The Spirit of Islam

The following excerpt is taken from an autobiographical novel Heirs to the Past by the Muslim writer Driss Chraïbi. The occasion is the funeral of the old father of the family, for which the émigré son, Driss Ferdi, has returned from the secular rationalism of Paris, where he has spent the last 16 years in a steady erosion of his Muslim convictions and identity.

Then a man stood up . . . and began to chant. What he chanted was of no importance. It was not the words, nor the meaning, nor even the symbolism, which moved our hearts, the men, women and children who were there. We forgot why we were there the moment he began to chant. It was the incantation, and the end of our woes and miserable little problems, the aching and yet serene longing for that other life which is ours and to which we are all destined to return, the victors and the defeated, the fully developed and those who are still at the larva state, the faithful and the atheists, through God’s great compassion. There was all of that in the voice of the man who stood chanting in the sun, and we were in his voice, I was in his voice despite the vast legacy of incredulity that I had received from the West. When he reached the end of a verse, he paused, and so it came about – an outburst of fervour. And while he chanted it was like a man in the wilderness chanting his faith. And the voice rose and swelled, changed in tone, became tragic, soared and then floated down on our heads like a seagull gliding gently and softly, little more than a whisper. And so – never again will I go in search of intellectuals, of written truths, synthetic truths, of collections of hybrid ideas which are nothing but ideas. Never again will I travel the world in search of a shadow of justice, fairness, progress, or schemes calculated to change mankind. I was weary and I was returning to my clan. The man who was not even aware of his voice or of his faith was alive and held the secret of life – a man who could not even have been a dustman in this world of founts of knowledge and of civilization. Peace and
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everlasting truth were in him and in his voice, while all was crumbling around him
and on the continents.

(Driss Chaïbi, *Heirs to the Past*, trans. Len Ortzen, London,
Heinemann Educational Books, 1971)

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**Question for discussion**

1. The speaker is here described as being led by the chanter’s voice
to experience some larger perspective than the merely intellectual.
What could account for this experience?

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**The Muslim View of Life**

The Muslim view of life shares a great deal with the Jewish and Christian views
to which it is related. The world has been created by a personal God, who has
revealed his will to man. At death God judges each soul accordingly, either for
heaven or for hell.

In the Muslim view, the most important thing is to acknowledge the absolute
supremacy of God. Since God is our Creator and our Judge, he deserves our
complete and total submission, and that submission in turn will bring us eternal
salvation.

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**The Emergence of Islam**

The Arab peoples before Mohammed worshipped numerous gods and spirits.
Sacred stones, trees, and springs were venerated, and spirits were believed to
inhabit the desert. The inhabitants of Mohammed’s native city, Mecca, worshipped
a high god named Allah together with other divinities, including three goddesses
known as the “Daughters of Allah.” The name *Allah* is a combination of *al*, which
is the definite article “the,” and *ilah*, the usual word for “God,” and thus means
“the God.” An important center of this worship was a cubical structure called the
Ka’bah, containing a sacred Black Stone, which remains a center of pilgrimage
in Islam.

There were also Jews and Christians in Arabia. Furthermore, according to
Islamic tradition, there were native Arab monotheists called *hanifs*, neither Jews
nor Christians, whose belief in the one and only God had descended in an
independent tradition from Abraham (whom the Koran views as a Muslim).

**Mohammed (Arabic, Muhammad)**

Mohammed was born in Mecca, a member of the dominant tribe there known as
the Koraish (Arabic, *Quraish*), probably around AD 570. His father, whose name
was Abdullah, or “slave of Allah,” died before he was born, and his mother Aminah died when he was six. He was brought up first by his grandfather, who made a modest living by providing pilgrims with water from a well sacred to Allah, so the boy was associated with the religious life from an early age. When, after only two years, his grandfather died, Mohammed was transferred to the care of his uncle, Abu Talib, also a religious man, and later one of his strongest personal supporters (though Abu Talib never embraced Islam).

In his twenties Mohammed came to be employed by a wealthy widow, Khadija, as overseer of her camel caravans, and journeyed with them to Syria. When he was 25, and she 40, they married, and she bore him six children.

In time Mohammed became more and more contemplative. He associated with the hanifs, and would go off into the hills for several days at a time in order to pray and meditate.

**Revelation**

During these excursions Mohammed began to have a series of extraordinary experiences. One night while he was asleep a spiritual being of great power appeared to him, identifying himself as the Angel Gabriel, and announcing that Mohammed was to be the messenger of God. On subsequent occasions and throughout the rest of his life, Gabriel made many revelations to him, which Mohammed was able afterwards to remember exactly. These revelations were couched in an exalted poetic language, which speakers of Arabic consider to be of unsurpassed beauty. They were committed to memory by his followers and eventually written down. Collected after Mohammed’s death, they make up the Koran, the sacred scripture of Islam.

**The Koran (Arabic, Qur’an)**

The chief message of the Koran is the absolute supremacy of God. There exists only one God, and his power is unlimited. He is in complete control of the universe, and human beings owe him total submission. The Arabic word for submission is *islam*.

The word *Koran* (or *Qur’an*), meaning “recitation,” comes from the command of the Angel Gabriel to Mohammed. The Koran is organized in chapters, called suras, of various lengths, some very short, some quite long. Predominantly, the statements of the Koran are placed on the lips of God.

To Muslims the Koran is a miracle of beauty and inspiration. It is often described as the only miracle to which Islam lays claim.

**The Hegira (Arabic, Hijra)**

In his native city, Mecca, Mohammed made little headway. His revelations aroused violent opposition from the merchants, who feared for their trade, which depended on the traditional religion. He made few converts. In the city of Medina, some
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300 miles to the north, however, he was regarded much more favorably. The city
was torn by strife, and leading citizens of Medina secretly invited Mohammed to
move there and serve as religious leader and arbitrator, promising to become
Muslims and obey him. This he did. In the year 622 of the Christian era, under
cover of darkness, he left Mecca and travelled to Medina. This event is called
the Hegira (or Hijra), the “emigration.” It is considered the founding event of
Islam as a religion. The year in which it took place was adopted as the first year
of the Islamic calendar.

Mohammed in Medina (Arabic, Madina)

Gradually Mohammed became the sole ruler of Medina, and transformed it into
an Islamic society. The worship of all other gods but Allah was eliminated, the
forms of public prayer were established, with Friday as the weekly day of prayer,
the fast of Ramadan was established and the mosque was created as the place of
prayer. The brotherhood of all Muslims was stressed, and an official system of
almsgiving was organized to help the poor.

In addition, Mohammed organized armed raids on the Meccan caravans tra-
versing the desert because the Meccans had confiscated the Muslims’ property.
The Meccans replied by sending guards to defend them. The armed forces on
both sides grew, leading to a series of battles from which Mohammed’s forces
emerged the victors. He became the chief political power in Arabia.

The return to Mecca (Arabic, Makka)

In AD 630 Mohammed resolved to capture Mecca. He gathered together a large
army and proceeded to the city, which surrendered to him. He transformed Mecca
into an Islamic city on the model of Medina, smashing the images of the gods,
and setting the Ka’bah up as the central shrine of Islam. Two years later he died.

The expansion of Islam

After Mohammed’s death many Arab tribes began to withdraw their allegiance
to Islam. His successors, the Caliphs, declared them apostates, sent armies out
against them, and quickly overcame them. Finding they were so easily victorious,
the Muslim armies continued to advance into more remote territories subject to
the Persian and Roman Empires. Both empires were unpopular, and the Muslim
armies were welcomed. Within a few short years they were masters of an enorm-
ous empire stretching from present-day Afghanistan to Egypt and as far west as
Spain.

The status of Mohammed

Muslims do not regard Mohammed as divine, or as a savior, but as a mere man.
Although a mere man, however, he is the Prophet, the man through whom
God has made his final revelation to mankind. This is expressed by his title “The Seal of the Prophets,” that is, the last and decisive prophet. There are no more prophets after him, for there are no revelations from God after the Koran. Although Islamic tradition does not regard Mohammed as divine, it does consider him sinless, and regards him as the highest model of behavior. The strongest argument for any belief or action is that it follows Mohammed’s example.

Sunna and Hadith

Because of Mohammed’s immense prestige, the Koran is not the only authority in Islam. Everything that Mohammed said or did is authoritative, and constitutes a Sunna, an approved custom or tradition. As a result, a large body of literature has developed tracing various actions and sayings to him and his companions. A report attributing some saying or action to Mohammed or his companions is called a hadith, and in practice they play as large a role in Muslim life as the Koran itself. The hadith is a special Muslim literary form. Typically it begins by giving the chain of witnesses, called an isnad, who have handed the report on to one another: A told B, who told C, who told D, and so on, that Mohammed did or said such and such. (The proper plural of hadith in Arabic is...
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ahadith; however, hadith seems to be widely used in English for both singular and plural.)

The Doctrines of Islam

The main doctrines of Islam are usually summed up under five headings.

One God

The most basic belief of Islam is that there exists a single personal God. This is a belief it shares with Judaism and Christianity. Perhaps even more strongly than those religions, if possible, Islam emphasizes that there is only one God. It rejects polytheism with the utmost intensity.

This emphatic monotheism is expressed in the Witness, or Shahada, uttered daily by devout Muslims:

There is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet.

La ilaha illa Allah; Muhammad rasul Allah.

The force of this belief is, first, to assert that all the other divinities that mankind has worshipped in the course of its history are mere myths, empty figments of the imagination.

Second, the belief provides the true God with a definite historical identity. God is not a mere abstract idea. One of the gods men have worshipped is actually the true God, namely Allah, the god worshipped specifically in Mecca by Mohammed’s tribesmen even before he was born. It was he, and no other, who revealed the Koran to Mohammed. (The Arabic language has no capital letters, and so no way of distinguishing between “god” and “God.”)

Third, the belief implies the absolute supremacy of Allah. He is in complete control of the universe. Whatever happens, happens only by his will. He is unique. Nothing can be compared to him or put in the same category with him. The Muslim theologian Al-Ghazali says:

He in His essence is one without any partner, single without any similar, eternal without any opposite, separate without any like. He is One: prior with nothing before Him, from eternity, without any beginning, abiding in existence with none after Him, to eternity without an end, subsisting without ending, abiding without termination . . . Measure does not bind him and boundaries do not contain Him.

(Quoted in Duncan B. Macdonald, Development of Muslim Theology, Jurisprudence and Constitution Theory, New York, 1903, p. 303; see also Cragg, House of Islam, p. 14.)

To place any created thing on the same level as God is to commit the sin of shirk, tantamount to blasphemy. This is why polytheism is so strongly detested:
it is felt to insult the unique dignity of God by associating imaginary beings with him. In the Muslim view, Christians also commit this sin by believing in Jesus as the Son of God, for God cannot have a son, that is, another being of the same nature as himself.

**Angels**

The Koran was revealed to Mohammed not directly by God, but by the Angel Gabriel speaking on behalf of God. It is therefore a doctrine of Islam that there exist spiritual beings in addition to man. The highest of these are the angels, the messengers and servants of God who carry out his will in the world. The Koran mentions Michael in addition to Gabriel.

Besides the angels, there is another kind of invisible being called the *jinn* (plural; the singular is *jinni*, the origin of the “genie” in the story of Aladdin’s lamp). The jinn were created by God out of fire and, unlike the angels, they eventually die. They are of both sexes and can be good or evil. Iblis, or Satan, is a jinni.

**Prophets and scriptures**

Although non-Muslims view Islam as the youngest of the major religions, Islam does not regard itself in the same way. It sees itself as identical with the first revelation God gave to mankind. The Koran mentions some 25 individuals to whom God gave the essentials of the Koranic message in earlier times. These are the prophets. A prophet in this sense is not necessarily a person who predicts the future, but one who speaks on behalf of God. They include Adam, Noah, Abraham (Ibrahim), Joseph (Yusuf), Moses (Musa), Aaron (Harun), David (Dawud), John the Baptist (Yahya), and Jesus (Isa). All of these were Muslims.

To each one God entrusted a scripture, containing essentially the same message as the Koran: of submission of God: to Moses, for example, he gave the Torah; to David the Psalms; to Jesus the Gospel. But in each case the scriptures were corrupted or misinterpreted. As a result these texts have no authority for Muslims. It was to correct these distortions that God sent Mohammed, revealing to him again the true Koran. It alone is now the pure scripture, possessing the original form given it by God, and so it supersedes all the earlier ones.

Islam, then, is simply the true form of what Judaism and Christianity ought to be and would be if they had remained faithful to their original inspiration.

**Resurrection and the Last Judgement**

As mentioned above, the Koran describes itself as a book of warning. What it warns mankind about is the Last Judgement. Almost every page of the Koran contains an urgent reminder that at the end of time, in an earth-shaking cataclysm in which he will raise all the dead to life, God will pass an eternal sentence on every human being. Those who believe the revelation given through Mohammed
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and who do good works will be rewarded with the delights of heaven. Those who did not believe will be consigned to the torments of hell.

However, like the earlier forms of Christianity (see below, p. 329), Islam has a doctrine of purgatory. After death the souls of those who do not deserve hell but are not yet ready to enter heaven will undergo a period of temporary suffering which will prepare them for entrance into heaven.

The divine decree and predestination

Since the Koran lays so much emphasis on the judgement of God, it plainly believes that human beings have free will. Those who are condemned to hell receive that punishment because they deserve it, since God is just. But this must not be understood to mean that human actions lie outside the scope of God’s control. Nothing lies outside God’s control, and that includes the free actions of men. It can be said, then, that God predetermines some to heaven and some to hell. Yet this does not abolish man’s responsibility for his own deeds and misdeeds.

This doctrine is more controversial than the other four, since it seems to imply a contradiction. In general Muslim thinkers have been content to admit that it is a profound mystery, and leave it at that (the principle of Bila Kayf), emphasizing that what counts in Islam is not theory but practice.

His beauty if it thrill thy heart,
If thou a man of passion art,
Of time and of eternity,
Of being and non-entity,
Ask not.

When thou has passed the basses four,
Behold the sanctuary door,
And having satisfied thine eyes,
What in the sanctuary lies,
Ask not.

(‘Attar)

The Law: Shariah and Fiqh

The Koran reveals the will of God for mankind. This constitutes a Law, which all are bound to obey on penalty of eternal condemnation. This Islamic law in its totality is termed the Shariah, meaning “the path.” The shariah includes laws concerning not only strictly religious matters, but also many other aspects of life, such as marriage and the family, inheritance, divorce, and government. Like the Jewish “Torah” Shariah is a broad term, including not only law but also faith and the entire Muslim way of life.

The Shariah cannot be questioned since it is divine. However, the practical application of the Shariah to the conditions of life is a matter of human –
interpretation and about this there can be different opinions. There is a science of the law, which is called *Fiqh*. 

**The Five Pillars of Islam**

There are five religious practices that Islam enjoins on its followers as a minimum: the shahada; worship (salat); legal almsgiving (zakat); fasting (sawm); and pilgrimage to Mecca (hajj).

**The Shahada**

This is the Witness or profession of faith mentioned above: “There is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet.” The statement itself made in the Witness bears the title of the *Kalimah*. It is this statement that makes a person a Muslim. Anyone who utters it during the course of his life, even if only once, is accounted a Muslim. It also forms part of the formal daily prayer, described next.

**Worship: salat**

All Muslims, both men and women, are required to perform ritual or formal prayer, called *Salat*. This prayer is not so much a request for favors or blessings as a public recognition of the sovereignty of God. It includes various bodily
postures such as bowing, sitting, standing, and prostration with the forehead touching the floor, while reciting such phrases as Allahu akbar (“God is most great”) and the Shahada. This public prayer is not the same as private prayer (du’a), for which no special formula is prescribed.

The ritual must be performed five times a day: at dawn, midday, mid-afternoon, sunset, and in the evening before going to bed. The form of this prayer is given in the next chapter (see pp. 000–0). The prayer is to be recited facing Mecca. The direction toward Mecca from wherever one may happen to be is called the Kibla. In the mosque it is marked by a niche in the wall, called the mihrab. Ideally the prayer should be performed in a mosque, but if that is not feasible any clean place will do, indoors or outdoors. Muslims often use a prayer mat for this purpose. At a mosque, shortly before the time for prayer, the muezzin (mu’adhdhin) chants the call to prayer (the adhan) from the minaret.

The sacred day of the week for Muslims is Friday. It is not a day of rest, unlike the Sabbath in Judaism and Sunday in Christianity. However, all men (but not women) are required to take part in the Friday noon prayer at a mosque, if one is available. The Friday service follows a special form, including a sermon by the leader (the imam).

The word mosque comes from masjid, meaning a place of prostration. Strictly speaking, it does not have to be a building but can be simply a piece of open ground dedicated to prayer. The mosque can legitimately be used for many purposes related to religion: as a school, meeting place, or even for eating and sleeping, if necessary.

Legal almsgiving: zakat

Muslims are strongly encouraged to provide help to those in need. In addition to private charity, Islamic law requires the payment of a special tax for this purpose, called the Zakat. It is to be paid at the end of each year, in proportion to one’s possessions.

As originally formulated, it is paid only on certain classes of goods above a minimum, such as animals, agricultural products, precious metals, and objects intended for sale. The modern times it includes paper money and the money held in bank accounts.

Today the zaket is not administered by the state in any Muslim country; it is voluntary, and often collected by mosque.

Fasting: sawm

For a month each year Muslims are required to fast. The fast occurs during the ninth month, Ramadan, and consists in abstaining from all food and drink from sunrise to sunset.

The fast of Ramadan is not exactly like the Christian Lent. There is no limitation on eating or drinking during the night, and this is usually a party time,
when families and friends get together and celebrate. There is an especially joyous celebration (the ‘Id al-Fitr) at the end of the month, one of the two chief feast days of Islam.

The official Islamic year is lunar, consisting of twelve months each of four weeks exactly, and is therefore shorter than our regular, solar year. As a result the month of Ramadan cycles backwards throughout the regular year, and occurs in different seasons. Consequently the length of the fast from sunrise to sunset varies greatly, from the middle of summer to the middle of winter. Ramadan is relatively easy to keep when it occurs in winter, but in midsummer it is more difficult.

**Pilgrimage to Mecca: the hajj**

As far as circumstances permit, every Muslim should go on pilgrimage to the sacred city of Mecca at least once in his lifetime. The city of Mecca is sacred because it was the site of the original, pre-Islamic worship of Allah. In that capacity it had been a center of pilgrimage long before the time of Mohammed. Only Muslims are allowed to enter the city. The proper time for the pilgrimage is a period of four days during the twelfth month of the Islamic year, and so, like Ramadan, it cycles backwards through the seasons.

Men must wear a distinctive white two-piece garment in place of their usual clothes. Those who have taken part in the pilgrimage agree that this uniform clothing, submerging all outward differences such as race, age, and wealth,
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conveys a profound experience of the unity and brotherhood of Muslims. Women may wear the costumes of their regions, but now usually wear white too.

The high point of the pilgrimage is the commemoration of the sacrifice carried out by Abraham. (As we have seen, Muslims view Abraham as a Muslim.) God had commanded Abraham to kill his only son Isma'il in sacrifice, as a test of faith, and Abraham made preparations to do so, but at the last moment God instructed him to kill a ram instead, which he did. (In the Hebrew Bible the son in the story was Isaac.) To commemorate this, the pilgrims perform animal sacrifices, and thousands of animals are killed in the space of an hour, creating a considerable problem in the disposal of the carcasses.

The day on which this is done, the tenth of the month, is celebrated not only in Mecca but throughout the Muslim world as the Feast of Sacrifice (‘Id al Adha), and is the second of the two great Muslim feast days.

Jihad

This term, often translated as “holy war,” literally has the broader meaning of “struggle, exertion.” It signifies the general effort to advance the cause of Islam, a duty sometimes ranked as a sixth Pillar. Mohammed spoke of a twofold jihad: one internal or spiritual and the harder, the struggle against oneself, against the unbeliever within one’s own heart; the other external and easier, against the enemies of Islam.

Islam prohibits wars fought purely for territorial gain, but allows war not only for self-defense, but also for the purpose of extending the domain of Islam:

Make war on the unbelievers and hypocrites and deal rigorously with them. (Koran 9: 73)

Make war on them until idolatry is no more and Allah’s religion reigns supreme. (Koran 8)

Fight for the sake of God those that fight against you, but do not attack them first. God does not love the aggressors [or, transgressors]. Kill them wherever you find them. Drive them out of the places from which they drove you. Idolatry is worse than carnage. (Koran 2: 190–1; see below, p. 265)

Fighting is obligatory for you. (see below, p. 266)

The Koran also states: “There shall be no compulsion in religion” (2: 256). However, at the present time this is usually interpreted to mean only that force should not be used to convert an adult to Islam.

Islam has never developed in explicit theory of the just war. The Hadith, however, gives certain rules for the conduct of war, forbidding, for example, wanton killing, and in general the killing of children, women, elderly men, monks, farmers and hired employees.
The People of the Book

The People of the Book are those who possess sacred books, chiefly Jews and Christians. Although Islam condemns Judaism and Christianity as distortions of the true religion, it accords them a special tolerance not shown to other religions. The Koran appears to teach that polytheists must be given the choice of conversion or death, though later opinion interpreted that as applying only to the era of the Koran. The People of the Book, however, must be allowed to continue to practice their faith. On the other hand, they are prohibited from making converts, and they must pay a special tax and wear distinctive clothing. In practice, the enforcement of these rules under Muslim governments has varied greatly from place to place.

In time this classification was extended to the Zoroastrians, in Persia, and to Hindus Buddhists and Laws, since they also possess sacred books.

Clean and Unclean

In order to take part in the ritual prayer and many other observances, a person must be ritually clean. Ritual uncleanliness is caused by various events considered as polluting. It is not the same thing as sin, for it does not necessarily imply any moral guilt, but if it has been contracted it must be removed before prayer. The concept is similar to that of kashrut in Judaism.

Pollution may:

1. be acquired from external sources (this is called *najasa*), such as contact with a wet discharge from an animal or human being (blood, urine, pus, feces); or
2. be the result of an action (this is called *hadath*). Hadath may be major or minor.

Major hadath result from seminal emission in the male or orgasm in the female. Minor hadath occur from any loss of consciousness, such as sleep, fainting, drunkenness, from urinating, or from touching the skin of the opposite sex. Purification is obtained by washing, in the case of minor hadath, or by taking a complete bath, with major hadath. For this reason every mosque has facilities for washing.

The left hand is always regarded as unclean. It is never used to greet, to give gifts, or to touch another, but is used for toilet activities. Similarly the left foot is considered to be inauspicious, and is not to be used to make the first step into the mosque or on a journey.

Circumcision

Circumcision is considered a form of purification (it is often called simply *tahara*, which means purification) and is obligatory for all Muslim boys, although the
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The age at which it is done varies from region to region; in some areas it is performed in infancy, in others as late as at the age of 10 or 12. The operation is carried out privately, but is traditionally accompanied by some kind of festivity, including music and feasting. Although it is not mentioned in the Koran, it is recommended in the Hadith.

“Circumcision” is also widely practiced on girls, in the form of cutting away all or part of the clitoris, although this is not so much an Islamic obligation as a folk custom, which is also practiced in some non-Islamic societies. It is done in private, without any celebration. The reasons given for it are varied, and the practice is usually enforced by women.

The Organization of Islam

Ideally Islam has no priesthood or clergy. The prayer service in the mosque can in principle be led by any believer. There is, however, a recognized class of those who are knowledgeable about the religious law comparable to the Jewish Rabbinate. This class is called the Ulama. One becomes a member of it, a Mawla, by studying with recognized older scholars who themselves have studied with recognized elders scholars back in an unbroken chain to the Prophet. The question as to what belongs officially to Islam and what does not is settled authoritatively by the agreement (ijma') of the ulama. Mohammed is reported in a hadith to have said, “My people will never agree together on an error.”

The title mufti is sometimes given to an expert outstanding for his knowledge of the law, frequently one who occupies an official position. When an authority is consulted on a particular question involving the interpretation of the law, the consulted on a particular question involving the interpretation of the law, the response he gives is called a fatwa. This is directly binding only on the questioner. Some fatwas, however, have attained a wider force.

Official decisions on matters of the religious law in particular cases, such as property, marriage and divorce, and inheritance, are made by a judge called a qadi, who is appointed by the civil ruler from among the members of the Ulama. At the present time, however, most Muslim countries have instead adopted modern Western legal systems. Calls to implement the Shari’ah usually mean, not to replace the modern system of administering the law with the ancient one, but to insert more content from the Shari’ah into the modern system.

Islam and Society

Islam is not only a private or individual religion. Many of its laws can be carried out only in a Muslim society, where the civil law follows Islamic principles. For example, Muslim law requires that property be inherited according to certain rules, with sons typically receiving twice as much as daughters. Muslim law
regarding marriage and divorce has many provisions that can operate only if supported by the civil law (or at least not prohibited by it. Muslim law can also function effectively in the absence of a state or civil government.) For example, a man can divorce his wife without any judicial process, by simply repeating to her three times (usually with an interval between them) “I divorce you.”

Muslims of the most traditional sort cannot be content to live in a secular society in the Western sense, which provides freedom of religion to all. In their view Islam requires a society in which the government is Islamic and Islam is the official religion. Ideally the whole world should be a single Islamic empire.

Further than this, the most traditional form of Islam requires not only political dominance but also economic and cultural superiority. The Islamic society ought to be the most advanced, the most prosperous. For many Muslims the combined political, economic and cultural predominance of the West in modern times is a cause of dismay. This is especially true because of the sexual freedom widely permitted in the West, which is offensive to traditional Muslims. Some Muslims consider that the chief reason for their nations’ decline in power is that they have not implemented the Shari’ah strictly and fully. The Ayatollah Khomeini’s rule in Iran from 1979 to 1989 was inspired largely by this view.

At the present time, however, the general question of the relationship of Islam to society is the subject of much debate, and a growing number of Muslims, especially those living in the Western democracies, have adopted a more liberal viewpoint.

Sunni and Shiite Islam

The division between Sunni and Shiite Islam is a question of the form of authority in Islam. On Mohammed’s death, a majority of his followers recognized his kinsman Abu Bakr as his successor or Caliph. Abu Bakr in turn was followed by three successors, all four being known as “the rightly guided Caliphs.” Muslims who recognize their authority are termed Sunni, meaning followers of the tradition stemming from the Prophet. In Sunni Islam the ultimate source of authority is considered to be the Muslim community. This is the most widespread form of Islam.

Some of Mohammed’s followers, however, maintained that Mohammed during his lifetime had designated his son-in-law Ali as his successor, and they refused to recognize the authority of Abu Bakr. These were the Party of Ali, or Shi’at Ali. In the view of Shiite Islam, authority resides not in the community but in the divinely appointed leader, the successor of Ali, called the Imam. God provides an Imam in every age, even though sometimes he may be hidden. Shiite Islam predominates in Iran, and has large communities in several other countries such as Iraq & Lebanon. There are several different Shiite sects, who recognize different Imams. Many expect the return to the twelfth and last Imam, who went into “occultation” during the middle ages.
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While Sunni and Shiite agree on the broad principles of Islam, Shiite Islam has distinctive practices of its own. One of these is the celebration of the Tenth Day of (the month of) Muharram, commemorating the death of Ali’s son Husayn in battle against other Muslims. Husayn’s suffering quickly came to be interpreted as voluntary self-sacrifice. It is regarded by the Shia as redemptive, and celebrated in a dramatic “passion play” in which the participants flagellate themselves with chains and smear themselves with blood, ritually sharing in Husayn’s fate.

Sufism

A Sufi aims to attain spiritual union with God through love. Conscious of God’s love, the Sufi makes it the central goal of his existence to love God in return. The high point of this life of spiritual love is sometimes described as a mystical marriage with God. The Sufi emphasis on love for God and union with him tends to relegate the details of the law to a matter of secondary concern. For the Sufi, it is often the spiritual significance of the law that is important, rather than its literal fulfillment. For similar reasons Sufism is relatively indifferent to political concerns.

Sufism exists both in Sunni and in Shiite Islam. It is organized in brotherhoods or orders which each typically owe allegiance to a particular spiritual master.

Orthodox Sufism maintains the distinction between the individual and God, viewing them as two separate realities. This is important if the individual is to be said to love God and obey him. Some Sufis have gone further, however, seeing the individual as essentially only an appearance of God, like a reflection in a mirror. This is the conception of monism, that there exists only a single reality. As we saw earlier, monism also occurs in Hinduism, for example, in the doctrine of some of the Upanishads, that Brahman alone is real; as well as in Mahayana Buddhism, in the view that the Buddha nature is the true identity of all that is. Consequently there are some fundamental similarities between these otherwise very diverse viewpoints. Some Sufis have expressed this monistic outlook by saying that they are identical with God, a statement which has called down savage persecution on them from orthodox Muslims, for whom it is blasphemy. On the other hand, some Sufis such as Ibn Arabi have been generally accepted and their book widely studied.

Sufis have produced some of the finest poetry in Islam, and among all Islamic literature some of the most accessible to non-Muslims. For a non-Muslim who wishes to understand the spiritual life of Islam, Sufi poetry provides perhaps the best introduction. The lines quoted above p. 268, are from a longer poem by the Sufi poet ‘Attar.

At the present time Sufism is the object of heated dispute. While many view it as the highest and noblest achievement of Islam, others are bitterly opposed to it as too liberal, and some see it as largely responsible for the decline of Islam as a political force.
Muslim Ethics

For the traditional Muslim, the Koran is the only source of absolutely certain knowledge in this world, since it is the word of God. Ethics, then, is a question of what the Koran says about any action – together with the reliable guide to it, the Hadith.

Ethics is concerned with the good. But what is the good? Is it something objective, which can be discovered by reason, or is it simply decided by the will of God? Does God command an action because it is just by its very nature, or is it just for the sole reason that God commands it? The traditional Muslim opinion is that actions are just because God commands them. It is considered that this view is necessary to maintain the absolute supremacy of God, for otherwise, it is argued, God would be subject to something outside of himself. It follows that the good or the just cannot be discovered by reason. Although in earlier centuries a group known as the Mu’tazilites did allow for an ethics based directly on reason, they did not long survive. Ethics must be based only on revelation, that is, Koran and Hadith. Consequently, Islamic ethics, like Orthodox Jewish ethics, is more a matter of the group, the collective, rather than of the individual conscience.

Koran and Hadith, however, do not address every question directly, and often leave room for different interpretations. The general term for this interpretation is *ijtihad*. In the early years of Islam a great deal of *ijtihad* was carried out by scholars, based largely on reasoning by analogy (*qiyas*), until by about the tenth century there was general agreement that everything that needed to be done in elaborating the divine law as a blueprint for Muslim life and society had been accomplished. This view is referred to as “the closing of the door of *ijtihad*.” Since then no further interpretation is admitted, but only application to particular circumstances.

*Qiyas*, or reasoning by analogy, means using a statement in the Koran about one action to make a decision about a similar action not mentioned there explicitly.

On this basis, Muslims recognize a universal moral law which prohibits harmful actions such as murder, robbery, adultery, and bearing false witness, because they are condemned in various places in the Koran. In addition, there is the specific Islamic law, which is binding only on Muslims. We have already seen the provisions of this regarding jihad and war in general (above, p. 000).

The interpretations of the revealed law by scholars are organized into a number of schools, named after their founders, which each tend to emphasize different principles, and to prevail in different territories. The most prominent schools are those founded by:

- al-Shafi’i, of Cairo, which tends to rely on reasoning by analogy;
- Malik, of the Hijaz (the province of Arabia which includes Mecca and Medina), which tends to raise the question of the general usefulness of an action;
Religions of Semitic Origin

- Abu Hanifa, of Baghdad, which prevails in many non-Arab areas such as Turkey and India, and tends to allow more room for individual judgement;
- Ibn Hanbal, which is strictly traditionalist and largely restricted to Saudi Arabia.

These are Sunni schools. The Shiite community has its own schools.

The overall effect of this ethical system in the past has been to consign moral judgements into the hands of the interpreters of divine revelation, the Ulama. With the advance of education in the Muslim community, however, more individuals are taking it on themselves to make such judgements, and here the tendency has been to refer rather more to the Koran than to the Hadith.

Modern Developments

Since the seventeenth century, with the rise of science, the emergence of democracy, and the development of the capitalist economy, Western society, which once lagged behind the Muslim world, has leaped dramatically ahead of it, becoming more knowledgeable, more technologically advanced, wealthier, more powerful, and, at least in its own view, more humane. The Islamic world, by contrast, sank into a general state of poverty and powerlessness during this period. As a result, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, many Muslim lands were colonized by Western nations. Although colonization brought benefits, such as modern methods of communication, transport, medicine, and economic and political organization, the superiority of the West has been experienced by many Muslims as an extreme humiliation.

In general, there have been two kinds of response to this. On the one hand, some Muslims, especially those who have been educated or live in Western societies, have argued that Islam can and should expand its intellectual horizons to include worthwhile features of the modern world such as science, democracy, capitalism, and the recognition of human rights. This would suggest a further development in the process of interpretation, ijtihad, which is sometimes referred to as “opening the door of ijtihad.”

On the other hand, there are many Muslims who believe the opposite, that the decline of the Muslim world has been caused by failure to implement the original Koranic law. According to this view, there must be a return to original Islam, the full, true, authentic Islam of the early Muslims, setting aside the accretions of later centuries. It is believed that if this were done it would lead to economic development and political power, and the restoration of the Muslim world to its former supremacy. The whole world would ultimately become a single Muslim empire. This message has found a wide audience around the world.

An important reform movement has been Wahhabism, founded by Muhammad al-Wahhab in Saudi Arabia. It represents an attempt to purify and strengthen Islam by returning to the rules developed during the early Muslim centuries, rejecting the developments of later times. It is hostile to everything that can be considered in any way to amount to shirk, idolatry, such as the popular veneration
of saints. This has led it to attack both Sufism and Shiism as idolatrous because they have fostered the veneration of saints. It is opposed to ornamentation in architecture, demanding simplicity. It requires the strict practice of the traditional Islamic law, and in some respects is even stricter than the original. To enforce its version of Islam it has routinely relied upon coercion.

The battle to restore the Islam of the original Muslims (who are known by the name salaf; whence the movement itself is called the salafiyya) therefore includes two further battles: against the occupying forces of the Western colonial powers, which now include especially the state of Israel, and against those Muslim rulers who are secularized and who reject the salafiyya. In English this movement is sometimes called Radical or Fundamentalist Islam.

Radical Islam and Islamic terrorism

Following the revelation of the horrors of the Nazi death camps and the attempted genocide of the Jewish people, in 1947 the United Nations General Assembly recommended the establishment of two states in the territory of Palestine: a Jewish state and an Arab state. The Jewish state was to provide a national home for the Jewish people, and the Arab state was to provide a home for the Arabs displaced by the creation of the Jewish state.

Palestine at this time was governed by Great Britain, who did not favor the plan, fearing it would result in injustice to the Arabs. The United States initially supported the plan, but then turned against it. Illegal Jewish immigration into Palestine had already been going on for many years, and two Jewish organizations, the Irgun and the Stern Gang, had long engaged in terrorist activity to support the Jewish settlers against opposition from both Arabs and British.

The Arab nations rejected the United Nations plan, arguing that the United Nations had no authority to dispose of Arab land and its people, and armed conflict broke out between Arabs and Jews. The Jewish community declared its independence, as the state of Israel. Surrounding Arab states thereupon declared war on the new state, a war which was decisively won by Israel. The displaced Palestinians were housed in camps, which were intended to be temporary but which, in the absence of a political settlement, became permanent. Once the state of Israel had come into existence, the United States provided it with considerable financial support.

In September 1972, at the Olympic Games in Munich, the Israeli team was attacked by a band of Palestinian terrorists. In the ensuing battle 11 Israelis and five Palestinians were killed. Since then a long series of terrorist attacks, often suicidal, have been perpetrated by Muslims against non-Muslims, especially Israelis and Americans, culminating in the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in September 2001. In Israel Palestinian suicide-terrorist attacks against Israelis continue at the time of writing on an almost daily basis, arguably with the connivance of the Palestinian Authority. Many terrorist attacks appear to have been not merely the work of private individuals or groups but supported by Islamic governments such as those of Libya, Iran, Syria, and Iraq.
At the same time radical Muslim groups have carried out armed rebellions against established governments in several nations such as the Philippines, Algeria, and India. Muslim regimes in Iran, Afghanistan, and Nigeria have implemented the most extreme provisions of the Koranic law. Writers considered to have insulted the Prophet or Islam have been made the subject of death fatwas (a declaration by a religious authority that a certain person may lawfully be killed by anyone). All this has led to questions about the nature of Islam, especially its relationship to violence. Is Islam capable of living in peace with other peoples and religions?

It cannot be denied that the Koranic approval of armed warfare against non-Muslims is troubling. Yet today the vast majority of Muslims live in peace with their neighbors. Every religion is capable of being interpreted and practiced in a variety of ways. Similar provisions can be found in the Jewish Torah, which even the most orthodox Jews today would scarcely think of carrying out. It would seem then that the answer to this question must be that peaceful coexistence with Islam is possible.

In the train of events leading to the Muslim violence of recent decades, there can be little doubt that by far the principal factor is the existence of the state of Israel. Muslim opinion views the establishment of Israel as a straightforward case of robbery: their land was taken and their people expelled by force. The Muslim population of Palestine were never given the chance to approve or disapprove of the scheme, and have never been compensated for their losses. This historic robbery was carried out and has been maintained with the support of the West, especially of the United States. In the view of Radical Muslims, the state of Israel must be eliminated. With regard to America and the West, the goal of Radical Islam and of Muslim terrorism is to persuade them to give up their support of Israel and withdraw entirely from the Middle East.

In the Jewish view, on the other hand, the Arab population lost its right to its land by refusing to accept the decision of the United Nations to partition Palestine into a Jewish state and a Palestinian one. This refusal left the matter to a contest of armed force, which Israel won.

In some respects, perhaps the principal contest at the present time lies within the Muslim community, between those who are willing to agree to a peaceful settlement with Israel and those who are not.

Summary of Islam

1. The chief message of the Koran is the absolute supremacy of God.

2. The main doctrines of Islam concern:
   - the existence of a single God;
   - angels;
   - prophets and scriptures;
   - resurrection and the Last Judgement;
   - The divine decree and predestination.
The principal duties incumbent on a Muslim are the Five Pillars of Islam:
recital of the shahada;
formal prayer, salat;
legal almsgiving, zakat;
fasting, sawm;
pilgrimage to Mecca, hajj.

Islam is not only a private or personal religion, but a social one.

Question for discussion

Several of the founding fathers of the United States, for example, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Benjamin Franklin, were Deists, that is, they believed in the existence of God, a divine Providence, and a life after death. How does this differ from Islam?

Test questions

1. Explain the Muslim doctrine of God.
2. Explain what is meant by saying that Mohammed is “The Seal of the Prophets.” What is the significance of this for the Muslim view of Judaism and Christianity?
3. Explain why Islam is not merely a private religion for individuals, but a social religion requiring adoption by the civil society.

Additional reading

Thoughtful, sympathetic, knowledgeable, with an extensive bibliography.
An excellent introduction, with a comprehensive bibliography.
Islam: Texts

The Koran (Arabic, Qur’an)

With the exception of the first Sura and a few other passages, the Koran has the form of a collection of instructions and sermons addressed to Muhammad by Allah. Muhammad himself could neither read nor write, but his utterances, made over many years, were committed to memory by his followers and were probably all written down, separately, before his death. They were not collected together, however, till after his death. The first caliph, Abu Bakr, is said to have commanded Muhammad’s secretary, Zayd ibn Thabit, to collect the scattered sayings into a single volume. However, disagreements arose about the true text, and the Caliph Uthman commissioned a committee, including Zayd, to produce an official version, which was distributed throughout the Muslim Empire. All earlier texts were then burned.

Sura 1: The Exordium (the Fatiha)

In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful.

Praise be to Allah, Lord of Creation, The Compassionate, the Merciful, King of the Last Judgement!

You alone we worship And to You alone we pray for help. Guide us in the straight path, The path of those whom You have favored,
Not of those who have incurred Your wrath,
Nor of those who have gone astray.

**Sura 93: Daylight**

In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful
By the light of day,
and by the fall of night,
your Lord has not forsaken you,
nor does he abhor you.

The life to come holds a richer prize for you than this present life.
You shall be gratified with what your Lord will give you.

Did He not find you an orphan and give you shelter?
Did He not find you in error and guide you?
Did He not find you poor and enrich you?

Therefore do not wrong the orphan,
nor chide away the beggar.
But proclaim the goodness of your Lord.

**Sura 92: Night**

In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful

By the night,
when she lets fall her darkness,
and by the radiant day!
By Him that created the male and the female,
your endeavours have different ends!

For him that gives in charity
and guards himself against evil
and believes in goodness,
We shall smooth the path of salvation;
but for him that neither gives nor takes
and disbelieves in goodness,
We shall smooth the path of affliction.
When he breathes his last,
his riches shall not avail him.

It is for Us to give guidance,
Ours is the life of this world,
Ours the life to come.
Religions of Semitic Origin

I warn you, then, of the blazing fire,
in which none shall burn save the hardened sinner,
who denies the truth and gives no heed.
But the good man who purifies himself by almsgiving
shall keep away from it;
and so shall he that does good works for the sake of the Most High only,
seeking no recompense.
Such men shall be content.

Sura 107: Alms

In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Have you thought of him that denies the Last Judgement?
It is he who turns away the orphan
and does not urge others to feed the poor.

Woe to those who pray
but are heedless in their prayer;
who make a show of piety
and give to alms to the destitute.

Sura 75: The Resurrection

In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful

I swear by the Day of Resurrection,
and by the self-reproaching soul!
Does man think We shall never put his bones together again?
Indeed, We can remould his very fingers!

Yet man would ever deny what is to come.
“When will this be,” he asks, “this Day of Resurrection?”

But when the sight of mortals is confounded
and the moon eclipsed;
when sun and moon are brought together –
on that day man will ask:
“Whither shall I flee?”

No, there shall be no escape.
For on that day all shall return to Allah.

On that day man shall be informed of all that he has done
and all that he has failed to do.
He shall become his own witness;
his pleas shall go unheeded . . .
Yet you love this fleeting life
and are heedless of the life to come.

On that day there shall be joyous faces,
looking towards their Lord.
On that day there shall be mournful faces,
dreading some great affliction.

But when a man’s soul is about to leave him
and those around him cry:
Will no one save him?
when he knows it is the final parting
and the pangs of death shall assail him –
on that day to your Lord he shall be driven.
For in this life he neither believed nor prayed;
he denied the truth,
and, turning his back,
went to his kinsfolk elated with pride.

Well have you deserved this doom;
well have you deserved it.
Well have you deserved this doom:
too well have you deserved it!

Does man think that he lives in vain?
Was he not a drop of ejected semen?
He became a clot of blood;
then Allah formed and moulded him
and gave him his male and female parts.
Is He then not able to raise the dead to life?

\textit{Sura 2: The Cow}\*

In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful

This book is not to be doubted.
It is a guide to the righteous,
Who have faith in the unseen
And are steadfast in prayer;
Who bestow in charity a part of what We give them;
Who trust what has been revealed to you

\* The name of this Sura is derived from the story included in it about God’s command to the Israelite people to sacrifice a cow and their attempts to evade the sacrifice.
And to others before you,
And firmly believe in the life to come.

These are rightly guided by their Lord;
These shall surely triumph . . .

**Righteousness**

Those that suppress any part of the Scriptures which Allah has revealed in order to gain some paltry end shall swallow nothing but fire into their bellies. On the Day of Resurrection Allah will neither speak to them nor purify them. Theirs shall be a woeful punishment.

Such are those that barter guidance for error and forgiveness for punishment. How steadfastly they seek the fire of Hell! That is because Allah has revealed the Book with the truth; those that disagree about it are in schism.

Righteousness does not consist in whether you face towards the east or the west. The righteous man is he who believes in Allah and the Last Day, in the angels and the Scriptures and the prophets;

who for the love of Allah gives his wealth to his kinsfolk, to the orphans, to the needy, to the wayfarers and to the beggars, and for the redemption of captives;

who attends to his prayers and pays the alms-tax; who is true to his promises and steadfast in trial and adversity and in times of war. Such are the true believers; such are the God-fearing.
Retaliation

Believers, retaliation is decreed for you in bloodshed:
a free man for a free man,
a slave for a slave,
and a female for a female.

He who is pardoned by his aggrieved brother
shall be prosecuted according to usage
and shall pay him a liberal fine.

This is a merciful dispensation from your Lord.
He that transgresses thereafter shall be sternly punished.

Men of understanding!
In retaliation you have a safeguard for your lives;
perchance you will guard yourselves against evil.

Wills

It is decreed that when death approaches,
those of you that leave property
shall bequeath it equitably to parents and kindred.
This is a duty incumbent on the righteous.

He that alters a will after hearing it
shall be accountable for his crime.
Allah hears all and knows all.

He that suspects an error or an injustice
on the part of a testator
and brings about a settlement among the parties
incurs no guilt.
Allah is forgiving and merciful.

The fast

Believers, fasting is decreed for you
as it was decreed for those before you;
perchance you will guard yourselves against evil.
Fast a certain number of days,
but if any one of you is ill or on a journey
let him fast a similar number of days later on;
and for those that can afford it there is a ransom:
the feeding of a poor man.
Religions of Semitic Origin

He that does good of his own accord
shall be well rewarded;
but to fast is better for you,
if you but knew it.

In the month of Ramadhan the Koran was revealed,
a book of guidance with proofs of guidance
distinguishing right from wrong.
Therefore whoever of you is present in that month
let him fast.
But he who is ill or on a journey
shall fast a similar number of days later on.
Allah desires your well-being, not your discomfort.
He desires you to fast the whole month
so that you may magnify Him
and render thanks to Him for giving you His guidance.

When My servants question you about Me,
tell them that I am near.
I answer the prayer of the suppliant
when he calls to Me;
therefore let them answer My call
and put their trust in Me,
that they may be rightly guided.

It is now lawful for you to lie with your wives
on the night of the fast;
they are a comfort to you
as you are to them.

Allah knew that you were deceiving yourselves.
He has relented towards you and pardoned you.

Therefore you may now lie with them
and seek what Allah has ordained for you.

Eat and drink until you can tell a white thread from a black one
in the light of the coming dawn.
Then resume the fast till nightfall
and do not approach them,
but stay at your prayers in the mosques.

These are the bounds set by Allah:
do not come near them.
Thus He makes known His revelations to mankind
that they may guard themselves against evil.
Do not usurp one another’s property by unjust means, 
nor bribe with it the judges 
in order that you may knowingly and wrongfully deprive others of their possessions. 
They question you about the phases of the moon. 
Say: “They are seasons fixed for mankind and for the pilgrimage.”

Righteousness does not consist 
in entering your dwellings from the back. 
The righteous man is he 
that fears Allah. 
Enter your dwellings by their doors 
and fear Allah, 
so that you may prosper.

It was the custom of pagan Arabs, on returning from pilgrimage, to enter their homes from the back.

**Fighting**

Fight for the sake of Allah 
Those that fight against you, 
But do not attack them first.

Allah does not love the aggressors. 
Kill them wherever you find them. 
Drive them out of the places 
From which they drove you.

Idolatry is worse than carnage.

But do not fight them 
Within the precincts of the Holy Mosque 
Unless they attack you there; 
If they attack you put them to the sword.

Thus shall the unbelievers be rewarded: 
But if they mend their ways, 
Know that Allah is forgiving and merciful.

Fight against them 
Until idolatry is no more 
And Allah’s religion reigns supreme.
But if they mend their ways,
Fight none except the evil-doers.

A sacred month for a sacred month:
Sacred things too are subject to retaliation.

If any one attacks you,
attack him as he attacked you.
Have fear of Allah,
and know that Allah is with the righteous.

**Generosity**
Give generously for the cause of Allah
and do not with your own hands cast yourselves into destruction.

Be charitable;
Allah loves the charitable.

**Fighting II**
Fighting is obligatory for you,
much as you dislike it.
But you may hate a thing although it is good for you,
and love it although it is bad for you.
Allah knows, but you do not.

They ask you about fighting in the sacred month.
Say: “To fight in this month is a grave offence,
but to debar others from the path of Allah,
to deny Him, and to expel His worshippers from the Holy Mosque,
is far more grave in His sight.
Idolatry is worse than carnage.”

They will not cease to fight against you
until they force you to renounce your faith –
if they are able.
But whoever of you recants and dies an unbeliever,
his works shall come to nothing
in this world and in the world to come.

Such men shall be the tenants of Hell,
and there they shall abide for ever.

Those that have embraced the faith
and those that have fled their land
and fought for the cause of Allah, may hope for Allah's mercy. Allah is forgiving and merciful.

**Drinking and gambling**

They ask you about drinking and gambling. Say: “There is great harm in both, although they have some benefit for men; but their harm is far greater than their benefit.”

**Alms II**

They ask you what they should give in alms. Say: “What you can spare.” Thus Allah makes plain to you His revelations, so that you may reflect upon this world and the hereafter.

**Orphans**

They question you concerning orphans. Say: “To deal justly with them is best. If you mix their affairs with yours, remember they are your brothers. Allah knows the just from the unjust.

If Allah pleased, He could afflict you. He is mighty and wise.”

**Marriage**

You shall not wed pagan women, unless they embrace the faith. A believing slave-girl is better than an idolatress, although she may please you.

And do not marry idolaters, unless they embrace the faith. A believing slave is better than an idolater, although he may please you.

These call you to Hell-fire; but Allah calls you, by His will, to Paradise and to forgiveness.
He makes plain His revelations to mankind, so that they may take heed.

They ask you about menstruation. Say: “It is an indisposition. Keep aloof from women during their menstrual periods and do not touch them until they are clean again. Then have intercourse with them as Allah enjoined you. Allah loves those that turn to Him in repentance and strive to keep themselves clean.”

Women are your fields: go, then, into your fields as you please.

Do good works and fear Allah. Bear in mind that you shall meet Him.

Give good news to the believers. Do not make Allah the subject of your oaths when you swear that you will deal justly and keep from evil and make peace among men. Allah knows all and hears all. He will not call you to account for that which is inadvertent in your oaths. But He will take you to task for that which is intended in your hearts. Allah is forgiving and lenient.

Those that renounce their wives on oath must wait four months. If they change their mind, Allah is forgiving and merciful; but if they decide to divorce them, know that He hears all and knows all.

Divorced women must wait, keeping themselves from men, three menstrual courses.

It is unlawful for them, if they believe in Allah and the Last Day, to hide what He has created in their wombs: in which case their husbands would do well to take them back, should they desire reconciliation.

Women shall with justice have rights similar to those exercised against them, although men have a status above women.
Allah is mighty and wise.

Divorce may be pronounced twice, and then a woman must be retained in honour or allowed to go with kindness.

It is unlawful for husbands to take from them anything they have given them, unless both fear that they may not be able to keep within the bounds set by Allah; in which case it shall be no offence for either of them if the wife ransom herself.

These are the bounds set by Allah; do not transgress them. Those that transgress the bounds of Allah are wrongdoers.

If a man divorce his wife, he cannot remarry her until she has wedded another man and been divorced by him; in which case it shall be no offence for either of them to return to the other, if they think that they can keep within the limits set by Allah.

Such are the bounds of Allah. He makes them plain to men of understanding. When you have renounced your wives and they have reached the end of their waiting period, either retain them in honour or let them go with kindness.

But you shall not retain them in order to harm them or to wrong them. Whoever does this wrongs his own soul.

Do not make game of Allah’s revelations. Remember the favours He has bestowed upon you, and the Book and the wisdom which He has revealed for your instruction.

Fear Allah and know that He has knowledge of all things.

If a man has renounced his wife and she has reached the end of her waiting period, do not prevent her from remarrying her husband if they have come to an honourable agreement.
Religions of Semitic Origin

This is enjoined on every one of you who believes in Allah and the Last Day; it is more honourable for you and more chaste. Allah knows, but you do not.

Mothers shall give suck to their children for two whole years if the father wishes the suckling to be completed. They must be maintained and clothed in a reasonable manner by the father of the child. None shall be charged with more than he can bear.

A mother should not be allowed to suffer on account of her child, nor should a father on account of his child.

The same duties devolve upon the father’s heir. But if, after consultation, they choose by mutual consent to wean the child, they shall incur no guilt. Nor shall it be any offence for you if you prefer to have a nurse for your children, provided that you pay her what you promise, according to usage.

Have fear of Allah and know that He is cognizant of all your actions. Widows shall wait, keeping themselves apart from men, for four months and ten days after their husbands’ death.

When they have reached the end of their waiting period, it shall be no offence for you to let them do whatever they choose for themselves, provided that it is decent. Allah is cognizant of all your actions.

It shall be no offence for you openly to propose marriage to such women or to cherish them in your hearts. Allah knows that you will remember them. Do not arrange to meet them in secret, and if you do, speak to them honourably.

But you shall not consummate the marriage before the end of their waiting period. Know that Allah has knowledge of all your thoughts.

Therefore take heed and bear in mind that Allah is forgiving and lenient.
It shall be no offence for you
to divorce your wives before the marriage is consummated
or the dowry settled.

Provide for them with fairness;
the rich man according to his means
and the poor man according to his.
This is binding on righteous men.

If you divorce them before the marriage is consummated,
but after their dowry has been settled,
give them the half of their dowry,
unless they or the husband agree to forgo it.
But it is more proper that the husband should forgo it.

Do not forget to show kindness to each other.
Allah observes your actions.

Attend regularly to your prayers,
including the middle prayer,
and stand up with all devotion before Allah.
When you are exposed to danger
pray while riding or on foot;
and when you are restored to safety
remember Allah,
as He has taught you what you did not know.

You shall bequeath your widows a year’s maintenance
without causing them to leave their homes;
but if they leave of their own accord,
no blame shall be attached to you
for any course they may deem fit to pursue.
Allah is mighty and wise.

Reasonable provision should also be made for divorced women.
That is incumbent on righteous men.
Thus Allah makes known to you His revelations
that you may grow in understanding.

Consider those that fled their country in their thousands
for fear of death.
Allah said to them: “You shall perish,”
and then He brought them back to life.
Surely Allah is bountiful to mankind,
but most men do not give thanks.
Fight for the cause of Allah
and bear in mind that He hears all and knows all.

Who will grant Allah a generous loan?
He will repay him many times over.
It is Allah who enriches and makes poor.
To Him you shall all return.


Question for discussion
1 What similarities and what dissimilarities do you see between the Koran and the Torah?

Hadith

The First Revelation of the Koran

Wahb b. Kaysan told me that Ubayd said to him: The Apostle would pray in seclusion on Mount Hira each year for a month to practice religious exercises, as was the custom of the Quraysh* in heathen days. When he completed the month and returned from his seclusion, first of all he would go to the Ka'ba and walk around it seven times, or as often as pleased God; then he would go to his house until in the year when God sent him, in the month of Ramadan, he set forth to Hira as was his wont, and his family with him.

When it was the night on which God honored him with his mission, and showed mercy on His servants thereby, Gabriel brought him the command of God.

“He came to me,” said the Apostle, “while I was asleep, with a piece of brocade whereon was writing, and said “Recite!” and I said “What shall I recite?”

He pressed me with it so tightly that I thought it was death; then he let me go and said “Recite!”

I said, “What shall I recite?”

He pressed me with it again so that I thought it was death, then he let me go and said “Recite!”

I said “But what shall I read?”

And this I said only to deliver myself from him lest he should do the same to me again, but he said:

* Muhammad’s tribe.
Recite: In the Name of thy Lord who created,
   Created man from blood clotted,
Recite: Thy Lord is the most beneficent,
   who taught by the Pen,
   Taught that which they knew not unto men.”

So I recited it, and he departed from me. And I awoke from my sleep, and it was as though these words were written on my heart.

Now none of God’s creatures was more hateful to me than an (ecstatic) poet or a man possessed; I could not even bear to look at them. I thought, “Woe is me – poet or possessed! Never shall Quraysh say that of me! I will go to the top of the mountain and throw myself down that I may kill myself and gain rest!”

When I was midway on the mountain, I heard a voice from heaven saying, “O Muhammad! Thou art the Apostle of God and I am Gabriel.”

I raised my head towards heaven to see, and lo! Gabriel in the form of a man, with feet astride the horizon, saying, “O Muhammad! Thou art the Apostle of God, and I am Gabriel.”

I stood gazing at him, moving neither forward nor backward; then I began to turn my face away from him, but towards whatever region of the sky I looked, I saw him as before.

I continued standing there, neither advancing nor turning back, until Khadija sent her messengers in search of me, and they gained the high ground above Mecca and returned to her while I was standing in the same place; then he parted from me, and I from him, returning to my family.

I went to Khadija* and sat by her thigh and drew close to her. She asked, “Why Abu al-Qasim (Father of al-Qasim), where hast thou been? By Allah, I have sent my messengers in search of thee, and they reached the high ground above Mecca and returned.”

I said to her, “Woe is me – a poet, or a man possessed!”

She said, “I take refuge in Allah from that, O Abu al-Qasim! God would not treat you thus; He knows your truthfulness, your great trustworthiness, your fine character, and your kindness to your family. This cannot be, my dear [literally: son of my uncle]. Perhaps you have seen something.”

“Yes, I have,” I told her. Then I told her of what I had seen, and she said, “Rejoice, O son of my uncle, and be of good heart! Verily by Him in whose hand is Khadija’s soul, I have hope that thou wilt be the prophet of this people.”

Then she rose and gathered her garments about her and set forth to her cousin Waraqa b. Naufal b. Asad b. Abd-al Uzza b. Quasyy, who had become a Christian and read the scriptures and learned from those who follow the Torah and the Gospel. And when she related to him what the Apostle of God told her he had seen and heard, Waraqa cried: “Holy! Holy! Verily, by Him in whose hand

* His wife.
Religions of Semitic Origin

is Waraqa’s soul, if thou hast spoken to me the truth, O Khadija, there hath come unto him the greatest Namus [angel], who came to Moses, and lo, he will be the prophet of this people. Bid him to be of good heart.”

So Khadija returned to the Apostle of God and told him what Waraqa had said, and that calmed his anxiety somewhat. And when the Apostle of God . . . returned to Mecca . . . Waraqa met him and said, “Son of my brother, tell me what thou hast seen and heard.”

The Apostle told him, and Waraqa said, “Surely by Him in whose hand is Waraqa’s soul, thou art the prophet of these people. There has come to thee the greatest Namus, who came to Moses. Thou wilt be called a liar, and they will use thee despitefully and cast thee out and fight against thee. Should I live to see that day, I will help God in such wise as He knoweth.”

Then he lowered his head and kissed Muhammad’s forehead; and the Apostle went to his own house, encouraged by Waraqa’s words, and with his anxiety relieved.


The first converts

Khadija . . . was the first to believe in God and His Apostle, and the truth of the message. By her, God lightened the burden of the Prophet. He never met with contradiction and charges of falsehood, which saddened him, but God comforted him by her when he went home. She strengthened him, lightened his burden, proclaimed his truth, and belittled men’s opposition. May God Almighty have mercy on her!

(*The Life of Muhammad*, p. 111)

Ali, son of the Prophet’s uncle Abu Talib, was the first male to believe in the Apostle of God, to pray with him, and to believe in his divine message, when he was a boy of ten. God favored him, in that he had been brought up in the care of the Prophet before Islam began.

A traditionist mentions that when the time of prayer began the Apostle used to go out to the glens of Mecca accompanied by Ali, who went unbeknown to his father . . . there they would pray the ritual prayers. One day Abu Talib came upon them while they were praying, and said to the Apostle, “O nephew, what is this religion I see you practising?”

He replied, “O uncle, this is the religion of God, His angels, His Apostles, and the religion of our father Abraham. God has sent me as a messenger to mankind, and you, my uncle . . . are the most worthy to respond and help me.”

His uncle replied, “I cannot give up the religion which my fathers followed, but by God you shall never meet with any harm so long as I live” . . . He said to Ali, “My son, what is this religion of yours?”
He answered, “I believe in God and in his Messenger and I declare what he brought is true, and pray with him.”

They allege that Abu Talib said: “He would not call you to do anything but what is good, so cleave to him.”

Zayd, the freedman of the Prophet, was the first male to accept Islam after Ali.

Then Abu Bakr b. Abi Quhafa . . . became a Muslim. He showed his faith openly and called others to God and His Apostle. He was a man whose society was desired, well liked, and of easy manners . . . a merchant of high character and kindliness. People used to come to him to discuss many matters . . . because of his wide knowledge, his experience of commerce, and his sociable nature. He began to call to God and to Islam all whom he trusted.

(The Life of Muhammad, pp. 114–15)

The night journey (isra’) and ascension (mi’raj) of the Prophet

The following account reached me from Abdallah b. Mas’ud and Abu Sa’id al-Khudri, and A’isha the Prophet’s wife, and Mu’awiyah b. Abi Sufyan, and al-Hasan al-Basri, and Ibn Shihab al-Zuhri and Qatada and other traditionists, and Umm Hani, daughter of Abu Talib. It is pieced together in the story that follows, each one contributing something of what he was told about what happened when he was taken on the night journey.

Al-Hasan said that the Apostle said: “While I was sleeping in the Hijr, Gabriel came and stirred me with his feet . . . he brought me out of the door . . . and there was a white animal, half mule, half donkey, with wings at its sides with which it propelled its feet . . .”

Qatada said that he was told the Apostle said: “When I came to mount him he shied. Gabriel placed his hand on its mane and said, “Are you not ashamed, O Buraq, to behave this way? By God, none more honourable before God than Muhammad has ever ridden you before.” The animal was so ashamed that he broke out in a sweat and stood still so that I could mount him.”

In his story al-Hasan said: “The Apostle and Gabriel went their way until they arrived at the temple in Jerusalem. There he found Abraham, Moses, and Jesus among a company of the Prophets. The Apostle acted as their leader in prayer. Then he was brought two vessels, one containing wine and the other milk. The Apostle took the milk and drank it, leaving the wine. Gabriel said: ‘You have been rightly guided, and so will your people be, Muhammad. Wine is forbidden you.’”

One of Abu Bakr’s family told me that A’isha, the Prophet’s wife, used to say, “The Apostle’s body remained where it was but God removed his spirit by night . . .”

I have heard that the Apostle used to say, “My eyes sleep while my heart is awake.” Only God knows how the revelation came and what he saw. But whether he was asleep or awake, it was all true and actually happened.
Religions of Semitic Origin

One of whom I have no reason to doubt told me on the authority of Abu Sa’id al Khudri: I heard the Apostle say, “After the completion of my business in Jerusalem a ladder was brought to me finer than any I have ever seen. It was that to which the dying man looks when death approaches. My companion mounted it with me until we came to one of the gates of heaven called the Gate of the Watchers. An angel called Isma’il was in charge of it, and under his command were twelve thousand angels, each having twelve thousand under his command.”

A traditionist who had got it from one who had heard it from the Apostle told me that the latter said, “All the angels who met me when I entered the lowest heaven smiled in welcome and wished me well except one, who said the same things but did not smile or show the joyful expression of the others. When I asked Gabriel the reason he told me that if he had ever smiled before or would smile hereafter he would have smiled at me, but he does not smile because he is Malik, the Keeper of Hell. I said to Gabriel, who holds the position with God which He has described to you, ‘obeyed there, trustworthy’ (Sura 74: 34). ‘Will you not order him to show me Hell?’ And he said ‘Certainly! O Malik, show Muhammad Hell.’ Thereupon he removed its covering and the flames blazed high into the air until I thought they would consume everything. So I asked Gabriel to order him to send them back to their place, and he did . . .”

In his tradition Abu Sa’id al-Khudri said that the Apostle said: “When I entered the lowest heaven I saw a man sitting there with the spirits of men passing before him. To one he would speak well and rejoice in him saying ‘A good spirit from a good body’ and of another he would say ‘Faugh!’ and frown . . . Gabriel told me this was our father Adam, reviewing the spirits of his offspring; the spirit of a believer excited his pleasure, and the spirit of a disbeliever excited his disgust.

Then I saw men with lips like camels; in their hands were pieces of fire like stones which they used to thrust into their mouths and they would come out of their posteriors. I was told that these were those who sinfully devoured the wealth of orphans.

Then I saw men like those of the family of Pharaoh with such bellies as I have never seen; there were passing over them as it were camels maddened by thirst when they were cast into Hell, treading them down, and they were unable to move out of the way. These were the usurers.

Then I saw men with good fat meat before them side by side with lean stinking meat, eating the latter and leaving the former. These are those who forsake the women whom God has permitted them, and go after those He has forbidden.

Then I saw women hanging by their breasts. These were those who had fathered bastards on their husbands . . .

Then I was taken up to the second heaven and there were the two maternal cousins, Jesus Son of Mary and John son of Zakariah. Then to the third heaven and there was a man whose face was as the moon at the full. This was my brother Joseph son of Jacob. Then to the seventh heaven and there was a man sitting on a throne at the gate of the Immortal Mansion (al-bayt al-ma’mur).
Every day seventy thousand angels went in not to come back until the resurrection day. Never have I seen a man more like myself. This was my father Abraham. Then he took me into Paradise and there I saw a damsel with dark red lips and I asked her to whom she belonged, for she pleased me much when I saw her, and she told me ‘Zayd ibn Haritha.’ ” The Apostle gave [his adopted son] Zayd the good news about her.

(The Life of Muhammad, pp. 181–6)

The Hegira (Hijra) (AD 622)*

When God wished to display His religion openly and to glorify His prophet and fulfill His promise to him . . . while he was offering himself to the Arab tribes (at the fairs) as was his wont, he met at al-Aqaba a number of the Khazraj (of Medina), whom God intended to benefit.

Asim b. Umar b. Qatada told me on the authority of some of the shaykhs of his tribe that when the Apostle met them he learned by inquiry that they were of the Khazraj and allies of the Jews of Medina. He invited them to sit with him and expounded Islam and recited the Qur’an to them. Now God had prepared the way for Islam in that they lived side by side with the Jews who were people of the scriptures and knowledge, while they themselves were polytheists and idolators. They had often raided them, and whenever bad feeling arose the Jews would say to them, “A prophet will be sent soon! His day is at hand. We shall follow him and kill you by his aid as Ad and Iram perished.”

So when they heard the Apostle’s message they said one to another: “This is the very prophet of whom the Jews warned us. Don’t let them get to him before us!” Thereupon they accepted his teaching and became Muslims, saying: “We have left our people, for no tribe is so divided by hatred and rancor as they. Perhaps God will unite them through you. So let us go and invite them to this religion of yours; and if God unites them in it, then no man will be mightier than you!” Thus saying they returned to Medina as believers.

(The Life of Muhammad, pp. 197–8)

The Apostle had not been given permission to fight or allowed to shed blood . . . he had simply been ordered to call men to God, endure insult, and forgive the ignorant. The Quraysh persecuted his followers, seducing some from their religion, and exiling others from their country. They had to choose whether to give up their religion, be maltreated at home, or to flee, some to Abyssinia, others to Medina.

When Quraysh became insolent toward God and rejected His gracious purpose, accused His prophet of lying, and ill-treated and exiled those who served Him and proclaimed His unity, believed in His prophet, and held fast to His religion, He gave permission to his Apostle to fight and to protect himself against those who wronged them and treated them badly . . .

* See above, p. 243.
When God had given permission to fight, and this clan of the Ansar had pledged their support to him in Islam, the Apostle commanded his companions . . . who were with him in Mecca to emigrate to Medina . . . So they went out in companies and the Apostle stayed in Mecca waiting for his Lord’s permission to leave Mecca and migrate to Medina . . .

Except for Abu Bakr and Ali, none of his supporters were left but those under restraint and those who had been forced to apostasize . . .

When the Quraysh saw that the Apostle had a party and companions not of their tribe and outside their territory, and that his companions had migrated to join them, and knew that they had settled in a new home and had gained protectors, they feared that the Apostle might join them, since they knew that he had decided to fight them. So they assembled in their council chambers, the house of Qusayy b. Kilab where all their important business was conducted, to take counsel what they should do in regard to the Apostle, for now they feared him . . .

Thereupon Abu Jahl said that he had a plan which had not been suggested hitherto, namely that each clan should provide a young, powerful, well-born warrior . . . then each of these should strike a blow at him and kill him. Thus they would be relieved of him, and responsibility for his blood would lie on all of the clans. His clan could not fight them all and would have to accept the blood money, to which they would all contribute.

(The Life of Muhammad, pp. 212–22)

Among the verses of the Qur’an which God sent down about that day and what they had agreed on are: “And when the unbelievers plot to shut thee up or to kill thee or to drive thee out they plot, but God plots also, and God is the best of plotters” (Sura 8, 30).

Now Abu Bakr was a man of means and . . . he bought two camels and kept them tied up in his house supplying them with fodder in preparation for departure . . .

When the Apostle decided to go he came to Abu Bakr and the two of them left by a window in the back of the latter’s house and made for a cave on Thaur, a mountain below Mecca. Having entered, Abu Bakr ordered his son Abdallah . . . to come to them by night with the day’s news. He ordered Amir b. Fuhayra, his freedman, to feed his flock by day and to bring to them in the evening in the cave. Asma his daughter used to come by night with food to sustain them . . .

When three days had passed, and men’s interest waned, the man they had hired came with their camels and one of his own. Asma came too with a bag of provisions, but finding she had forgotten a rope, she undid her girdle and used it to tie the bag to the saddle. Thus she got the name “She of the girdle.” . . .

They rode off, and Abu Bakr carried his freedman Amir behind him to act as a servant on the journey . . .

(In Medina, each of the clans) came to him and asked him to enjoy their wealth and protection, but he said, “Let the camel go her way,” for she was under
God’s orders . . . Finally she came to the home of the Banu Malik b. al-Najjar where she knelt at (what later became the door of his mosque) which was used at that time as a drying floor for dates and belonged to two orphans of that clan. When it knelt, the Prophet did not alight, and it rose and went a short distance, then . . . returned to the place where it had knelt at first and knelt there again . . .

The Apostle alighted . . . when he asked to whom the date-store belonged, Mu’adh b. Afra told him the owners were orphans in his care . . . and he could take it for a mosque and he would pay the young men for it.

The Apostle ordered that a mosque (and lodgings for his family) be built, and he joined in the work to encourage the Muhajirin and the Ansar . . . (Emigrants and Medinans.) (The Life of Muhammad, pp. 223–8)

When the Prophet was firmly established in Medina and his brethren the emigrants were gathered to him and the affairs of the helpers arranged, Islam became firmly established. Prayer was instituted, the alms-tax and fasting were prescribed, legal punishments were fixed, the forbidden and the permitted prescribed, and Islam took up its abode with them . . .

The people gathered to him at the appointed time of prayer . . . At first the Prophet thought of using a trumpet like that of the Jews who used it to summon to prayer. Afterwards he disliked the idea and ordered a clapper to be made . . . to be beaten when the Muslims should pray.

Meanwhile Abdallah b. Zayd b. Tha’lab a b. Abdu Rabbihi, brother of Banu al-Harith, heard a voice in a dream, and came to the Apostle saying: “A phantom visited me in the night. There passed by me a man wearing two green garments carrying a clapper in his hand, and I asked him to sell it to me. When he asked me what I wanted it for I told him it was to summon people to prayer, whereupon he offered to show me a better way; it was to say thrice:

‘Allahu Akbar! [God is most great] Allahu Akbar!
I bear witness that there is no god but God!
I bear witness that Muhammad is the Apostle of God!
Come to prayer! Come to prayer!
Come to salvation! Come to salvation!
Allahu Akbar! Allahu Akbar!
There is no god but God!”

When the Apostle was told of this he said that it was a true vision if God so willed it, and that he should go with Bilal and communicate it to him so he might call to prayer thus, for Bilal had the most penetrating voice. When Bilal acted as the first muezzin Umar . . . came to the Apostle dragging his cloak on the ground and saying that he had seen precisely the same vision. The Apostle said, “God be praised for that!”
Religions of Semitic Origin

I was told this tradition . . . on the authority of Muhammad b. Abdallah b. Zayd b. Tha’laba himself. Muhammad b. Ja’far b. Zubayr told me on the authority of Urwa b. Zubayr of a woman of the Banu al-Najjar who said: “My house was the highest of those round the mosque, and Bilal used to give the call from the top of it every day. He would sit on the housetop waiting for the dawn; when he saw it, he would stretch out his arms and say, ‘Oh God, I praise Thee and ask Thy help for Quraysh, that they may accept Thy religion.’ I never knew him to omit those words for a single night.”

(The Life of Muhammad, pp. 235–6)

The death of the Prophet

A’isha, the Prophet’s wife, the daughter of Abu Bakr, said: “The Apostle returned from (prayers for the dead in) the cemetery to find me suffering from a severe headache, and I was saying, ‘O, my head!’”

He said, “Nay, A’isha, O my head!”

Then he said, “Would it distress you if you should die before me so I might wrap you in your shroud and pray over you and bury you?”

I said, “Methinks I see you returning therefrom to my house and spending a bridal night in it with one of your wives!”

He smiled at that, and then his pain overtook him . . .

He called his wives and asked their permission to be nursed in my house, and they agreed . . .”

A’isha used to hear the Apostle say, “God never takes a prophet to Himself without giving him the choice.”

“The last word I heard the Apostle saying was, “Nay, rather the Exalted Companion of paradise.”

I said (to myself), “Then by God, he is not choosing us!” And I knew it was as he used to tell us, that a prophet does not die without being given the choice . . .

“The Apostle died in my bosom during my turn: I wronged none in regard to him. It was due to my ignorance and extreme youth that the Apostle died in my arms. Then I laid his head on a pillow, and got up beating my breast and slapping my face.”

Sa’id b. al-Musayyib told me on the authority of Abu Hurayra: When the Apostle was dead, Umar got up and said, “Some of the disaffected will allege that the Apostle is dead, but by God he is not dead: he has gone to his Lord as Moses went and was hidden from his people for forty days, returning to them after it was said that he was dead. By God, the Apostle will return as Moses returned, and will cut off the hands and feet of those who allege that he is dead!”

When Abu Bakr heard this . . . he paid no attention but went into A’isha’s house to the Apostle who was lying covered by a mantle of Yamani cloth. He
uncovered his face and kissed him, saying, “Dearer than my father and my mother! You have tasted the death which God had decreed; a second death will never overtake you.” Then he replaced the mantle and went out.

Umar was still speaking, and he said, “Gently, Umar, be quiet.” But Umar went on talking. When Abu Bakr saw he would not be silent he went forward to the people, who came to him and left Umar. Giving thanks and praise to God, he said: “O men, if anyone worships Muhammad, Muhammad is dead. If anyone worships God, God is alive, immortal!”

Then he recited this verse: “Muhammad is nothing but an Apostle. Apostles have passed away before him. Can it be that if he were to die or be killed you would turn back on your heels? He who turns back does no harm to God, but God will reward the grateful” (Sura 3, 38).

Umar said, “By God, when I heard Abu Bakr recite these words, I was dumbfounded so that my legs would not bear me and I fell to the ground, knowing that the Apostle was indeed dead.”

(The Life of Muhammad, pp. 105–7, 197–8, 212–22, 223–8, 235–6, 678–83)

Question for discussion

1. How would you compare the Hadith to the Talmud?

Prayer

Here is a description of Salat:

The saying of prayer (Salat) is obligatory upon every Muslim, male or female, five times a day, viz. early in the morning, a little after midday, in the afternoon, immediately after sunset and in the first part of the night before going to bed. The service consists of two parts – one part to be said alone, preferably in private, and the other in congregation, preferably in a mosque, but in case there is no congregation of Muslims both parts may be performed alone.

The morning or Fajr prayer consists of two Rak’ahs said alone, followed by two said in congregation. The midday or Zuhr prayer consists of four Rak’aat said alone, followed by four said in congregation, and these again followed by two said alone. The afternoon or ’Asr prayer consists of four Rak’aat said in congregation. The sunset or Maghrib prayer consists of three Rak’aat said in congregation, followed by two said alone. The night or ’Isha prayer consists of four Rak’aat said in congregation followed by two, and again by three, said alone. Besides these, there is the Tahajjud, or after midnight prayer, which is not obligatory, consisting of eight Rak’aat said in twos.
Description of a Rak’ah

One Rak’ah is completed as follows:

1. Both hands are raised up to the ears in a standing position, with the face towards the Qiblah in Mecca, while the words Allahu Akbar (God is the greatest of all) are uttered. This is called the Takbir.

2. Then comes the Qiyam. The right hand is placed straight upon the forearm of the left, over the navel, while the standing position is maintained and the following prayer is recited (though there are other prayers too):

   “Glory to thee, O God, Thine is the praise and blessed is Thy Name and exalted is Thy majesty, and there is none to be served beside Thee . . . I betake me for refuge to God against the accursed satan.”

   After this the Fatihah or opening Surah of the Qur’an is recited in the same position. At the close is said Amen, be it so, and then any portion of the Qur’an which the devotee wishes is repeated by heart. Generally one of the shorter chapters at the close of the Holy Book is repeated and the Chapter termed Ikhlas is the one recommended.

3. Then, saying Allahu Akbar the worshipper lowers his head down, so that the palms of the hand reach the knees. In this position, which is called Ruku’, phrases expressive of the divine glory and majesty are repeated at least three times. They are the following: “Glory to my Lord the great.”

4. After this, the standing position is resumed, with the words: “God accepts him who gives praise to Him, O our Lord, Thine is the praise.”

5. Then the worshipper prostrates himself, the toes of both feet, both knees, both hands, and the forehead touching the ground, and the following words expressing the divine greatness are uttered at least three times. This is the first Sijdah. “Glory to my Lord the most High.”

6. Then the worshipper sits down in a reverential position (on his haunches). This is the Jalsah.

7. This is followed by a second prostration, or Sijdah, (as described under 5) with the repetition of the same words.

8. This finishes one Rak’ah. The worshipper rises and assumes a standing position for the second one, which is finished in the same manner as the first. But at the end of the second one, instead of assuming the standing position he sits down in a reverential position called the qada’, and with the glorification of God he combines prayers for the holy prophets, for the faithful and for himself, called the Tahiyah, which runs as follows: “All prayers and worship rendered through words, actions and wealth, are due to God. Peace be upon you, O prophet and the mercy of God and His blessings. Peace be on us and the righteous servants of God. I bear witness that none is worthy to be worshipped save God and I bear witness that Muhammad is His servant and His Apostle.”

9. If the worshipper intends more than two Raka’at he repeats also the following prayer of blessings upon the Prophet: “O God, magnify Muhammad
and the followers of Muhammad, as Thou didst magnify Abraham and the followers of Abraham. For surely Thou art praised and magnified. O God, bless Muhammad and the followers of Muhammad, as Thou didst bless etc."

The following prayer may also be added to this: “My Lord, make me, and my offspring also, to continue prayer. Our Lord, accept the prayer: grant Thy protection to me and to my parents and to the faithful on the day when the reckoning shall be made.”

This closes the prayer, which ends at the Salam, or the greeting, being also the greeting of the Muslims to each other. The worshipper turns his head first to the right and then to the left, saying with each turn of the head: “Peace be upon you and the mercy of God.”


**Question for discussion**

1 What do you find distinctive about the Islamic conception of public prayer?