

A short Introduction to  
Islam:  
Faith and Practice

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Preface

IN THE NAME OF ALLAH, THE MERCIFUL, THE COMPASSIONATE

Praise be to Allah and may peace and blessing be on His most beloved messenger Muhammad (PBUH).

This booklet offers a short introduction to the Islamic faith and practice. It is prepared for those Non-Muslims who visit our Mosques and wish to know about Islam. These visitors are mostly school children and their teachers, but some scholars and clergymen do also visit our Mosques to see the format of the Muslims' prayers.

It is hoped that this booklet will provide some basic information to all of them and will also help the teachers of the Religious Education at schools and other general readers.

I am greatly indebted to all the members of MLC, particularly, to those who have helped in preparation and publication of this booklet, and those members of the community who have sponsored it.

May Allah bless all of them with a good reward. Amin.

24th April 2001

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A) Islamic Faith:

The Arabic word "ISLAM" means voluntary surrender to the will of Allah and obedience to His commandments. "ALLAH", also is an Arabic word and the proper name of God. Muslims prefer to use Allah rather than God. The Islamic way of life is based on total obedience to Allah. This is the way to obtain peace in this world and in the life hereafter, hence, Islam also means peace. A Muslim greets another Muslim by saying:

As-salamu-alekum - peace be upon you, and the reply is

Wa'alaikumus-salam - peace be on you too.

Islam is a complete way of life. A person who freely and consciously accepts, "that there is no deity except Allah and Muhammad is the (final) Messenger of Allah", is called a Muslim. This declaration in Arabic words is:

LA ILAHA ILLALLAH, MUHAMMADUR RASUL ULLAH

This is a declaration every Muslim must make. A believing Muslim is one whose heart is completely penetrated by this declaration, as the other pillars of Islam and articles of faith are derived from it, for example, belief in angels and Allah's books, belief in Messengers, the life hereafter and the day of Judgement. According to Islamic faith, humanity receives from its Creator not only an innately good nature, reason and conscience but also special guidance called revelation through His messengers. AL-QUR'AN is the sacred book of Muslims, and the final book of guidance from Allah, sent down to Muhammad (peace be upon him) through the angel Gabriel (JIBRA'IL).

Muslims believe that Allah is the Creator, the Lord and the Master, the One, who brings all things into existence things from nothing. He is the only One, who deserves to be worshipped. There are five cardinal pillars of Islam: viz., the article of faith (SHAHADA); daily obligatory prayers (SALAH); welfare contribution (ZAKAH); fasting in the month of Ramadan (SAWM) and pilgrimage to the House of Allah (HAJJ).

As Islam is a complete way of life, it tells man about the purpose of his creation and existence, his ultimate destiny, his place among other creatures. It teaches the Muslims of their rights and obligations to each other and to humanity at large. Man is a part of human society and of the universe. The laws, which govern human nature, govern their mutual relationship. According to Islamic thinking, Allah created the entire universe. The universe came into existence when Allah willed it. The universe is subject to the will of Allah. The laws, which govern human nature, are no different from the laws governing the physical universe.

The laws, which Allah gave believers to organise their life, form part of the Islamic Code (SHARIAH). Each word of Allah, whether it is an injunction or a prohibition, a promise or an admonition, a rule or guidance is a part of the SHARIAH, and binding on the Muslims. Islam categorises society into two parts: the one which follows Islam in belief and practice, in law and organisation, in moral and manners, and the other which does not follow Islam. In Islam, "It is Allah, Who is sovereign in the heavens and sovereign on earth" (Qur'an 43:84). Hence, "the command belongs to Allah alone" (Qur'an 12:40). Every person owes obedience to His divine laws (SHARIAH). It frees every person from servitude to others and thus freedom prevails. SHARIAH forms the attitude of Muslims, controls the way of their lives, their marriages and family life, their diet, dress and festivals, sets out the criteria for their social life and determines the values of their habits and traditions.

Islam distinctively bases the fundamental, binding relationships of its society on belief; and on the basis of this belief, black and white, red and yellow, and Arabs and Greeks, become one community. In this society, Allah is the Lord, and only He is worshipped. The most honourable among the people is one who is the noblest in character, and all individuals are equally subject to the laws of (SHARIAH) which are not man-made, but made by Allah the Creator of the universe.

Muslims believe that they have come from Allah and ultimately return to Allah. If they lead their lives in accordance with the guidance provided by the Divine, it will enable them to avoid hell-fire, and attain the reward of a place in paradise in life after death. Therefore, they pray to Allah for His help, guidance and bounty. Prayer is the heart of Islamic religion and faith. Allah, the most Gracious has taught Muslims in the opening chapter of the Holy Qur'an (Surah Fatiha) a beautiful and comprehensive supplication, consisting of the following articulation:

1. Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the universe,

2. The Beneficent, the Merciful,
3. The Owner of the Day of Judgement,
4. Thee (alone) we worship; Thee (alone) we ask for help,
5. Show us the straight path,
6. The path of those whom Thou hast favoured,
7. Not the path of those who earn Thy anger nor of those who go astray. Amin!

## B) The Muslim Scripture

Al-Qur'an is the sacred book of Muslims and the final book of guidance from Allah, sent down to Muhammad (PBUH) through the angel Gabriel.

It was the night of 27th of the month of Ramadan that Muhammad (PBUH), the prophet of Islam, was in the cave of Hira, on the outskirts of the city of Makkah. He used to retire to the cave of Hira for peace, quiet and contemplation. He was concerned about the problems of his people, their drunkenness, adulteries, idolatry, wars, their rank injustices and cruelties.

The recluse of Hira yearned for a solution. He retired to this retreat frequently. One night - the Night of Power and Excellence (LAILALTUL-QADR) when Divine peace rested on creation - all nature was lifted up towards its Lord. In the middle of that night, the book of God was opened to the thirsting soul. Gabriel, the angle of God, appeared to him and commanded him in his mother tongue, "IQRA", which means read or recite or rehearse or proclaim. Muhammad (PBUH) was too terrified and was totally unprepared for this shock. In fear and trepidation he cried out, maa-ana-beqaa-ri", I am not learned. The angel repeated the command "IQRA", for the second time. With an identical response from Muhammad (PBUH), Gabriel embraced him hard and commanded him the third time, "IQRA Bismi Rabb-i-Kallazi Khalaq", "read in the name of thy Lord and Cherisher, Who created". Muhammad (PBUH) now grasped that what he was required to do was to repeat what was being said. Following the above first verse, four more verses were repeated and recited by Muhammad (PBUH).

Every word of the Qur'an is the word of Allah. It was revealed over a period of 23 years in the Arabic language. It contains 114 chapters (SURAHS) and 6,236 verses and 323,760 words.

Muslims learn to read it in Arabic and many memorise it completely, word for word.

The holy Qur'an in its own words is "a fountain of mercy and wisdom, a warning to the heedless, a guide to the erring, an assurance to those in doubt, a solace to the suffering, a hope to those in despair". (Al-Qur'an 90:1-2) The holy Qur'an is unrivalled in the way it is recorded and preserved. The astonishing fact about this book of Allah is that it has remained unchanged to the letter for over fourteen centuries.

The holy Qur'an deals with man and his ultimate goal in life. Its teachings cover every aspect of life and life after death. It contains principles, doctrines and directions for every sphere of human activity. One of the unique features of the holy Qur'an is its call to reflect on the signs found in the heavens and earth and in the soul of man itself. It invites reflection on the signs of His presence and purpose in creation. It also includes the stories of previous prophets, viz. Adam, Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Lot, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Jesus, and ends with Muhammad, the final messenger of Allah to mankind.

The theme of the holy Qur'an broadly consists of three fundamental concepts: the oneness of Allah (God), Prophethood and life after death.

The holy Qur'an warns human beings not to play into the hands of devil (Satan), who is man's arch enemy, and reminds them of the day of judgment, when Allah will be sitting on His throne and each man will be presented to account for his deeds. It teaches human beings to fear Allah and adore Him by His beautiful names, to perform prayers to uplift the self spiritually and to be hopeful of mercy from your Lord.

Listed below are the first five verses of the first revelation to Muhammad (PBUH) for the readers' reflection and study:

1. Read! (or proclaim) in the name of thy Lord and Cherisher, Who created;
2. Created man, out of a clot of congealed blood,
3. Proclaim! and thy Lord is the most Bountiful,
4. He, Who taught (the use of) the pen,
5. Taught the man, what he never knew,

(Al-Qur'an 96:1-5)

### C) Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the Sunnah.

The holy Qur'an is the Divine revelation and primary source of guidance. Sunnah is the tradition of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The Qur'an says, "Take what the apostle assigns to you and abandon that which he withholds from you". (Qur'an 4:80).

As long the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) lived, he was naturally regarded as a teacher and the ideal person to settle problems arising out of daily life. All sorts of legal problems, particularly, those which arose out of the terms of the holy Qur'an were referred to him. Thus, he was elevated to the position of a supreme judge, with the functions of interpreting and explaining the general provisions of the Divine revelation. In addition, he not only interpreted the verses of the holy Qur'an but he also implemented them practically first on himself and then enforced them in Muslim society existing at that time. All that valuable treasure is known as the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and is binding on the Muslims.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), son of Abdullah, son of Abdul Muttalib, of the tribe of Qureysh of Arabia, was born in Makkah on April 20, 571 AD. His father had died before he was born. He was brought up first by his grandfather, Abdul Muttalib, and after his death, by his uncle, Abu Talib. Aminah, the mother of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), died when the Prophet was only six. His first marriage took place at the age of 25 to a noble lady of Makkah, Khadijah, who was 15 years older than he was. This marriage proved to be a very happy one and lasted for almost 26 year, till she died

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) began to receive the revelation from Allah at the age of 40. The people of Makkah at that time worshipped idols. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) invited them into Islam, and declared that there is no deity other than Allah, Who alone should be worshipped. For the first three years, he preached only to his family members and intimate friends. He was then commanded to "rise and warn". Whereupon he began to preach in public, pointing out the wretched folly of idolatry in the face of the tremendous laws of day and night, of life and death, of growth and decay, which manifest the power of Allah and attest to His sovereignty. The leaders of the Makkan people became actively hostile, persecuting his poor disciples, mocking and insulting them. Having no success with the Makkans, he went to Ta'if, but with no success. He advised his followers to leave Makkah to avoid persecution, but the Makkans hatched a plan to kill him. The Prophet only waited for God's command. It came at last. It was the night chosen by enemies for his

assassination. He left home accompanied by Abu Bakr (RA) and set out on a long journey to Yathrib, now known as Madinah. The Islamic calendar begins from the day of this migration of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

The people of Madinah accepted him as their leader and he established the first Islamic state there. The Prophet organised the early Muslims and preached the message of Allah with unmatched patience and wisdom. The Qureysh of Makkah armed themselves against him and the first battle was fought at Badr, and the Muslims won this battle with the assistance of Allah despite the fact that their opponents were well equipped and three times greater in number. Subsequent to this war, there was the battle of Uhud, the war of the Trench, the campaign of Khyber, when the truce of Hudeybia was broken by his enemies. It was the time when the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) summoned all Muslims capable of bearing arms and marched towards Makkah. The Qureysh were overpowered and laid down their weapons. Makkah was conquered without bloodshed. The Prophet proclaimed a general amnesty and forgave all of them. This went beyond the expectation of Makkans. In their relief and surprise, the whole population of Makkah hastened to swear allegiance to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

The Prophet caused all the idols which were in the sanctuary to be destroyed, saying, "Truth has come; darkness hath vanished". Eventually Islam was established in the whole of the Arabian Peninsula and made a tremendous contribution to the history and civilisation of the world. Within a very short span of time, the Message of Islam spread from Arabia to the utmost parts of the known world. Over a billion Muslims in the present day bear testimony to the success of that message.

The personality of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was good enough to stand up to all the tests of his time and he left behind him a legacy, which changed the history of this world. According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica "Muhammad is the most successful of all the prophets and religious personalities". Michael H. Hart, a Christian American, astronomer, mathematician, lawyer, chessmaster, and scientist, after extensive research published an incisive biography of the 100 most influential people of all times. From this research, which included illustrious personalities, such as, Jesus Christ, Moses, Caesar, the Wright brothers, Napoleon, Shakespeare, Columbus, and Michael Angelo, Michael Hart rated the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as number one. He concluded the biography with the words; "It is this unparalleled combination of secular and religious influence which I feel entitles Muhammad (PBUH) to be considered the most influential single figure in

human history.

In an era, when the world was awash with blind prejudice and ignorance, the Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) divine message and glorious teachings became the purging torrent of spiritual enlightenment.

May Allah exalt the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), his family, his companions and all the believers. Inshallah! Amin.

#### D) The Role of the Mosque in the Muslim Community

Places of worship are known to exist from the time the history of mankind was first recorded. This is a confirmation of the fact that man craves to establish a relationship with his Creator. He built temples, shrines, synagogues, churches and Mosques for this purpose. These places met in one way or other, this basic need, according to the vision of the role of religion in the life of a given religious tradition.

The Mosque is the most important institution in Islam. After the home and work place, it is the most frequented place in Islamic society. Muslims visit it daily five times. There, he rekindles his spirituality, strengthens his relationship with his Creator, meets his fellow Muslim brethren and renews his sense of belonging.

Looking at the early stage in the Islamic Mission, in particular, the Makkan era, a small group of converts, living in a sea of polytheists, were living as strangers in such an environment. Non-Muslims dominated all authorities, the way of life and social norms. This may account for the absence of a Mosque built by the Muslims. However, there was KA'BA, the cubicle building, which was first built by the Prophet Abraham in Makkah. This had remained as a place of pilgrimage right up to the advent of Islam, when it became the centre of worship and pilgrimage for the Muslim community who carried on the monotheistic message of the Abrahamic faith. The Ka'ba is situated in the great Mosque in Makkah, known as Masjid-al-Haram (the sacred Mosque).

The migration of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) from Makkah to Madinah signalled a great change in the character of the Muslim community. For the first time, the Prophet was free from the dominant authority of the polytheists of Makkan. On arrival at the outskirts of Madinah, at Quba,

he built the first Mosque. After staying at Quba, for five days, he went to al-Madinah. In Madinah, at the time of arriving, he had been riding a she-camel. He released the leash of his she-camel in order to find a spontaneous place for a halt, to which nobody could object. The Prophet descended at the place where it stopped and later built a great Mosque there. It is called the Prophet's Mosque. This was to be a great indication of the far-reaching role the Mosque was to play in moulding the shape of the community, which was chosen by Allah to lead humanity to make the spiritual, moral and social changes, which would change the future history of mankind till the last day.

At Madinah, the Prophet was free to meet his companions at any time and in any place. The most suitable venue was the Mosque. From its inaugural moment, the Mosque assumed responsibilities, which were unknown to any place of worship. The life of the newly emerging community was gradually taking shape in and through the Mosque.

The following were, besides the prayers, the most important functions of the Mosque of the Prophet:

It is a centre

- i. Of learning;
- ii. For receiving dignitaries and delegates;
- iii. For Charity distribution;
- iv. For sheltering the homeless;
- v. Of entertainment on special occasions;
- vi. Functioning as a judicial court.

The functions of the Mosque in the Muslim countries nowadays are more limited in view of the fact that many institutions have been established apart from the Mosque. They perform functions, which have been withdrawn from the Mosque.

In general, mosques are places for the worship. Though Muslims are permitted to offer their prayers anywhere on the earth provided that place is clean, for the purpose of collective prayer, the Mosque is a must. All the Mosques in the Muslim world are purpose-built Mosques. Their distinctive features are their minarets; dome; mehrab (niche) and mimber (pulpit).

Within 10 years of the Prophet's passing away, Muslims entered Jerusalem in peace, and conquered Alexandria and Persia. Within 50 years, Muslims were entering Spain in the West, the Indus Valley in the East and camping on the river Oxus to the North in Central Asia. The simple faith of Islam became a world religion. Islam became heir to Greco-Roman Civilisation. It was Islam that extended the Greek philosophical heritage. Many non-Greek texts were translated into Arabic by the end of the 9th Century so Islam proved a bridge between Judaism and Christianity in the West and Vedanta and Buddhism in the East.

Islam created the first known cosmopolitan eclectic civilisation from the Atlantic to the Pacific - anybody irrespective of religion or race could travel, trade and settle down as a free human being from Gibraltar to the plains of the Ganges. Even the Mongol hordes of the early 13th Century, which had massacred Muslims and plundered Muslim cities, became Muslims within 100 years, and they brought fresh energy into Islamic history in the form of the Ottoman and Mughal empires in the West and in the East.

Islam became a world transforming power on the basis of its theological and human vision of one Transcendent God and one, universal humanity. As in those times, so today, Islam stands firmly on its theological foundation as a simple faith in one transcendent Creator and Lord, First and Last, Manifest and Hidden.

By this faith, Islam brings about an emancipation of the human spirit away from slavery to superstition and dogma, whether sectarian or secular. By the same faith and simplicity, Islam stands today as it once stood, a symbol of human dignity and freedom.

Today, the population of the Muslims is more than 1.2 billion. The following indicates the Muslim population of some countries as based on the Muslim directory, UK 2000.

Muslim dominated country:

Population:

(Million)

Afghanistan

20

Kyrgyzstan

4.7

Algeria

27.9

Libya

5.4

Azerbaijan

8

Malaysia

20

Bangladesh

120.5

Morocco

27

Egypt

62.8

Nigeria

111.5

Guinea

6.8

Pakistan

140

Indonesia

197

Saudi Arabia

17.5

Iran

67.4

Sudan

28

Iraq

20.4

Syria

14.7

Ivory Coast

14.3

Tajikistan

6

Jordan

5.4

Tanzania

17

Kashmir (Azad & Held)

13

Tunisia

8.9

Kazakhstan

17.1

Turkey

62

Uzbekistan

22.8

#### Muslims in non-Muslim Countries:

Country

Total Population

(Million)

Population of Muslims

%

China

1200

7

Eritrea

3.5

45

Mozambique

16.5

16

Ghana

17.5

38

India

936

11

Muslims in Europe and America:

Country

Total Population

(Million)

Population

%

Albania

3.4

75

Bulgaria

8.8

13

France

58

2

Germany

81.5

2

UK

58.3

2

Yugoslavia

4.5

19

Argentina

250

2

Canada

29.3

1

Guyana

1.3

10

USA

263.5

.25

Australia

17

1

New Zealand

3

.4

Islam, in brief, is a Divine way of life, which brings out the noblest human characteristics, developing and using them for the construction of human society. Islam has remained unique in this respect to this day. Those who deviate from this system, whether based on nationalism, colour and race, class struggle, or similar theories, are truly harming mankind. They do not help mankind to develop those noble characteristics, which have been given him by his Creator, nor do they assist human society in benefiting from an harmonious blending of all those capabilities, experiences and characteristics, which have been developed among the various races of mankind.

Islam is a vital force, taught and observed by a worldwide community. Islam has survived the revolutions of Turkey and the communist world, and Islam has shown that it has much to contribute in lending a moral and spiritual dynamic to the social reforms and revolutions in many parts of the Muslim world. In fact, it is a system, which could restore peace and human dignity.

The message of Islam is: Join in!

#### F) IBADAH i.e. Worship

In the beginning of this booklet, faith has been briefly defined. It was made clear that, the Prophet Muhammad (blessing of Allah and peace be upon him) enjoined us to believe in five articles of faith, which in short, are the followings:

1. Belief in one God (Allah) who has absolutely no associate with Him in His divinity;
2. Belief in His Angels;
3. Belief in His books, and in the Holy Qur'an as His last book;
4. Belief in His Prophets, and in Muhammad (PBUH) as his last and final messenger; and
5. Belief in life after death.

These five articles make up the bedrock of Islam. One who believes in them, enters the fold of Islam, and becomes a member of the Muslim community. One, enters in Islam, simply by making a declaration before four people, of his intention and reciting the Kalemah,

"LA ILAHA ILLULLAHU, MUHAMMADUR RASULULLAH"

i.e. there is no deity, but Allah and Muhammad (PBUH) is Allah's messenger.

However, one does not become a complete Muslim, by mere vocal profession alone. One has to carry out in practice the instructions given by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as ordained by Allah.

Among those instructions, the first and foremost thing is IBADAH - the primary duties, which must be observed by each and every person, professing to belong to the Muslim community. IBADAH is an Arabic word, derived from "ABD" (a slave) and it means submission. Allah is the Master and we are slaves. Whatever a slave does in obedience to and for the pleasure of his Master is "IBADAH".

To help achieve this aim, a set of formal "IBADAH" has been drawn up as a course of training. The more assiduously we follow the training, the better equipped we are to harmonise the ideals and

practices. The "IBADAH" are thus the pillars on which the edifice of Islam rests. These are commonly known the five pillars of Islam, which are:

1. "SHAHADA" proclamation of one's belief as a Muslim;
2. "SALAH" five daily prayers;
3. "ZAKAH" welfare contribution;
4. "SAWM" fasting of the month of holy Ramadan; and
5. "HAJJ" pilgrimage to the House of Allah.

If these five duties are performed regularly, correctly and sincerely, it will transform a Muslim's life in accordance with the wishes of its Creator. Faithful practice of these duties should inspire him to work towards the establishment of justice, equality and righteousness. Therefore, more details of these duties are given.

### SALAH (Worship)

Many people, including some Muslims, misunderstand the concept of worship. Worship is commonly taken to mean performing ritualistic acts, such as, prayers, fasting, charity, etc. This limited understanding of worship is only one part of the comprehensive concept of worship in Islam. The traditional definition of worship includes almost everything in an individual's activities.

Ritual worship, if performed in a true spirit, elevate man morally and spiritually. It enables him to carry on his activities in all the walks of life according to the guidance provided by Almighty Allah. Among ritual worship, Salah, ritual prayer, occupies the key position. Salah constitutes one pillar of Islam and is considered the cornerstone of the religion.

Salah refers to the five obligatory daily prayers, which are offered individually or congregationally. Salah is an act of worship, which we as Muslims should offer to remember Allah. It brings us closer to Him. The Qur'an says: "Establish Salah to remember me (Allah)". (20:14)

Salah is a distinctive mark of a believer. It prevents an individual from all sorts of abominations and vices by providing him with occasions of direct communion with his Creator five times a day. The individual renews his covenant with Allah and seeks His guidance again and again by saying: "You alone we worship and to You alone we turn for help. Guide us along the straight path". (1:5-6)

Salah strengthens belief in the existence of God and transmits this belief into the innermost recesses of the man's heart. It enlivens this belief and makes it a constructive force in the practical course of life and helps a person to realise his natural and instinctive aspirations to greatness and high morality. Furthermore, it purifies the heart and develops the mind, cultivates the conscience and comforts the soul. It fosters the good and decent elements in a person, and suppresses the evil and indecent inclinations. Salah is the first manifestation of faith and also foremost in the basic conditions for the success of the believers. "Successful indeed are the believers who are humble in their prayers". (23:1-2)

Any Muslim who fails to observe his Prayers and who has no reasonable excuse is committing a grave offence and a heinous sin. This sin is grave because it is not only against Allah, but is also against the very nature of man. The best way to cultivate in man a sound personality and actualise his aspirations in a mature course of development is through Islamic Prayer. To neglect Salah is to suppress the good qualities in human nature.

Salah is the practical proof of our faith in Allah and Islam. Allah says in the holy Qur'an:

"Salah at fixed times has been enjoined on the believers." (4:103)

The daily prayers are:

1. FAJR (From dawn until just before sunrise)
2. ZUHR (After mid-day until afternoon)
3. ASR (From late afternoon until sunset)
4. MAGHRIB (After sunset till the daylight ends)
5. ISHA (From night until dawn breaks)

We offer Salah to remember Allah our Creator and to be close to Him, to gain His favour and bounty. The offering of Salah is obligatory for every Muslim, male or female, who is:

\* sane and responsible;

\* relatively mature and over the age of puberty, normally about fourteen. {Children should be trained by the parents to start practising Salah at the age of seven and are strongly urged to do so by the age of ten.

The following is a beautiful supplication offered in the night prayers, Qunut:

"O God! We beseech You for help and guidance, and seek Your protection and believe in You, rely on You, and extol You and are thankful to You and are not ungrateful to You, and we

declare ourselves clear of, and forsake, him who disobeys You.

O God! To You we pray and prostrate ourselves, and to You we betake ourselves, and You we are quick to obey and for Your mercy do we hope and Your punishment do we fear, for Your punishment overtakes the unbelievers.

O God! Exalt our Master Muhammad and his people, and the true followers".

### The Call for Prayer (Adhan)

Before the prayers, the Muadhhdin calls for the prayer, namely, Adhan. It is a call to leave every thing behind and come to Almighty Allah for prayer. The wording of Ad'han is:

- \* Allah is great; Allah is great.
- \* Allah is great; Allah is great.
- \* I bear witness that there is no deity other than Allah.
- \* I bear witness that there is no deity other than Allah.
- \* I bear witness that Muhammad (PBUH) is the messenger of Allah.
- \* I bear witness that Muhammad (PBUH) is the messenger of Allah.
- \* Come for prayer; Come for prayer.
- \* Come for salvation; Come for salvation.
- \* Allah is great; Allah is great.
- \* There is no one to be worshipped, but Allah.

### Fasting in the month of Ramadan

Fasting as an institution, discipline and experience in one form or another, has always been an important and often necessary part of religious life in almost every faith. The Qur'an says:

"O you believers! Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you, that you may (learn) self-restraint (taqwa). (Al-Qur'an 2:183)

Fasting is considered a practical way of giving thanks for the guidance provided. Millions of Muslims throughout the world fast every year in the month of Ramadan. They have been fasting in this way consistently since the second year of Hijrah, when the verses concerning fasting were revealed to the Prophet. One finds absolute continuity and universality in the observance of this act

of worship by Muslims the world over.

Fasting means abstaining from eating, drinking, smoking and sexual intercourse from dawn to dusk for the sake of Allah. The true spirit of fasting is to refrain from all kinds of sins. In Islam, fasting is not regarded as an act of penance or atonement or a means of torturing the body, but as a discipline. Through fasting, the believer learns how to control his three basic desires: hunger, thirst and sex. These are not only desires but also human necessities. Islam does not seek to crush them; rather it controls them and brings them under control and set limitation. When a believer develops his self-control over his legitimate desires, it becomes easier for him to control his evil desires because of the will power, which he developed by fasting. While fasting, one must cultivate the habit of abstaining from all forbidden acts but if one does not fast with a true spirit; fasting becomes fruitless. As the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: "Whoever does not give up false speech and evil conduct, Allah is not in need of his leaving off food and drink." (Sahih-al-Bukhari)

The Prophet has called the fasting a "Shield". Fasting is a shield in various senses when it is observed in its true spirit. Fasting may protect the observer against hellfire, against attacks of Satan, his own bad desires and other evil forces. The Prophet has advised the fasting person not to use obscene language or do any act of ignorance. If any other person uses bad language against him or tries to quarrel with him, he should try his best to avert it and avoid it by saying, "I am fasting". This kind of attitude will safeguard him against indulging in any wrong action.

There is a difference between fasting and starving. In starving, only the stomach fasts but in real Islamic fasting every part of the body observes the fast. As the Prophet (PBUH) said: "When you fast, let your ear fast and your eye fast and your tongue fast and your hand and every limb fast".

Such a view of "Total Fast" is in the interest of purification of both body and soul through regular suspension of interaction with the world so that one is protected from the corrupting contact with the world. Such was the revelation to Mary (RA) once she had given birth to Jesus (PBUH):

"So eat and drink and cool your eye and if you see any man say: I have vowed fast to the Gracious One and this day will enter into no talk with any human being". (Al-Qur'an 19:26)

In Islamic practice, fasting from speech is sometimes associated with a retreat during the month of fasting or at other times. Fasting is a discipline of self-control, purification of body, mind and soul and illuminating hearts. It all leads to concentrating in prayer and to worship in humility and is a

source of presence before the One God.

## ZAKAH (Spending in the way of the Good)

There is voluntary spending for good causes, and in Islam, there is obligatory spending, which is called Zakah, a set percentage of one's annual income to be given in the service of God. The following verses of the Qur'an will express the entire perspective on Zakah more eloquently than any formal, academic account. The Qur'an places Zakah (charity) in its broadest perspective, as an integral part of one's spiritual being and conduct. The key verse is at the very beginning of the holy Qur'an (Chapter 2:1-2):

"This is the Book in it is guidance sure, without doubt, to those who fear God; who believe in the Unseen are steadfast in prayer and give out of what we have provided for them".

"Those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah and do not follow up their gifts with reminders of their generosity or with injury, their reward is with their Lord ... (2:262)

"The likeness of those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah, is as the likeness of a grain (of corn): it grows seven ears and each ear has a hundred grains. Allah gives manifoldly to His credit (in repaying) and he will have (besides) a good reward (i.e. paradise)". (57:11)

"Alms are for the poor and the needy, and those employed to administer (the funds), for those whose hearts have been (recently) reconciled (to truth); for those in bondage and in debt; in the cause of God; and wayfarer: (this is) ordained by God and God is full of knowledge and wisdom". (9:60)

The verse, which highlights in all essential details the unity of faith and conduct, is the following (inviting one and all to ponder and understand the totality of one's conduct who believes in, and is at peace with, God):

"It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards East and West; but it is righteousness to believe in God, and the Last Day, and the Angels and the Books and the Messengers; to spend of your sustenance, out of love for Him, for your kin, for orphans, for the needy, for the wayfarer for those who ask and for the ransom of slaves; to be steadfast in prayer and practice regular charity; to fulfil the contracts which you have made and to be firm and patient in pain (or suffering) and adversity and throughout all periods of distress. Such are the people of truth, the God fearing". (2:177)

Zakah is a compulsory payment from a Muslim's annual savings at the rate of 2.5% on the value of cash, jewellery, and precious stones and metals. A separate rate applies to animals, crops and mineral wealth.

Zakah is neither a charity nor a tax. Charity is optional, whilst taxes can be levied by the government for any of the needs of the society.

Zakah, however, can only be spent on helping the poor and needy, the disabled, the oppressed, debtors and welfare purposes, as defined in the Qur'an and the Sunnah.

### HAJJ (The pilgrimage of House of Allah)

The Muslims from different parts of the world gather once a year in Makkah for the most ritualistic act of Hajj. Hajj is the name of the collection of all possible prayers in Islam. It contains every aspect of teachings of Islam. It has a very broad connotation though it consists of some set patterns, rules and rites, which the performer of Hajj (Pilgrim/Haji) has to perform.

It is a journey to the House of Allah in Makkah, Saudi Arabia, in the month of "Dhul-Hajjah", the twelfth month of the Islamic Calendar. Hajj symbolises the unity of mankind; Muslims from every race and nationality assemble, together in equality and humility to worship their Lord. The pilgrims, in ritual clothing of "IHRAM" have the unique feelings of being in the presence of their Creator, to Whom they belong. To Whom they must return after death, in a similar cloth of "KAFAN ", i.e. two white sheets in which the body is wrapped before burial. Nowadays, every year, about two to three million Muslims gathered in Makkah for the Hajj from all over the world.

Ka'ba (House of Allah) is the focal point of this spiritual IBADAH, which is also symbolic from antiquity of monotheistic worship, of giving testimony that one is present before the Supreme One, having set aside every other association of race and language, nation and country, away from home, alone before the Alone, "Here I am O' God, here I am." (labbaika-Allahumma-Labbaik).

According to the holy Qur'an, the Ka'ba was built by Abraham and Ishmael, who were ordained by God to "sanctify my house for those who compass it around, or use it as a retreat, or bow or prostrate themselves therein for prayers". (2:135) After entering Makkah in peaceful triumph (628 CE), the apostle cleansed the House of God from all sorts of idols drawn from superstitious beliefs

and reconstructed the Ka'ba as a House of the one, invisible, transcendental God. The Ka'ba has, therefore, remained central to Muslim piety, being the direction of daily prayers and the place of sanctuary and peace where no blood is shed, whether of any animal or any human, as a sign of harmony between man and man, between man and nature. The Hajj is based on the conviction of each pilgrim that, "Our God and your God is One God".

The pilgrimage to the Ka'ba is one of the pillars of the Islamic faith and practice. Each adult Muslim, man and woman, is called upon to go on this pilgrimage, provided he or she has sufficient resources to travel to Makkah. The pilgrim (Haji) returns home as though transformed and refined, as an example and teacher of the universal faith and identity of Islam. The Hajj, therefore, re-lives Abraham's faith and devotion, worship and his sacrifice every year. Thus making Islam a very ancient and very recent call to faith in one Supreme God (Allah).

#### A SUMMARY OF THE PROPHET'S LAST SERMON

This sermon was delivered on the ninth day of Dhul Hijja, 10A.H. in the valley of Arafat, during the performance of Hajj. This sermon delivered by the last Messenger of Allah, is a great charter for humanity. It is a guarantee for peace, justice and equality.

Muhammad (PBUH), the highly praised, the chosen one, the trustworthy, the truthful one, while delivering this farewell sermon, said:

"O people, lend me an attentive ear; for I know not whether after this year, I shall ever be amongst you again. Therefore, listen to what I am saying to you very carefully and TAKE THESE WORDS TO THOSE WHO COULD NOT BE PRESENT HERE TODAY.

O People, just as you regard this month, this day, this city as sacred, so regard the life and property of every Muslim as a sacred trust. Return the goods entrusted to you to their rightful owners. Hurt no one so that no one may hurt you. Remember that you will indeed meet your Lord, and that He will indeed reckon your deeds. Allah has forbidden you to take usury (interest), therefore, all interest-obligation shall henceforth be waived. Your capital, however, is yours to keep. You will neither inflict, nor suffer, inequity. Allah has judged that there shall be no interest and that all the interest due to Abbas ibn'Abd'al Muttalib shall henceforth be waived...

Beware of Satan, for the safety of your religion. He has lost all hope that he will ever be able to lead you astray in big things, so beware of following him in small things.

O People, it is true that you have certain rights with regard to your women, but they also have rights over you. Remember that you have taken them as your wives only under Allah's trust and with His permission. If they abide by your right, then to them belongs the right to be fed and clothed in kindness. Do treat your women well and be kind to them for they are your partners and committed helpers. However, it is your right that they do not make friends with anyone of whom you do not approve, as well as never to be unchaste.

O People, listen to me in earnest, worship Allah, say your five daily prayers (Salah), fast during the month of Ramadan, and give your wealth in Zakah. Perform Hajj if you can afford to.

All mankind is from Adam and Eve. An Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab, nor does a non-Arab have superiority over an Arab; also, a white has no superiority over a black, nor does a black have any superiority over a white, except by piety and good deeds. Learn that every Muslim is a brother to every Muslim and that the Muslims constitute one brotherhood. Nothing shall be legitimate to a Muslim, which belongs to a fellow Muslim, unless it was given freely and willingly. Do not, therefore, do injustice to yourselves.

Remember, one day you will appear before Allah and answer for your deeds. So beware, do not stray from the path of righteousness after I am gone.

O People, NO PROPHET OR APOSTLE WILL COME AFTER ME AND NO NEW FAITH WILL BE BORN. Reason well, therefore, O People, and understand words, which I convey to you. I leave behind me two things, the Qur'an and Sunnah, and if you follow these, you will never go astray.

ALL THOSE WHO LISTEN TO ME SHALL PASS ON MY WORDS TO OTHERS AND THOSE TO OTHERS AGAIN; and may those last ones understand my words better than those who listen to me directly. Be my witness, O Allah, that I have conveyed your message to your people".

## FESTIVALS

These celebrations are observed to seek the pleasure of Allah. There is no concept of a festival for pleasure's own sake in Islam; but there are occasions of joy and happiness. The happiest occasion of a Muslim's life is to see the laws of Allah established in their totality on the earth. Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Adha are the two major festivals in Islam.

EID-UL-FITR is observed on the first day after the month of Ramadan. On this day, after a month of fasting, Muslims express their joy and happiness by offering a congregational prayer, preferably

in an open field. They express their gratitude to Allah for enabling them to observe the fast. Special food is prepared, and it is customary to visit friends and relatives and to give presents to children to make the occasion lively and special for them.

EID-UL-ADHA begins on the 10th day of the month of Dhul-Hijjah and continues until the 12th. This celebration is observed to commemorate the willingness of Abraham when he was asked to sacrifice his own son, Ishmael. Abraham showed his readiness and Allah was very pleased. A lamb was sacrificed instead of Ishmael on Allah's command. Muslims offer congregational prayer on the day, and afterwards they sacrifice animals, such as, sheep, goats, cows and camels to seek the pleasure of Allah. The meat of the sacrificed animal is shared amongst relatives, neighbours and the poor.

Some other occasions to remember include the beginning of the Hijrah (migration of the Prophet), Lailatul Mi'raj (Night of Ascension) and dates of Islamic battles fought by Muhammad (PBUH). There is a night of special significance in Ramadan known as Lailatul Qadr (Night of Power). It occurs in one of the odd numbered nights of the last ten days of the month of Ramadan. The Qur'an mentions it as a night "better than a thousand months".

Islamic festivals are observed according to the Islamic Calendar, which is based on lunar months. The lunar year is about 10 days shorter than the solar year. Festival dates are determined by the appearance of the moon.

## CONCLUSION:

Allah, the most High, the Lord of the universe, has stated in His last revealed book, Al-Qur'an, "For, We assuredly sent among every people an apostle (with the command) serve Allah and eschew evil". Hence it is the duty of each Muslim, to be well informed, about his religion, and to worship Allah, as ordained by the Islamic SHARIAH.

Allah has taught a beautiful supplication to his last apostle Muhammad (PBUH) commanding him to:

"Say; Truly my prayers and my services of sacrifice, my life and death, are all for (Allah), the Cherisher of the universe: No partner hath He; thus am I commanded, and I am first to those who

bow to His will. (Al-Qur'an 6:162-163)

The message of Islam is for all mankind. It is a universal religion. Its call transcends the barriers of race, colour and tongue. It raises mankind high enough near to his Creator and binds mankind in everlasting fraternity.

Let us all take a little time to reflect over this Divine message. May Allah, show us the Divine light and straight path. Amin!

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