

The Principles of Islam

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

by

Maulana Abdul Aleem Siddiqui Quadri

The beautiful panorama of the heavens and the earth, which we see around us, carries in its bosom the testimony that it is the creation of a Great Artist. The existence of order and design in the universe, which modern science teaches us, leads us to the belief in the existence of a Supreme Power and a Supreme Intelligence who is responsible for this complex but orderly design, --of a Supreme Being who brought it into existence and supplied it with all that it needed for its life and growth, --in the language of the Holy Qur'an, of the Rabbul-Alameen.

The universe, as we know it in Science, is an organic Whole, all of whose parts are beautifully and harmoniously inter-related. It is, further, a Domain of Law in which every particle exists and moves in subjection to a prescribed and immutable course of law. Neither the huge planets that swim in space, nor the tiny particles of sand that lie scattered on the seashore, can deviate even slightly from that course. Their life is a life of complete submission to the Laws of Nature, in the language of Science, and to the Laws of God, in the language of Religion. Their life is the life of Islam, which means submission to Divine Commands. In other words, they are Muslims. The Holy Qur'an refers to this truth in the following words:

"And to Him submits whatever is in the heavens and the earth, willingly, or unwillingly, and to Him do they return" (III: 83).

The sole exception to this general rule is man. He is unique in the whole domain of creation, inasmuch as he possesses not only the faculty of reasoning but also a free will. This makes his course of action and the pattern of his behaviour undetermined. You can predict the action of the sun, because it functions under an immutable law and possesses no freedom to deviate from it. But you cannot do the same thing in the case of man. The activity of all the things of the universe is mechanical. But not so that of man. He can choose his ends and he can prescribe the means. For that purpose, he relies on his Reason. But, in that way, he commits mistakes side by side with achieving great things, and ultimately lands himself in a confusion. The same faculty, which is his asset, becomes the instrument of his undoing, solely because of its wrong use. The human intellect can guide him only to certain limits, because it works on the basis of known facts to discover the unknown. It can serve efficiently to some extent in the domain of the physical reality. But when it enters the realm of fundamental truths, where the first requirement is the possession of a comprehensive knowledge of the past, the present, and the future, it can give us only conjectures and inferences. In its very nature, it is incapable of discovering ultimate truths of life.

The human soul is, however, in dead earnest to know those ultimate truths, because without them the real meaning of life remains unexplained and the true code of human endeavour remains unfixed. Science cannot supply that, because it deals only with the immediate physical reality. Philosophy cannot give it, because it works on postulates and inferences.

It is at this stage that the human soul cries for guidance from the Great Beyond or the Great Unseen. It yearns to have a torch which might illumine its path, and a Guide who might supply the guidance based on sure and certain knowledge.

Humanity needs such a sure, positive and comprehensive guidance, and the same Loving Creator who sustains us and the universe in the matter of physical needs and has also taken it upon Himself to supply this vital need.

Human history bears testimony to the fact that religion has existed since the beginnings of the life of humanity on this

earth. This shows that the Beneficent God supplied mankind with guidance simultaneously with its creation, so that it might not have to grope in the dark and might walk the way of the law in conformity with its nature.

Those who were appointed by God to deliver that guidance are known in the terminology of religion as Prophets and Messengers. They themselves received that guidance in the form of "Divine Revelation", and when they presented it to the people in a written form, it was known as "Scripture" or "Revealed Book". The contents of those Scriptures have always been those laws which the Creator and Sustainer of the universe has appointed for the right life of man. The aim of that guidance has always been to teach man to submit to the Divine Laws, which attitude is expressed in Arabic by the term "Islam". Divine Guidance wants man to act and behave in accordance with the law of his true nature, as a free being, even as the rest of the creation conforms with the laws of nature in a mechanical way ---in one word, to be Muslim. The Holy Qur'an says:

"The nature (made by) God in which He has created man. There is no altering in God's creation. That is the right religion. But most men do not know" (XX: 30).

This guidance from God was not confined to one group or community, but was sent to all nations and races. This blessing of God was bestowed universally as the Holy Qur'an reports:

"And there is not a (single nation to whom a Warner was not sent." (XXXV: 24).

History has preserved the names of some of them, while the names and works of many others have now been forgotten. Among those whose names are still remembered are: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and Jesus. The last of the line was Muhammad (God bless him and all other Prophets!). He appeared in the seventh century of the Christian era, called humanity back to the path of the former Prophets, and presented to the world the Holy Qur'an, which contains the laws taught by the former Prophets in their perfect and most comprehensive form. People had named the teachings of the previous Teachers variously as "Judaism", "Christianity", etc. The last Prophet reminded them of the real and original and meaningful name, namely, Islam. He declared, in the words of the Holy Qur'an:

"Verily, the religion with God is Al-Islam (i.e. Submission)". (III: 9).

"The religion of your forefather Abraham. He named you as Muslims". (XXII: 78).

"Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian, but he was upright and submitted (to his Lord)". (III: 67).

The Final Prophet raised religion from the level of sectarianism and taught that the Divine Religion, wherever found and by whomsoever preached, had always been the same, namely, Islam, which, as I have already emphasized twice, means submission to and conformity with the laws appointed by God.

Now, the teachings of Islam fall under two headings, namely: (1) Belief, and (2) Action. In matters of belief, the basic belief is that which-relates to God. It is the form of this belief which fashions the whole human outlook. When the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be with him!) appeared, different religious communities had different notions. People had invented conceptions of godhead and had raised human beings, nay, even the inorganic things, to the status of divinity. Reforming all those wrong notions, the Holy Prophet Muhammad taught the first lesson of Islam in the words:

"There is none worthy of worship except Allah".

This revolutionary declaration means that God is One and One only, and has no partner. God is the Creator, and everything beside Him is "created". It means that no creature can be ranked with the Creator, however great might be his achievements and attributes. The line of demarcation is very distinct and cannot be crossed.

Of course, history has recorded the working of miracles by the Prophets and Messengers. But, in that case, the Prophets and Messengers were merely instruments and the force that really worked behind their miracles was the

Hand of God. The sole function of the Prophets and Messengers was to invite humanity to God and to attract the human hearts and intellects to Him. Of all the Great Signs, which were associated with their lives, the greatest was the reception of messages from God for delivery to the people. It was because of this that they were called "Messengers". They taught the highest truths in spite of their illiteracy and complete lack of schooling.

Belief in the mission and the message of all those Messengers was preached by the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be with him!) as the second part of Islamic basic belief, and along with the declaration of the Unity of God, the Divine Messengership of Muhammad was added, for, as the last of the line of Prophets and Messengers, he represents all his predecessors. This gives us the full Islamic article of faith:

"There is none worthy of worship but Allah, (and) Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah".

Now, just as the belief in the plurality of gods leads to the irreconcilable division of humanity, so does the notion of differentiating between God's Prophets and Messengers. Therefore, the guidance coming truly from one God cannot permit it, and, consequently, we find the Holy Qur'an teaching us the following basic belief:

"Say: We believe in Allah, and in that which has been revealed unto us, and in that which was revealed unto Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes, and in that which Moses and Jesus got, and in that which (other) Prophets received from their Lord. We make no distinction between them..."(III: 84).

One other point where humanity has committed grave mistakes concerns a species of God's creatures known as "Angles". Some have believed in them as "daughters of God", while others have made them partners in the Supreme Godhead. Islam makes it clear that they are created spiritual beings who serve as executors of God's Will in the capacity of humble slaves. They are not the bestowers of Divine Blessings but only a medium for Divine Action. The real Bestower is God Almighty alone, and the angels are mere servants, as the Holy Qur'an says:

"They do not disobey God in what they are commanded and they do as ordered"

Now, I may say a word on the Islamic article of Faith concerning the Last Day and the Day of Judgment. We all know that the violation of a physical law always causes us physical injury. The use of wrong foods, the effects of wrong climate, the non-observance of the rules of hygiene, brings about physical consequences which are evil. On the other hand, the observance of the laws of health guarantees our development and natural growth. In fact, every one of our actions is consequential. The results might manifest themselves early or late, but they must ultimately manifest themselves. Islam believes in the final assessment of all our actions and the true manifestation of their ultimate results on a day named by it as the Day of Judgment.

Regarding the duration of the life of the universe, modern science postulates its ultimate end. It teaches that the numerous planets and stars which constitute the universe are bound together by a network of magnetic forces which is fed by the radiation of energy emanating from those bodies. It further teaches that energy is diminishing and decreasing every day, and on that basis it infers that a time must come when the balance of forces must be upset, destroying the entire universe. Islam, too, teaches the belief in the ultimate ending of the world, and names that occurrence as the *Qiyam-e-Qiyamet*, or the advent of the Last Day.

These are the simple principles of Islamic belief. And here I may emphasize a very important point. The fact is that two fundamental beliefs are absolutely necessary to keep man within the bounds of healthy existence and growth:

Firstly, the belief in the All-Knowing and All-Seeing God, who knows and sees, not only his positive action, but also the ideas and emotions which run through the most secret recesses of his heart.

Secondly, the belief that he is responsible for his action and is ultimately bound to receive his reward or punishment.

It is evident that, for most people, the real deterrent is the existence of the instruments of the law under which they live and the fear of punishment consequent upon the violation of law. It is also evident that one would hardly have

the courage of committing any crime in the presence of the sentinels of the law.

The Holy Qur'an has taught in the most unambiguous words that no one can bear the burden of any other's sin and no one can be held accountable for the deeds of someone else. Every human being is responsible for his or her actions alone. The Holy Qur'an says:

"No one bears the burden of the other" (VI : 164).

Consequently, if a person is rightly inspired with the belief in the existence of the All-Seeing and All-Knowing God and in his ultimate personal accountability, it would be difficult for him to commit evil.

Thus it is that the fundamental principles of belief in the teachings of all the Prophets, namely, in Islam, are: Belief in the One True God; Belief in all the Prophets of God; Belief in all the Divinely-revealed Books; Belief in the Angels; Belief in the Last Day and the Day of Judgment; Belief in human accountability, on the basis of the possession of free will, and in the ultimate reward or punishment.

Besides these principles of belief, the Code of Law which humanity received through Divine Revelation, in the form of the Holy Qur'an, supplies us with a complete system of guidance for all the practical walks of life. It is not possible to deal with it here in any detail. Only a brief reference can be made under three fundamental items, namely: (1) Duties towards God; (2) Duties towards self; (3) Duties towards others.

Duties towards God rest on the basic problem of the establishment of the right and conscious relation of man with God. In what form should this relation manifest itself? The basic fact in this connection is the attitude of love and thankfulness. It is a natural human attribute to feel thankful to anyone who does the smallest amount of good to us and to love him who loves us. What then about God who brought us forth from mere nothingness and took upon Himself the obligation of leading us to the pinnacle of our perfection? Therefore, Islam teaches us to make that Real Bestower of all Blessings as the center of our love, to bend our personality in thought and deed towards Him, and to express our gratitude to Him with our tongues as well as our hearts. It prescribes for that purpose continuous remembrance of God and a form of worship or prayer, named as Salat. The function of this prayer and remembrance is the same in the spiritual life of man as that of the nourishing foods in his physical life, and the greater the attention one pays to it, the greater is the spiritual and moral development. In its obligatory form, Islam prescribes it to be performed in a fixed manner and to be observed at certain fixed times of the day and the night, even as the physicians fix the forms and the times of meals for the proper nourishment of the physical body. Divine Revelation tells us in the Holy Qur'an:

"Verily, prayer is obligatory on the believers at fixed times". (IV: 103).

And the Last Prophet (peace be with him!) emphasized the institution of prayer in these words:

"What separates a Servant (of God) from infidelity is Prayer".

While referring to the nourishing value of prayer for the soul, the Holy Qur'an says:

"Verily, in the remembrance of God do hearts find rest". (XIII: 28).

The consequences of the observance of prayers have been spoken of in these words:

"Verily, prayer keeps away from indecencies and evil". (XXIX: 45).

Thus prayer provides the protection against moral and spiritual diseases which results in spiritual development and leads to close communion with God.

The establishment of the right relation with the Creator and the cultivation of love for Him must result not only in the devotion of one's attention, but also in the practical and active dedication of one's life and wealth to Him. It must further result in the creation of the deepest sentiments of love for His creatures. For the practical demonstration of this love, Islam prescribes the obligatory "poor-tax" or Zakat.

Towards this end, Islam also prescribes the observance of Haj or Pilgrimage to Mecca as obligatory on every Muslim of means. In this observance, a Muslim has to sacrifice his wealth as well as his comforts for the sake of the love of God. On the social side, the Haj is the instrument of fostering fraternal relations between the different Muslim units scattered all over the world and of solving their political, economic and international problems.

There remains now one more Islamic obligatory practice, and that is Saum, or Fasting. The harmonious development of human personality depends upon the harmonious working of the human self, which is always in danger of being corrupted or destroyed by the widespread inclination towards self-indulgence. To steer clear of the temptations and pitfalls of human life, man is urgently in need of the cultivation of self-control. To that end, Islam has prescribed obligatory fasting during the whole month of Ramadan every year.

The Holy Qur'an says:

"O you who believe! Fasting has been prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those who were before you, so that you may attain piety; -- (It is fasting for a) fixed number of days". (II: 183).

It may be pointed out here that while announcing the obligatoriness of fasting, the Holy Qur'an refers to the fact that the same had been prescribed for those who followed the previous scriptures and Prophets. But this institution also met the same fate in other religions as the other basic teachings. Misinterpretations and interpolations of those Messages caused this institution to disappear from those religious groups. The Holy Qur'an reminded about it and renewed the teaching of the former Prophets with regard to fasting. The Qur'anic institution of fasting is observed during all the days of Ramadan by means of total abstinence during daytime from eating, drinking and sexual acts. Thus, when a person practices self-control with regard to those things which are lawful, he automatically cultivates the power of resisting the evil temptations in thought and deed.

This completes the statement of the fundamental principles of Islam which have been summed up by the Holy Prophet Muhammad (God bless him!) in the following words:

"Islam is founded on five things: To bear witness that there is none worthy of worship but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah; to establish prayer; to pay the prescribed Charity; to fast during Ramadan; and to perform the Pilgrimage to the Kaaba if one has means of doing so".

It may be pointed out that the general conception prevailing in the world is that it is merely a bundle of certain rituals, prayers and ceremonies. This is not, however, the conception of Islam, which comprehends in itself a complete and perfect Code of Life dealing with spiritual, moral, political, economic, in fact, all the aspects of human activity. The Holy Qur'an declares in very clear terms:

"This day I have perfected your religion for you, and completed My favour on you, and chosen for you Al-Islam as your religion." (V: 4).

I have so far referred to those principles of Islam which fall under the category of purely "religious" or "devotional", although I must emphasize that they, too, have a vital bearing on human culture.

Now, as regards "Duties towards self", Islam considers human life as the first and the most important blessing of God, and urges its preservation and reverence for it. Wanton injury to human life is a sin in Islam, which lays down the general rule in the words of the Holy Qur'an:

"And be not cast by your own hands to ruin" (II: 195).

Suicide is one of the major crimes according to the Islamic law, and God has prescribed the severest punishment for it. On the other hand, the preservation and right development of one's self is one of the major virtues. In that respect, Islam has gone to the extent of forbidding certain foods and drinks which the All-Knowing God knows are injurious for the human body. Thus, the Holy Qur'an says:

"O Mankind! Eat of that which is lawful and wholesome, and follow not the ways of the devil." (II: 168).

"You have been forbidden only carrion and blood and pork and that which has been slaughtered in the name of other than Allah" (II – 173).

"Verily, intoxicants and games of chance and divining by arrows and idols are pollution of Satan's handiwork. Therefore, abstain from them if you wish to attain success." (V: 93).

Islam has also taken into consideration the moral aspect of human dress and has prescribed the obligatory covering of certain parts of the body which have a sexappeal.

Islam does not hold the world and its struggle in contempt. On the other hand, it regards the earning of livelihood by rightful means as an obligation and a blessing of God.

The Holy Qur'an says:

"For man is naught but what he strives for." (LIII: 39).

"And seek of the Bounty of Allah."

The Holy Prophet says:

"One who earns livelihood (by sweat of brow) is Allah's beloved."

Islam has forbidden us from earning wealth by unlawful means.

The Holy Qur'an says:

"Devour not each others' wealth by unlawful means" (IV: 29).

"God has permitted fair business and has prohibited usury." (II: 275).

Islam has also placed limits on the right of spending our wealth. In the Holy Qur'an, we read:

"Be not extravagant. Verily, Allah loveth not those who are extravagant." (VII: 31).

"Be not prodigal. Lo! The prodigals have ever been brothers of the devils. And the devil was ever ingrate to his Lord." (XVII: 26 – 27).

Concerning well-doing to others, the Holy Qur'an observes:

"And those who, when they spend, are neither extravagant nor miserly, but walk the middle course." (XXV: 67).

There is a widespread notion that there are only two ideologies in the world, between which mankind has to make a choice, namely, Communism and Capitalism. But both of these ideologies suffer from extremism, and the salvation of humanity lies in the adoption of a balanced ideology. Such an ideology is found in Islam, which allows initiative and private property, but limits the means of income and the ways of expenditure, which harmonizes the interests of the society and the individual on a free moral basis, and which, in its state constitution, guarantees to all individuals the provision of their basic needs.

The one great difference between Islam and the modern ideologies is that Islam bases all its teachings on moral

foundations and lays full emphasis on the moral reform of the individual. Absolute moral values like Truthfulness, Justice, Charity, etc. are its very life-blood. The interests of the individual and the society exist as co-centric realities. The Islamic society is a co-operative commonwealth of free individuals hedged in with restraints of harmony, even as the human body is one.

Equality of all human beings in essential humanity is one of the basic principles of Islam. And this conception stands, not only in respect of relations between man and man, but also in connection with the relations between man and woman. In fact, Islam ennobled and established the status of woman at a time when she was being regarded as a chattel and at best as a plaything for man, and it was being debated whether she was a human being at all, -- at a time when she possessed no legal personality of her own and was deprived even of the right of owning property. According to the Islamic ideology, as a daughter, woman is more beloved than a son; as a wife, she is "The Queen of her house", and as a mother, her status is superior to that of a father.

Islam wiped off all distinctions of race and colour and taught in the most unambiguous terms the most practical and the truest form of the human brother-hood. The Holy Qur'an says:

"O Mankind ! We created you from one male and one female and made you into nations and tribes that ye may know each other. Lo ! the noblest of you in the sight of God is he who is best in conduct.." (XXXIX: 13).

This brotherhood is made up of individuals who are to be respected without attaching importance to any physical distinctions. In fact, Islam regards the individual as a world by himself, as representing the whole of humanity in his person. Thus says the Holy Qur'an:

"He who kills anyone except for murder or mischief in the land, it is as if he killed all mankind; and he who saves the life of anyone, it is as if he saved the life of all mankind." (V: 35).

The one great source of strife between human beings is the existence of egotism culminating in self-interest. Islam takes a determined stand against it when it preaches the ideal of Muslim life in the following words:

"They sacrifice their own interests, even though it causes them hardship".

The Islamic conception of sacrifice is a natural corollary of the ideal of unbounded love for fellow beings. That, in its turn, is rooted in the ideal of the love of God, which is the central idea to which all the teachings of Islam are directed. The first principle of Islam is true faith in the Existence and the Unity of God. The goal of Muslim life is the attainment of nearness and proximity to God. The Muslim lives not for himself but for God, and all his actions as a Muslim must lead to that goal, as the Holy Qur'an says:

"Say: verily, my prayer and my sacrifice, my life and my death, are all for Allah, Lord of the worlds, Who has no partner (in His Kingdom)". (VI: 162).

Even in the field of scientific quest, the ideal of a Muslim is to know God and His Plan. For we read in the Holy Qur'an:

"Verily, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and in the alternation of the night and the day, are signs for persons of understanding, who remember God standing, sitting and reclining on their sides and ponder over the creation of the heavens and the earth, (and say O our Lord! Thou hast not created all this in vain. Glory be to Thee! Preserve us from the doom of Fire". (III - 188).

This is a very brief outline of the Islamic principles of life. In this teaching, we have neither mystery nor dogma. On the other hand, it is the religion of broad daylight. It is based on the natural laws appointed by God, and consequently every one of its principles is capable of rational proof and demonstration.

It is the obligation of every rational human being to employ his reason and to consider whether he should follow the

man-made imperfect "isms" or the Perfect Guidance given by the All-Knowing God. Islam is not the product of any human brain. It is a Divine Teaching revealed to a man who knew neither to read nor to write, who had received no schooling in science or philosophy, and whose very environment was averse to the possibilities of the cultivation of any higher attributes. That man, that orphan child of Lady Amina, that unlettered son of the desert, stood in the wilds of Arabia, fourteen centuries ago, and proclaimed about himself the following words of God:

"And he does not speak of his own desire. It is naught but an inspiration inspired"

He stood up as an unlettered Teacher, but on the basis of the revelation he received from God, he astounded the world by expounding the highest principles of wisdom and knowledge. He gave to humanity that revealed and perfect Code of Life which transformed the Bedouins of the desert into the most advanced nation of the world and revolutionised the whole human outlook. Those who were sunk in barbarism and moral degradation became the torchbearers of morals and the teachers of the world in all the arts of peace and war. They stood at the cradle of modern science and they remained the master-people of the earth for centuries.

The same inspiration, the same message, the same system exists even today in its original and authentic form in the Holy Qur'an. The life of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be with him!) as the practical commentary of the Holy Qur'an and as the most comprehensive model of human perfection is still preserved in the authentic record of history, and stands out as the Beacon Light for all time.

Let those who honour the demand of rationality and who wish to tread the path of true human perfection come to the Holy Qur'an and God's Last Prophet, Muhammad (peace be with him!) and receive perfect guidance in all the walks of life – spiritual, moral, political, economic, individual and collective. May the Beneficent God guide the whole of mankind to the Straight Path.

AMEN!

Copyright (c) 1997 - 2005 by
NooreMadinah Network
<http://www.NooreMadinah.net>