in a few dozen pages with ample quotes drawn from the sources of the religion itself—the Qur'an and Sayings of the Prophet ﷺ. In an hour or two, a reader can finally know an accurate answer to this pressing question, an answer without which ignorant fear of the other will continue to be a ghost that haunts our frightened planet.

—Hamza Yusuf Hanson



## INTRODUCTION

WHILST EVERY MUSLIM CHILD and every non-Muslim student of Islam learns the basic tenets of Islam's Five Pillars, few, if any, non-Muslim scholars—and all too few Muslims—understand that these tenets are not arbitrary religious rites individually collected together by Islamic tradition. Rather, they are a perfect and holistic 'interlock' of spiritual practices Divinely-designed to engage human beings as such in all that they are and all that they should—and can, once again—be. In what follows, we will examine what Islam is as such; why it is what it is, and how its different rites are held together—like the invisible string of a perfect pearl necklace—by an underlying single common spiritual idea.<sup>1</sup>

### WHAT IS ISLAM?

What is Islam? The answer to this question is well-known, as the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ himself was asked this question by the Archangel Gabriel, the Archangel of Revelation. The religion of 'Islam' (meaning literally: 'surrender of one's own will to God's will') has five 'pillars': (1) the two testimonies of faith (that: '*La ilaha illa Allah, Muhammad Rasul Allah*'; '*There is no god but God, Muhammad is God's Messenger*'); (2) the five-times daily canonical prayer; (3) the tithe (*zakat*); (4) the fast of the holy month of *Ramadan*, and (5) the *Hajj*. Beyond that, the religion consists of six articles of faith or '*Iman*' (meaning literally 'faith in God'), and then '*Ihsan*' (meaning 'excellence' but implying virtue through constant regard

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1 This is of course not to deny the diversity or different Schools of Jurisprudence (*Madhahib*) within Islam, but rather to say that all Muslims, in so far as they identify themselves as Muslims—that is to say, in 2012 CE, perhaps 1.65 billion people, some 23% of the population of the world of over 7 billion people—all agree on the Five Pillars of Islam, and the Six Articles of Faith of *Iman* as the common essence of their religion. See: Appendix: 'The Diversity of Islam.'

to, and awareness of, God).<sup>2</sup> The following is the text of the ‘*Hadith Jibri’l*’ in which Islam is defined, as narrated by the second Caliph of Islam, the great ‘Umar Ibn al-Khattab:

*“One day when we were sitting [in Medina] with the Messenger of God [the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ] there came unto us a man whose clothes were of exceeding whiteness and whose hair was of exceeding blackness, nor were there any signs of travel upon him, although none of us knew him. He sat down knee upon knee opposite the Prophet, upon whose thighs he placed the palms of his hands, saying: ‘O Muhammad, tell me what is the surrender (Islam)’. The Messenger of God answered him saying: ‘The surrender is to testify that there is no God but God and that Muhammad is God’s Messenger, to perform the prayer, bestow the alms, fast Ramadan and make if you can, the pilgrimage to the Holy House.’ He said: ‘You have spoken truly,’ and we were amazed that having questioned him he should corroborate him. Then he said: ‘Tell me what is faith (Iman)’. He answered: ‘To believe in God and His Angels and His Books and His Messengers and the Last Day [the Day of Judgement], and to believe that no good or evil comes but by His Providence’. ‘You have spoken truly,’ he said, and then: ‘Tell me what is excellence (Ihsan)’. He answered: ‘To worship God as if you saw Him, for if you see Him not, yet He sees you’. ‘You have spoken truly,’ he said ... Then the stranger went away, and I stayed a while after he had gone; and the Prophet said to me: ‘O ‘Umar, do you know the questioner, who he was?’ I said: ‘God and His Messenger know best’. He said: ‘It was Gabriel [the Archangel]. He came unto you to teach you your religion (din)’.”<sup>3</sup>*

But what do these five rites, six tenets and single spiritual state have in common? Why and how are they sufficient to constitute

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<sup>2</sup> Thus *Islam* as such is *orthopraxy*, whereas *Iman* as such is *orthodoxy*, at least as far as the basic articles of faith are concerned.

<sup>3</sup> *Sahih Muslim, Kitab Al-Iman*, 1; no. 1.

‘*your religion (din)*’?

To understand this question properly—and thus the reason for Islam—it is necessary first to understand the components of the question; i.e. it is necessary to understand three things: (A) what is a religion?; (B) what are human beings?, and (C) what is the purpose and the spiritual function of each one of these rites, doctrines and state?

## WHAT IS A RELIGION?

The English word ‘religion’ is now a contested and perhaps ‘culturally-loaded’ word, but etymologically it is derived from the Latin ‘*re-ligio*’ meaning to ‘re-tie’—and hence ‘bond’—(between man and heaven). Similarly, the Arabic word for religion (‘*din*’) means literally<sup>4</sup> a ‘debt’ that binds one to God (for having created us). A true religion as such is thus what ‘attaches’ human beings to God and hence to salvation, paradise, felicity and deliverance.

## WHAT ARE HUMAN BEINGS?

Human beings consist of three major dimensions: (1) a body (*jism*), (2) a soul (*nafs*) and (3) a spirit (*ruh*)—and the links between them. Each of these exists in its own plane or world and yet they are all connected, somewhat like water with salt crystals in the daylight: the light (symbolizing the spirit) penetrates and contains the water (symbolizing the soul) and the salt (symbolizing the body), and yet each remains distinct. The light is formless; the water is formal but subtle; the salt is formal and gross, and so—symbolically speaking—are the spirit, the soul and the body. In what follows, we describe these as briefly and simply as we can, based upon the Qur’an. However, this subject—spiritual anthropology—is a complex one and requires some detail to be understood properly:

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<sup>4</sup> See: *Al-Mufradat fi Ghareeb Al-Qu’ran*, Al-Raghib Al-Isfahani, (d. 502 AH), (Dar Al-Ma’rifah, Beirut, Lebanon, 2005 CE), p.181.

## (1) The Body

The body is evident. Everyone knows, feels, and uses their body. It is the living, physical and animal part of human beings. It is the part of humans that breathes, eats and moves, and it is what enables humans to exist in the physical universe. It is synonymous with terrestrial life and is thus also the temporal part of human beings—the part of human beings which starts from the union of human ovum and sperm, grows into a fetus, is born as a baby, grows up and eventually dies and withers away. God says in the Holy Qur'an:

*V*erily We created man from a quintessence of clay; /  
Then We placed him as a drop [of seed] in a place of rest  
firmly fixed; / Then We fashioned the drop into a clot; then  
We fashioned the clot into a little lump; then We fashioned out  
of the little lump bones; then We clothed the bones with flesh;  
and then We produced another creation. So blessed be God, the  
Best of Creators! (*Al-Mu'minun*, 23:12–14; see also *Al-Hajj*,  
22:5 and *Al-'Alaq*, 96:1–3).

Finally, as is well-known, the body (normally) has five senses through which it 'perceives' the physical world around it and relays information about it to the mind: eyesight and hearing (see: *Al-Baqarah*, 2:20), smell (see: *Al-Rahman*, 55:12), touch (see: *Al-Nisa*, 4:43) and taste (see: *Al-Mu'minun*, 23:20 and *Al-Ra'd*, 13:4).

## (2) The Soul

The soul of a person is really that person him or herself: his or her particular personality; what makes a person an individual being with a distinct identity and consciousness. Indeed, the word for 'soul' in Arabic ('*nafs*') means both 'soul' and 'self', which precisely shows the overlap between the two concepts.

The soul is immortal ('*khalidah*'—see: *Al-Bayyinah*, 98:8 *et passim*): it survives man's physical death. This is shown by the hundreds of verses in the Qur'an referring to the afterlife, since if the soul were not itself immortal, there would be no perpetual afterlife for human beings.

The soul is born with primordial innocence and virtue (the ‘*fitra*’). God says (in a *Hadith Qudsi*):

*“I have created My servants pure in religion (hunafa) but the devils lure them away from their religion”*.<sup>5</sup> (See also: *Al-Baqarah*, 2:135–136; *Al-Nisa*, 4:125; *Yunus*, 10:105; *Al-Nahl*, 16:123; *Al-Rum*, 30:29–30; *et al.*).

Nevertheless, we see in the Holy Qur’an that the soul has three ‘parts’, or rather—since the soul as such is necessarily indivisible—that the soul has three ‘modes’. These are:

- i. ‘*the soul that incites unto evil*’ (‘*al-nafs al-ammara bil su*’—*Yusuf*, 12:53);
- ii. ‘*the soul that blames*’ (‘*al-nafs al-lawwama*’—*Al-Qiyamah*, 75:2), and
- iii. ‘*the soul at peace*’ (‘*al-nafs al-mutma’innah*’—*Al-Fajr*, 89:27).

‘*The soul that incites unto evil*’ is obviously the evil or the ‘lower’ part of the soul—what in modern English might be called the ‘ego’. It is in a constant struggle against ‘*the soul that blames*’—what in modern English might be called the ‘conscience’. God says in the Holy Qur’an:

**O** *you who believe! You have charge of your own souls. He who errs cannot injure you if you are rightly guided. Unto God you will all return; and then He will inform you of what you used to do.* (*Al-Ma’idah*, 5:105; see also: *Fussilat*, 41:46; *Al-Jathiyah*, 45:15; and *Al-Taghabun*, 64:16).

Thus the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said to his companions, on returning from war: “*We have returned from the Lesser Holy War to the Greater Holy War*”. When asked what the Greater Holy War was, he replied: “[It is] *the war against the ego [nafs]*”.<sup>6</sup>

If the ego wins this ‘(inner) Greater Holy War’, then the soul becomes evil and ceases to believe in God, but if the conscience

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<sup>5</sup> *Sahih Muslim*, no. 2197; *Sahih Ibn Habban*, no. 653.

<sup>6</sup> Ahmad bin Hussein Al-Bayhaqi, *Kitab Al-Zuhd*, Vol. 2, p. 165, no. 373.

wins this struggle definitively then the soul regains its primordial virtue and *the soul*, [now] *at peace*, can return to God and Paradise. God says in the Holy Qur'an:

*O you soul at peace! / Return unto your Lord, well-pleased [yourself] and well-pleasing [unto Him] / So enter you among My servants! / And enter you My Paradise. (Al-Fajr, 89:27–30).*

The soul's faculties include:

- i. sentiment ('*hubb*'—see: *Al-Ma'idah*, 5:54 *et al.*);
- ii. the will ('*iradah*'—see: *Al-Isra*, 17:19 *et al.*);
- iii. the intellect ('*aql*'—see: *Al-Baqarah*, 2:44; 2:75; *Al-Mulk*, 67:10 *et al.*);
- iv. the faculty of speech ('*kalam*'—see: *Al-Baqarah*, 2:44 and *Al-Rahman*, 55:1–4);
- v. the faculty of learning and of imitation ('*ta'allum*'—see: *Al-'Alaq*, 96:3–5);<sup>7</sup>
- vi. feelings ('*shu'ur*'—see: *Al-Shu'ara*', 26:113);<sup>8</sup>
- vii. the imagination ('*khayal*'—see: *Ta Ha*, 20:66);
- viii. the memory ('*dhakira*'—see: *Yusuf*, 12:45);
- ix. insight ('*basira*'—see: *Aal-'Imran*, 3:52; *Yusuf*, 12:87; *Maryam*, 19:98; and *Al-Anbiya*', 21:12);
- x. intuition ('*ihsas*'—see: *Al-An'am*, 6:104; *Al-Tahrim*, 66:3; *Yusuf*, 12:86–87);<sup>9</sup>
- xi. sense ('*inas*'—see: *Al-Naml*, 27:7; *Al-Qasas*, 28:29).<sup>10</sup>

### (3) The Spirit

Like the word '*nafs*', the word '*ruh*' ('spirit') has two meanings: the

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7 No doubt the faculty of speech and the faculty of learning and of imitation are part of—or extensions of—the intellect.

8 No doubt feelings are part of—or an extension of—sentiment.

9 No doubt it is insight and intuition which 'connect', as it were, the soul to the spirit.

10 No doubt it is sense which 'connects', as it were, the soul to the body.

first simply means ‘the life energy’ within a body. The second (which is the one we are using here) refers to the spirit, which is the inner witness of the soul and the body taken together. This spirit is the Divine breath within man. As the Holy Qur’an says:

*Then He fashioned him [man] and breathed into him of His spirit; and appointed for you hearing and sight and hearts. Small thanks give you! (Al-Sajdah, 32:9).*

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*And when I have fashioned him and breathed into him of My Spirit, then fall down before him prostrate, (Sad, 38:72; see also: Al-Hijr, 15: 28–42).*

The spirit is superior to the soul (and of course the body) because it is not just immortal but also free from individual personality and restrictions.

It is through the Holy Spirit that Revelation comes, but even those who are not God’s prophets may be graced with ‘direct’ and infallible knowledge through the spirit.

*The Exalter of Ranks, the Lord of the Throne. He causes the Spirit of His command upon whom He will of His slaves, that He may warn of the Day of Meeting, (Ghafir, 40:15; see also: Al-Nahl, 16:2).*

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*[A]nd I know from God that which you know not. / Go, O my sons, and ascertain concerning Joseph and his brother, and despair not of the Spirit of God. Lo! none despairs of the Spirit of God save disbelieving folk. (Yusuf, 12:86–7).*

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*Then found they one of Our slaves, unto whom We had given mercy from Us, and had taught him knowledge from Our presence. (Al-Kahf, 18:65; see also: Al-A’raf, 7:62, and Al-Tahrim, 66:3).*

Moreover, all human beings have inherited from the first ancestor Adam ﷺ a seed of this knowledge from God in their very spirits

before they were even born. It is this spirit that gives human beings the ability for speech and a deep innate knowledge of the existence of their Lord God (even if in their lifetimes the imperfections of their own souls obscure—at a certain psychic level—the Truth from them).<sup>11</sup>

*And [remember] when your Lord brought forth from the Children of Adam, from their reins, their seed, and made them testify of themselves, [saying]: “Am I not your Lord?” They said: “Yes, verily. We testify.” [That was] lest you should say at the Day of Resurrection: Lo! of this we were unaware; / Or lest you should say: “[It is] only [that] our fathers ascribed partners to God of old and we were [their] seed after them. Will You destroy us on account of that which those who follow falsehood did?” (Al-A’raf, 7:172–173)*

Between—or perhaps connecting—the spirit and the soul there are four other subtle realities, namely: (i) the breast (*sadr*); (ii) the heart (*qalb*); (iii) the inner heart (*fu’ad*), and (iv) the heart’s core (*lubb*). These may be explained as follows:

(i) The breast (*sadr*) is the seat of unbelief and misgivings, but also the seat of ‘expansion’. God says:

*Whoever disbelieves in God after [having affirmed] his faith—except for him who is compelled, while his heart is at rest in faith—but he who opens up his breast to unbelief, upon such shall be wrath from God, and there is a great chastisement for them. (Al-Nahl, 16:106)*

*... / From the evil of the slinking whisperer, / who whispers in the breasts of mankind, / of the jinn and mankind. (Al-Nas, 114:4–6)*

*Whomever God desires to guide, He expands his breast to Islam;*

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<sup>11</sup> Indeed, human beings always know the truth deep down in themselves. God says in the Holy Qur’an: *Rather man has insight into his [own] soul, / though he should offer his excuses. (Al-Qiyamah, 75:14–15).*

*and whomever He desires to send astray, He makes his breast narrow and constricted, as if he were engaged in ascent to the heaven. So, God casts ignominy over those who do not believe. (Al-An'am, 6:125)*

(ii) The heart (*qalb*) can be blind, and filled with doubt and rancour; but it can also be filled with tranquillity, peace and faith (indeed, it is the 'seat' of faith in human beings). God says:

*Have they not travelled in the land so that they may have hearts with which to comprehend, or ears with which to hear? Indeed it is not the eyes that turn blind, but it is the hearts that turn blind within the breasts. (Al-Hajj, 22:46)*

*They alone ask leave of you who do not believe in God and the Last Day, and whose hearts are doubtful, so in their doubt they waver. (Al-Tambah, 9:45)*

*And those who will come after them say, "Our Lord, forgive us and our brethren who preceded us in [embracing] the faith, and do not place any rancour in our hearts toward those who believe. Our Lord, You are indeed Kind, Merciful!" (Al-Hashr, 59:10)*

*He it is Who sent down the Sakinah [great peace] into the hearts of the believers, that they might add faith to their faith. And to God belong the hosts of the heavens and the earth. And God is ever Knower, Wise. (Al-Fath, 48:4)*

(iii) The inner heart (*fu'ad*) may be empty and may require 'strengthening'. In believers it inclines towards the good, but in disbelievers it inclines towards the bad. However, it possesses (inward, spiritual) vision, for God says:

*And the inner heart of Moses's mother became empty. Indeed she was about to expose him had We not fortified her heart that she might be of the believers (Al-Qasas, 28:10)*

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*And all that We relate to you of the accounts of the messengers, that with which We might strengthen your inner heart. And in these, there has come to you the Truth and an admonition and a reminder to the believers. (Hud, 11:120)*

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*And that the inner hearts of those who do not believe in the Hereafter may incline to it, and that they may be pleased with it, and that they may acquire what they are acquiring. (Al-An'am, 6:113)*

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*As they come hastening with their heads turned upwards, their gaze returning not to them, and their inner hearts as air. (Ibrahim, 14:43)*

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*The inner heart denied not what it saw. (Al-Najm, 53:11)*

(iv) The heart's core (*lubb*) is completely free of fault, blindness and doubt. It requires no strengthening; it is always in a state of devotion and remembrance, and it possesses insight. God says:

*S*ay: "The evil and the good are not equal, even though the abundance of the evil attract you". So fear God, O you who have cores, that you might prosper. (Al-Ma'idah, 5:100)

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*He gives wisdom to whomever He will, and he who is given wisdom, has been given much good; yet none remembers save they who have cores. (Al-Baqarah, 2:269)*

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*This is a Proclamation for mankind, and so that they may be warned thereby, and that they may know that He is One God, and that they who have cores may remember. (Ibrahim, 14:52)*

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*A Book that We have revealed to you, full of blessing, that they may contemplate its signs and that they who have cores may remember. (Sad, 38:29)*

Clearly, the heart (*qalb*) is higher and purer than the breast (*sadr*); and the inner heart (*fu'ad*) is higher and purer than the heart; and the heart's core (*lubb*) is higher and purer than the inner heart. Clearly also, the breast, heart, inner heart and heart's core are not the physical realities with the same names (though there is a certain relation between them), but metaphysical realities that lie between—and connect—the soul and the spirit. Thus the breast and the soul share avarice in common; God says: *But avarice has been made present in the souls ... (Al-Nisa', 4:128)*

*And whoever is saved from the avarice of his own soul, those—they are the successful. (Al-Hashr, 59:9; see also: Al-Taghabun, 64:16)*

Similarly, the heart's core and the spirit share spiritual knowledge and secrets; God says:

*Exalter of ranks, Lord of the Throne, He casts the Spirit of His command upon whomever He wishes of His servants, that he may warn them of the Day of Encounter. (Ghafir, 40:15)*

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*“O my sons, go and enquire about Joseph and his brother, and do not despair of God's [gracious] Spirit. Indeed none despairs of the [gracious] Spirit of God save the disbelieving folk”. (Yusuf, 12:87)*

Beyond this, however, little can be said about the spirit because it is infinite and it comes from God. God says in the Holy Qur'an:

*They will ask you about the spirit. Say: “The spirit is by command of my Lord, and of knowledge you have been vouchsafed but little”. (Al-Isra, 17:85)*

However, the fact that there is in every human being both a soul and a spirit—two ‘subjectivities’, as it were—explains why, in the Holy Qur'an, God promises every single pious person two paradises. God says in the Holy Qur'an:

*But for him who fears the station of his Lord there are two paradises. (Al-Rahman, 55:46)*

\* \* \*

In summary, human beings are comprised of: (A) a mortal body with five senses; (B) an immortal soul born with primordial innocence (*fitra*) but which comprises three modes (an ego or ‘soul that incites unto evil’; a conscience or ‘soul that blames’, and a ‘soul at peace’) and has a number of faculties (these being: sentiment and feelings; a will; an intellect comprising the faculty of speech and the faculty of learning and of imitation; an imagination; a memory; sense, and insight and intuition), and (C) a spirit which comes from the Divine breath within human beings and comprises subtle realities between it and the soul, these being: (in descending order): (1) the heart’s core (*lubb*); (2) the inner heart (*fu’ad*), (3) the heart (*qalb*), and (4) the breast (*sadr*).

\* \* \*

The sum total of human beings’ spiritual, subtle and physical constituent parts and faculties explain how and why human beings were made:

- i. in the ‘fairest form’ (*‘ahsan surah*’—see: *Ghafir*, 40:64; *Al-Taghabun*, 64:3, and *Al-Infitar*, 82:6–8);
- ii. in the ‘fairest stature’ (*‘ahsan taqwim*’—see: *Al-Tin*, 95:1–8).<sup>12</sup>

And why human beings are:

- iii. the regents of God on earth before whom the angels had to prostrate themselves as he knew all ‘the names’ (*‘khalifah*’—see: *Al-Baqarah*, 2:29–35; *Al-A’raf*, 7:11, and *Yunus*, 10:14).
- iv. the recipients of a trust (*‘amanah*’) too great for the heavens and the earth and the mountains (*Al-Ahzab*, 33:73).

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<sup>12</sup> The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said: “Verily God created Adam in His own image.” (*Sahih Al-Bukhari, Kitab Al-Isti’than*, 1; *Sahih Muslim, Kitab Al-Birr* 115; *Musnad Ibn Hanbal*, 2: 244, 251, 315, 323, etc. et al.)

All this also explains why God has preferred human beings over other beings. God says in the Holy Qur'an:

*V*erily we have honoured the Children of Adam. We carry them on the land and the sea, and have made provision of good things for them, and have preferred them above many of those whom We created with a marked preferment. (Al-Isra, 17:70).

## WHAT ARE THE PURPOSES AND FUNCTIONS OF THE RITES OF ISLAM, IMAN, AND IHSAN?

### (A) ISLAM

(1) The Two Testimonies of Faith (*Shahadatayn*):

The *Shahadatayn* or the 'two testimonies of faith' consist of bearing witness that: '*La ilaha illa Allah, Muhammad Rasul Allah*' ('*There is no god but God, Muhammad is God's Messenger*' – لا إله إلا الله محمد رسول الله).<sup>13</sup>

It is an act of both the will and the intelligence: the will in the sense that the word 'Islam' literally means in Arabic 'surrender' (of the will), and hence 'submission', and intelligence in the sense that Islam objectively means acknowledging the reality of the One God, and the truth of His Messenger ﷺ. This is at first not necessarily the same as complete faith in the depths of one's being, and indeed God says:

*T*he Arabs of the desert say: "We believe (*amanna*)". Say you [Muhammad]: "You believe not", but say rather "we submit (*aslamna*)", for faith has not yet entered your hearts.

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<sup>13</sup> Both *Shahadahs* or Testimonies of Faith actually both occur (albeit separately) as phrases in the Holy Qur'an and thus their recitation could be said to constitute part of it (the first *Shahadah*—*La ilaha illa Allah*—in *Al-Saffat*, 37:35 and *Muhammad*, 47:19; and the second *Shahadah*—*Muhammad rasul Allah*—in *Al-Fath*, 48:29).

*Yet if you obey God and His Messenger, He will not withhold from you any reward that your deeds deserve. Verily God is Forgiving, Merciful. (Al-Hujurat, 49:14)*

Nevertheless, it does involve the soul consciously fully acknowledging God, and that is why it is in principle sufficient for salvation.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, it necessarily involves the ‘breast’ (*sadr*), for God says:

*Whoever God desires to guide, He expands his breast to Islam; and whomever He desires to send astray, He makes his breast narrow and constricted, as if he were engaged in ascent to the heaven. So, God casts ignominy over those who do not believe. (Al-An‘am, 6:125)*

## (2) The Five Canonical Daily Prayers (*Salat*):

The canonical prayers are five prayers said at specific times during the day,<sup>15</sup> namely: *fajr* (dawn); *duhr*, (noon), *‘asr* (evening), *maghrib* (sunset) and *‘isha* (night). Each prayer consists of either two, three or four cycles (*rak‘ahs*)—a minimum of seventeen in total daily<sup>16</sup>—which each comprise four positions: standing, bowing, prostrating and sitting in a kneeling position on the ground. Each of these prayer positions symbolizes (and in fact actualizes) spiritual attitudes that have their roots in human beings being God’s regents on earth, their being His servants, their being His creations and

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14 The Prophet ﷺ said:

*No servant ever said: “La ilaha illa Allah” (there is no god but God) then died upon that but that entered Paradise ... even if he committed adultery and stole. (Sahih Bukhari, Kitab Al-Libas, no. 5827; Sahih Muslim, Kitab Al-Iman, 95/1, no. 94; see also Sahih Muslim, Kitab Al-Iman, 55/1.)*

*No servant ever said: “La ilaha illa Allah” (there is no god but God) sincerely from the heart but that the gates of Heaven were opened to him so that he could reach the throne of Allah, as long as he avoided mortal sins. (Sunan Al-Tirmidhi, 45:10, no. 3660.)*

15 God says: ... [S]urely the prayer is for believers a prescription at specific times. (*Al-Nisa*, 4:103).

16 The seventeen *rak‘ahs* are divided as follows: *fajr* (dawn): 2; *duhr*, (noon): 4; *‘asr* (evening): 4; *maghrib* (sunset): 3; and *‘isha* (night): 4.

their being all these things together; or again: in the spirit, the soul, the body and the entirety of human beings; or finally: in the soul's rectitude; in the effacement of the ego; in the ego's effacement from effacement, and the spiritual balance of human beings. Whilst standing, Muslims recite the opening prayer of the Qur'an the *Fatihah* the 'opening' and—according to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ himself—“*the greatest Surah in the Holy Qur'an*”,<sup>17</sup> which in principle contains everything one can and should want to say to God, and another passage of the Qur'an (open to choice). Before the prayer, there is a call to prayer (*athan*) and then a standing call to prayer (*iqama*); during each of the movements and during the bowing, prostrating and sitting-kneeling there are specific blessed formulas of remembrance, glorification and praise of God; towards the end of the prayer there are greetings and salutations of peace to God, to the Prophet ﷺ and his family, to the believers, to the righteous and then to all the world; after the prayer there are recommended prayers and supplications; and of course in addition to the seventeen obligatory daily *rak'ahs* there are a number of other prayers which it was the Prophet's ﷺ *sunnah* (custom) to pray<sup>18</sup> and

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17 *Sahih Bukhari, Kitab Tafsir Al-Qur'an, Bab ma Ja'a fi Fatihat Al-Kitab (Hadith no. 1); also: Sahih Bukhari, Kitab Fada'il Al-Qur'an Bab Fadl Fatihat Al-Kitab, (Hadith no. 9), no. 5006.*

18 These include: two *rak'ahs* before the *fajr* prayer, two at sunrise (*shuruq*); two after the end of the time of the *fajr* (*duha*); two before and after the *duhr* prayers; two after *maghrib*; two after *'isha*, and three the *shafi'* and *mitr* prayers before sleeping (making a total of about 32 *rak'ahs* per day, albeit that there are slight variations amongst scholars as to their details). There are also specific occasions when extra prayers are demanded (such as the *Hajj*, the *'Eid*, funerals, marriage, eclipses, entering a mosque, droughts, rain, travelling and so on, in addition to extra *tarawih* prayers (eight or twenty cycles — scholars differ on this point) that it is customary to pray in the blessed month of Ramadan at night, in addition to the option of waking up in the last part of the night to pray *tahajjud* prayers, in imitation of the Qur'anic injunction to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ:

*And part of the night, keep vigil as a free devotion (nafilatan) from you; perchance your Lord shall resurrect you in a glorious station. (Al-Isra', 17:79; see also Surat Al-Muzammil, 73:2 and 73:20.)*

Other additional and voluntary prayers include: the *awabin* prayers after the sunset prayer; the once-off or occasional *salat al-tasabih* (glorification prayer); prayers after repentance (*tambah*); prayers asking for guidance or a vision (*istikharah*), and prayers after the ablutions

which therefore are highly recommended. We will not go into the spiritual meaning and devotional attitudes to be realized in every stage and every detail of the prayers—they have been the subject of a number of superlative spiritual treatises over the course of Islamic history<sup>19</sup>—except to say that the prayer serves to ‘attach’ the soul ‘to’ God (as well as many of its faculties including the faculty of speech, the imagination, the memory, and the faculty of learning and of imitation—these are all particularly engaged through the Word of God, the Qur’an, during the prayer, and indeed outside of it), and also to involve the body in this (since the prayer involves specific bodily movements). It is this ‘attachment of the soul’ that precisely explains the Prophet’s ﷺ love for prayer above all worldly joys. The Prophet said ﷺ: “Three [things] in this world have been made loveable to me: perfumes, women and prayer has been made the apple of my eye”.<sup>20</sup>

We should also mention that the formal prayer is not valid without ritual ablution, and so the ablutions—the greater [*ghusl*] ablution and the lesser ablution [*wudu*])—must be thought of as an integral part of the prayers. The ablutions consist of movements which purify both spiritually and with water (or in its absence, with pure soil) the individual limbs and the body as a whole for the sins and actions they have committed. Ablution thus also serves to ‘re-attach’ the body and its limbs towards God. It also necessarily involves a sort of existential repentance that detaches a person from his (or her) ego and previous sins, and thereby also necessarily engages the conscience (*‘al-nafs al-lawmah*’).

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for the ablutions. There is also a special way of saying the prayers (*salat al-khauf*) if one fears being attacked whilst praying (see *Al-Nisa*, 4:101–102), and there is a dispensation to say truncated and combined prayers (*salat al-musafirum*) during travel.

19 Notably: Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali’s (450–505 AH / 1058–1111 CE) *magnum opus*, *The Revival of the Religious Sciences (Ihya ‘Ulum Al-Din)*, *Kitab Al-Salat* (vol.4), as well the standard abridgements and summaries of the whole work, especially Ghazali’s own abridgements: *Kimyat Al-Sa’adat* (of medium length) and *Al-Arba’in fi Usul Al-Din* (relatively short).

20 Bayhaqi, *Al-Sunan Al-Kubra*, 7/87; *Musnad Ibn Hanbal*, 3/ 128 and 199; see also: *Al-Nasai*, *Al-Sunan Al-Sughra*, *Kitab ‘Ishrat Al-Nisa*, no. 3940.

### (3) Giving Tithe (*Zakat*)

The tithe (*zakat*) consists of giving one-fortieth of one's savings annually to the poor and destitute; more may be given as charity (*sadaqah*), but the rate for the tithe is permanently fixed for all, rich and poor as a percentage of wealth, as are the categories of poor who may receive it. God says: .... *But what you give as tithe, seeking God's Countenance, such [of you who do so]—they are the receivers of manifold increase.* (*Al-Rum*, 30:39)

Thus, apart from its crucial social function, the tithe serves to detach people from the world, and in so doing brings spiritual growth and blessings. It is also an act of compassion and sentiment towards others, for the sake of God. God says:

*And they give food, despite [their] love of it to the needy, and the orphan, and the prisoner. / "We feed you only for the sake of God. We do not desire any reward from you, nor any thanks".* (*Al-Insan*, 76:8–9)

### (4) Fasting (*Siyam*) the Holy Month of Ramadan annually

The fast consists not only of abstaining from food, drink, smoking and sexual contact during the whole of the holy month of Ramadan from before sunrise to sunset, but also—and equally importantly—from sin, especially gossip, slander, and anger. Fasting serves to detach people from their bodies and their egos. Thus God says in the Qur'an:

*You who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you, even as it was prescribed for those before you, that perhaps you may ward off [evil].* (*Al-Baqarah*, 2:183)

And the Prophet ﷺ said: "God says: 'Every deed of the son of Adam is for him except fasting; it is for Me and I shall reward for it...'"<sup>21</sup>

In every other deed—including charity and prayer—the ego

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<sup>21</sup> *Sahih Al-Bukhari; Kitab Al-Sawm*, no. 1761; *Sahih Muslim; Kitab Al-Sawm*, no. 1946.

can try, within itself, to lay claim to the deed and thereby puff itself up about that deed in the soul's 'internal chatter', this eventually giving rise to spiritual pride. During fasting, however, the body and the ego themselves are deprived of their sustenance and their hold on the soul is mitigated (in principle at least) for a certain period of time, giving the soul a chance to 'grow' spiritually.

#### (5) The Pilgrimage (*Hajj*)

The *Hajj*—which every able-bodied Muslim that has means to perform it is obligated to do so once in their lifetime—is a pilgrimage to Mecca for a certain day every (lunar) year. God says:

*And proclaim unto mankind the pilgrimage. They will come unto thee on foot and on every lean camel; they will come from every deep ravine, / That they may witness things that are of benefit to them, and mention the name of God.... / Then let them make an end of their unkemptness and pay their vows and go around the ancient House. / That (is the command). And whoso magnifies the sacred things of God, it will be well for him in the sight of his Lord.... (Al-Hajj, 22:27–30)*

Though the *Hajj* has one central rite—standing on Mount 'Arafah on the 'Day of 'Arafah'<sup>22</sup>—it contains many other rites and recommendations ('*sunnah*' acts), and a number of regulations. The rites and recommendations include: settling one's debts, asking forgiveness of one's acquaintances and preparing oneself as if setting off for death; travelling to Mecca; dressing in the *ihram* (two white strips of unwoven cloth) and consecrating oneself therein; saying "*labayk Allahumma labayk!*" ("here I am O Allah, at Your service"); performing the *tawaf* (circumambulating the Ka'bah); performing the *sa'i* (running between the rocks of Safa and Marwah); praying at the *maqam* of Ibrahim ﷺ or the *hijr* of Isma'il ﷺ; touching the Black Stone (on the corner of the Ka'bah) or the Multazam

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22 The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said: "*The Hajj is 'Arafah...*" (*Sunan Al-Tirmidhi*, no. 889; *Sunan Abu Dawud*, no. 1949).

(the wall between the door of the Ka'bah and the Black Stone) and contemplating the Ka'bah; drinking water from the well of Zamzam; going to the plain of Mina; (then comes the standing at 'Arafah); then spending time and sleeping at Muzdalifah; throwing pebbles at the devil (at the *Rajm Iblis*); performing the *tawaf* of *ifada*; shaving one's head; sacrificing an animal (a garlanded sheep at the end of the pilgrimage); undoing the *ihram*; visiting the Ka'bah again and performing the *tawaf* of departure; visiting the Prophet's ﷺ tomb in Medina and if possible the *Al-Aqsa* Mosque in Jerusalem after the *Hajj* (this was traditionally known as the 'Long *Hajj*'). God says in the Holy Qur'an:

*And proclaim unto mankind the pilgrimage. They will come to you on foot and on every lean camel; they will come from every deep ravine, / That they may witness things that are of benefit to them, and mention the name of God on appointed days over the beast of cattle that He has bestowed upon them. Then eat thereof and feed therewith the poor unfortunate. / Then let them make an end of their unkemptness and pay their vows and go around the ancient House. / That (is the command). And whoso magnifies the sacred things of God, it will be well for him in the sight of his Lord. The cattle are lawful unto you save that which hath been told you. So shun the filth of idols, and shun lying speech, / Turning unto God (only), not ascribing partners unto Him; for whoso ascribes partners unto God, it is as if he had fallen from the sky and the birds had snatched him or the wind had blown him to a far-off place. / That (is the command). And whoso magnifies the offerings consecrated to God, it surely is from devotion of the hearts, / Therein are benefits for you for an appointed term; and afterward they are brought for sacrifice unto the ancient House. (Al-Hajj, 22:27-33; see also: Al-Baqarah, 2:158, and: Al-Baqarah, 2:196-200)*

There are also a number of prohibitions for the *Hajj* which include bans on hunting; on conjugal relations; on lewdness or

gossip; on shaving or on cutting one's hair or nails whilst in a state of *ihram*.<sup>23</sup>

Underlying all of these various, diverse and ostensibly separate rites, recommendations, regulations and prohibitions there is one single idea that makes sense of them all, binds them all together, and shows their common purpose and goal. That idea is *the return to the (subtle) heart*. God says in the Holy Qur'an:

*We shall show them Our portents on the horizons and within themselves until it will be manifest unto them that it is the Truth. Does your Lord not suffice, since He is Witness over all things? (Fussilat, 41:53).*

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*And in the earth are portents for those whose faith is sure. / And (also) in yourselves. Can you then not see? (Al-Dhariyat, 51:20–21)*

These verses imply that there is a certain 'mirroring' of God's portents ('*ayat*') between the universe and human beings, such that it has been said traditionally that 'man is a small universe and the universe is a large man'. Without delving into this in too much detail, it will now be apparent that in this sense Mecca—and the mysterious cubic, black-shrouded Ka'bah in particular—are the true spiritual heart of the world, and to go to Mecca for pilgrimage means to return symbolically and virtually—if not fully or permanently in the majority of cases—to one's heart. Thus the inward aim and true meaning of the *Hajj* is *to return to one's own true heart*.

This idea explains many things, including why Mecca is the *qiblah*—the direction of prayer for Muslims—for the heart is the locus of faith, and since one prays through faith, one prays fundamentally with, and through, the heart. God says in the Holy Qur'an:

*The foolish of the people will say: What has turned them from the qiblah which they formerly observed? Say: Unto*

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23 See: *Al-Ma'idah*, 5:1–2 and *Al-Ma'idah*, 5:95–97.

*God belong the East and the West. He guides whom He will unto a straight path. / Thus We have appointed you a middle nation, that you may be witnesses over mankind, and that the messenger may be a witness over you. And We appointed the qiblah which you formerly observed only that We might know him who follows the messenger, from him who turns on his heels. In truth it was a hard (test) save for those whom God guided. But it was not God's purpose that your faith should be in vain, for God is Full of Pity, Merciful toward mankind. / We have seen the turning of your face to heaven (for guidance, O Muhammad). And now verily We shall make you turn (in prayer) toward a qiblah which is dear to thee. So turn your face toward the Inviolable Place of Worship, and you (O Muslims), wheresoever you may be, turn your faces (when you pray) toward it. Lo! Those who have received the Scripture know that (this revelation) is the Truth from their Lord. And God is not unaware of what they do. (Al-Baqarah, 2:142-144; see also Al-Baqarah, 2:149-150)*

This also explains why during the *Hajj* ordinary actions like travelling (to Mecca); walking (when circumambulating the Ka 'bah); running (between the rocks of Safa and Marwah); merely looking at the Ka 'bah; touching (the Black Stone); throwing pebbles (at Iblis); standing (on Mount 'Arafah); drinking (water from Zamzam); shaving one's head (marking the end of the *Ihram*); sacrificing an animal (a garlanded sheep at the end of the pilgrimage); putting on and wearing certain ritual garments (the *Ihram*), and, above all, coming to and being in a certain sacred place (that is, Mecca)—all become fully fledged sacred rites.<sup>24</sup> They become rites because during the

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24 One can distinguish, in the realm of religion, between acts that are merely consecrated to God and acts that themselves constitute a religious rite, either through spiritual contemplation of that act or due to the intrinsically holy content of the act itself. For example, in Islam one may consecrate the act of reading a (necessarily noble) book to God by starting it with the Basmalah (In the Name of God, the Infinitely Good, the Ever-Merciful), but reading the Qur'an is in itself an actual prayer or religious rite, due to its being God's Word.

*Hajj*, because then the pilgrim is dominated by his (or her) heart, and in the heart everything is a Remembrance of God, and nothing else matters. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ indicated this precisely with his words:

*“The circumambulating round the Holy House, the passage to and fro between Safa and Marwah, and the throwing of pebbles were only ordained as a means of remembering God”*.<sup>25</sup>

Finally, this explains why the sincere pilgrim’s sins are forgiven:<sup>26</sup> in returning to one’s own true heart, one leaves behind one’s old ego and its sins, and finds ‘*the soul at peace*’ (‘*al-nafs al-mutma’innah*’).

## (B) *IMAN*

(1) Faith (*Iman*) as such

We have already cited God words:

*The Arabs of the desert say: ‘We believe (amanna)’. Say you [Muhammad]: ‘You believe not’, but say rather ‘we submit (aslamna)’, for faith has not yet entered your hearts. Yet if you obey God and His Messenger, He will not withhold from you any reward that your deeds deserve. Verily God is Forgiving, Merciful. (Al-Hujurat, 49:14)*

Thus faith (*Iman*) differs from mere submission (*Islam*) in the sense that it is not primarily an act of the will, or of wanting to believe, but rather of actually sincerely believing in God in one’s (subtle) heart (*qalb*), as mentioned earlier. To a certain extent, faith also engages the intelligence, the memory and intuition in the worship of God—for the six articles of faith must be borne in mind and thought about—but its real import is that the soul not

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25 *Sunan Al-Tirmidhi, Kitab Al-Hajj*, no. 64.

26 The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said:

*“He who makes the pilgrimage to the House—avoiding indecent and immoral behavior—emerges like a newborn babe”*. (*Sahih Al-Bukhari, Kitab Al-Hajj; Sahih Muslim, Kitab Al-Hajj*.)

go through the motions of religion and of the five pillars of Islam blindly, mechanistically or with some hidden degree of doubt, but rather have real certainty in God. In this sense, it is like permanently being on *Hajj* wherever one is.

If *Islam* involves certain rites that one must perform, *Iman* also necessarily involves the performance of good deeds in general as well as desisting from evil actions and harming others. This is implied in belief in *God and His Angels and His Books and His Messengers and the Last Day [the Day of Judgement]*, and to believe that no good or evil comes but by His Providence, because whoever believes in God and His Angels, His Books, His Messengers and the Last Day, knows that these enjoin good deeds and prohibit evil ones, and that according to God's Books, on the Last Day, people will be judged according to their deeds. Indeed, in the Holy Qur'an true *Iman* is always associated with good works:

*They only are the [true] believers whose hearts feel fear when God is mentioned, and when His revelations are recited unto them they increase their faith, and who trust in their Lord; / who establish worship and spend of that We have bestowed on them. / Those are they who are in truth believers. For them are grades [of honour] with their Lord, and pardon, and a bountiful provision. (Al-Anfal, 8:2–4)*

In no less than fifty other passages<sup>27</sup> in the Holy Qur'an the phrase 'do good works' ('*amilu al-salihah*') comes immediately after the mention of 'those who believe' ('*alladhina amanu*'). Thus good deeds are an inevitable concomitant of true faith, to the extent that praying and worship alone—without good deeds and virtue—do not suffice to make faith (*iman*) into righteousness (*birr*). God says in the Holy Qur'an:

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27 The following verses in the Holy Qur'an contain the phrase 'those who believe and do good works' ('*Alladhina amanu wa amilu al-salihati*'): 2:25; 2:82; 2:277; 3:57; 4:57; 4:122; 4:173; 5:9; 7:42; 10:4; 10:9; 11:23; 13:29; 14:23; 18:30; 18:107; 19:96; 22:14; 22:23; 22:50; 22:56; 24:55; 26:227; 29:7; 29:9; 29:58; 30:15; 30:45; 31:8; 32:9; 34:4; 35:7; 38:24; 38:28; 41:8; 42:22; 42:23; 42:26; 42:36; 45:30; 47:2; 47:12; 48:29; 65:11; 84:24; 85:11; 95:6; 98:7 and 103:3.

*I*t is not righteousness [birr] that you turn your faces to the East and the West [in prayer]; but righteous is he who believeth in God and the Last Day and the angels and the Scripture and the prophets; and gives wealth, for love of Him, to kinsfolk and to orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and to those who ask, and to set slaves free; and observes proper worship and pays the poor-due; and those who keep their treaty when they make one, and the patient in tribulation and adversity and time of stress. Such are they who are sincere. Such are the pious. (Al-Baqarah, 2:177)

*You will not attain unto righteousness [birr] until you spend of that which you love. And whatsoever you spend, God is Aware thereof. (Aal-'Imran, 3:92)*

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ summed up the relation between faith and good works as follows: “None of you has faith until you love for your brother what you love for yourself”.<sup>28</sup> “None of you has faith until you love for your neighbour what you love for yourself”.<sup>29</sup>

## (2) From *Islam* to *Iman*

How does faith in God grow in the hearts of those who do not believe? That is to say, how is the psychological transition from *Islam* to *Iman* made? Thus also: how can people who do not believe in God, come to believe in God? This is an all-important question that has bedevilled humanity for millennia. We have cited earlier the Qur’anic verse:

*The Arabs of the desert say: ‘We believe (amanna)’. Say you [Muhammad]: ‘You believe not’, but say rather ‘we submit (aslamna)’, for faith has not yet entered your hearts. Yet if you obey God and His Messenger, He will not withhold*

28 Sahih Al-Bukhari, Kitab al-Iman, no. 13.

29 Sahih Muslim, Kitab Al-Iman, Bab Al-Dalil ‘ala min Khasail Al-Iman..., Vol. 1, p. 67 or Vol. 1, p. 17, no. 45 or no. 71 and 72.

*from you any reward that your deeds deserve. Verily God is Forgiving, Merciful. (Al-Hujurat, 49:14)*

From the words ‘not yet (*lamma*)’<sup>30</sup> it is clear that faith eventually comes through the persistent *practice* of Islam; indeed, God says at the end of the verse: *Yet if you obey God and His Messenger, He will not withhold from you any reward that your deeds deserve.* In other words, practicing the five pillars of Islam eventually leads to faith taking root deep in the heart of a Muslim. This is in a sense to be expected since, as will later be seen, the five pillars of Islam engage so much of what human beings as such are. From this it also follows that practicing the five pillars of Islam *more* will lead to faith quicker. Thus one may do the following: (1) invoke the *Shahadah* more, and indeed, frequently throughout the day and night; (2) one may pray more (and indeed, as already mentioned, one should pray the minimum of 13 or 15 extra *rak’ahs* of *sunnah* daily prayers throughout the day and night); (2b) one may also strive to constantly renew one’s state of ablution; (3) one may give away in alms and charity more than the 2.5% annually required by *zakat*; (4) one may fast the *sunnah* (i.e. Mondays and Thursdays, at least, in addition of course to the fast of the month of Ramadan), and (5) one may—if circumstances permit—perform the minor pilgrimage (*‘umrah*). In addition, since, as we have seen, faith is inextricably bound to the performance of good deeds in general, one may perform more good deeds as such. All these things gradually lead to faith growing and taking deep root in the heart, until faith becomes complete and total certainty of God.<sup>31</sup> This is because—as seen earlier—faith is

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30 Abul-Qasim Al-Zamakhshari (d. 538 AH, 1143 CE) explains:

‘Know that that which is an affirmation by the tongue without the profound agreement of the heart is *Islam*, and that which is a profound agreement of the heart with the tongue is *Iman* .... As regards ‘*lamma*’ (‘not yet’), it implies an expectation that those [people] would [truly] believe thereafter ...’ (Jar Allah Abul-Qasim Al-Zamakhshari, *Al-Kashaf*, Vol.4, p.1536, Commentary on: 49:14, Dar Sadir, Beirut, Lebanon, 1st ed., 2010.)

31 There are three degrees of certainty (*yaqin*) in God mentioned in the Qur’an. These are (in ascending order): certain knowledge (*‘ilm al-yaqin*) or certainty of the mind and soul;

seated in the (subtle) heart, and what prevents belief is not a mental error, but the heart becoming overwhelmed by the accumulation of a person's bad<sup>32</sup> deeds over his or her lifetime: bad deeds form a kind of 'psychic covering' over the heart of those who commit them, so that in the end, if enough bad deeds are committed, no light emerges from a person's heart and that person becomes a disbeliever. Thus the way to remove that 'cover' is repentance and performing good deeds. Indeed, God says: *No indeed! Rather that which they have earned is rust upon their hearts.* (*Al-Mutaffifin*, 83:14)

The Prophet himself ﷺ commented on this verse as follows:

*If a servant [of God] commits a sin, a black spot forms on his heart, and if he changes, repents and asks for forgiveness, his heart is cleansed. But if he [the servant] relapses, it returns until it dominates the heart. This is the rust that God mentioned: "No indeed! Rather that which they have earned is rust upon their hearts".* (*Al-Mutaffifin*, 83:14)<sup>33</sup>

In short, faith increases not—as educated people might sometimes think—through reading complicated works of doctrine and theology or of *shari'ah* but through the *practice* of Islam and good deeds. As Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali says:

If a man has studied a hundred thousand intellectual issues and

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certain vision (*'ayn al-yaqin*) or certainty through the vision of the heart (*qalb*) and inner heart (*fu'ad*); and certain truth (*haqq al-yaqin*) or consummation in the truth. God says:

*No indeed! Were you to know with certain knowledge ('ilm al-yaqin).* (*Al-Takathur*, 102:5)

*Again, you will surely see it with certain vision ('ayn al-yaqin).* (*Al-Takathur*, 102:7)

*This indeed is the certain truth (haqq al-yaqin).* (*Al-Waqi'ah*, 56:95).

<sup>32</sup> These 'bad' deeds as such need not be deeds that actively harm others as such (although these are the worst deeds). They may be deeds that are simply self-centered and indifferent to God, or dominated by lower passions, and in that sense are 'bad'. God says:

*[A]nd no one has any favour [outstanding] with him that must be requited; / but only seeking the pleasure of his Lord the Most High;* (*Al-Layl*, 92:19–20)

Thus all deeds that are not done for the sake of God, or that are done in indifference to Him, are in that sense 'bad', or at least not 'good'.

<sup>33</sup> Sunan Al-Tirmidhi, *Kitab Tafsir Al-Qur'an*, *Tafsir Surat Al-Mutaffifin* (83:14); no. 3334.

understood them, but did not act on the strength of them, they would not be of use of him.<sup>34</sup>

### (C) *IHSAN*

(1) Excellence / Virtue (*Ihsan*) as such

The word '*Ihsan*' comes from the Arabic tri-letter root *H-S-N* which means beauty, and since inner beauty is virtue we can translate '*Ihsan*' as either 'virtue' or 'excellence'. The '*muhsinin*'—those who have '*Ihsan*'—are one of eight categories<sup>35</sup> of virtuous people in the Qur'an whom God loves, and indeed, of these eight categories they are the ones mentioned the most frequently as being loved by God.<sup>36</sup> Additionally, of the eight categories, it is one of only three categories (the other two being: the patient [*al-sabirun*] and those who fear God [*al-muttaqun*]) whom God is mentioned as being 'with'. It is also the only category whom God is mentioned as being 'indeed with' ('*la-ma*''). God says:

*But as for those who struggle for Our sake, We shall assuredly guide them in Our ways, and truly God is indeed with the virtuous. (Al-'Ankabut, 29:69)*

Furthermore, the *muhsinin*—and only *muhsinin*—are described in the Holy Qur'an as being 'near to God's mercy'. God says:

*And work not corruption in the land, after it has been set right, and call upon Him in fear, and in hope—surely the mercy of God is near to the virtuous. (Al-'A'raf, 7:56)*

All this is to say then that *Ihsan* can be understood as not

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34 Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, *Letter to a Disciple*, trans. Tobias Mayer, Islamic Texts Society, Cambridge, 2005, p.8.

35 See: Ghazi bin Muhammad, *Love in the Holy Qur'an*, (Kazi Books, USA, 2011) Chapter 7: God's Love for Humanity.

36 See: *Al-Baqarah*, 2:195; *Aal 'Imran*, 3:134; *Aal 'Imran*, 3:148; *Al-Ma'idah*, 5:13, and *Al-Ma'idah*, 5:93.

only the highest virtue, but also as the sum of all virtues. If Islam entails performing the fundamental rites, and *Iman* entails doing good deeds and avoiding evil ones, then *Ihsan* entails *being* virtuous as such even when one is not doing anything or cannot do anything. Its definition in the *Hadith Jibril* as ‘*To worship God as if you saw Him, for if You see Him not, yet sees He you*’ indicates this—since worshipping God as if we saw Him necessarily implies impeccable and permanent virtue in all our actions. It also suggests something further. The words ‘as if’ suggest that there is a possibility—or at least a virtual possibility—of ‘seeing’ God in some way.

This is a complex issue which has been much debated in Islamic history. We may summarize it as follows:

God cannot be encompassed by vision or seen physically by human beings during this life, for He says:

*V*ision (*al-absar*) cannot attain Him, but He attains [all] vision. And He is the Subtle, the Aware. (*Al-An‘am*, 6:103)

*And when Moses came at Our appointed time, and his Lord spoke with him, he said, ‘My Lord! Show me that I may behold You!’ Said He, ‘You shall not see Me, but behold the mountain, and if it remains, in its place, then you shall see Me’. And when his Lord revealed Himself to the mountain He levelled it to the ground and Moses fell down senseless. And when he recovered his senses he said, ‘Glory be to You! I repent to You, and I am the first of the believers’. (*Al-A‘raf*, 7:143)*

Nevertheless, in the next life, the blessed will be able to ‘look towards’ their Lord (*‘illa rubiha nathira*). God says: *Some faces on that day will be radiant, / looking towards their Lord. (*Al-Qiyamah*, 75:22–23)*

Even in this life, though God cannot be seen through physical vision, His greatest signs and His Light may be seen by the blessed

with, or perhaps ‘through’, their inner hearts (*fu’ad*—and hence *a fortiori* ‘through’ their cores [*lubb*]). God says:

*So He revealed to His servant what he revealed. / The inner heart (fu’ad) did not deny what he saw. / .... / Vision (basar) did not swerve, nor did it go beyond [the bounds]. / Verily he saw some of the greatest signs of his Lord. (Al-Najm, 53:10–11; 17–18)*

This is to say then that *Ihsan* is not only a state of impeccable virtue, but it also involves spiritual vision through the inner hearts (*fu’ad*, pl. *af’ida*) and cores (*lubb*, pl. *albab*) of human beings.

## (2) From *Iman* to *Ihsan*

How does faith in God (*Iman*) become excellence / virtue (*Ihsan*)? That is to say, how is the transition—or rather the spiritual transformation—from faith to impeccable virtue made? We have just seen that *Ihsan* is not only a state of impeccable virtue, but that it also involves spiritual vision through the inner hearts (*fu’ad*, pl. *af’ida*) and cores (*lubb*, pl. *albab*) of human beings. God describes this spiritual transformation in the following beautiful *Hadith Qudsi* (i.e. a *hadith* where God Himself speaks on the tongue of the Prophet ﷺ; it is known as ‘*Hadith al-Nawafil*’):

*“Whosoever is hostile to one of My friends (wali)—I declare war upon them. And nothing is more beloved to Me, as a means for My servant (‘abd) to draw near unto Me, than the worship which I have made binding upon him; and My servant ceases not to draw near unto Me with added voluntary devotions (nawafil) of his own free will until I love him; and when I love him I am the Hearing wherewith he hears and the Sight wherewith he sees and the Hand wherewith he grasps and the Foot whereon he walks. And if he asks Me, I will certainly give him; and if he seeks protection in Me, I will most certainly protect him. And I hesitate in nothing that I do so much as I hesitate in taking the believer’s soul: he hates to die, and I*

*hate to hurt him.*”<sup>37</sup>

From this *Hadith Qudsi* it is clear that through more and more *nawafil* (‘added voluntary devotions’)<sup>38</sup> the believer gradually comes to the state of *Ihsan* and spiritual vision—since God says that He becomes *the Hearing wherewith he hears and the Sight wherewith he sees*—and indeed something perhaps beyond that as well, since God also says: *and the Hand wherewith he grasps and the Foot whereon he walks. And if he asks Me, I will certainly give him; and if he seeks protection in Me, I will most certainly protect him.*

This of course was the state of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ *par excellence*.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, in order to reach that state—which is

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37 *Sahih Al-Bukhari, Kitab Al-Riqaq, Bab Al-Tawadu’, Hadith no. 38; no. 5602 in total.* The following verse of the Qur’an may also be thought of as tersely summarizing this *Hadith Qudsi* (since, as we saw earlier, ‘certainty’ (*yaqin*) comprises degrees ending in consummation in the Truth): *And worship your Lord until Certainty comes to you. (Al-Hijr, 15:99).*

38 It goes without saying that the *sine qua non* of these *nawafil*—and indeed, all acts of worship—is that they must be done with sincerity to God (to the extent of one’s faith, or to the extent of one’s striving to have more faith) and hence with the right intentions. Gods says:

*Indeed We have revealed to you the Book with the truth; so worship God, devoting your religion sincerely to Him. / Surely to God belongs sincere religion.... (Al-Zumar, 39:2-3; see also: Al-Zumar, 39:14; Ghafir, 40:14; Ghafir, 40:65, and by contrast: Al-Anfal, 8:35.)*

Similarly, the Prophet ﷺ said: *Actions are in their intentions. Every person shall have what he intended. (Sahih Al-Bukhari, Kitab Bad’ al-Wahy, Hadith no.1; Sahih Muslim, Kitab al-Imarah, Hadith no. 5036.)*

Specifically, God accepts three intentions behind acts of worship, these being: fear of Him, love of Him, or knowledge of Him (in accordance with three main faculties of the soul—the will, sentiment and the intelligence—as mentioned earlier). God says:

*... [C]all on Him in fear and ardent hope. Lo! the mercy of God is near to the virtuous. (Al-A’raf, 7:55; see 7:54-58; 7:205).*

*... Lo! they used to vie one with the other in good deeds, and they cried unto Us in longing and in awe, and were humble before Us. (Al-Anbiya, 21:90; see 21:89-90; see also: Al-Sajdah, 32:15-19; Al-Zumar, 39:9; Al-Fatihah, 1: 5-7).*

39 This is proved by the very fact of this *Hadith Qudsi* itself, for it was God speaking on the Prophet’s ﷺ own tongue: in other words, since God was speaking directly, as it were, through the mouth of the Prophet ﷺ through inspiration—much like the Revelation of the Qur’an itself, except that a *Hadith Qudsi* is not a Revelation as such but a Divine Inspiration of a ‘lesser magnitude’ than the Qur’an—this means that the Prophet ﷺ had not only himself attained the spiritual state described in the *Hadith Qudsi* to perfection, but also that he ﷺ

obviously also a state of being ‘loved more’ by God—it is necessary to follow the Prophet’s ﷺ example. Indeed, God says this, precisely:

*S*ay: ‘If you love God, follow me, and God will love you more (yuhbibkum), and forgive you your sins; God is Forgiving, Merciful.’ (Aal ‘Imran, 3:31)

In the Qur’an God twice mentions the words ‘good example [to be followed]’ (*‘uswatun hasanatur*’), once referring to the Prophet Abraham ﷺ and his companions,<sup>40</sup> and once the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, as follows:

*V*erily there is for you a good example in the Messenger of God for whoever hopes for [the encounter with] God and the Last Day, and remembers God often. (Al-Ahzab, 33:21)

Hence this means that following the example of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, means above all loving God (thus hoping for Him) and remembering God often. Indeed, a large part of the *sunnah* (the custom of the Prophet ﷺ)—if not most of it—consists of either invocations or supplications (and all supplications necessarily remember God and are therefore in a sense also ‘invocations’) to be pronounced before or after almost every imaginable legitimate and necessary action or vital function from the moment of birth to the moment of death; marking the beginning of each day of the week, from waking up in the morning to going to bed at night; from hearing a rooster crow in the morning to seeing the moon at night; from putting on one’s clothes to taking them off; from eating and drinking to going to the bathroom; from making love to (and against) being angry; from coughing to sneezing to laughing to yawning; from leaving one’s home to entering it; from greeting someone to saying goodbye to them; from before starting one’s prayers to after finishing them, and from before starting a conversation to after

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had gone ‘beyond’ that to a state where God had actually also spoken through his tongue.

<sup>40</sup> See: *Al-Mumtahinah*, 60:4 and 6.

finishing one, and so on. Equally, the Qur'an is constantly enjoining people to remember God as often as possible, if not constantly, to the extent that it might be said that remembering God—or invoking<sup>41</sup> His Name in some form<sup>42</sup>—appears to be the cardinal spiritual imperative of the Qur'an. God says:

*Recite what has been revealed to you of the Book, and maintain prayer; truly prayer prevents against lewd acts and indecency. And the remembrance of God is surely greater, and God knows what you do. (Al-Ankabut, 29:45)*

*And mention the Name of your Lord, and devote yourself [exclusively] to Him with complete devotion. (Al-Muzzammil, 73:8)*

41 The word for remembrance in Arabic—*'dhikr'* (ذِكْرٌ)—has four, related basic meanings: 'to bear in mind' or 'to remember'; 'to think of'; 'to mention', and to 'invoke' as an act of prayer. (See: Al-Raghib Al-Hussein bin Muhammad bin Al-Mufadal Abul-Qasim Al-Isfahani (d. 403 AH), *Mu'jam Mufradat Alfadh Al-Qur'an* (ed.: Yusuf Al-Sheikh Muhammad Al-Baqi; Dar Al-Fikr, Beirut, Lebanon, 1st Printing 1426–1427 AH / 2006 CE, pp. 135–137.)

42 Such as one of the Beautiful Names of God mentioned in the Qur'an with the vocative particle (e.g. saying: "*Ya Rahman*" or "*Ya Rahim*"); or such as invoking "*Subhan Allah*" ("Glory be to God"); or "*Al-Hamdu Lillah*" ("Praise be to God"); or "*La ilaha illa Allah*" ("There is no god but God"); or "*Allahu Akbar*" ("God is the Greatest"); or "*La Quwata* [or: *La Hawla wa la Quwata*] *illa Billah*"; ("There is no strength [or: "There is no power nor strength"] save in God"); or even: "*Allahuma Salli 'ala Sayidna Muhammad wa Salim*" ("O God!, invoke blessings on our master Muhammad and salute him with a greeting of Peace"). All of these formulas and others are found in the Qur'an in various forms (and in the *hadith*), and their invocation is based on the Qur'an's repeated injunctions to invoke them.

For example, all of the following verses from the Qur'an commend, enjoin or echo just the glorification of God (*tasbih*) specifically: *Aal-'Imran*, 3:41; *Al-A'raf*, 7:206; *Yunus*, 10:10; *Yusuf*, 12:108; *Al-Isra*, 17:44; *Maryam*, 19:11 and 19:35; *Ta Ha*, 20:33 and 20:130; *Al-Anbiya*, 21:20 and 21:22; *Al-Mu'minun*, 23:91; *Al-Nur*, 24:36 and 24:41; *Yasin*, 36:83; *Al-Naml*, 27:8; *Al-Qasas*, 28:68; *Al-Rum*, 30:17; *Al-Ahzab*, 33:42; *Al-Saffat*, 37:159; *Fussilat*, 41:38; *Al-Fath*, 48:9; *Qaf*, 50:40; *Al-Tur*, 52:43 and 52:49; *Al-Hashr*, 59:23 and 59:24; *Al-Qalam*, 68:28; *Al-Insan*, 76:26 *et al.*—and this is not even to mention the import of the seven *surahs* in the Qur'an (the '*Musabihat*') that start with *tasbih*, namely: *Al-Isra*, 17:1; *Al-Hadid*, 57:1; *Al-Hashr*, 59:1; *Al-Saff*, 61:1; *Al-Jum'a*, 62:1; *Al-Taghabun*, 64:1; *Al-'A'la*, 87:1. Accordingly, Muslim scholars have written many books detailing these sacred formulas and their merits, most notably: Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali's *The Revival of the Religious Sciences (Ihya' 'Ulum Al-Din)* vol. 9, *Kitab Al-Adhkar wal-Da'wat* (*The Book of Invocations and Supplications*). See also: Hasan bin 'Ali Al-Saqqaf, *Kitab Fada'il Al-Dhikr*, (RABBIT, Jordan, 2011) which is available as a free download at: [www.rissc.jo](http://www.rissc.jo).

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*Is it not time for those who believe that their hearts should be humbled to the remembrance of God.... (Al-Hadid, 57:16)*

*O you who believe! Remember God with much remembrance. / And glorify Him morning and evening. (Al-Ahzab, 33:41-42)*

*And mention the Name of your Lord at dawn and with the declining of the sun. (Al-Insan, 76:25)*

*And never say regarding something, 'I will indeed do that tomorrow', / without [adding], 'If God will'. And remember your Lord if you forget.... (Al-Kahf, 18:23-24)*

*When you have performed the prayer, remember God, standing and sitting and on your sides.... (Al-Nisa', 4:103)*

*Go, you and your brother with My signs, and do not flag in remembrance of Me. (Ta Ha, 20:42)*

*[T]hose who believe and whose hearts are reassured by God's remembrance. Verily by God's remembrance are hearts made serene. (Al-Ra'd, 13:28)*

*And to God belong the Most Beautiful Names — so invoke Him by them, and leave those who blaspheme His Names.... (Al-A'raf, 7:180)*

*... Say: 'God', then leave them to play in their vain discourse. (Al-An'am, 6:91)*

*Remember Me, I will remember you .... (Al-Baqarah, 2:152)<sup>43</sup>*

Conversely, God warns repeatedly in the Qur'an of the consequences of forgetting Him and not invoking Him:

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43 See also: *Al-Baqarah*, 2:200, 203; *Aal 'Imran*, 3:190-191; *Al-A'raf*, 7:55-56, 180, 201, 205; *Al-Anfal*, 8:45; *Al-Isra*, 17:110; *Ta Ha*, 20:14; *Al-Hajj*, 22:34-35; *Al-Nur*, 24:37; *Al-Jumu'ah*, 62:9-10; *Al-A'la*, 87:14-15 et al.

*But whoever disregards My remembrance, his shall be a straitened life. And on the Day of Resurrection We shall bring him to the assembly, blind. (Ta Ha, 20:124)*

*And whoever withdraws from the Remembrance of the Compassionate One, We assign for him a devil (qarin) and he becomes his companion. (Al-Zukhruf, 43:36)<sup>44</sup>*

Thus the Prophet ﷺ said, in summary:

*“Shall I not tell you the best of your acts, and purest in the sight of your Lord, and the most exalted in your ranks—and better for you than spending gold and silver; and better for you than encountering your enemies and smiting their necks and their smiting your necks?” They [his companions] said: ‘Indeed yes’. He [ﷺ] said: “The remembrance of God, Most High”.<sup>45</sup>*

Thus frequent—if not constant—remembrance of God is the means necessary for the spiritual transformation from *Iman* to *Ihsan*.<sup>46</sup>

44 See also: *Al-Baqarah*, 2:114; *Al-Nisa'*, 4:142; *Al-A'raf*, 7:179–180; *Al-Kahf*, 18:28, 100–101; *Ta Ha*, 20:99–101, 124–127; *Al-Furqan*, 25:18; *Al-Zumar*, 39:22–23; *Al-Najm*, 29:30; *Al-Mujadilah*, 58:19; *Al-Munafiqun*, 63:9–10; *Al-Jinn*, 72:17; *Al-Ma'un*, 107:4–6, et al.

45 *Sunan Al-Tirmidhi, Kitab Al-Da'wat*, vol. 5, p.495, no.3377 (Dar Ihya Al-Turath Al-'Arabi, Beirut); Ibn Hajr, *Fath Al-Bari*, vol. 6, p.5; Imam Malik bin Anas, *Al-Muwatta', Kitab Al-Nida Lil-Salat, Bab ma ja'a fi Dhikr Allah Tabaraka wa Ta'ala*; vol. 1, p.211, no.492 (Al-Turath Al-Arabi, Egypt; ed.: Mohammad Fuad Abd Al-Baqi).

46 This explains why the invocation of God is the central spiritual practice of traditional mainstream orthodox mysticism (Sufism). Thus Fakhr Al-Din Al-Razi, the great Qur'anic Commentator and Theologian (d. 1209 CE, 606 AH), writes:

‘Know, O people, throughout my life I repeat the word ‘*Allah*’. When I die I will say ‘*Allah*’, when I am questioned in the grave I will say ‘*Allah*’, on the Day of Resurrection I will say ‘*Allah*’, when I take the book I will say ‘*Allah*’, when my good and bad deeds are weighed I will say ‘*Allah*’, when I reach the path I will say ‘*Allah*’, when I enter Paradise I will say ‘*Allah*’, when I see God I will say ‘*Allah*’, etc.’ (Fakhr Al-Din Al-Razi, *Al-Tafsir Al-Kabir wa Mafatih Al-Ghayb*, Section on the *Basmallah*).

Equally, the great mystic and jurist Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali (450–505 AH; 1058–1111 CE) writes:

The [mystic] way is that you cut off your attachments completely, so that your heart no longer pays attention to: family, children, possessions, homeland, and [even] sanctity. Rather, you have to endure until your state is such that the absence and

There are perhaps three reasons why this is so: (1) remembrance is the easiest of all rites and indeed all acts—all that it requires is consciousness and will—and therefore it can be practised at all times and in all circumstances; (2) remembrance is the most basic and direct of all rites since it involves thought and therefore the soul itself; and (3) remembrance does not involve an ordinary object of thought or an ordinary word (like ‘tree’ or ‘mountain’), but rather God Himself as the Object of thought<sup>47</sup> through a word or a sacred

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the presence of these things are equal to you. Then you isolate yourself in a private corner [somewhere] and limit your acts of worship to the obligatory prayers and to the established supererogatory prayers (*rawatib*), and you sit, empty of heart, concentrating your attention, preparing to draw near to God Most High, through your remembrance of Him.

This is at the beginning of the matter: you persist in remembering God Most High with your tongue, such that you do not stop saying: “*Allah*”, “*Allah*” with presence of heart and full consciousness until you reach a state in which, if you were to stop moving your tongue, you would find it as if still invoking the word [*Allah*’], because it has grown so accustomed to it. Still you endure patiently doing that, until the role of your tongue is gone but your soul and heart continue invoking without your tongue moving. Then you persist until nothing remains in your heart except the meaning of the word [*Allah*’], and your mind does not think of the letters or form of the word [*Allah*’]—only purely the meaning, present in your heart, necessarily and at all times.

You can choose things only up to this point. After this you have no control, except in continuing to repel distracting thoughts. Then you lose your power of choice, and nothing remains for you except to wait and see what happens to you by way of ‘spiritual openings’ [*futih*’], like what happens to the saints (and which are actually only a mere part of what happens to the Prophets). It may be something like a passing lightning bolt that does not last; then it comes back. But it may delay, yet if it comes back then it may stay, and stabilize [in you]. If it stays, it may stay for a long time, or perhaps just a short period. Or it may happen in succession. And there may be different varieties. The stations of the saints are countless, in accordance with their different natures and virtues. That is the method of Sufism; it has been summarized as complete purification on your behalf, along with serenity and clarity; and then preparedness and waiting, only. (Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, *Mizan al-Amal*, ed. Dr. Sulayman Dunya, Dar Al-Ma’rifa, Egypt, 1964, p.222–223 [trans. Ghazi bin Muhammad].)

47 If a person were to merely repeat to themselves a word like ‘goodness’ constantly for long periods of time, there would no doubt be some psychological effects through ‘autosuggestion’ or a kind of ‘self-hypnosis’—some modern cults do precisely this—but this would never produce *Ihsan* or true virtue in a soul because the word ‘goodness’ in English is not

formula that He Himself has Revealed in Arabic in the Qur'an, and thereby beautified and made holy in its very form. God says:

*Is he whose breast God has opened to Islam, so that he follows a light from his Lord [like he who disbelieves]? So woe to those whose hearts have been hardened against the remembrance of God. Such are in manifest error. / God has revealed the most beautiful of discourses, a Book, consistent with itself (yet) repeating — whereat quiver the skins of those who fear their Lord; then their skins and their hearts soften to the remembrance of God. That is God's guidance, by which He guides whomever He wishes; and whomever God leads astray, for him there is no guide. (Al-Zumar, 39:22–23)*

Thus the invocation of God's Name in Arabic—الله (Allah)—is a sacrament in itself. This explains why only constant invocation of a sacred formula from the Qur'an containing God's Name is able to penetrate 'the skin' of human beings into the hearts, and eventually their inner hearts (*af'ida*) and cores (*albab*).

#### (D) SUMMARY OF THE PURPOSES AND FUNCTIONS OF THE RITES OF *ISLAM*, *IMAN* AND *IHSAN*

Summarizing the purposes and functions of the rites of *Islam*, *Iman* and *Ihsan*, we may say the following:

*Islam*:

1. The Two Testimonies of Faith (*Shahadatayn*) are an act of both the will and the intelligence, and involve the (subtle) 'breast' (*sadr*).
2. The Five Canonical Daily Prayers (*Salat*) serve to 'attach' the soul (and many of its faculties including the faculty of speech, the imagination, the memory, and the faculty of learning and of imitation—these being particularly engaged by the Qur'an) 'to' God. The body, too, is

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Revelation and therefore does not act as a vehicle of Divine grace and objective holiness. Moreover, *Ihsan* requires *Iman a priori*, which is to say that even the invocation of a Divine Name without the presence of faith in the first place would not be effective, just as faith without *Islam* is not effective.

involved in this (since the prayer involves specific bodily movement). Another indivisible part of prayers are ablutions, which serve to ‘re-attach’ the body and its limbs towards God and detach a person from his (or her) ego and previous sins, thereby also necessarily involving the conscience (*‘al-nafs al-lammamah’*).

3. Giving Tithe (*Zakat*) serves to detach people from the world and is an act of sentiment.
4. Fasting (*Siyam*) the Holy Month of *Ramadan* annually serves to detach people from their bodies and their egos.
5. The Pilgrimage (*Hajj*) is the return to one’s own true heart, and in doing this a person also finds his (or her) own ‘*soul at peace*’.

*Iman:*

Faith (*Iman*) is an act of the (subtle) heart (*qalb*), but it also—to a certain extent—engages the intelligence, the memory and intuition. Faith necessarily involves performing good deeds and abstaining from bad ones.

*Ihsan:*

*Ihsan* is not only the highest virtue, but a state comprising all the virtues. It involves the inner hearts (*fu’ad*, pl. *af’ida*) and cores (*lubb*, pl. *albab*) of human beings. It requires frequent, if not constant, remembrance of God.



A clear pattern emerges from the above: the rites and duties of *Islam*, *Iman* and *Ihsan* are not haphazard or random. They are not unrelated to each other. They are specifically designed and revealed by God to suit human beings as such in order to systematically involve every single one of human beings’ constituent parts and faculties—in an exactly complementary and holistic way—in first acknowledging God, and then in attaching themselves completely to Him, and by the same token detaching the soul from the world, the body and the ego.

To be precise (and recapitulating our list of human constitu-

ent parts and faculties from earlier): *the body* and its *five senses* worship God through the movements of prayer, and are purified through ablution and fasting; *the soul* worships God through prayer, becomes detached from the world through the tithe, and from the ego and the body through fasting; *the ego* is purified through ablution and fasting; *the conscience* worships God through and in the ablution; *the soul at peace* worships God through pilgrimage; *sentiment and feelings* worship God through the tithe; *the will, the intellect* and *the breast* worship God through *Islam* and the double testimony of faith; *the faculty of speech, the faculty of learning and of imitation, the imagination* and *the memory* worship God through prayer and through the Qur'an; *the heart* worships God through *Iman* and through pilgrimage; and *the spirit, the heart's core, the inner heart*—and hence also *insight* and *intuition*—worship God through *Ihsan* and through constant remembrance of God, albeit none of the above preclude each other. Moreover, human beings worship God through *Iman* in *knowing* (and hence, *doing*), and through *Ihsan* in *being*.

This is the great secret of *Islam*, *Iman* and *Ihsan*, and the invisible thread that binds them all together: *Islam*, *Iman* and *Ihsan* consist inwardly, and perhaps *essentially*, of harnessing all that human beings are in their bodies, souls and spirits to worshipping and loving God as much as possible *in a perfectly complementary and internally-completing way*. In a sense, this must be so, since human beings were created to worship God. God says:

*And warn, for warning profits believers. / I created the jinn and humankind only that they might worship Me. / I do not desire from them any provision, nor do I desire that they should feed [Me]. / Lo! it is God Who is the Provider, the Lord of Strength, the Firm. (Al-Dharyyat, 51:55–58)*

Moreover, *Islam* requires all that human beings are because of the Oneness of God. The Absoluteness of the Object of worship requires the entirety of the subject that worships.

## WHY IS ISLAM?

As we have seen, the religion of Islam takes as its starting point human beings such as they are. Accordingly, Islam has no need of a doctrine of redemption; no need of monasticism; no need of a complex theology based upon the idea of a unique manifestation of the Divine Word; no need of a church to intercede with God for human beings and no need of a clergy; no need of a sacerdotal caste; no need of a covenant theology or of a doctrine of a chosen race; no need of a Dualistic or Trinitarian theology; no need for pantheism; no need for deism; no need for arcane philosophy; no need for fantastic mythologies; no need of unspeakable mysteries for adepts; no need for basing itself on the existential suffering of human life; no need for basing itself on an ethic of social harmony in a particular society; no need for basing itself in a particular historical time or geographic land, and no need for basing itself on a subjective individual state or an objective degree of reality—like various other religions in history and presently—and it certainly has no need to claim to worship God through icons, relics, idols, statues, miracles, sacred animals, subtle beings or angels. The religion of Islam simply bases itself on reality as it is: humankind as it is, and God as He is, and everything else follows from these two axioms.<sup>48</sup> This is the reason Islam is what it is; it is the reason for Islam; it is the answer to ‘*Why* is Islam?’: Islam is what it is because it responds—and corresponds—perfectly to human beings as such, so that they worship God as such, in all and with all that they are.

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<sup>48</sup> ‘Islam is the meeting between God as such and man as such.

God as such: that is to say God envisaged, not as He manifested Himself in a particular time, but independently of history and inasmuch as He is what He is and also as He creates and reveals by His nature.

Man as such: that is to say man envisaged, not as a fallen being needing a miracle to save him, but as man, a theomorphic being endowed with an intelligence capable of conceiving of the Absolute and with a will capable of choosing what leads to the Absolute....

To sum up: Islam confronts what is immutable in God with what is permanent in man.’ (Frithjof Schuon, *Understanding Islam*, [World Wisdom Press, USA, 1994] pp.1–2).

Islam is as simple as a complete and true religion can be.<sup>49</sup>

This explains why Islam is the primordial religion (*al-din al-hanif*), and how the Islam brought by the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ 1400 years ago is merely a restatement of the religion of the Prophet Abraham ﷺ 2800 years or so before that. God says:

*No; Abraham in truth was not a Jew, neither a Christian, but he was a Muslim and a hanif, and he was never of the idolaters. (Aal-‘Imran, 3:67)*

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49 It is true that it could be argued that there are various aspects of the *shari‘ah* and the *sunnah* that are not simple, and that some Arab cultural customs have worked their way into Islam as such, but it is necessary to bear in mind that the purpose of the *shari‘ah* is to provide a social and ethical equilibrium wherein people can live their lives with dignity and practice Islam freely, and the purpose of the *sunnah* is merely to provide a model to practice Islam more completely. More essentially, it is necessary to bear in mind that Islam with no accretions is completely sufficient in itself for Salvation. This is seen in the following *hadith* related by Talha bin Ubaydullah:

*A man from Najd with unkempt hair came to God’s Messenger and we heard his loud voice but could not understand what he was saying, until he came near and then we came to know that he was asking about Islam. God’s Messenger said, “You have to offer prayers perfectly five times in a day and night (twenty-four hours).” The man asked, “Is there any more (praying)?” God’s Messenger replied, “No, but if you want to offer the Nawafil prayers (you can).” God’s Messenger further said to him: “You have to observe fasts during the month of Ramadan.” The man asked, “Is there any more fasting?” God’s Messenger replied, “No, but if you want to observe the Nawafil fasts (you can).” Then God’s Messenger further said to him, “You have to pay the Zakat (obligatory charity).” The man asked, “Is there anything other than the Zakat for me to pay?” God’s Messenger replied, “No, unless you want to give alms of your own.” And then that man retreated saying, “By God! I will neither do less nor more than this.” God’s Messenger said, “If what he said is true, then he will be successful (i.e. he will be granted Paradise).” (Sahih Al-Bukhari, Kitab Al-Iman, Hadith no. 44.)*

There is also a similar account related by Abu Hurayrah:

*A Bedouin came to the Messenger of God ﷺ and said: “Messenger of God—direct me to a deed by which I may be entitled to enter Paradise”. Upon this he (the Prophet) remarked: “You worship God and never associate anything with Him, establish the obligatory prayer, and pay the Zakat which is incumbent upon you, and observe the fast of Ramadan.” He [the Bedouin] said: “By Him in Whose hand is my life, I will never add anything to it, nor will I diminish anything from it”. When he [the Bedouin] turned his back, the Prophet ﷺ said: “He who is pleased to see a man from the dwellers of Paradise should catch a glimpse of him”. (Sahih Muslim, Kitab Al-Iman, Hadith no. 14.)*

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*And who is fairer in religion than he who submits his purpose to God and is virtuous, and who follows the creed of Abraham as a hanif? And God took Abraham for a close friend. (Al-Nisa, 4:125)*

This also explains why Islam is the normative—and hence ‘middle’—religion, that is, by that fact, a ‘witness’ over humanity as such:

*Thus We have appointed you a middle nation, that you may be witnesses over mankind, and that the Messenger may be a witness over you. (Al-Baqarah, 2:143)*

Equally, this explains why Islam is the universal religion—that is to say, the religion of all the prophets prior to the Prophet Muhammad’s ﷺ restatement of it. God says:

*Say, ‘We believe in God, and that which has been revealed to us, and that which has been revealed to Abraham and Ishmael, and Isaac and Jacob, and the Tribes; and in that which was given to Moses and Jesus, and the prophets, from their Lord; we make no division between any of them; and to Him we submit’. / Whoever desires a religion other than Islam, it shall not be accepted from him and in the Hereafter he shall be among the losers. (Aal-‘Imran, 3:84–85)*

And also:

*God bears witness that there is no god, except Him, and the angels, and those of knowledge; upholding justice; there is no god except Him, the Mighty, the Wise. / Lo!, the religion with God is submission [to the One God]..... (Aal-‘Imran, 3:18–19)*

Being Primordial, Normative and Universal, Islam is necessarily perfect in itself. God says:

*Today I have perfected your religion for you, and I have completed My favour upon you, and I have approved Islam for you as religion.... (Al-Ma'idah, 5:3)*

## CONCLUSION

A proper understanding of what human beings are in their depths, and what religion as such is and aims to do, shows incontrovertibly that Islam is an internally-perfect and perfectly simple Divine 'roadmap' to show human beings the straight path to Paradise. When human beings know themselves, they know what the religion of Islam is; when human beings understand themselves, they understand why the religion of Islam is. Thus the Opening Chapter (*Al-Fatihah*) of the Qur'an—and the beginning of every prayer in Islam—is:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ①  
 الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ②  
 الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ③  
 مَالِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ ④  
 إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ ⑤  
 اهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ ⑥  
 صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ ⑦

*In the Name of God, the Infinitely Good, the Ever-Merciful. /  
 Praise be to God, the Lord of the worlds. /  
 The Infinitely Good, the Ever-Merciful. /  
 Master of the Day of Judgement. /  
 It is You we adore, and it is from You we seek help. /  
 Guide us upon the straight path. /  
 The Path of those on whom is Your Grace, not of those on whom  
 there is wrath, nor of those who go astray.  
 (Al-Fatihah, 1:1-7)*

## APPENDIX: THE DIVERSITY OF ISLAM

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Thirty years or so after the death of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in 632 CE, Muslims became politically divided over the Caliphate (the supreme political leadership) of Islam. Gradually, these differences became ideologically so deep that Muslims coalesced into two large ‘branches’ (*Sunnis* and *Shi‘as*) of the religion and one small one (the *Kharwarij*).

These three branches then developed their own schools of juridical methodology (*Madhhabs*) and consequently of Islamic holy law (*Shari‘ah*): the *Sunnis* developed four major *Madhhabs* (*Hanafi*, *Maliki*, *Shafi‘i* and *Hanbali*,) dating back to around 800 CE; the *Shi‘a* developed two major *Madhhabs* (the *Ja‘faris*—the so-called ‘Twelvers’, named for the number of their ‘infallible Imams’; and the *Zeidis*—the so-called ‘Fivers’, likewise named for the number of their imams); the *Thahiri Madhhab* developed in Muslim Andalusia (there are no *Thahiris* as such alive today but scholars still consider the methodology of this *Madhhab* as valid), and the *Ibadhis* developed their own *Madhhab*. These together comprise the so-called ‘eight *Madhhabs*’ of Islam.

Within the eight *Madhhabs* of Islam, which are Juridical schools and not necessarily doctrinal ones (*‘aqidah*), there are different schools of thought. Most *Sunnis* of the four *Madhahib*—with the notable exception of the *Salafis/Wahabis* (who are *Hanbali* of origin but have their own distinct formulation of *Sunni ‘aqidah*)—follow the *Ash‘ari-Maturidi* (despite slight differences, the two are essentially one tradition) theology and *‘aqidah*. Mention must then be made of the *Sufis* (perhaps a quarter of *Sunnis* are associated with Sufism in one form or another—legitimate Sufism being typified by the writings of Imam Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali) and the students of *‘Irfan*. These are not followers of new legal schools—quite the contrary, the *Sufis* are *Sunni*, and the students of *‘Irfan* are *Shi‘a*—but rather mystics within those legal schools. Within *Shi‘ism* there

are also the minority *Ismailis* (the ‘Seveners’—so-named because of the number of their ‘infallible Imams’). These have two branches: (a) the *Dawudi Buhara* who follow the *fiqh* of Qadi Nu‘man and thus are basically *Shafi‘i* with some *Ja‘fari fiqh* under the aegis of their leader, the Sultan of the Buhara, and (b) the *Nizaris* who follow their ‘living Imam’, the Agha Khan.

Today (2012 CE), the *Sunnis* comprise around 90 per cent of all Muslims, the *Shi‘a* around 9 per cent, and the radical *Khawarij* no longer exist, and have been replaced by the *Ibadhis* who comprise less than 1 per cent of all Muslims. The *Ibadhis* survive only in Oman and the Southern Sahara; the *Ja‘fari Shi‘a* are concentrated in Iran and Iraq (with some minorities into the Persian Gulf, Syria and Lebanon, Pakistan, India and Afghanistan); the *Zeidi Shi‘a* are concentrated in the Yemen, and the *Sunnis* are everywhere else.

Finally, as regards ‘philosophical outlooks’ it might be said that these are basically of three different kinds: (1) ‘traditionalists’ who respect the *Madhhabs* as described above (over 90% of all Muslims could be described as such); (2) ‘fundamentalists’ who challenge the 1380 years of received Islamic tradition and practice in the name of ‘going back to’ (what they believe to be) the age of the Prophet ﷺ (perhaps 5% of all Muslims could be described as such), and (3) modernists who basically believe in compromising or remaking Islamic tradition to suit modern conditions (these comprise less than 3% of all Muslims, mostly Westernized, wealthier and with secular academic educations).

Nevertheless, all of these different kinds of Muslims, in so far as they identify themselves as Muslims—that is to say, perhaps 1.65 billion people in 2012 CE, some 23% of the population of the world of over 7 billion people—all agree on the Five Pillars of Islam, and the six articles of Faith of *Iman* as the common essence of their religion.

(See: Ghazi bin Muhammad, *Kitab Ijma‘ Al-Muslimin ‘ala Ihtiram Madhahib al-Din*, (3rd ed., 2006, RABIIT), Preface by H.E Grand Prof. Dr. Muhammad Sayyid Tantawi (whole book). See also: [www.AmmanMessage.com](http://www.AmmanMessage.com).)

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

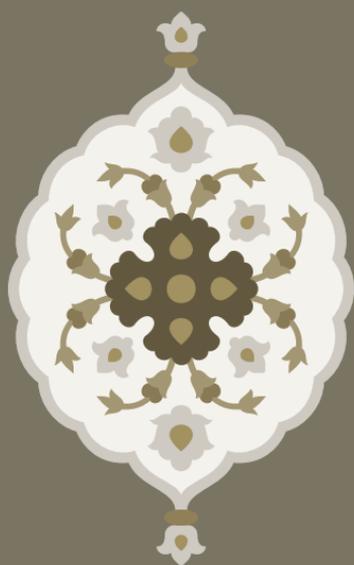
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H.R.H. Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad bin Talal (born in Amman on the 15th of October 1966) is the nephew of the late King Al-Hussein bin Talal of Jordan. He received his BA from Princeton University in 1988 *Summa cum laude*; his first PhD from Cambridge University, U.K., in 1993, and his second PhD from Al-Azhar University in Cairo 2010.

Prince Ghazi has held many official positions in Jordan including: Cultural Secretary to H.M. King Hussein; Advisor for Tribal Affairs to H.M. King Hussein; Personal Envoy of and Special Advisor to H.M. King Abdullah II, and Chief Advisor for Religious and Cultural Affairs to H.M. King Abdullah II.

In 1996 Prince Ghazi founded the Al-Balqa Applied University, and in 2008 he founded the World Islamic Sciences and Education University. In 1997 he founded the National Park of the Site of the Baptism of Jesus Christ ﷺ, and in 2000 he established the Great Tafsir Project ([www.Altafsir.com](http://www.Altafsir.com)), the largest online project for exegesis of the Holy Qur'an. He was the author of 'Three Articles of the Amman Message' in 2005; the author of the historic open letter 'A Common Word Between Us and You' in 2007, and the author of the World Interfaith Harmony Week United Nations General Assembly Resolution in October 2010. In 2012 he established the Al-Ghazali Integral Professorial Chair in Al-Aqsa Mosque and Al-Quds University, and the Al-Razi Integral Professorial Chair in the King Hussein Mosque and Jordan University. Prince Ghazi is also Chairman of the Board of Trustees of The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought.

Prince Ghazi is the author of a number of books and articles—including the widely-acclaimed work *Love in the Holy Qur'an*—as well as the recipient of a number of awards and decorations including the Eugen Biser Prize (2008) and the St. Augustine Award for Interfaith Dialogue (2012).





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# WHAT IS ISLAM AND WHY?



