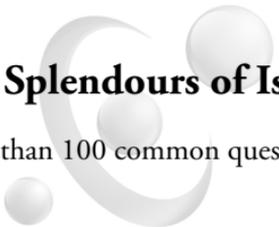


# The Splendours of Islam

Answers to more than  
100 common questions about Islam



Shaik Kadir



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MCAS

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## FOREWORD

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.

We are witnessing in Singapore a growing interest in Islam among people who are not born of Muslim parentage. While books on Islam in the English language have increased significantly in the last few decades, very few of these books are presented in a question-and-answer style. In response to this challenge, Shaik Kadir has made a laudable effort in compiling a list of questions commonly asked about Islam, and answering each one of them.

This book is written in a style that reflects the exposure that Shaik Kadir has had in interacting with the non-Muslims of Singapore. It has helped him develop an understanding and approach that shows respect for the beliefs of non-Muslims while explaining Islam and its perspective to them.

Shaik Kadir knows that there are no standard (or model) responses to the questions on Islam. Some Muslims would prefer to respond to the questions asked in a different manner, producing different facts and explanations, and with different emphasis. There are no static or one-way answers. These are the constraints that this book, or any other books presented in a similar arrangement, have to face. However, this book will have served its purpose if it has succeeded in presenting a general introduction to Islam.

May the reader gain much from this book.

Ridzuan Wu Chia Chung  
President (1980 – 2005)  
Muslim Converts' Association of Singapore  
(Darul Arqam Singapore)

## PREFACE

During a conversation with a close Christian friend, I had the occasion of indicating that Jesus Christ was mentioned 25 times in the Quran. My friend stared at me blankly. I repeated the fact. Showing great surprise, he said, “Really! Are you sure? I never knew that Jesus Christ is mentioned in the Quran. What does the Quran say about Jesus Christ?” He seemed very eager to know about it.

Many non-Muslim friends have also asked their Muslim friends questions ranging from why Muslims are prohibited from eating pork to why Muslim men are allowed to take up to four wives.

Many Muslims, including myself, often answered the various questions asked by our eager-to-know non-Muslim friends on aspects and issues of the Islamic belief and practices inadequately. This is because many Muslims may not be fully prepared to deal with such queries, particularly orally.

However, Muslims do feel that they have a duty to answer the queries from non-Muslims adequately and sincerely, and to share Islam with them. They hope that such sharing of Islam will strengthen further the bond of friendship between Muslims and non-Muslims and enable them to live in unanimity and wholesomeness. I, too, have this urge and hope.

Apart from some of the queries on the Islamic belief mentioned above, what else would the curious non-Muslims like to know? Wouldn't it be good if such queries could be compiled and answered collectively in a book?

Copies of “contribution for questions on Islam” with blank spaces for five questions were given to a number of my non-Muslim friends and friends of my Muslim friends and relatives. Within a span of about six weeks, 55 contributors submitted a total of 246 questions. Some contributed two or three questions while others contributed more. A number of the questions were multi-decked. There was no obligation for them to return the forms. Yet, the response rate was high, about 80 per cent, indicating that the contributors were enthusiastic about

the project. These contributors were people with qualifications ranging from GCE 'O' level to university degrees. They comprised students and people who held various career positions.

Many contributors submitted questions on the same subject matter and I had to edit them into a common question for that particular subject in the simplest form. A few questions even carried a tinge of untruth, not because the contributor was malicious but perhaps because he could have heard about that subject from unreliable sources. For instance, one question went "Why are Muslims anti-Christ?" This is not a fact. Thus, I reworded it to "Can Muslims be anti-Christ?"

Many participants also took the opportunity to ask questions relating to the stand of Muslims on the aspects of Christianity. I guess, these questions were asked out of their curiosity on some aspects of belief shared by Islam and Christianity. "As Islam came some 600 years after Jesus Christ, could Prophet Muhammad have copied the Bible?" someone even asked. The answers to such questions as well as those that touch on Jesus Christ and his mission will be given from the viewpoint of Islamic teachings and interpretations which are based on the Quran and the Prophetic Traditions (Hadith).

What everyone has asked, stemmed from curiosity and innocence. I thank them all for their questions; in fact, without their contributions, the publication of this book would not have taken place.

I must point out that this is not an "A to Z" book on Islam; it only discusses some of its aspects and issues.

This book was originally published as "The Straight Way" by Muslim Converts' Association of Singapore in 1993. This present publication is a revised version.

Shaik Kadir

## INITIAL NOTES

The word “God” may conjure up different interpretations by people of different faiths. In Islam, the word for God is “Allah” and it has a concise and well-defined meaning mentioned in the Quran, which runs thus: “He is God, the One and Only; God, the Eternal, Absolute; He begets not, nor is He begotten; and there is none like Him.” (112:1-4) For familiarity’s sake, I use the word “God” in this book to refer to Allah.

All quotations from the Quran carry their respective references in brackets. For instance, “(112:1-4)” as given above, means Chapter 112, verses 1 to 4.

In the Quran, God speaks. He speaks directly to Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) or to mankind. At times, He refers to Himself as “God” (Allah); sometimes as “I”, and, at other times, as “We”, depending on the aura, tone and situation of the speech He makes. The use of “We” when God refers to Himself does not indicate plurality. In the (Arabic) language of the Quran, “We” is used by God in the singular sense as a mark of respect.

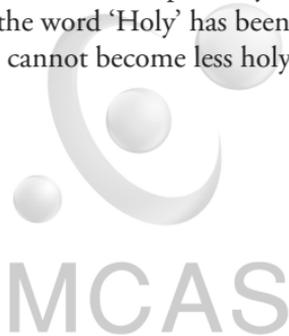
The words in the Quran, in the Arabic form, are God’s exact Words as revealed to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). But when the Words are translated, they are no longer God’s Words; they are actually the interpretation of God’s Words, hence the translation is the translator’s words, not God’s. But for the ease of reference, I use the phrase “God says...” in this book, and the words quoted (in English) should not be assumed as being God’s exact Words.

When a Muslim mentions the name of Prophet Muhammad, he says “Sallallah-alaihi-wasallam” which means “Peace (and Blessings of Allah) Be Upon Him”, usually abbreviated to “PBUH”. This is a salutation made as a mark of respect and love for the Prophet. Muslims also make a similar salutation to the other Prophets, including Abraham, Moses and Jesus Christ, when mentioning their names. However, in this book, this salutation has been dispensed with to avoid confusion. The mention of “the Prophet” refers to Prophet Muhammad.

The sayings and actions of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), known as the Sunnah, are recorded in writings called the Hadith. Like the Quran, the Hadith too has its references. Each saying of the Prophet, when quoted, should actually be followed by a bracket mentioning the name of the reporter. Here are two examples: (1) The Prophet said: “The search for knowledge is an obligation laid on every Muslim.” (Ibn Majah) and (2) The Prophet said: “Place trust in him who trusts you, but do not cheat him who cheats you.” (Tirmidhi, Abu Dawud and Darmi).

In the first Hadith, the bracket shows that Ibn Majah related the saying, while the second Hadith shows that three persons related it. However, to save words in this book, I have omitted the references.

The Quran should be mentioned respectfully as the “Holy Quran”. Again, to save words, the word ‘Holy’ has been omitted with the excuse that the Quran cannot become less holy without the mention of the word.





## Sources of Islamic Belief

1. What sources are used in formulating the Islamic law?
2. How was the Quran revealed?
3. What are the general features of the Quran?
4. What is the role of the Quran as the final Book of Guidance?
5. What kind of Message or Guidance does the Quran generally impart?
6. Does the Quran address its message to all mankind?
7. In simple terms, how do you explain that the words in the Quran are the exact Words of God revealed to Prophet Muhammad?
8. Why is the Quran referred by Muslims as a living miracle?
9. Has the Quran undergone changes and revision?
10. Why is the Quran written in Arabic?
11. How is it possible for non-Arab Muslims to read, understand and appreciate the Quran (which is in Arabic)?
12. What makes Muslims believe that the Quran is a Divine Revelation and that it was not written by Prophet Muhammad?
13. How important is the Sunnah (conduct and advice of the Prophet) to Muslims?

## **1. What sources are used in formulating the Islamic law?**

Muslims use two main sources – the Quran and the Hadith – in formulating the Islamic law and in their teachings of Islam. These sources regulate everything from religious undertakings to civil matters, like inheritance.

The Words of God as revealed exactly to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) make up the Quran while the sayings, advice and explanations of the Prophet (on any subject) are contained in the Hadith. The Words of these two sources are kept separate – to avoid getting them mixed up for the simple reason that the Words of the Quran are of divine origin while the words of the Hadith are inspired words of the Prophet, reported by his Companions.

While the Prophet specifically conveyed the Revelations of the Divine Words, (as they came to him) to be recorded as the Quran, he did not ask his own words and actions on any issue to be recorded for the fear that his sayings would be mistaken as Divine Revelations.

However, the Prophet did not forbid his Companions to record his sayings and doings to aid memory so long as they did not regard his personal words as the Words of God. His Companions, on their part, took exceptional pains to maintain and preserve the entire record which was handed down to succeeding generations with utmost care and attention.

The Quran carries no acknowledgement of any human name as its author. This is because God is the Author of the Quran. Only the Words were committed into prints by human agency. (See Question 2.) The Quran is just ONE book comprising 114 chapters. On the other hand, the words of the Prophet were reported by the Prophet's Companions and wives. Each saying of the Prophet carries the name of the person who reported it. The Hadith, classified according to subject matter, is available in volumes.

The fact that the Quran comprises the Words of God and the Hadith the records of the sayings and deeds of the Prophet is clear from the distinct style and language used in them. The former, being God's Words, is

distinctive, while the latter, being the words of Prophet Muhammad reported by people, is ordinary.

## **2. How was the Quran revealed?**

The first Revelation Prophet Muhammad received from God was the instruction to read or recite a 5-verse Revelation that began: “Read! In the Name of thy Lord and Cherisher...” (96:1) It was conveyed by Archangel Gabriel, the same Angel who conveyed God’s Revelations to His earlier Prophets, including Abraham, Moses and Jesus. Prophet Muhammad received this first Revelation at the age of 40 in 610 CE.

The Prophet received the Revelations on various matters, ideas, knowledge, elucidation, instructions, advice and guidance over a span of 23 years. Sometimes the Prophet received a single verse, sometimes a few verses together and sometimes an entire chapter. God says: “We have rehearsed the Quran to thee (O Muhammad) in slow, well-arranged stages gradually.” (25:32)

Upon receiving each Revelation, the Prophet asked any one of his Companions who could read and write to record it. This was done by the Prophet reciting the Revelation he had received from God and the scribe taking it down. After the scribe had taken down what had been dictated to him (on the writing materials of those days), the Prophet asked the scribe to read aloud what he had recorded – to ensure that he had recorded accurately what had been dictated to him.

In this way, the entire Quran – 114 chapters in all – was completed in manuscript form before the Prophet’s death. The various chapters in the Quran were arranged by the Prophet himself through divine guidance. (The chapters of the Quran are not arranged in chronological order but in the order of divine preferences. For instance, the first verses the Prophet received, which began with “Read! In the Name of thy Lord...” are in Chapter 96, not in Chapter 1).

A standard copy of the Quran was put together within a few years of the death of the Prophet when most of his immediate Companions, who had heard him recite the Quran and had themselves committed it to memory, were still living. The Prophet's successor, Caliph Abu Bakar, requested Zayd bin Thabit to compile all 114 chapters of the Quran into one volume. Zayd was chosen because it was he who had taken down most of the Prophet's dictation of the Revelation. The volume was then scrutinised by the Prophet's Companions and kept with Hafsa, the Prophet's widow.

It was during the time of Caliph Othman, the third Caliph, some 12 years after the death of the Prophet, that a committee was formed, with the celebrated Zayd bin Thabit as Chairman, to take on the task of reproducing the standard volume into a number of copies to be sent to all the principal cities, like Mecca, Madinah, Kufah, Basrah and Damascus, for other copies to be made from the standard copy sent.

### **3. What are the general features of the Quran?**

The Quran is in Arabic with the words rendered in prose-poetic style. It is not a compilation of many books into a volume but just One Great Book.

The Quran is divided into 30 parts and comprises more than 6,000 verses spread over 114 chapters. Of these, 93 chapters were revealed in Mecca, while the rest were revealed in Madinah. The word "Quran" is mentioned many times in the Quran itself and is applicable to the whole Book as well as to any part of its text.

The Quran begins with a 7-verse chapter called "Fatiha", which means the "Opening Chapter". The first verse of this chapter begins with the words: "Bismillah Hirrahmaa Nirrahim" which is interpreted as "In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful."

These seven verses form a complete unit by themselves and they are recited in every prayer and on many other occasions. This chapter rightly appears in the beginning of the Quran because it not only gives a gist or synopsis of the whole Book, but also sums up marvellously

man's relation to God. This chapter, apart from telling us that God is "Most Gracious", "Most Merciful", "The Cherisher and Sustainer of the worlds" and "Master of the Day of Judgement", informs us to pray thus: "Show us the Straight Way." (1:6)

The Author of the Quran is God, hence it states no name of any human being as its author.

Each chapter of the Quran has a title. For example, Chapter 9 is called "Taubah" ("Repentance") and Chapter 107 is called "Ma'un" ("Neighbourly Need"). There is also a chapter, Chapter 19, called "Maryam" ("Mary"), which talks about the story of Mary, her ancestors and her son, Jesus Christ. Each chapter of the Quran, immediately after the mention of the name of the chapter, begins with the salutation "Bismillah Hirrahmaa Nirrahim" ("In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful"), except chapter 9. This chapter does not begin with the salutation because the contents deal with wrath.

The Quran is so respected by Muslims that it is always kept in a clean place and at a height, never on the floor. Muslims would also not carry it into the toilet. To read it, Muslims would take the ablution first, to physically and spiritually cleanse themselves. As a Book of God, the Quran is held in high esteem by Muslims.

#### **4. What is the role of the Quran as the final Book of Guidance?**

The role of the Quran is to help in creating the right relation between man and God, between man and man, and between man and other things in the universe so that mankind can attain the highest goals in every field of human life – spiritual, moral, intellectual and social. God tells Prophet Muhammad that the Quran is "A Book that We have revealed to thee abounding in good, that they may ponder over its verses, and that people of understanding may mind." (38:29)

The Quran, as a Book of Guidance, provides the principles and rules of living graciously, and also invites man to discover the Bounties of God through study, research and exploration. It provides immense stimulus

for man to tap the three important sources of knowledge – self, human history and the physical world – for him to benefit from them. It is up to man to respond to the Guidance provided in the Quran.

God says: “Those who listen to the Word (the Quran) and follow the best meaning in it; those are the ones whom God has guided, and those are the ones endowed with understanding.” (39:18)

Afzalur Rahman, in his book, “Quranic Sciences”, says: “The Quran is a Book of Guidance for man. It invites him to the Right Way of living so that he may be able to lead a happy, virtuous and peaceful life on this earth. It is an open invitation to each individual to accept this Way of Life for his own good. It is up to each individual to accept or reject it from his own free will.

The nature of this Invitation and Messages clearly shows that it appeals to the conscience of each person to think, understand and weigh this Guidance for himself, without any external pressure, and then accept it if he finds it beneficial and reject it if he is not convinced of its Truth. However, everything is clearly explained and no doubt is left about it.

The Quran makes it absolutely clear: “There is no compulsion in religion.” (2:256) This is a clear indication that the creed of Islam and its Way of Life is not thrust upon anyone forcibly. As has been said, it is a matter of belief and it concerns the conscience of each person and, therefore, cannot be forced upon anyone.

The Quran, as a Book of Guidance, appeals to the conscience of people and exhorts them to think and reflect carefully before rejecting or denying their Lord and Creator. God says: “Truly We have shown man the Way. Whether he be grateful or ungrateful (rests on his will).” (76:3)

## **5. What kind of Message or Guidance does the Quran generally impart?**

What is important about the Quran is its advice that the guidance furnished by it should be understood and applied in one’s daily life.

The Quran provides complete guidance on how man can lead a useful and deserving life on earth and, at the same time, how to achieve spiritual benefits in preparation for the Hereafter. It strongly encourages people neither to neglect this world nor the Hereafter.

Afzalur Rahman, in his book “Quranic Sciences”, says: “The Quran encourages believers to strive hard in the acquisition of material means and invites them to study all its laws and sciences in order to benefit from them. It has made it obligatory to study every aspect of the material sources of the universe and to unveil and disclose all its secrets and mysteries and to exploit them and use them (in the right way for their service). With these instructions, how can a believer, whether a scholar or a philosopher, feel mentally or psychologically averse to the arguments and reasoning of the Quran? It is the only Book which meets every man at his own level of intellect and reasoning and provides him with an integral philosophy which covers both the world of matter and that of spirit; the only philosophy in which there is no conflict between matter and spirit, or between work and virtue, or worship and (striving in the field of) science.”

The function of the Quran, in its barest form, is synonymous with that of a machine manual. When a company manufactures a machine, be it a radio or a refrigerator or a car, the company supplies with it a manual (guide book) explaining about the machine and how it should be used. This is to ensure that the user obtains full benefit from the machine and that it is kept in a sound condition and is fully functional. In the same way, God, who created us and the entire universe, gave us a “Guide Book” – the Quran – so that, by following it, we can keep ourselves properly functional in relation to everything in this world and the next.

God says that the Quran is a “Book which explains all things, a Guide, a Mercy and Glad Tidings to Muslims.” (16:89)

A self-contained Book for all times, the Quran contains a code of life which regulates everything a human being has to do from birth to death. It also inculcates the noblest ideals of monotheism, universalism, democracy, fraternity, liberty and unity.

Afzalur Rahman, in his book, “Islam” writes: “The Quran explains the Tawhid (Oneness of God) effectively. It tells us how to live a virtuous life, how to treat parents, relatives, friends, strangers, the poor and orphans. It instructs us about economics and about our social, educational and political needs. It deals with internal and foreign affairs, in peace-time and during war. It provides advice in all matters concerning marriage, divorce, birth and death, property, inheritance, buying and selling, trade and commerce, civil and criminal law and many other practical matters. In short, it is a Book of complete guidance covering life in general.

## **6. Does the Quran address its message to all mankind?**

The Quran addresses all human beings – Muslims as well as non-Muslims.

The Quran, which describes itself as the “Message” and the “Final Message”, mentions that it “is nothing less than a Message to all.” (68:52) It is for all mankind, anyone and everyone.

God says: “We have explained in detail in this Quran, for the benefit of mankind, every kind of similitude.” (18:54) and “We have put forth for men in this Quran every kind of parable in order that they may receive admonition.” (39:27)

Addressing Prophet Muhammad, God says: “Verily, We have revealed the Book (the Quran) to thee (O Muhammad) in truth for (instructing) mankind. He, then, that receives guidance benefits his own soul; but he that strays injures his own soul.” (39:41)

## **7. In simple terms, how do you explain that the words in the Quran are the exact Words of God revealed to Prophet Muhammad?**

That the Quran contains the exact Words of God’s Revelations to Prophet Muhammad can be illustrated, in the simplest form, thus: the boss of a huge company wants a message to be given to his workers. He can do this in two ways: one, by meeting his workers individually or

in an assembly, and two, by putting his message in a circular or e-mail and sending it to everyone.

The former method, however, is not practical if the number of workers is huge, but the second method is preferred because the circular (hard copy) can be read slowly for full understanding without fear of missing out on facts and also it can be kept for future reference or study. E-mails (soft copy) can also be printed and kept.

God, in His Wisdom, chose a method somewhat like the second example cited for the obvious advantage in it.

This method of delivering the Message through the Prophet (or Chosen Man or Messenger) can be further illustrated as follows: the boss of the company dictates his messages from time to time into a tape-recorder. His secretary later transcribes the messages from the tape-recorder into a type-written format, or types on a stencil (mastercopy), and then produces as many copies as desired by photocopy means for distribution to the workers as circulars or emailing to them.

A similar line of processes took place with the Quranic Revelations. God revealed His Message to the Prophet (as did the company's boss who spoke into the tape-recorder). The Prophet, by divine means, retained each and every Revelation (Message) in his memory (just like the tape-recorder is able to do so by electronic means) until he found a scribe to take down in writing (like the tape-recorder did when the secretary played it for typing) whenever the Messages needed to be delivered to the people. Just like any typewriter or computer could be used to type out the messages from the tape-recorder without affecting the messages recorded in it in any way, the Prophet, too, asked any scribe to take down his dictation with the divine revealed Message fully intact. (The divine Messages could have been affected with errors, distorted or misunderstood had the Prophet spoken and after some years or decades later his teachings written down by his followers or others from their memories.

Even today misunderstandings and inaccuracies occur with newspaper reports although reporters take down messages in shorthand, by electronic recording and then editing them. In the case of the Prophet,

he requested the scribe to read back what he [the scribe] had taken down to make sure that he [the scribe] had recorded the Revelations accurately as dictated by the Prophet).

Thus, just like the message in the circular or e-mail is authored by the company's boss, the Quran is authored by God because the Prophet (like the tape-recorder) or the scribe (like the secretary) had nothing to do with the actual construction of the sentences of the Messages. They were merely helping inspiration (like the electronic impulses of the tape-recorder) to materialise into prints on paper. This is how the Quran came into being from God.

### **8. Why is the Quran referred by Muslims as a living miracle?**

Many of God's Prophets in the past had performed miracles either to prove that they were sent by God or to help people achieve certain goals. However, as these miracles were for certain people of the time of the respective Prophets, they are neither tangible nor available today as a living proof. But the Quran is. It is a miracle by itself. When people asked Prophet Muhammad what miracle he had performed, the Prophet pointed to the Quran – to show that it is a living miracle for all time.

Muslims regard the Quran as a living miracle because, among other reasons, it:

- Is a Book par excellence in the provision of complete guidance for this life and the Hereafter,
- Is available in the language (Arabic) as revealed to the Prophet,
- Is inimitable in diction, sound and rendering,
- Is accurate in its presentation of facts,
- Has remained pure (without interpolation),
- Has no contradiction or inconsistencies,

- Has influenced the lives of people, and
- Is responsible for the swift spread of Islam, even now.

With regard to the Quran being a miracle from the point of view of its influence on people, Maulana Muhammad Ali in his book, “The Religion of Islam”, says: The Quran is a miracle because it brought about the greatest transformation that the world has ever witnessed – a transformation of the individual, of the family, of the society, of the nation, of the country. It produced an effect, a hundred thousand times greater than that of any other miracle recorded of any Prophet; hence, its claim to be the greatest of all miracles is uncontested.”

Researches on the Quran have been made throughout these 14 centuries. More particularly, in recent years, in the wake of religious enquiries, Quranic scholars, scientists and mathematicians have each, in their own way and expertise, discovered that the factual contents of the Quran, as well as the arrangement of its Words and text, point to the fact that the Quran is indeed the living miracle of Islam.

### **9. Has the Quran undergone changes and revision?**

Muslims all over the world and of whatever sect use the same Quran. There is only one version – the same version that was received by Prophet Muhammad from God through the Angel Gabriel.

No changes or revisions were made or needed to be made to the Quran because there was no necessity to add anything to it or to delete anything from it for the sake of embarrassment, inadequacy, updating or dispute. As God’s Words for all times, places and people, the Quran stands today as exactly the same in contents as the first standard copy kept by Hafsa, the Prophet’s widow. In the Words of God, the Quran is “a Book well-guarded” (56:79), a Book sublime, falsehood comes not to it from before or from behind”. (41:42)

God Himself promises to protect it from corruption. God says: “We have, without doubt, sent down the Message and We will assuredly guard it from corruption.” (15:9)

## **10. Why is the Quran written in Arabic?**

If a Holy Book is to be reliable, the original, in the language spoken by the Prophet, ought to be available. This is the case with the Quran.

God says: "It is a Quran written in Arabic." (39:28) Abdullah Yusuf Ali, commenting on this verse in his English translation of the Quran, says: "Previous Revelations had been in other languages. Now the Revelation was given in Arabia in Arabic itself, the language of the country, which all could understand. And it is a beautiful language, straight and flexible, and fit to be the vehicle of sublime truths."

Arabic is a living language, a language that has today become one of the most recognised world languages. This alone shows the importance of why the Quran has been revealed through Prophet Muhammad, an Arab, in Arabic. Only God would have known right from the beginning that Arabic would not become a dead language and be known only to a handful of scholars.

Arabic is noted for the grandeur of its diction, the elegance of its style and the variety and magnificence of its imageries, and the Quran uses these excellently in its rendering.

The Quran has been translated in all major languages of the world. However, the word, "Quran", exclusively refers to the Quran in Arabic and not to the translated works. This is so because, firstly, the Quran was revealed in Arabic, secondly, the Quran was not authored by a human being, and thirdly, translated works cannot equal the original in delivery, impact and meaning.

Indeed the original (in Arabic) is in the hands of Muslims all over the world.

## **11. How is it possible for non-Arab Muslims to read, understand and appreciate the Quran (which is in Arabic)?**

Indeed most non-Arab Muslims read the Quran without understanding the text. However, being the Words of God for all mankind, people, even little children, can easily learn to read the Quran. They are also

able to commit large portions of it to memory. What is more, many Muslims in the world, even children, can recite the whole of the Quran (that is, without looking at the text). This is the miracle of the Quran.

Non-Arab Muslims are however encouraged to learn Arabic to understand the Quran. However, for those who do not know Arabic, they understand the text by reading the translation of the Quran in the language they know. Translations are available in Chinese, Malay, Tamil and in numerous other languages.

Well-known translated works in English are those by Leopold Weiss (Muhammad Asad), a German convert, Marmaduke Pickthall (Muhammad M Pickthall), a British convert and Abdullah Yusuf Ali, a Muslim scholar from India. But the most widely used translation is the one by Abdullah Yusuf Ali because his work carries the Arabic text of the Quran, its translation and a commentary.

Reading the Quran, even when a man does not understand what he is reading, has its blessings because one is reading the exact Words of God. Also, the Quran is spoken of as a Healing. God says: "The Quran is a Guide and Healing to those who believe." (41:44)

However, it is strongly important to understand the Quran (in its original Arabic or translations) and follow the Guidance given in it.

## **12. What makes Muslims believe that the Quran is a Divine Revelation and that it was not written by Prophet Muhammad?**

Muslims believe that Prophet Muhammad is not the author of the Quran. God is its Author. The following points bear the facts.

- First of all, the Quran itself, at a number of places and in different ways, says that it is from God. One of the claims runs thus: "This is indeed a Quran most honourable, a Book well-guarded...a Revelation from the Lord of the Worlds." (56:77-80)

(Here, one ought to know the features of the Quran

to understand the claim better. For instance, if the Quran had consisted of a number of books, and each book was made up of a number of chapters, then each of the books had to claim that it was from God in order to render the WHOLE volume as coming from God. But, this is fortunately not so with the Quran. The Quran is just ONE book made up of 114 chapters. So, if the Quran claims, in any of its chapters, that the Book is from God, then the WHOLE Quran is from God. Yet, the Quran does not make the divine claim only once, but several times in different phrases and in different chapters.)

- If the Prophet had written the Quran – a Book par excellence – surely he would have claimed credit for it, but he did not. He could not claim what was not his. Indeed, God says: “This Quran is not such as can be produced by anyone other than God.” (10:37)
- The Prophet was unlettered. However, even if he was literate and had written the Quran, how could he be bold enough to make this statement: “Do they not consider (ponder over) the Quran (with care)? Had it been from other than God, they would surely have found therein discrepancies”. (4:82)

Abdullah Yusuf Ali, commenting on this verse (verse 4:82) in his English translation of the Quran, says: “From a mere human point of view, we should have expected much discrepancy, because (1) Prophet Muhammad who promulgated it was not a learned man or philosopher, (2) it was promulgated at various times and in various circumstances, and (3) it is addressed to all grades of mankind. Yet, when properly understood, its various pieces fit together better than a jigsaw puzzle even when arranged without any regard to chronological order. There was just the One Inspirer and one inspired.”

- The Quran took 23 years to complete. Had the verses of the Quran (which contains more than 6,000 verses) been written by the Prophet, he would have needed a number of drafts and the work would have needed editing, updating, etc. But this did not happen, yet the information is consistent throughout the Quran. The verses were taken down as dictated by the Prophet only once and no redrafting, editing or updating took place after that.
- At a number of stages during the 23-year period, challenges to reproduce, even a chapter of the Quran, were made. If the Prophet had written the Quran, he would not have dared make the challenges, for fear that the learned Arabs and eminent poets of his time would have taken up his challenges and shamed him. One of the challenges goes thus: “And if you are in doubt as to what We have revealed (from time to time) to Our Servant (Muhammad), then produce a chapter like thereunto...” (2:23)
- The Quran says that the Prophet was not learned. So, if the Prophet was educated in some institution but mentioned in the Quran that he wasn't, he would have been accused of being a liar and his mission would have fallen through.
- Even if the Prophet was learned, how could he have written such an inimitable Book of Information and Wisdom without resorting to consultation with prominent scholars and the best books from the best libraries in the world? If he did this, it would surely have been known, since every move he made was known to people. The Prophet was a historical person, not a mere mythological figure.
- The Prophet, right up to his last days, was the busiest and most active person in history. So, how could he have found time to write such a comprehensive

and extensive Book of Guidance which would have needed years of seclusion and concentration to complete?

- In the Quran, in Chapter 111, it is mentioned that Abu Lahab, one of the Prophet's uncles who was always against Islam, would never accept Islam. This Revelation came some ten years before the death of Abu Lahab. How could the Prophet have dared to write this chapter because all he (Abu Lahab) needed to do to prove that the Quran was not the Words of God, was to accept Islam dishonestly.
- The Prophet was mentioned by name in the Quran only five times whereas Jesus Christ's name was mentioned 25 times. Could the Prophet go to such an extent of honouring someone more than himself if he had written the Quran?
- There is a chapter in the Quran entitled and dedicated to "Mary", the mother of Jesus Christ, while there is no chapter called, or dedicated to, the Prophet's own mother, Amina, or daughter, Fatimah, nor were their names mentioned in the Quran. Could this have happened if the Prophet was the author of the Quran?
- Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ, is glorified in the Quran as a "woman of all nations" (3:42). Why would the Prophet glorify a woman he had never seen and one from another race, saying that she was chosen (by God) above all women unless the formulation of the verses had nothing to do with the Prophet's own authorship but that he only repeated what was inspired to him by God?
- In the Quran, God is called "Allah" (in Arabic). He is also referred to by His Attributes, like the Cherisher, the Merciful, the Almighty. There are 99 such Attributes but none of these is "Abba" (Father)

by which the Arab Christians of the Prophet's time (and even today) refer to God. If the Prophet was the writer of the Quran, he would surely have used "Abba" as one of the names for God because of its familiarity, frequent usage and also because it was easier to say "Abba" than many of the Attributes.

- Although the Quran's objective is basically religious, it does touch on principles and laws governing the universe. A French scientist, Maurice Bucaille, in his book, "The Bible, The Quran and Science", says: "What initially strikes the reader confronted for the first time with a text of this kind (the Quran) is the sheer abundance of subjects discussed: the Creation, astronomy, the explanation of certain matters concerning the earth, and the animal and vegetable kingdoms, human reproduction ... I could not find a single error in the Quran. I had to stop and ask myself: if a man was the author of the Quran, how could he have written facts in the 7th Century AD that today are shown to be in keeping with the modern scientific knowledge?"
- The Quran mentions a number of scientific facts which were unknown to the world then. Some of them are:
  - The moon has no light of its own and that what we see is the reflected light of the sun. (91:1-2),
  - The universe came about by a 'big bang' or disintegration billions of years ago. (21:30),
  - Every living thing began in water. (continuation of 21:30),
  - Stages of reproduction of a life in the womb. (22:5),

- Every living thing, including vegetable matter, is created in pairs of male and female. (36:36),
- All celestial body (namely, moon and planets) have their own course of orbit. (7:54 and 21:33),
- Space travel is possible. (55:33), and
- There is also life (in whatever form) in other parts of the universe. (42:29)

All these scientific facts were discovered only in the last couple of centuries whereas the Quran mentioned them 14 centuries ago. How could the Prophet, even if he was educated, have known these facts centuries ahead of recent times?

- Learned Arabs and other experts in the Arabic language acknowledge that the style, diction and rendering in the Quran far excels those in the Hadith. Those in the Quran are inimitable, proving that the Quran is authored by God.
- Umar, later to become Caliph, had wanted to kill the Prophet because of his (Islamic) teachings. One day, Umar heard his sister reading something – the sound, diction and meaning of which made him halt to listen. His sister, who had secretly converted to Islam, was reading (part of) the Quran. Umar realised that the Words he was listening to could not be the words of man. He submitted to Islam soon after.
- The Quran says: “If the whole of mankind and jinns (spirits) were to come together to produce the like of this Quran, they could not produce the like thereof even if backed up by each other with help and support.” (17:88) This is a bold statement

indeed. If the Prophet had written the Quran, would he, as a human being, dare make such an explosive statement? Would this statement go unchallenged by the learned Arabs of his time?

Prophet Muhammad, being an unlettered person, could not have written the Quran. It is the Revelation from God. The Quran itself categorically states: “This Quran is not such as can be produced by anyone other than God. (It is a Book) from the Lord of the Worlds.” (10:37)

### **13. How important is the Sunnah (conduct and advice of the Prophet) to Muslims?**

The Sunnah is the words and actions of Prophet Muhammad available in writings called the Hadith.

The importance and status of the Sunnah lies in the fact that the Prophet, as the Messenger of God, not only brought the Revelation of God (the Quran) but also put the divine teachings into practice, a practice that covered every walk and aspect of life, including social, political and economic.

The Prophet had conducted himself as a model for Muslims to follow. God assures us of this: “You have indeed in the Messenger of God a beautiful pattern (of conduct) for anyone whose hope is in God.” (33:21)

God instructs Muslims to obey the Prophet because to obey him is to obey God Himself. God says: “He who obeys the Messenger, obeys God.” (4:80) and “Obey God and obey the Messenger”. (4:59) God also instructs the Prophet to tell people thus: “If you do love God, follow me: God will love you.” (3:31)

God further tells Muslims: “Whatever the Messenger gives you, take it; and whatever he forbids, abstain from it.” (59:7)

Muslims obey the Prophet because he was guided by God through His Inspiration. God says: “(The Prophet) does not speak of his own desire. It is no less than Inspiration sent down to him.” (53:3)

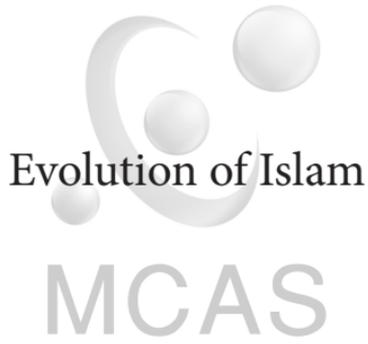
The instruction: “Obey God and obey the Prophet.” (4:59) means that just as God’s orders in the Quran are worthy of obedience, so are the interpretations and applications of God’s orders by the Prophet are equally binding on Muslims. In essence, the orders of God and the Prophet are one, for whoever “obeys the Messenger, obeys God.” (4:80) The Prophet and God are one in purpose.

The Prophet received the first Divine Revelation when he was 40 years old. In the next 23 years he gave people a way of life which he practised himself. His practice was not a mere private code of conduct but detailed interpretation and application of the Divine Message known to all. Thus, to obey the Prophet also means to follow his practices and teachings which are recorded in the Hadith.

The Prophet was not only the Messenger of God but also the teacher and interpreter of the Quran. For instance, regarding certain practical aspects of the Islamic belief, like the Solat (Islamic prayer), the Quran only mentions it as an injunction binding on Muslims: “Enjoin prayer on thy people (O Muhammad!).” (20:132) So the Prophet told the people: “Look at me, see how I perform the prayer, and follow me.” And so, Muslims learnt the manner and the order in which the Islamic prayer has to be performed. This Sunnah is recorded in the Hadith.

In all the other aspects of Islamic practices, including fasting, performing the Haj (pilgrimage), giving of alms and social interaction, Muslims follow the practices of the Prophet in his role as the elucidator of the Quran.

The Sunnah compliments the Quran and acts as a practical aid to the correct understanding of the meaning of the Quran.



## Evolution of Islam

14. Does the Qur'an mention that Allah loves people and that He hears their prayers?
15. What is the religious concept of Islam?
16. Briefly, what is Islam all about?
17. What does Islam teach?
18. Does Islam say that it is the only religion recognised by God?
19. If Islam is an ideal religion, why did the Meccans resist Islam when it was introduced?
20. Do Muslims believe in the Biblical Prophets?
21. What does Islam say about the teachings of Prophets before Prophet Muhammad?
22. Is Prophet Muhammad's life history known?
23. What is the role and mission of Prophet Muhammad?
24. Why is Prophet Muhammad regarded as a model for mankind?
25. Can Prophet Muhammad remove the sins of Muslims?
26. Did Prophet Muhammad perform miracles?
27. How highly is Prophet Muhammad regarded by the Muslims?
28. If Prophet Muhammad was the last in the line of Prophets sent by God to guide people, surely he would have been mentioned in the Old Testament?

29. If Prophet Muhammad is a Prophet to come after Jesus Christ, surely Jesus Christ would have known it and he would have mentioned the Prophet's coming?
30. Do Muslims believe in Jesus Christ?
31. What does the Quran say about Jesus Christ and Mary?
32. Were the miracles performed by Jesus Christ mentioned in the Quran?



#### **14. Does the Qur'an mention that Allah loves people and that He hears their prayers?**

There are numerous verses in the Quran which mention that God is Compassionate, Merciful, Gracious, etc, to indicate that He loves people. Two such verses are:

- “If anyone does evil or wrongs his own soul but afterwards seeks God’s forgiveness, he will find God Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful.” (4:110)
- “Verily God is full of Grace and Bounty to men.” (40:61)

God also hears the prayers of people. The following are two verses in which God says that He answers the prayers of everyone:

- “Call on Me: I will answer your prayer.” (40:60)
- “I am indeed close to them: I listen to the prayer of every supplicant when he calls on Me.” (2:186)

#### **15. What is the religious concept of Islam?**

Islam is the crowning of the teachings of all the Prophets of God. In other words, Islam is the culminating or ultimate level in the evolution of religious teachings for mankind.

As God is one, His Religion (to people) is also one, namely, Islam. Islam was delivered since early times in ‘manageable’ stages or portions with each portion being itself a modular whole for the people and the period of that stage until the arrival of Prophet Muhammad whose mission was to deliver a universal set of teaching for all mankind and for all times.

Why was not Islam delivered in one go in early times? Because this would not be practical. Would it not be illogical, for instance, for the early people, say, the cavemen to be able to receive the “completed” religion (Islam) which comes with the Quran in Arabic (when they could not

even read or write in any language) and all the Islamic practices, like fasting for a month (in Ramadan), praying five times a day, etc? All the cavemen actually needed would probably be some simple ethics on how to be righteous people.

In other words, in the Hereafter, those righteous cavemen can occupy the same level of nearness to God as those righteous Muslims of the Islamic era.

Islam says that ever since the existence of human life on earth, God has sent 124,000 Chosen men (termed variously as Messengers, Warners, Apostles and Prophets) to various people to guide them towards righteous living.

God says:

- “To every nation was sent an Apostle”. (10:47),
- “There was never a people without a Warner having lived among them (in the past).” (35:24)
- “We assuredly sent amongst every people an Apostle (with the Command): ‘Serve God, and eschew evil’”. (16:36)

Regarding their mission, God says: “We sent Prophets save as bearers of good news and to warn: so those who believe and mend their lives – upon them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.” (6:48)

In the Quran, only 25 of the 124,000 Prophets and Messengers are mentioned because it may be irrelevant to mention every one of them by name. Those mentioned include, Adam (the first Prophet), Abraham, Moses, Jesus Christ and Muhammad (the final Prophet). Many of the Prophets came to deliver just moral teachings while some came to deliver divine laws.

Prophet Moses and Prophet Jesus delivered the Law and the Gospel respectively. Prophet Jesus did say (in the Bible) that he came to confirm the Law. And Prophet Muhammad, as the last in the line of Prophets,

delivered a detailed Message, called the Quran, to all mankind. Thus, when Prophet Muhammad came, he not only introduced new laws but also confirmed the teachings of the previous Prophets by repeating them. (A couple of examples are the prohibition of eating pork and the reiteration of the Oneness of God).

God says: “And this is a Book (the Quran) which We have sent down, bringing blessings, and confirming the Revelations which came before it.” (6:92) Thus, right from the beginning, all Prophets taught the one and only religion – Islam – in its essence, namely, “Serve God and eschew evil.” (16:36)

The most important teaching of Islam is the Oneness of God, and this was reiterated by all the Prophets, including Prophet Moses and Jesus Christ (thus indicating that indeed they were all inspired by the One God). For example, Prophet Moses said: “The Lord our God is one Lord.” (Deuteronomy 6:4-5) Jesus Christ mentioned the same words when a scribe asked him what the first commandment was (Mark 12:29). And God says: “He is God, the One and Only; God, the Eternal, Absolute; He begets not, nor is He begotten; and there is none like Him.” (Quran 112:1-4)

That it was Islam, the religion which all the previous Prophets had taught in its essence, is confirmed by the Quran, thus: “The same religion has He (God) established for you as that which He has enjoined on Noah – that which We (God) have sent by Inspiration to thee (O Muhammad), and which We enjoined on Abraham, Moses and Jesus.” (42:13)

The essence of Islam taught by all Prophets is: God is One, and do righteousness. The Religion of God (Islam) became perfected and completed when mankind was ready in maturity and facility to receive a comprehensive guidance for both this world and the next – through Prophet Muhammad.

God tells mankind: “This day have I perfected your Religion for you and completed My favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your Deen.” (5:3) (“Deen” is righteous way of living.)

## 16. Briefly, what is Islam all about?

Islam is an all-encompassing Religion that teaches people not to desert this world or the Hereafter. Salvation and entry to Heaven depends on how the commands of God, given in the teachings of Islam, are carried out as one goes through the rough and tumble in this world.

Islam is for all mankind, for all times and all places. There is nothing difficult in Islam for any person to believe in it and practise it. The teachings aim at preserving the belief in One God and practising righteous living. These goals are in harmony with the nature of mankind. Islam seeks to purify the souls through the recognition of God and His worship and to reinforce the ties of mankind and to establish them on the basis of love, mercy, brotherhood, equity and justice.

Ibrahim Ma Tien Ying, a Chinese Muslim scholar, diplomat and educationalist, briefly describes the teachings of Islam in one of his writings, thus: "Islam teaches not nationalism but inter-nationalism; it does not belong to either the Malays or the Arabs. Any national can belong to it. Islam is logic itself; it teaches the virtues of all previous teachings and places them in their proper perspective. Some old teachings are distorted. A study of comparative religion is most advisable for everyone in the world."

"Muslims honour their ancestors perhaps more than the people of other religions, but they never go to the extreme of worshipping them. Worship of the Creator of their ancestors is certainly a better step. They pray daily to the Creator to bestow upon their ancestors the Garden of Bliss.

"Islam suits the life of everyone in this world then, now or in the future.

"A busy man of today needs Islam more than riches, as he needs a comforting and quiet respite from his work, which he can only find in Islam.

“Islam deals with all matters in the world and in the Hereafter. It is a guide to mankind in all matters, if only man were to ponder over it.

“Islam offers mankind a perfect code of laws; methodically teaching people to strive to practise moral culture, to be kind to all, not to waste, to be magnanimous and tolerant and to live in peace with others in order to attain universal brotherhood. It teaches man to discover the Creator of the worlds and to analyse all things by practising the teachings of the Quran and by following the advice and conduct of Prophet Muhammad. To believe in Islam is to achieve a happy life by standing firm on the earth under the heavens. Islam attaches equal importance to life in this world and in the next. It is not merely a religion, but a perfect code of life to be observed by man.

“Islam teaches us true monotheism which forbids idol worship and opposes superstitions of any kind.

“Islam is the most reasonable and rational religion in the world for there is nothing it teaches and enjoins that is not practicable to any person in whatever country he may be.”

Islam has no mysteries and is not beyond the comprehension of the common and ordinary mind. On the contrary, Islam is an active realisation of the existence of the One God and the willing submission to Him. It is easily understood and meant to be practised for happy living.

## **17. What does Islam teach?**

Islam not only puts emphasis on the spiritual or devotional aspect of life but also on all beneficial activities of Man. It focuses on the all-round development of his personality and social life as a whole.

Islam gives a comprehensive guidance to a Muslim to develop righteousness. Actually, the verses from the Quran and the Hadith (sayings of Prophet Muhammad) quoted throughout the pages of this book would make the reader realise that all these quotations provide guidance to people. Thus, anyone who follows the Islamic guidance

faithfully will become a person of high calibre, a person worthy of his status as a human being, the only being who has been given the opportunity to rise above the status of even an angel. Thus, such a well-guided person would become an ideal citizen of any country.

In fact, God tells a person to be righteous in this very world if he wants to enter Paradise (metaphorically expressed as “Gardens”) in the next world. The Quran is full of such advice, one of which runs thus: “Verily, God will admit those who believe and work righteously to Gardens beneath which rivers flow.” (22:23)

The Guidance to do righteousness is given throughout the Quran, but here the reader is drawn to Chapter 17, where, from verses 23 to 37 of this 111-verse chapter alone, 12 commandments are given for a man to follow. The Commandments are given in detail in the Quran but here they are summarised as follows:

- Worship none but God (17:23),
- Be kind to your parents (17:23-24),
- Help your relatives and the wayfarer (17:26),
- Do not be spendthrift, nor niggardly [that is, stingy] but keep a just balance between these two extremes (17:27-29),
- Do not kill your children for fear of want (17:31),
- Do not commit adultery (17:32),
- Do not kill (17:32)
- Do not touch the property of orphans, unless it be to their [the orphans’] benefit (17:34),
- Fulfill your undertakings and responsibilities (17:34),
- Do not cheat but be fair in your business and other dealings (17:35),

- Do not indulge in idle curiosity or talk about things you have no knowledge of (17:36), and
- Do not be proud or boastful (17:37).

The comprehensiveness of the guidance given in the Quran is evident even in a subject like courtesy. Two examples are:

- “O you who believe! Enter not houses other than your own, until you have asked permission and saluted those in them...And if you find no one (answering your salutation) enter not.” (24:27-28); and
- “O you who believe! Let not some people among you laugh at others; it may be that the (latter) are better than the (former); nor defame, nor be sarcastic to each other, nor call each other by (offensive) nicknames; ill-seeming is a name connoting wickedness...avoid suspicion as (much as possible): for suspicion in some cases is a sin; and spy not on each other, nor speak ill of each other behind their backs. (49:11-12)
- In the Hadith, the moral commandments as given by the Prophet are also very comprehensive. Some of these are:
  - “Verily God is Pure and loves the pure, is Cleanly and loves the cleanly, is Beneficent and loves the beneficent, is Generous and loves the generous”,
  - “The most perfect Muslim is he who is the best in manners and who treats his wife well”,
  - “A true Muslim is he from whose tongue and hands the people are safe”,
  - “He is not a believer who eats his fill while his neighbour is hungry”, and

- “When a man dies, his works stop, except three: his acts of charity which are continued by his family members, his knowledge by which the living may benefit and his pious issue (offspring) who prays for him.”

In Islam, the guidance for attaining righteousness is given very comprehensively, covering not only aspects of the spiritual but also of life. These moral values will certainly promote the well-being of man in this world. However, the onus of attaining the level of righteousness lies on the person. The Prophet therefore said: “A man shall be asked concerning three (things) on the day of resurrection: concerning his life, how he lived it; concerning his wealth, how he acquired it and in what (way) he spent it; and concerning his knowledge, what (good) he did with it.”

## **18. Does Islam say that it is the only religion recognised by God?**

Islam means “Total submission to the Will of God” or “Establishment of Peace”. Islam is for all humanity. It is a total way of life, covering all aspects of human life.

The Quran indicates that Islam is the only religion recognised by God after the advent of Prophet Muhammad. With the Quran, the One Religion of God becomes available as a complete Guidance. Thus, it has been given a name – Islam – by God Himself. God says: “The Deen before God is Islam.” (3:19) As such, God urges people to follow Islam: “This (Islam) is My Way, leading straight; follow it; follow not other paths.” (6:153) (“Deen” is interpreted as a “righteous way of living”.)

God again says: “Truth has been made distinct from error...” (2:256) This is to say that whatever distortions that had occurred to the earlier Revelations have been corrected in Islam. Man can change. There have been instances of people disliking Islam at various points of their lives for one reason or another, and at another after some reflection or personal encounter, accepting it. Some even accept Islam very much later in their lives. As such, Muslims are encouraged to spread Islam.

Prophet Muhammad advised Muslims: “Impart the teachings of Islam to others, even if it be just one sentence.”

Islam is not a cult that makes people submissive to a leader who indulges in strange activities. It does not teach people to shun the progressive activities of the world. On the contrary, Islam stands for anything that is pleasing and pleasant in the most intellectual sense – for both this world and the next. Islam is “glad tidings” for all people. Therefore God urged the Prophet to spread it.

God says:

- “O Prophet! Truly We have sent you as a Witness, a Bearer of glad tidings, and a Warner, and as one who invites (people) to God’s (Grace) by His Leave and as a lamp spreading light. Then, give the glad tidings to (people) that they shall have from God a very great Bounty.” (33:45-47)

That people are free to accept Islam and that there is no compulsion in religion, is mentioned in the Quran thus:

- “O you men! Now TRUTH has reached you from your Lord! Those who receive Guidance, do so for the good of their own soul; those who stray, do so for the good of their own loss.” (10:108), and
- “Let there be no compulsion in religion: TRUTH stands out clear from error.” (2:256)
- If one accepts the Truth (Islam), one gains, and if, after knowing about Islam, one still does not accept Islam, one loses. God says: “Indeed there have come to you clear proofs from your Lord: whoever will believe, it is for the good of his soul, and whoever will disbelieve, it shall be against himself.” (6:104)

God further says:

- “We have shown man the Way, whether he be grateful or ungrateful (rests on his will).” (76:3). “The Way” is the Way of Islam.

## **19. If Islam is an ideal religion, why did the Meccans resist Islam when it was introduced?**

The following points provide an insight into some of the main reasons for their resistance to Islam:

- Pagan belief: Many pagan Arab tribes practised fetishism, worshipping anything from animals to plants, even rocks. Others had idols in their home for worshipping. However, their main temple was the Ka'aba where they had some 360 idols. The tribes came to the Ka'aba to worship the idols and even to go round the temple naked.

The Ka'aba was built by Prophet Abraham and his son, Ishmael, as a place to worship the One God. But, as time passed, the pagans made images of Prophet Abraham and his son, including those of other mythical characters, and placed these idols in the Ka'aba for worship.

Islam's main teaching is the worship of the One God. So when Prophet Muhammad urged the pagans to stop worshipping the idols which represented numerous gods and mythical figures, the pagans saw it as a threat to their religious belief, although this urging was done by way of wisdom and fair exhortation.

- Custody of the Ka'aba: The custody of the Ka'aba was an object of great jealousy among the tribes as it conferred on the custodian the most honourable functions and privileges in the right of the pagan Arabs.

When Islam denounced idol worship and requested for the sanctification of the Ka'aba back to its original pure objective (as taught by Prophet Abraham), opposition grew.

- Indulgence in vices and immorality: The pagan Arabs were passionately addicted to drinking and merry-

making with women. They indulged in fornication and adultery. They also indulged in gambling, so much so it was common to see a man staking away his property and wives. Also, the idle hours of the rich were occupied by slave girls with their singing and dancing.

Islam prohibited all these vices and immorality and encouraged slaves to be freed. These, thus, became threats to their pleasure-indulging life.

- Unlimited number of wives: Polygamy was practised to an unlimited extent. The rich had dozens of wives and concubines. Islam limited the number of wives to a maximum of four. There should be no concubines. A Muslim, even if he was rich, could not take more than one wife unless he had valid reasons. This restriction was unpleasant to the pagan Arab man's way of life.
- Non-existence of woman's rights: Women had no rights at all. They were treated like playthings and chattels and could be bought and sold at will.

Islam gave women their rights and status in society. They were held in honour and regarded as complimentary to men. They were given rights, such as for inheritance, maintenance if divorced and choice and consent in marriage. The pagan Arabs saw this as an infringement of their (men's) rights and status.

- Human sacrifices: Sacrifices of young women for the idols were frequent. Killing female infants was also practised. Islam put a stop to these atrocious and inhuman practices. The pagan Arabs regarded this prohibition as interference to their tradition.

However, Truth finally prevailed. More and more pagan Arabs were attracted to Islam by its ideal teachings. Then, within 30 years from the demise of Prophet Muhammad, the whole of Arabia, the birthplace of Islam, embraced Islam.

## 20. Do Muslims believe in the biblical Prophets?

Muslims believe in God's Prophets mentioned in the Bible, including Jesus Christ.

According to the Hadith, God had sent 124,000 Messengers, Prophets and Warners throughout the ages to various communities and nations.

The Quran says that Prophet Adam was the first Prophet and Prophet Muhammad was the last and the seal of all the Prophets, Messengers, Warners and Apostles. Twenty-five of these "chosen" people are mentioned in the Quran when God relates certain matters concerning their roles. God says: "Of some Apostles, We have already told thee the story; of others We have not." (4:164)

An example of a verse where God mentions ten of the biblical prophets when He tells Prophet Muhammad that other Prophets too had received His (God's) Inspiration is: "We have sent thee (O Muhammad) Inspiration, as We sent it to Noah and the Messengers after him: We sent Inspiration to Abraham, Ishmael, Jacob and the Tribes, to Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron and Solomon, and to David We gave the Psalms." (4:163)

Prophets and Messengers are men of the highest spiritual standing chosen by God to have the honour of conveying His Message to people, at different stages of history. None of them claimed divinity.

Gaafar S. Idris, in his booklet "Islam – the Basic Truths", says: "They are men of extremely high moral, spiritual and intellectual standards that qualify them – in the eyes of God – to be the bearers of His "Lights" to the world. When God chooses any of them, He supports him with a clear "sign" that proves the truth of his claim, and distinguishes him from false prophets, sorcerers and soothsayers. None of them betrays the Message or falls short of being exemplary in practising what he preaches.

"Despite the vast spiritual, moral and intellectual difference between them and ordinary men, and despite the special relation with God that they enjoy, Prophets are nonetheless humans with all that this term implies. They beget and are begotten; they eat and drink and go

about in market places, they sleep and they die, they forget and they err. Their knowledge is limited; and they can tell only that part of the future which God reveals to them. They cannot intercede with God on behalf of any person except with His permission, and it is not left to them to cause people to go in the right path. In short, they have no part to play in the running of the affairs of the universe.”

## **21. What does Islam say about the teachings of God’s Prophets before Prophet Muhammad?**

Muslims say that since God is One, He would not have made different Prophets teach different things on the most important and fundamental aspect of belief – God and human salvation.

Muslims therefore believe that God gave the same fundamental Messages to all His Prophets, including Prophets Moses, Jesus and Muhammad. Basically, all these Messages advocated the same core teaching – that God is one and that people should worship God alone. God says: “Not an apostle did We send before thee (O Muhammad) without this Inspiration sent by Us to him: that there is no god but I, so serve Me.” (21:25)

For example, concerning the Message received by Prophet Jesus, God says: “We sent Jesus, the son of Mary, the Gospel: therein was Guidance and light and confirmation of the Law that had come before him.” (5:46)

The Revelations received by Prophet Muhammad make up the Quran, which is also called as the “Reminder” and the “Final Message” to mankind. The Quran is thus the last of the Revealed Books, a Final Testament. As such, the Quran supersedes all the other Books, namely the Law of Moses, Psalms of David and the Gospel of Jesus, repealing them. God says: “This is a Book (the Quran) which We have sent down, bringing Blessings, and confirming (the Revelations) which came before it.” (6:92)

The Quran confirms the earlier original teachings of the Prophets by mentioning and repeating them in the Quran. According

to Gary Miller, a Canadian mathematician and scholar, and a convert to Islam, the Quran acts as quality control. It rejects what is incorrect as a result of human interpolation in the records of the older Revelations and accepts those teachings or historical details which are true and have remained undisturbed. The Quran is thus a Book that confirms the Revelations received by all the previous Prophets. It fulfils, completes and further explains the one Religion of God for all mankind in all ages. God says to mankind: "This day have I perfected your Religion for you, completed My Favour upon you and have chosen for you Islam as your Religion." (5:3)

Regarding the Quran, God says: "This is the Book (the Quran) which We have revealed as a Blessing; so follow it and be righteous." (6:155)

## **22. Is Prophet Muhammad's life history known?**

Every detail of Prophet Muhammad's life is known and recorded. Muhammad was born on 29 August 570. His father, Abdullah, died before he was born. His mother, Aminah, died when he was six years old. His grandfather, Abdul Mutalib, who became his guardian, died when he was eight. He was then taken cared by one of his uncles, Abu Talib, in whose house he grew up. Here is a case of an orphan boy who, through sheer hard work, became the most influential personality in history.

In his youth, Muhammad's pure character and his regard for truth and honesty won him the title "Al-Amin" (The Trustworthy) from his people.

In his early twenties, Muhammad came into the service of Khadijah, a rich and upright widow, who employed him as one of her agents in her trading business. She was so greatly impressed by his conduct and sense of responsibility that she offered him her hand in marriage, although she was 15 years her senior. Muhammad accepted the proposal and they were married. He was 25 years at that time. Muhammad received Prophethood at the age of 40.

Prophet Muhammad remained the husband of Khadijah for 25 years during which he had three sons and four daughters by her, but all his sons died in infancy. After Khadijah's death, the Prophet married again.

He even had more than one wife at one time, but all his wives except one, were elderly widows whom he married to support them.

For many years, the Prophet faced opposition to his preachings. But, eventually he triumphed in his mission with God's Guidance.

The Prophet died of old age when he was 63.

Abdullah Yusuf Ali, in the commentary of his English translation of the Quran on the verse (61:6) which mentions that Jesus Christ foretold the coming of Prophet Muhammad, says: "The Prophet's whole life from beginning to end was one vast miracle. He fought and won against odds. Without learning from men, he taught the highest wisdom. He melted hearts that were hard, and strengthened hearts that were tender and required support. In all his sayings and doings, men of discernment could see the working of God's hand."

### **23. What is the role and mission of Prophet Muhammad?**

Prophet Muhammad, as the final Messenger for mankind came to:

- Reiterate and enforce the unity of God. That is, that there is only One God and worship is due to Him only, not to any deity or man,
- Establish the oneness or brotherhood of mankind,
- Establish Islam as the completed and perfected religion for all mankind, and
- Deliver the Final Testament, that is, the Quran, a verbatim Message of God for mankind. God says: "Verily in this Quran is a Message for people who would truly worship God." (21:106)

That the Prophet was sent for all people, irrespective of race, is clear from the following Words God addressed to the Prophet:

- “We have sent thee as an Apostle to instruct mankind” (4:79),
- “We sent thee not, but as a Mercy for mankind” (21:107), and
- “O Prophet! Truly, We sent thee as a Witness, a Bearer of Glad Tidings and a Warner and as one who invites (people) to God’s Grace.” (33:45-46)

God also persuades mankind to believe in the Prophet, thus:

- “Muhammad is the Apostle of God and the seal of Prophets” (33:40),
- “O mankind! The Apostle has come to you in truth from God: believe in him: it is best for you” (4:170), and
- “He who obeys the Messenger, obeys God.” (4:80)

The Prophet in his farewell address not long before his death, advised Muslims: “I have left two things among you – the Quran and my Sunnah (conduct and advice). You will not go astray as long as you cling to these.”

#### **24. Why is Prophet Muhammad regarded as a model for mankind?**

Being the final Prophet of God, Prophet Muhammad had been endowed with a life that is an epitome of success. He was born an orphan and rose to become a ruler of integrity. Each of the different phases of his life provides examples for anyone who wishes to emulate it for righteous living.

The Prophet’s character alone is a paragon of virtue, a model for all men. God says to the reader of the Quran: “You have indeed in the Messenger of God (Muhammad) a beautiful pattern (of conduct) for any one whose hope is in God and the Final Day.” (33:21)

Ali Akbar, in his book “God and Man”, says: “Great minds and teachers like Buddha and Christ could not present their lives as models for mankind to follow. One left the family while the other had none. One severed his connections with the worldly affairs altogether and the other had never entered into them.

“Their teachings are lofty but can be followed only by those who live an ascetic life like them. The human progress in acquiring knowledge of the Creator and the Universe and mastering elements and scientific research could never be possible if all people lived ascetic lives, and the world would come to an end in one generation as far as human beings are concerned if all practised celibacy. God Who is the Creator of all mankind could not depute persons to advocate principles contrary to the laws laid down by Him for the procreation of His creatures.

“But the great model Muhammad presents all phases of life to follow. As an orphan, as a shepherd, as a son, as a nephew, as father, as grandfather, as husband, as a citizen, as a neighbour, as a humanitarian and lover to children and orphans, as supporter and free worker for poor widows and needy persons, as tolerant teacher never offending susceptibilities or beliefs of others, as conqueror, as forgiver of those who persecuted him after they came under his power by his example of forgiving the people of Mecca who had ruthlessly persecuted him, as master of those who came to him as slaves by freeing them at once, as a ruler and a teacher of good treatment which should be meted to those who differ from you in religion when they come under your protection by his own example, as the first giver in the world to women a right of full possession of property and inheritance from parents, sons, brothers and sisters and other relations; and in many other respects a model to follow.”

## **25. Can Prophet Muhammad remove the sins of Muslims?**

Prophet Muhammad was a Prophet and Messenger of God and his mission was to deliver the Message of God to people. He is not responsible if people do not believe in the Message he delivered. It is up to the people to use their intellect and reason to verify the Message (Islam) he has delivered and accept it if it is rational.

The Prophet did not come to cleanse the sins of people. If he could, he would be equal to God in power and this becomes absurd in Islam, contrary to the teachings of the Quran. Neither Prophet Muhammad nor any other Prophets could remove the sins of people. Only God has the Power to do it.

In Islam, every person is held responsible for his or her acts. The reward for good acts and the punishment for evil acts, if unrewarded or punished while on this earth, will be meted out accordingly in the Hereafter on the Day of Judgement – by God.

By God's Mercy and Compassion, sins committed through irreligious acts, could be pardoned by God alone through seeking His forgiveness and executing sincere repentance.

## **26. Did Prophet Muhammad perform miracles?**

Prophet Muhammad did perform some miracles but they were all spiritual in nature. One of his well-known miracles was the “Night Journey” during which he travelled (spiritually) to the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem (later to be known as Al-Aqsa Mosque, the third holiest mosque in Islam) and from there to Heaven and back. When he returned he taught Muslims the five daily prayers. However, Muslims do not need to emphasise on these miracles to strengthen or highlight the Islamic religion.

Physical miracles were performed by some of the earlier Prophets to convince the people of their divine missions, usually when forced or requested. The pagan Meccans too asked the Prophet what miracles he could or had performed. Hinting that miracles as performed by the earlier Prophets would have no effect in his time, the Prophet pointed at the Quran and said in a metaphorical sense: “The Quran is my miracle.”

Indeed, the time (some 600 years after Jesus Christ) was ripe for an intellectual miracle – a Book – to take place. The Quran is that Book, a living miracle, one that exists today just as “performed” by the Prophet; a tangible one indeed, a miracle by which people could see,

touch and receive guidance.

By this miracle, (the Quran), Muslims throughout the world, from those days till today, have abstained from the prohibited and obeyed the obligatory, such as performing the five daily prayers, facing the Ka'aba in Mecca during prayers, fasting in Ramadan, going for the Haj pilgrimage, and living as best as they could according to the teachings of Islam.

## **27. How highly is Prophet Muhammad regarded by the Muslims?**

As far as Muslims are concerned, no human being, Muslim or non-Muslim, can occupy a place higher than Prophet Muhammad as the most influential or greatest person in history. The Prophet was the number one man, whose character alone, is a model for all men.

The following three testimonies from non-Muslim scholars should suffice to show the influence and greatness of the Prophet:

- “My choice of Muhammad to lead the list of the world’s most influential persons may surprise some readers and may be questioned by others, but he was the only man in history who was supremely successful in both the religious and secular levels.” (Michael H. Hart, “The 100 – A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History”, Citadel Press (Carol Publishing Group), New York 1989, p.33. Among the 100, Hart ranked Isaac Newton, 2nd; Jesus, 3rd; Buddha, 4th; Confucius, 5th; Albert Einstein, 10th; Karl Marx, 11th; Moses, 16th; George Washington, 27th; Alexandra the Great, 35th; Asoka 52nd, etc. In “The Premise” of the book, the author says: “I have ranked these 100 persons in order of importance: that is, according to the amount of influence that each of them had on human history and on the everyday lives of other human beings... they were the people who changed our lives and formed our world.”)

- “Leaders must fulfill three functions: (1) provide for the well-being of the led, (2) provide a social organisation in which people feel relatively secure, and (3) provide them with one set of beliefs. People like Pasteur and Salk are leaders in the first sense; people like Gandhi and Confucius, on the one hand, Alexander, Caesar and Hitler, on the other, are leaders in the second or perhaps the third sense. Jesus and Buddha belong to the third category alone. Perhaps the greatest leader of all times was Muhammad who combined all three functions. To a lesser degree Moses did the same.” (Jules Masserman, a famous US psychoanalyst, writing under the heading, “Who were History’s Great Leaders”, Time Magazine, July 1974).
- “If greatness of purpose, smallness of means and astounding results are the three criteria of human genius, who could dare to compare any great man in modern history with Muhammad? The most famous men created arms, laws and empires only. They founded, if anything at all, no more than material powers which often crumbled away before their eyes. This man Muhammad, moved not only armies, legislation, empires, people and dynasties, but millions of men; and more than that, he moved the altars, the gods, the religions, the ideas, the beliefs and the souls.
- “On the basis of a Book (the Quran), every letter of which has become law, he created a spiritual nationality which blended together people of every tongue and of every race...”
- “...philosopher, orator, apostle, legislator, warrior, conqueror of ideas, restorer of rational beliefs, of a cult without images; the founder of twenty terrestrial empires and of one spiritual empire, that is Muhammad. As regards all standards by which human greatness may be measured, we may well ask, is there

any man greater than he?” (Lamartine, “Historie de la Turquie”, Paris 1854, Vol.II pp. 276-277)

Muslims respect and revere Prophet Muhammad highly, and he is always dear and near to them.

**28. If Prophet Muhammad was the last in the line of Prophets sent by God to guide people, surely he would have been mentioned in the Old Testament?**

Muslims scholars say the Prophet Muhammad is mentioned in the Old Testament of the Bible. They say that some of the prophecies attributed to Jesus Christ were actually meant for Prophet Muhammad.

One such verse that foretold the coming of Prophet Muhammad is: “I will raise them up a Prophet from among the brethren, like unto thee, and I will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him.” (Deuteronomy 18:18)

In this verse, God, speaking of Moses, tells him that a Prophet will be coming. To identify who this Prophet is – Jesus Christ or Prophet Muhammad – three distinct clues are presented in the verse, as follows:

- The Prophet will be “among their brethren”,
- He will be “like unto thee” (that is like Moses), and
- He will speak as commanded by God with God’s own Words (that is, God will put His Words into the Prophet’s mouth, namely, “I will put my words in his mouth”).

To deal with the first clue, namely, “Among their brethren”, it is imperative to note that Moses and his people (the Israelites) are here taken as a racial entity, and as such ‘brethren’ would undoubtedly be the Arabs.”

Prophet Abraham had two sons, one from his first wife, Sarah, and the other from his second wife, Hagar. Sarah bore Isaac whose progeny became the Jews while Hagar bore Ishmael whose progeny became the Arabs. “If Ishmael and Isaac are the sons of the same father (Abraham), then they are brothers. And so the children of the one are the BRETHREN of the children of the other. The children of Isaac are the Jews and the children of Ishmael are the Arabs – so they are the BRETHREN to one another.” Prophet Muhammad was an Arab. “This is exactly as the prophecy has it – from among their brethren.” The prophecy distinctly mentions that the Prophet who would be coming would be like Moses must arise not from the children of Israel or from “among themselves” but “among their brethren”. Muhammad therefore was from “among their brethren!”

The second clue is “Like unto thee”, that is, like you (Moses). In other words, the coming Prophet would share a lot of similarities with Moses. The similarities between Prophet Moses and Prophet Muhammad are numerous. Both prophets:

- Had earthly father and mother,
- Were conceived in the normal way, that is, through association between husband and wife,
- Did not remain single – they married,
- Had children of their own,
- Were regarded by people as Prophets (that is, they were mortal men, not divine),
- Were not regarded by people as God,
- Were accepted by their own people in their life-time,
- Were temporal as well as spiritual heads of their people,
- Possessed authority of kings,

- Brought new laws,
- Lived to see the complete success of their mission,
- Died a natural death from old age,
- Did not have to die for the sins of the world, and
- Lay buried in earth.

The above information points to the fact that Jesus Christ was unlike Moses, but Prophet Muhammad was like Moses. This, thus, fulfils the prophecy in Prophet Muhammad.

Regarding the third clue, “I will put my words in his mouth”, history indicates that one evening when Muhammad was meditating in the cave of Hira in Mecca, he heard a voice – the voice of Archangel Gabriel – asking him to read. Muhammad, then 40 years old, was terrified. Soon, still in his bewilderment, he replied “I am not learned.” When the request was made for the third time, Muhammad realised that he was to repeat words after the Angel. So he repeated what the Angel recited, that is, the first Revelation of God’s Words comprising five short verses. From then onwards, for over 23 years, Prophet Muhammad repeated the Words put into his mouth by God and these Words formed the Quran. God says: “He (Muhammad) does not speak of his own desire, it is not less than a Revelation sent down to him.” (Quran 53:3-4)

There is yet another clue in the Bible about the Prophet Muhammad’s identity regarding the issue “I am not learned”. This appears in the Book of Isaiah, thus: “And the book delivered to him that is not learned, saying read this, I pray thee, and he saith, I am not learned.” (Isaiah 29:12)

In the Quran at Chapter 7 verse 158, Prophet Muhammad is referred to as “the unlettered Prophet” and “I am not learned” were the exact words he uttered, twice, to the Archangel Gabriel when he was commanded to read the first Revelation. Isn’t Prophet Muhammad’s response to the Angel the exact fulfilment of this biblical prophecy?

The Book of Deuteronomy provides yet another clue. Here God says: "...My words which he shall speak in my name..." (Deuteronomy 18:19)

Here is the further fulfilment of the prophecy in Prophet Muhammad. Note the phrase "My words which he shall speak in my name." In whose name will Prophet Muhammad speak?

The answer is found right in the very first words of the First Revelation Prophet Muhammad received from God through the Archangel Gabriel in the cave of Hira, which goes: "Read! In the name of thy Lord and Cherisher who created man..." (96:1) Not only does this first Revelation carry the answer, but every chapter of the Quran, except Chapter 9, gives the answer as each begins with "In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful." Prophet Muhammad thus spoke "In the name of God", fulfilling the biblical prophecy in Muhammad to the letter.

**29. If Prophet Muhammad is a Prophet to come after Jesus Christ, surely Jesus Christ would have known it and he would have mentioned the Prophet's coming?**

First of all the Quran tells that Jesus Christ mentioned the coming of Prophet Muhammad, thus: "And remember, Jesus, the son of Mary, said: 'O Children of Israel! I am the apostle of God (sent) to you, confirming the Law (which came) before me, and giving Glad Tidings of an Apostle to come after me, whose name shall be Ahmad.'" (61:6)

Commenting on the word "Ahmad", Abdullah Yusuf Ali, in his English translation of the Quran, says: 'Ahmad', or 'Muhammad', the Praised One, is almost a translation of the Greek word Periclytos. In the Present Gospel of John, xiv. 16, xv. 26, and xvi. 7, the word 'Comforter' in the English version is for the Greek word 'Paracletos', which means 'Advocate', 'one called to the help of another', 'a kind friend', rather than 'Comforter'. Our scholars contend that Paracletos is a corrupt reading for Periclytos, and that in the original saying of Jesus these was a prophecy of our holy Prophet 'Ahmad' by name. Even if we read Paracletos, it would apply to the holy Prophet, who

is 'a Mercy for all creatures' (xxi. 107) and 'most kind and merciful to the Believers' (ix. 128).

"Muslim scholars say Jesus Christ did mention about Prophet Muhammad's coming (although not by his name, just as Jesus Christ was not mentioned by name in the Old Testament, although his coming was prophesied.)

Jesus Christ said: "If you love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray to the Father and He shall give you another comforter that he may abide with you forever." (John 14:14-16)

The scholars say that since Jesus Christ was a man, the 'another comforter' mentioned by Jesus Christ would also be a man and this man was Prophet Muhammad. 'Abide forever' is interpreted as the Prophet's Laws (in the Quran) which will remain intact, unaltered and applied for all time. (Jesus Christ usually spoke in parables and metaphoric language.)

Next, Jesus Christ said: "But when the comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of Truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me: And he also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning." (John 15:26-27)

Jesus Christ said that "he shall testify of me... and bear witness." Prophet Muhammad did just that through God's Revelation. "We (God) gave Jesus, the son of Mary, clear signs and strengthened him with Holy Spirit." (Quran 2:87) and that "... Jesus, the son of Mary was (no more than) a Prophet of God..." (Quran 4:171) (Note: The Quran always refers to Jesus as 'son of Mary' as he has no father.)

Jesus said: "Nevertheless I tell you the truth; for if I go not away, the comforter will not come unto you, but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of Judgement." (John 16:5-8)

Through Prophet Muhammad, Muslims come to know more about the One God, sins and Judgement.

That no one can die carrying away the sins of other, is indicated thus: “And if any one earns a sin, he earns it against his own soul...” (Quran 4:111) Each person will be judged individually. The Quran then, in various chapters, goes on to show what constitutes sins and how to avoid or overcome them.

The Quran says further: “Every soul shall have a taste of death; And on the Day of Judgement shall you be paid your full recompense. You shall certainly be tried and tested in your possessions and personal selves.” (Quran 3:185-186)

Next, Jesus said: “I have yet many things to say unto you, but you cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of Truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself, but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak; and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me; for he shall receive of mine, and he shall declare it unto you.” (John 16: 12-14)

There are several points highlighted in this speech of Jesus. They are:

- “I have many things to say but you cannot bear them now.”

This indicates that Jesus Christ had to teach but he could not continue because “you cannot bear them now”, meaning his disciples and people were unprepared or were not in a frame of mind to receive or learn what he had to say or teach further. (We see from the Bible that Jesus Christ was always harassed and taunted by his enemies. Eventually, he was sent to be crucified.)

- “When the Spirit of Truth is come, he will guide you into all truth.”

Dr M. Muhsin Khan says: “This ‘person’ whom Jesus prophesied will come after him, is called ‘Parqaleetos’ in

the Bible. This word was deleted by later interpreters and translators and changed at times to 'Spirit of Truth', and at other times, to 'comforters' and sometimes to 'Holy Spirit'. The original word was in Greek and its meaning is 'one whom people praise exceedingly'. The essence of the meaning of the word is applicable to the word 'Muhammad' (in Arabic). "Even as a boy, Muhammad was referred to as 'most trustworthy' and the name 'Muhammad', which was given to an Arab for the first time in history, means the most praised one."

- "He shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak."

This factor is the outcome of "I (God) shall put my words in his mouth" and it is explained in Question 28.

- "He will show you things to come."

This sentence refers to a host of pointers on such matters from spiritual development and worldly matters to scientific expositions which have been revealed through Prophet Muhammad. It could also include purely theological matters as how some sections of the world's population view Jesus Christ in the period between him and Prophet Muhammad, and even now.

- "He shall glorify me."

One of the ways Jesus Christ has been and will be glorified forever is: "And Zakariya and John, and Jesus and Elias: All are in the ranks of the Righteous" (Quran 6:85) and "Jesus Christ, the son of Mary, held in honour in this world and the Hereafter and (of the company of) those nearest to God" (Quran 3:45).

- "He shall receive of mine and he shall declare it unto you."

It is known now (in the Quran) that God would question

Jesus on Judgement Day if he had taught anything different from what God had instructed him to teach. In reply, Jesus would say, “Never said I to them aught except what thou didst command me to say, to wit, worship God, my Lord and your Lord; and I was a witness over them whilst I dwelt among them; when Thou didst take me up Thou wast the Watcher over them, and Thou art a Witness to all things.” (Quran 5:117)

What Jesus Christ taught and what he wanted to teach further but was unable to teach is available in Islam. It is also interesting to note Jesus Christ’s reply to God in the above Quranic verse, namely, that as long as he was among his people he made sure that they worshipped God alone.

(Questions 28 & 29 were initially one question worded thus: “If Prophet Muhammad was a Prophet of God, surely he would have been mentioned in the Bible?” The answers were extracted from several books written by Muslim scholars, including Muslims who were former Christians. The books are “Muhammad in the Bible” by Dr Jamal Badawi; “Muhammad, the Biblical Prophet” by Dr M.H. Durrani (formerly Rev Dr Durrani, Anglican Priest, Church of England.); “What the Bible says about Muhammad” by Ahmad Deedat; “Jesus and Muhammad in the Bible and Quran” by Dr Mohammad Muhsin Khan; “Muhammad in the Bible” by Prof Abdul Ahad Dawud (former Rev David Benjamin Keldani, a Roman Catholic priest) and “The Bible’s Preview of Muhammad” by Sulayman Shahid Mufassir (former ordained Christian minister).

### **30. Do Muslims believe in Jesus Christ?**

Muslims believe that Jesus Christ is one of the greatest Prophets of God.

The Quran mentions a great deal about Jesus Christ. A look at the index under “Jesus” in the English translation of the Quran by Abdullah Yusuf Ali, shows a long reference list of subject matter pertaining to

Jesus. Some of these are: Jesus' birth, apostle to Israel, like Adam, not crucified, not God, sent with Gospel, not son of God, Message and miracles, and mission limited.

Muslims do not regard Jesus Christ as being divine. The Quran says that he was a Prophet and every bit a human being in the same nature as all the other Prophets, including Prophet Muhammad. The Quran always refers to Jesus Christ as "son of Mary", never as "son of God" or Lord (meaning the Creator). To Muslims, God does not need a partner to assist Him. He need not appear as human being to experience human life or to sacrifice himself to save human beings from Hell, for God is Self-Sufficient, All-knowing, Most Powerful, Most Compassionate, etc.

Muslims also believe that:

- Jesus was not son of God literally,
- He was not one of three in the Trinity,
- He was not God, and
- He was not crucified (that is, he did not die on the cross).

The references on these points in the Quran are:

- Not son of God: "The Christians call Christ the son of God. That is a saying from their mouth. (In this) they but imitate what the unbelievers of the old used to say... how they are deluded away from the Truth." (9:30)
- No Trinity: "They do blaspheme who say: "God is one of three in a Trinity": For there is no God except One God." (5:73)
- Not God: "They do blaspheme who say "God is Christ, the son of Mary." But said Christ: "O Children of Israel! Worship God, my Lord and your

Lord.” (5:72) This is exactly what Jesus had said, according to the Bible, namely, “The Lord our God is one Lord.” (Mark 12:29-30)

- Not crucified: “That they said (in boast), “We killed Jesus Christ, the son of Mary.” But they killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them... for of surety they killed him not.” (4:157)

All Prophets of God prior to Prophet Muhammad, including Prophet Abraham, Prophet Moses and Jesus Christ, were sent by God to deliver His Message to man. As the Message of Revelations were from the One and Only God, and that these Prophets taught their followers to worship none but God, this made all of them Muslims. Even, their disciples and followers were Muslims so long as they followed what was taught by those Prophets appointed by God.

Another factor which causes Muslims to believe that Jesus Christ and the other Prophets were Muslims is the nature of their teachings. They taught people the Oneness of God. For example, Prophet Moses and Jesus Christ said that “the Lord our God is one Lord.” (Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and Mark 12:29-30 respectively). In the Quran, it is: “He is God, the One and Only.” (112:1-2)

Another important fundamental essence of Islam taught by them is that only God should be worshipped. God says: “Serve God, and eschew evil.” (16:36)

A Muslim is defined as one who has received the guidance of Islam through Prophet Muhammad, or its essence through the other Prophets before Islam. That is to say, he must totally surrender himself to God alone and not regard any deity or the Prophet as God or God incarnated. In this sense, whoever followed closely the teachings of the Prophets before Prophet Muhammad were Muslims.

### 31. What does the Quran say about Jesus Christ and Mary?

Muslims can never be anti-Christ. This is because one of the articles of the Islamic faith is the belief in all the Prophets of God, including Jesus Christ who was the last but one in the long line of Prophets sent by God to guide man.

Muslims believe:

- That Mary (Jesus' mother) was a chaste woman, "chosen above the women of all nations." (3:42)
- That Mary conceived Jesus miraculously (that is, without a male intervention), and
- That Jesus Christ performed miracles (See Question 32).

Some of the references on Jesus Christ in the Quran are:

- His conception: When the Angels told Mary that she would conceive Jesus, she exclaimed: "O My Lord! How shall I have a son when no man has touched me?" God said: "Even so God creates what He wills. When he has decreed a Plan, He says "Be" and it is" (3:47),
- Explaining the creation of Jesus Christ further, God says: "The similitude of Jesus before God is that of Adam: He created him from dust, and then said to him "Be": and he was" (3:59),
- God equips Jesus Christ with Knowledge: "And God will teach him the Book and Wisdom, the Law and the Gospel" (3:48),
- God mentions a number of Prophets, including Jesus, thus: "And Zakariya and John and Jesus... all among the righteous...and to all (God) gave favour above all nations" (6:85-86),

- When Jesus Christ's life was in danger, he prayed to God and God answered: "O Jesus! I will take thee to Myself and clear thee (of the falsehoods) of those who blaspheme" (3:55), and
- When Jesus Christ's enemies wanted to crucify him, God, as He had promised (see the above verse), took him up to Himself: "God raised him up unto Himself; God is exalted in Power, Wise." (4:158)

(The aim of this verse, (4:158) is to inform Muslims that Jesus Christ, who is a Prophet of Islam, was not crucified, that is, he was never killed on the cross as his enemies had intended and announced. Perhaps this is because the crucifixion was a way of killing wrong-doers and certainly Jesus Christ was not a wrong-doer and therefore God did not allow His beloved Prophet to meet his death in such a dishonourable manner. Muslims see the words "raised up" as a Godly expression. So, instead of being disgraced as a malefactor, which he really was not, Jesus Christ was, on the contrary, honoured by God.)

Muslims believe in Jesus Christ as one of their great Prophets and they revere, respect and love him just as they do Prophet Muhammad. Muslims can never be anti-Christ.

### **32. Were the miracles performed by Jesus Christ mentioned in the Quran?**

Islam makes it an article of faith to believe in Jesus Christ as well as all the other Prophets of God. According to Islam, many Prophets, including Jesus Christ, did perform miracles. Regarding Jesus Christ's miracles and his miraculous nature, the Quran says that:

- Jesus Christ was conceived miraculously (that is, without the intervention of a human male),

- His mother, Mary, knew that the child she conceived was going to be a Prophet,
- He performed his very first miracle when he was just a baby. He talked to people, defending his mother from false accusations of sexual misconduct. (Muslims find him truly a deserving son, a miracle baby on top of that, who in later life helped others through miracles, now helped his own chaste and righteous mother. He defended her, a woman honoured and chosen by God for being “above the women of all nations” from false accusations of sexual misconduct at a moment when she most needed a strong defence to get her character cleared. Indeed a miracle took place, the most remarkable and noblest of all his miracles!) He defended her to the amazement of all those present, and
- He performed many miracles, through God’s power endorsed on him, to help people and, at the same time, to convince them that he was sent by God to guide them.

Muslims believe that Mary knew that she would conceive Jesus miraculously. The Quran says that God sent Angels to inform Mary of the good news that she had been especially chosen to conceive Jesus who would grow to become a great Prophet.

“Behold!” the Angels said: “O Mary, God hath chosen thee above the women of all nations.” (Quran 3:42)

The Angels proceeded: “O Mary! God giveth thee glad tidings of a word from Him: his name will be Jesus, the son of Mary, held in honour in this world and the Hereafter and (of the company of) those nearest to God. He shall speak to the people in childhood and in maturity.” (Quran 3:46)

Upon receiving this news, although a good piece of news, Mary in her innocence, was shocked. Mary responded: “O My Lord! How shall I have a son when no man hath touched me?” The Angel replied: “Even so: God createth what he willeth: When He decreed a Plan, He but saith to it, ‘Be’ and it is.” (Quran 3:47-48)

From these Quranic verses Muslims believe that Jesus Christ was conceived miraculously; that is, Mary was a virgin when she conceived Jesus Christ, and that this was made possible by the power of God. God (through the Angels) explains in the verse above that He need only say “Be” and it will happen, just as Adam was created without even a mother! God says: “The similitude of Jesus before God is as that of Adam; He created him from dust, then said to him: ‘Be’, and he was.” (Quran 3:59) When Mary conceived Jesus, she retired to a remote place in the East and only returned after the birth of the child. Some curious people, learning that the baby was Mary’s son, insinuated that she had brought shame to her upright and pious parents, amazed though they were to see such a charming child.

The Quran relates: “They said: ‘O Mary! Truly an amazing thing hast thou brought! O Sister of Aaron! Thy father was not a man of evil nor thy mother a woman unchaste!’” (Quran 19:27-28)

Commenting on this verse, Abdullah Yusuf Ali, in his English translation of the Quran, says: “The amazement of the people knew no bounds. In any case they were prepared to think the worse of her, as she had disappeared from her kin for some time. But now she comes, shamelessly parading a babe in her arms! How she had disgraced the house of Aaron, the fountain of priesthood!

“Sister of Aaron: Mary is reminded of her high lineage and the unexceptional morals of her father and mother. How, they said she had fallen, and disgraced the name of her progenitors!

“What could Mary do? How could she explain? Would they, in their censorious mood accept her explanation? All she could do was to point to the child, who, she knew, was no ordinary child. And the child came to her rescue. By a miracle he spoke, defending his mother.”

The Quran says: “But she (Mary) pointed to the babe. They said: ‘How can we talk to one who is a child in the cradle?’ He (the infant Jesus) said: ‘I am indeed a Servant of God: He hath given me Revelation and made me a Prophet; and He hath made me blessed wheresoever I be. He hath made me kind to my mother, and not overbearing or miserable.’” (Quran 19:29-33)

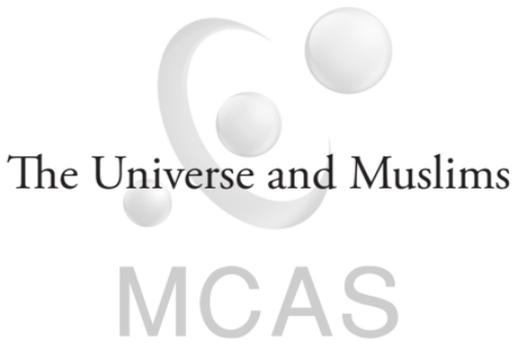
Jesus Christ’s other miracles were also mentioned in the Quran. A verse goes: “Then God will say (to Jesus Christ): ‘And behold! Thou makest out of clay, as it were, the figure of a bird, by My leave, and thou breathest into it, and it becometh a bird, by My leave, and thou healest those born blind, and the lepers, by My leave. And behold! Thou bringest forth the dead by My leave. When thou didst show them the Clear Signs (that is, the miracles), and the unbelievers among them said: ‘This is nothing but evident magic.’” (Quran 5:113)

In this verse, it is revealed that Jesus Christ:

- Made a bird out of clay,
- Healed those born blind,
- Healed the lepers, and
- Gave life to the dead.

(The repetitive mention of “by My leave (permission)” after each miracle serves to emphasise the point that each and every miracle Jesus Christ performed was done with the power of God, not of his own. Jesus Christ himself admitted this in the Bible. He said: “I can of my own self do nothing...” (John 5:30)

Muslims believe that Jesus Christ performed all these miracles to help him in his mission as a Prophet of God.



The Universe and Muslims

MCAS

## The Universe and Muslims

33. What does the Quran say about the creation of the universe?
34. Does the Quran say anything about life in other galaxies?
35. What is the purpose of human life in Islam?
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53. What is understood by the term brotherhood?



### **33. What does the Quran say about the creation of the universe?**

God says in the Quran that He is the Lord and Creator of the universe, thus:

- “The seven heavens and the earth, and beings therein, declare His Glory” (17:44), and;
- “Say: ‘Who is the Lord and Sustainer of the heavens and the earth?’ say: ‘(It is) God.’ Say: ‘God is the Creator of all things: He is the One, the Supreme and Irresistible.’” (13:16)

In Islam, Creation, which includes living and non-living things, is never static but always changing from stage to stage towards an ultimate creation. In other words, there is continuity in the creative act of God. God says: “Every day in (new) Splendour does He (shine).” (55:29)

Regarding the formation of stars and planets in the universe, the Quran points to a “Big Bang” or disintegration theory. God says: “Do not the unbelievers see that the heavens and the earth were joined together (as one unit of Creation), before we clove them asunder?” (21:30)

The earlier creation (before the “Big Bang” or disintegration) and the present universe, both products of God’s unceasing creation, took, in human reckoning, billions of years to evolve. Even the present universe is changing. For instance, looking at our own earth, scientists say the shapes of the countries billions of years ago were not as they are today.

So, one day, the “heavens and the earth”, which were different then, when no human beings existed, will be different from the present. In the language of Islam, the next creation – the ultimate creation for a higher form of life – is what is termed as the Hereafter.

### **34. Does the Quran say anything about life in other galaxies?**

Some science fiction writers have portrayed outer space creatures with monstrous-looking features in their stories, but so far such creatures have remained in the realm of science fiction.

However, the Quran does allude to life in outer space, thus: “And among His Signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the living creatures He has scattered through them.” (42:29)

These verses indicate that there is life in some form or other in other galaxies. Until scientific means become more sophisticated to make this discovery, this Quranic statement will remain to be discovered.

### **35. What is the purpose of human life in Islam?**

God created man to serve Him, meaning that men should believe in the One God and do good. This is the object of human life. God says: “I have not created men except that they should serve Me.” (51:56)

God created man superior to any other living creatures. He says: “We have created man in the best make.” (95:4) This superiority gives man the ability to progress both materially and spiritually. The progress he makes will benefit him both in this world and in the Hereafter. Thus, since all human beings will die, the ultimate goal of life in this world is the eventual meeting with the Creator in the Hereafter. What one has to do is to believe in God and follow His commands in doing righteousness. God says: “Whoever expects to meet his Lord, let him work righteousness, and in the worship of his Lord, admit no one as partner.” (18:110)

This life is a preparation for the Hereafter, the “Eternal Home”, to which all human beings ultimately go. As such, Muslims are required to observe righteousness in their daily life, based on Quranic teachings, like eating halal food, wearing modest clothing, performing prayers, giving alms, etc, because of the fact that they live for God alone. And to those who strive to attain nearness to Him, God sees to it. He says: “O thou man! Verily thou art ever toiling on towards thy Lord –

painfully toiling – but thou shall meet Him.” (84:6) This recognition and promise from God is indeed good news to Muslims.

### **36. What is the concept of life after death in Islam?**

In Islam, every person has a soul. When he dies, his soul enters the next stage of life. Thus, life continues in the Hereafter after one’s physical death. Death is just a gateway to another form of (higher) life. It is therefore important that the soul is “clean” and “pure”, because the life in the Hereafter is spiritual in nature, sublime and eternal.

When a baby is in the womb of its mother (the confines of the womb is itself a world of its own), there is no way for it to understand the vast potential of the world outside. But, the outside world is a reality. In the same way, people in this world cannot fathom the Hereafter. However, the next world is real and it is described in the Quran with words which man can relate to, such as “Gardens” for Paradise and “Fire” for hell.

For people who are in doubt about the reality of the Hereafter, God says: “O mankind! If you have a doubt about the Resurrection, (consider) that We created you out of dust, then out of sperm, then out of a leech-like clot, then out of a morsel of flesh, partly formed and partly unformed, in order that We may manifest (our Power) to you; and We cause whom we will to rest in the wombs for an appointed term, then do We bring you out as babes, then (foster you) that you may reach your age of full strength; and some of you are called to die; and some are sent back to the feeblest old age, so that they know nothing after having known (much). And (further), thou seest the earth barren and lifeless, but when We pour down rain on it, it is stirred (to life), it swells, and it puts forth every kind of beautiful growth (in pairs). This is so, because God is the Reality: It is He who gives life to the dead, and it is He Who has Power over all things. And verily, the Hour will come: There can be no doubt about it, or about (the fact) that God will raise up all who are in the graves.” (22:5-7)

In the Hereafter, after the Day of Judgement, those who do not qualify for entry into paradise will dwell in Hell. (See Question 38.) God says:

“Is the man who believes no better than the man who is rebellious and wicked? Not equal are they.” (32:18) “As to those who are rebellious and wicked, their abode will be the Fire.” (32:20) But “(For those who believe and do good), God has prepared Gardens under which rivers flow, to dwell therein forever: that is the Supreme Felicity.” (9:100)

God explains further: “Verily he who comes to his Lord as a sinner (at Judgement), for him is Hell: therein shall he neither die nor live. But such as come to Him as Believers who have worked righteous deeds, for them are ranks exalted, Gardens of Eternity, beneath which flow rivers: they will dwell therein for aye: such is the reward of those who purify themselves (from evil).” (20:74-76)

God metaphorically describes Paradise as “Gardens with rivers flowing beneath” because people tend to associate gardens, particularly one that incorporates flowing water, with a place that is pleasant, serene, peaceful and enduring.

God assures that those who enter Paradise will live in it eternally. Some examples are:

- “For the righteous are Gardens in nearness to their Lord, therein is their Eternal home” (3:15),
- “For the righteous is a beautiful place of (final) Return – Gardens of Eternity” (38:49-50), and
- “God will say: “This is a Day on which the truthful will profit from their truth: theirs are Gardens with rivers flowing beneath – their Eternal House: God well-pleased with them, and they with God: that is the Great Salvation.”(5:119)

Paradise is also described as a “Home of Peace”, God says: For them (those who believe and do righteous) will be a Home of Peace” (6:127) and “their greeting therein will be: ‘Peace!’”(14:23)

### 37. How could a person enter Paradise?

Islam teaches people that the way to Heaven or Paradise, which the Quran terms as “Gardens” (See Question 36.), is through this world. In other words, to enter Paradise, a person should take advantage of the opportunities available to equip himself, so as to be worthy for entrance into this Supreme Abode. The qualifications are not difficult to acquire. He only has to believe in God, perform the daily prayers, fast in Ramadhan, perform the Haj, if he has the means to do it, and follow all the other Commands of God for righteous living.

To gain entry into Paradise, a person needs to accumulate spiritual or merit points (Divine Blessings). These points are acquired through works that are the result of sincere intention. For instance, if a person gives away thousands of dollars to charity for the sake of name and publicity, he gets no merit points. However, he would get one merit point when the money he has donated benefits people. The benefits would be multiplied if his intentions are also sincere. One gains merit points through righteous acts. What are the righteous acts? God shows what they are and who the righteous are in a number of ways in the Quran.

A few examples are:

- “It is righteous to believe in God and the Last Day, and the Angels and the Book and the Messengers: to spend of your substance out of love for Him (God), for your kin, for orphans, for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask, to be steadfast in prayer and practise regular charity: to fulfill the contracts you have made: and to be firm and patient, in pain (or suffering) and adversity and throughout all periods of panic.” (2:177)
- “Those who show patience, firmness and self-control; who are true (in word and deed); who worship devoutly; who spend (in the way of God); and pray for forgiveness...” (3:17)

- “Those who restrain anger and pardon (all) men; for God loves those who do good.” (3:134),
- “Those who serve God and join not partners with Him, and do good to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, those in need, neighbours who are near, neighbours who are strangers, the companion by your side, the wayfarer (you meet)...God loves not the arrogant, the vain glorious, (nor) those who are niggardly...” (4:36)

As can be seen, the above verses, merely four of the more than 6,000 verses of the Quran, are so impregnated with active and practical guidance for anyone who wishes to live a righteous life.

For a Muslim, it is not difficult to enter Paradise as he has been given complete guidance on how to gain merit points. All he needs to do is to believe in the One God, perform the daily prayers as they act as guards against committing sins, fast during Ramadhan, give the zakat (alms) and fitrah (contribution to help the poor and needy), abstain from everything that is haram (prohibited), food and actions included, and possess good and positive attitudes and behaviour.

Thus, in Islam, those who believe and work (that is, do righteousness) can easily enter Heaven. God says: “Those who believe and do deeds of righteousness, We shall admit them to (Heaven).” (4:122) And again He says: “If people do deeds of righteousness, be they male or female, and have faith, they will enter Heaven.” (4:124)

### **38. What is the concept of Hell in Islam?**

Unlike on earth, where life is short and full of problems, Paradise or Heaven is a creation of God in which life is eternal, blissful and devoid of problems. It is a creation where nearness to God is achieved. Hence, only non-sinners or people whose souls are completely purified will enter Paradise. Even for the Muslims, there is no guarantee that every one of them will enter Paradise straightaway. Only Prophet Muhammad and all the other Prophets, including Prophet Abraham,

Prophet Moses and Jesus Christ, who were free from sins, have direct entry into Paradise. Therefore, Muslims are advised by Islam to follow the Commands of God to the best of their ability. God-willing the practising Muslims will enter Paradise directly.

In contrast, Hell is a creation where impure souls enter. Metaphorically speaking, fire is used in Hell to purify the sinners. God says: “Those who are wretched shall be in the fire.” (11:106) The word “fire” is used as an imagery because people use fire to prepare an item for consumption, for transformation from one state to another, and for purification. For example, raw food items are cooked (and made tasty) by the use of fire (or electricity which has the same effect as fire). Fire is also used to reshape a piece of metal or used to melt it to remove impurities. In all these examples, the time taken for the items to be made good depends on their “condition”. Likewise is the situation in Hell. The soul of the sinner is purified and the length of “stay” there depends on the intensity of his sins, the more sins he has, the longer will he be in Hell, as God wills.

Thus, Hell is a place for reform and recovery, like a prison or a reformatory centre on earth.

God creates Hell because he loves man, including the sinners. The creation of Hell is due to His mercy, as implied when He says: “My Mercy encompasses all things.” (7:156)

Punishment is imposed out of love. A mother, for instance, punishes her child for some disobedience to make him good. Thus, punishment is meted out not for the pleasure of it but because she loves the child; she wants to reform him for his own good. Punishment in Hell is therefore not permanent; it’s a form of purifying act.

God has given human beings intellect, choice and Divine Guidance; so, each and every human being’s destiny is in his own hands. God says: “It is not We that wronged them: they wronged their own souls.” (11:101)

### **39. All Muslims will go to Heaven while all non-Muslims will go to Hell. Is this statement true?**

According to Islam, the opportunity for anyone to go to Heaven (also known as Paradise) has been available ever since man appeared on earth.

In pre-historic times, adherence to some morals would be sufficient to ensure a person's entry into Paradise. This is akin to the life of a baby. A mother does not demand that her baby recognises her in order for her to accept the baby as hers. But as the baby grows up, the mother will make the child understand that she is the mother and will want it to follow some guidance. Why? So that the child can lead a good life during adulthood.

The statement "Muslims will go to Heaven and non-Muslims will go to Hell" is only a generalisation because it is frequently mentioned in the Quran that those who will enter the "Gardens" (Heaven) are those who "believe and do good". In other words, one must believe correctly as directed by God as well as lead oneself according to the Commands of the Creator. This opportunity is available in Islam and is described in the Quran as the "Straight Way".

Heaven is for people who have attained a high level of spiritual upliftment while they are on earth. Hell is the place where purification takes place to make a soul suitable for dwelling in Paradise, the Abode of Bliss and Eternity, reserved only for the deserving.

### **40. Do Muslims believe in Angels and the Holy Spirit mentioned in the Bible?**

It is an article of the Islamic faith to believe in Angels who are the spiritual creatures of God. Angels do not die, nor do they multiply. They have no material body. As such, we cannot see an angel. But "He sees you, he as well as his host, from whence you cannot see him." (7:27)

Angels can assume any form they like when they carry out their

respective responsibilities. They are not endowed with powers of discrimination like those of human beings. Their function is to obey God; they cannot disobey Him. "They do not disobey God in what He commands them and they do as they are commanded." (66:6)

According to Islam, each angel performs a specific function. The names of the major ones are known. Among them is the Archangel Gabriel who delivered the Divine Revelations of God to all the Prophets, including Jesus Christ and Prophet Muhammad. The Archangel is also called the "Spirit of Faith and Truth" (26:193) or the "Holy Spirit" (16:102). For example, God says: "The Holy Spirit has brought the Revelation from thy Lord." (16:102)

When Gabriel visited the Prophets, the Prophets never saw him with their physical eyes. They only saw him with their spiritual senses. God tells Prophet Muhammad: "He (Gabriel) revealed it (the Divine Revelation) to thy heart (O Muhammad) by God's command." (2:97) When Gabriel came to Prophet Muhammad, sometimes in the form of a man, the Prophet did not behold him but merely heard his voice. Those who were sitting near the Prophet, also did not see the Angel nor hear the words of the Revelation although they were fully conscious of the change coming over the Prophet.

The Archangel Gabriel is also mentioned in the Quran as strengthening the Prophets (2:87) and the believers (58:22).

The Quran states that Jesus Christ was strengthened with the Holy Spirit (that is, he was assured of God's help). This was mentioned thrice in the Quran because of the serious allegations made by his enemies against him. One such verse runs thus: "To Jesus, the son of Mary, We (God) gave clear signs, and strengthened him with the Holy Spirit." (2:253)

The Archangel Gabriel and all the angels are pure and holy. Muslims do not worship them, as God alone is worthy of all worship.

## **41. What does Islam say about the end of the world and the Day of Judgement?**

Muslims believe that the world will end one day and a new existence will be created. Since God has created the vast and fathomless universe, mentioned in the Quran as “the heavens and earth”, He will recreate the next (higher) form of existence which is eternal and everlasting.

The Quran does not mention when the world will end. It is like a man’s life. He does not know when and how his life will end but he is certain that he cannot live forever.

The Day of Judgement is the day when God, upon reviving the life of every person who has departed from this world, will judge them accordingly. God says: “That is the Day for which mankind will be gathered together – that will be the Day of Testimony” (11:103) and “On the Day of Judgement shall you be paid full recompense” (3:185) On this Day, God will judge everyone’s actions on earth. Those who have believed and done good deeds will be rewarded with entry into Paradise while those who have committed sins will enter Hell.

God says that the Day of Judgement will be “the Day when no soul shall have power (to do) aught for another: for the command that Day, will be (wholly) with God.” (82:19)

Abdullah Yusuf Ali, offering his interpretation of this verse in his English translation of the Quran, says: “In this world, we all depend on one another proximately, though our ultimate dependence is always on God, now and forever. But here, a father helps a son forward; husband and wife influence each other’s destinies; human laws and institutions may hold large masses of mankind under their grip; falsehood and evil may seem to flourish for a time, because a certain amount of limited free-will has been granted to man. This period will be all over then. The good and the pure will have been separated from the evil and the rebellious; the latter will have been rendered inert, and the former will have been so perfected that their wills will be in complete consonance with God’s Universal Will. The Command, thenceforward, will be wholly with God.”

## **42. Are Muslims free from sins?**

A Muslim, in the true sense of the word, is a person who totally submits to the Will of God; that is, he believes that no man-made thing or human being is god except God who is Allah (the God). In this regard, all the biblical prophets, like Prophet Abraham, Prophet Noah, Prophet Moses and Jesus Christ, were Muslims as they had neither regarded another human being as a God, a partner of God or a son of God literally, nor considered or claimed themselves as divine. Each of them worshipped and prayed to a Being above them – Allah (the God).

After the coming of Islam, whoever follows the teachings of Islam is called a Muslim, a term mentioned in the Quran itself, because the most basic and main belief of Islam is that no other thing or human being should be worshipped or associated with God.

The gravest and greatest sin, according to Islam, is the association of anything or human being with God. Since Muslims do not do this, they are free from committing the gravest and greatest of all sins.

As a human being, man, whether he is a Muslim or not, is vulnerable to various forms of temptation, depending on his individual tendencies to acquire sins by doing wrong. There are numerous wrong actions a person is susceptible to commit, such as backbiting, spreading rumours, hating someone, misunderstanding, theft, committing crimes and so on. Depending on the magnitude of the harm these wrongs can bring to his own self, his family, his community, his country and the whole world, the sin is still not as huge as divinely associating a person with God or taking a man as God, because a person committing any of these wrongs would have been dealt with by the laws of the community or country or given forgiveness by human beings while he is still living.

In this regard, Islam says that the temptation to commit a sin can be greatly reduced or eliminated if a Muslim strictly adheres to the teachings of Islam.

According to Islam, sins are acquired, not inherited. Thus, if a father commits a sin, his new-born baby does not inherit his sin, nor does

that baby inherit any sin committed by the first man, Adam. In Islam, every baby born, whether from Muslim or non-Muslim parents, is pure and sinless. Since people acquire sins as they grow up, Islam therefore provides rules and regulations to give them the opportunity to prevent themselves from committing sins, and to receive God's Graces through doing good. God says: "God loves the righteous." (9:7)

Muslims do not believe in an inherited or original sin. They do not believe that every human being inherits the sins committed by Adam and Eve. (According to Islam, the first disobedience or sin committed by God's first human beings, Adam and Eve, have been forgiven by God who is Merciful and Compassionate.)

### **43. Can a Muslim enter Paradise if he repents his past "bad" actions when he is about to die?**

A person's life can end at any moment. That is why, God advises people to believe in Him and do good as early as possible in one's life (in the case of born Muslims) and immediately upon one's conversion to Islam or upon learning the truth of Islam.

Believing in God (that is, faith alone) is insufficient. Faith has to be accompanied by deeds (that is, doing good according to God's Command). God says that repentance at the time of death – for a man who knows Islam – will not be accepted. This is because he will have no more time to alter his ways for repentance. The repentance that will be accepted is the one undertaken when he is active in life and in good health so that he could alter his ways to meet the requirements of Islam. However, if a non-Muslim or an ignorant born-Muslim comes to know about Islam for the first time and believes in its truth at his death-bed, God, being Merciful and Compassionate, will accept his repentance.

God says: "God accepts the repentance of those who do evil in ignorance and repent soon afterwards: to them will God turn in Mercy: for God is full of Knowledge and Wisdom. Of no effect is the repentance of those who continue to do evil, until death faces one of them and he says: 'Now have I repented indeed.'" (4:17-18)

#### 44. Why does Islam allow polygamy?

First of all, let it be borne in mind that:

1. Islam is a religion from God. It is not a man-made religion, hence, only God knows the true nature of human beings (His creation) and the world situation at any point in time, and
2. Islam takes marriage as sacred with the husband having to show justice to the wife in every aspect of life, from protection to love and companionship to maintenance.

These two points have bearing on the Quranic injunction on this subject. God says: "...marry women of your choice, two or three or four. But if you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then (marry) only one..." (4:3)

From this verse, it can be seen that (1) there is a limitation to the number of wives a man can have at any one time – up to a maximum of four, and (2) a man should not marry more than one wife if he cannot "deal justly" with them.

What is meant by dealing justly? It means that: (1) He has to show equality to all his wives with regard to protection, love, companionship and maintenance, and (2) He has to make sure that his taking another wife does not result in the divorce of his first wife (if the marriage has been happy all along).

In other words polygamy can only take place respectfully in a situation where the husband can "deal justly" with each of his wives in such matters as family protection, love, companionship and maintenance. This restriction, though difficult, is not impossible for some people.

When a husband and his one wife come to a point of irreparable crisis in their marriage (for whatever reasons), a divorce is permitted (as a recognised entity) in Islam. In the same vein, if a hopeless or desperate situation arises and the husband has to marry another woman (for whatever reasons), polygamy is permitted (as a recognised entity). Like divorce, polygamy is a means to meet an exigency of an unexpected

development. It should be a solution to a problem. Some of the likely problems for which a man may want to take another wife are:

- Wife is clinically certified to be infertile,
- Husband wants to have a male offspring,
- Wife suffers from an incurable illness, making pregnancy dangerous, and
- A situation where the number of the women is in preponderance to men, like after a war. This has happened and can happen in any country.

In the final analysis, polygamy in Islam is not an encouragement or an obligation but merely an allowance, so that, if and when it has to take place, the marriage is still valid and within the fold of Islam. But how far the man can “deal justly” with each of his wives is another matter. He who calls for the piper pays for the tune. If he is unable to “deal justly”, he sins to the extent of his fallings, whatever they may be or whenever they are committed.

#### **45. Do Muslim women support polygamy?**

It is quite understandable that a wife would not allow her husband to take another wife. As the saying goes: “Which woman would like to share her husband with another woman?” This is a case of human weakness, such as jealousy and selfishness. But this feminine weakness in itself is the (deterrent) factor that checks the weakness of some men getting out of hand in matters of plural marriages.

However, there have been cases of Muslim women who had willingly or even requested their husbands to take another wife because of their incapacity to fulfil the obligations of a wife.

In the eyes of God, a man who can “deal justly” with two legal wives has not committed any sins whereas a man with one wife indulging in illicit affairs with another woman has greatly sinned.

Said a woman: “A woman would not feel so hurt if, with her permission and knowledge, her husband has another wife, but she would certainly feel insulted and unforgiving, if she came to know of her husband having an affair behind her back.”

The Islamic message is: It is angelic for a woman to allow her husband to take another wife in an exigency (instead of saying “I would prefer a divorce to being a co-wife”), and it is angelic for a man never to desire another woman even when a favourable circumstance presents itself. This is a situation that depends greatly on the spiritual strength of the individual, and therein lies the divine test of a person in the realm of jealousy and passion in this world.

#### **46. Do women have rights in Islam?**

Women have rights and significant position in Islam. In fact, the status given to women in Islam was unprecedented in the history of religions. Islam exalted the status of women at a time when women all over the world were treated as inferior to men.

God says: “And women shall have rights similar to the rights against them” (2:228), and further: “To men is allotted what they earn and to women what they earn.” (4:32)

In Islam, a woman is given absolute right to keep, sell or manage her property in her own way. It also includes the property acquired by her as her marriage gift. Her husband cannot take it back. God says: “If you decide to take one wife in place of another, even if you had given a whole treasure to her, do not take it back.” (4:20)

A woman’s right to inheritance is also defined in Islam. God says: “From what is left by parents and those nearest related, there is a share for women, a determined share, be the property large or small.” (4:7) (The share is mentioned in detail in verse 11 of the same Quranic chapter.)

All these Quranic instructions should be seen against the then universal practice of granting no rights to women and the position of women in Islam. Some of the teachings of Prophet Muhammad on this subject are:

- “The rights of women are sacred. See, therefore, that women are maintained in the rights granted to them.”
- “A giver of maintenance to widows is like a bestower in the way of God, and utterer of prayers all the night and keeper of fast.”
- “Admonish your wives with kindness.”
- “A Muslim must not hate his wife; and if he be displeased with one bad disposition in her, then let him be pleased with another which is good.”
- “He is the best of Muslims whose disposition is best; and the best of you are those who behave well to your wives and treat them well.”
- “God commands you to treat women well, for they are your mothers, daughters and aunts.”
- “A virtuous wife is a man’s best treasure.”
- “He who wishes to do good and enter Paradise at the best door must please his mother (and father).”
- “Paradise lies at the feet of mothers.”

In some Muslim communities, the Muslim woman seems not to have been given her rights and position. This, however, has nothing to do with Islam. In most cases, pre-Islamic tradition had been condoned. Only the readiness of the community would make this element manifest in the light of Islamic ideals.

#### **47. Parents are important people in one's life. What has Islam to teach its followers about this aspect?**

Islam teaches its followers to give respect and high esteem to their parents. The Quran tells Muslims to pray for their parents' well-being in gratitude for the care given to them when they were children.

Indeed it is generally the parents who take great care of the child since his birth and give him the first and earliest guidance. God therefore advises people: "Be good to your parents..." (6:151)

Because a child's earliest guidance was given by his parents, Islam places great emphasis on the rights of parents and gives priority of respect to them over all human beings. The respect due to parents is second only to the respect due to God. God says: "Thy Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him, and that you be kind to parents. Whether one or both of them attain old age in your life-time, say not to them a word of contempt, nor repel them, but address them in terms of honour." (17:23)

In this verse, the following important instructions are given:

- Be kind to your parents,
- Do not speak harshly to them,
- Do not treat them as useless beings or discard them in their old age, and
- Honour them (but not to the extent of worshipping them).

Children are encouraged to respect their parents and to be polite to them. The commands, like "be kind", "be good" and "show gratitude", are used in a very comprehensive sense and include the respect, honour, obedience, love and consideration due to them. These commands are meant to develop in youths, the willing desire to serve them, particularly in their old age.

Islam instructs people to be kind to their parents. God says: "We have

enjoined on man kindness to parents.” (29:8) He also advises: “Treat with kindness your parents and kindred, and orphans and those in need...” (2:83)

Islam considers the act of reviling parents a serious sin. Prophet Muhammad said: “A man’s reviling of his parents is one of the serious sins.”

A person should also not abuse his parents or other people’s parents because abusing other people’s parents is just like abusing his own parents. A Hadith records the Prophet as saying: “One of the most vicious deeds is to abuse one’s parents. They asked: “O Prophet! Can there be anyone who would abuse his parents?” He replied: “Yes, when anybody abuses another person’s father, of course, he abuses his own father, and when he abuses anybody’s mother, undoubtedly he abuses his own mother. That is just like abusing one’s parents.”

Islam advises a person to show respect to both his parents. The high esteem he should have for his parents is reflected in the following statements made by the Prophet:

- “The secret of pleasing God lies in the pleasing of one’s father and the cause for annoying God lies in annoying one’s father.”
- “Paradise lies at the feet of mothers.”,
- “He who wishes to do good and enter Paradise must please his mother and father.”

God especially wants a person to be aware of the pain his mother has to endure when he is in her womb and during his birth. He should therefore show gratitude to his parents for the hardship they have to bear in taking care of him in his childhood – feeding him, cleaning him, seeing that he is comfortable and teaching him in the first few years of his life. God says: “And We have enjoined on man (to be good) to his parents: in travail upon travail did his mother bear him, and in years twain was his weaning: (Hear the command). Show gratitude to Me and to thy parents: to Me is (thy final) goal.” (31:14)

In these verses, the word “man” is specifically used instead of “child” in order to draw attention to the fact that a child does not ignore his mother, but an adult usually does, particularly upon getting married. God therefore commands a person to show gratitude, first, to God because he owes Him his whole existence, and, second, to his parents because he owes them his early life.

As parents take care of their children when they are young, God therefore requests that they look after their parents. God says: “Bear them company in this life with justice and consideration, and follow the way of those who turn to Me in love.” (31:15)

The phrase “bear them company” shows that, when a person’s parents become old, he should give them the love and warmth in his own home. It clearly indicates that it means much more than merely bearing the expenses of their living in an old folk’s home, for instance.

Respect and honour for one’s parents is a virtue. His duty is to shower his love and kindness on them. God teaches him to say this prayer for them: “My Lord! Bestow on them Thy Mercy even as they cherished me in childhood.” (17:24)

#### **48. Does Islam encourage Muslims to seek knowledge?**

Islam encourages Muslims to seek knowledge and do work. It requires Muslims to be knowledgeable and hard working. In fact, Islam began with the process of learning, with the word “Iqra” which means “Read”. The very first Revelation Prophet Muhammad received from God goes thus: “Read! In the name of thy Lord and Cherisher...He who taught (the use of) the pen, taught man that which he knew not.” (96:1-5)

The Quran and the Hadith abound in advice and exhortation for people to study and work to gain benefits for both this world and the Hereafter. The importance placed by Islam in these two areas can be seen from some of the following Quranic verses and quotations from the Hadith:

## Education:

- “A house empty of wisdom is just like a ruined deserted house.” (Hadith)
- “God commands you to acquire wisdom.” (6:151)
- “Invite all to the way of thy Lord with wisdom.” (16:125)
- “Studying is like glorifying God, and teaching is like charity.” (Hadith)
- “Learn, teach and widen your knowledge and do not die ignorant. God does not excuse ignorance.” (Hadith)
- “The greatest ornament of a person is learning.” (Hadith)
- “Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave.” (Hadith)
- “He who walks in the path seeking knowledge, God will make easy for him the path of Paradise.” (Hadith)
- “Follow not the path of the ignorant.” (10:89)
- “The acquisition of knowledge is the obligation of every Muslim, male and female.” (Hadith)
- “Pursue knowledge even if it be in China.” (Hadith)
- “A piece of knowledge from wherever gained is like a lost property recovered.” (Hadith)
- “Knowledge enables the possessor to distinguish right from wrong; it lights the way to Heaven; it is our friends in the desert, our society in solitude, our companions when friendless; it sustains us in misery; it is an ornament amongst friends and an armour

against enemies.” (Hadith)

- “The ink of the scholar is more holy than the blood of the martyr.” (Hadith)
- “To the student who goes forth in quest of knowledge, God allots a high place in the mansions of bliss; every lesson received has its rewards.” (Hadith)
- “Knowledge is the life of Islam and the pillar of belief.” (Hadith)
- “Whosoever seeks knowledge and finds it will get two rewards: one of them the reward for desiring and pursuing it, and the other for attaining it; therefore even if he is not successful in attaining it, for him is one reward.” (Hadith)
- “To listen to the instructions of science and learning for one hour is more meritorious than attending the funeral of one thousand martyrs. (Hadith)
- “One hour’s study of the creations of God is worth more than ten years of ignorant prayers.” (Hadith)
- “Eminence in science is the highest honour.” (Hadith)
- “Those who are blind in this world will be blind in the Hereafter.” (17:72)

Research:

- “Do they not look at the camels, how they are created? And at the sky, how it is raised high? And at the mountains, how they are fixed firm? And at the earth, how it is spread out?” (88:17-20)
- “Do they not observe the birds, held poised in the midst of the air and the sky?” (16:79)

- “See you not how God has made subservient to you whatsoever is in the skies and whatsoever is in the earth and showered on you His Blessings, both manifest and hidden.” (31:20)
- “Research is like Jihad in the cause of Allah.” (Hadith)
- “Those who do not observe, listen and understand are like cattle.” (Hadith)

#### Work:

- “Work, and God will see your work.” (9:105)
- “The wage-earner is a friend of God.” (Hadith)
- “One who earns his livelihood (by the sweat of his brow) is God’s beloved.” (Hadith)
- “Whoever is able and fit and does not work for himself or for others, God is not gracious to him.” (Hadith)
- “No man eats better food than that which he eats out of the work of his own labour.” (Hadith)
- “God is gracious to him who earns his living by his own labour and not by begging.” (Hadith)
- “He who seeks the world lawfully, refrains from begging, caters for his family and is kind to his neighbours, will meet God with his face shining like the full moon.” (Hadith)
- “Whatever suffering you suffer, it is what your hands have wrought.” (42:30)
- “Do your work in the world in such a way as if you were going to live forever; and work for the Hereafter as if you are going to die tomorrow.” (Hadith)

- “Man can have nothing but what he strives for.” (53:39)
- “Flee not but return to the good things of this life.” (21:13)
- “A Muslim who lives in the midst of society and bears with patience the afflictions that come to him is better than the one who shuns society and cannot bear any wrong done to him.” (Hadith)
- “Seek the Home of the Hereafter with the (bounties) which God has provided you (in this world) and neglect not your share of this world.” (28:77)

God also teaches us to supplicate thus: “O my Lord! Advance me in knowledge.” (20:114)

#### **49. Why must a non-Muslim convert to Islam when marrying a Muslim?**

To Muslims, religion is a serious matter, not one that can be taken lightly or for granted. This is so because one is answerable for one's behaviour and actions to God in the Hereafter.

It is a law in Islam that for a Muslim marriage to be legal, the two parties intending marriage must be Muslims. A kadhi (the official who solemnizes a Muslim marriage) will not carry out his duties if one of the parties is not a Muslim.

Practising Muslims fear God in the sense that they respect Him, and would not disobey the teachings of Islam.

A Muslim marriage, which is a long term affair and which will affect the religious inclination of the children, is a sacred social contract. A Muslim who wishes to be legally married in Islam, will therefore insist that the non-Muslim person he/she intends to take as a spouse, converts to Islam before they register for the marriage ceremony.

Islam is the extension and completion of all the revealed teachings of God, one that teaches its followers to have a firm belief in the one God and to practise righteousness for their well-being both for this world and the Hereafter. A Muslim is a follower of this perfected or ultimate religion.

### **50. What are the requirements needed for a non-Muslim who wishes to embrace Islam?**

The following are the requirements for conversion to Islam:

- In some countries, like in Singapore, the males must be at least 18 years old and females at least 16 years old,
- His/Her conversion has to be registered. In the case of Singapore, it can be done at the Muslim Converts' Association of Singapore (MCAS) also known as Darul Arqam.
- He/She officially converts to Islam, at the above-mentioned places, by pronouncing the shahadah (pledge of conviction of faith) in Arabic thus: "Ash Hadu Allaa Ilaaha II-lallaah Wa Ash Hadu Anna Muhammadar Rasullullah" which means "I bear witness that there is no deity but Allah and I bear witness that Muhammad is His Messenger". The pledge is to be taken in front of at least two adult Muslim witnesses,
- He/She is advised to take a Muslim name (See Question 51), and
- He/She must take up a basic course on Islam, preferably before the conversion.

The children of a family need not meet the restriction for the age of conversion if all the family members convert to Islam together.

A boy who has not attained puberty must be circumcised when his family converts to Islam. Circumcision is highly encouraged for a male above the age of puberty. On top of being in line with Prophetic Tradition, circumcision is good for cleanliness. Circumcision enables one to easily clean his private part. The penis' foreskin usually will gather some urine in its sac. Thus, if one has embraced Islam, and has not undergone circumcision, he must ensure that his penis is clean before performing any prayers, by pulling back the foreskin.

A non-Muslim becomes a Muslim immediately upon pronouncing the shahadah before at least two adult Muslim witnesses. According to the Hadith, his or her past sins are forgiven up to the point of the conversion.

A Muslim has to do the daily prayers, fast in Ramadhan and apply all the teachings of Islam in his daily life. But if a convert is unable to do all the prayers immediately upon conversion, he should try to do those he could. However, he should aim to be a practising Muslim as soon as possible in order not to miss out in the accumulation of spiritual merits.

### **51. Should a non-Muslim who converts to Islam retain his name or adopt a Muslim name?**

When a non-Muslim converts to Islam, it is encouraged though not compulsory for him to adopt a Muslim name. This is done purely for the sake of identification as a Muslim by other Muslims. Also, when a Muslim wants to enter Mecca and Madinah, he has to produce documents to show that he is a Muslim as non-Muslims are not allowed to enter these holy cities. Otherwise, it is not necessary. Belief in God and His Messenger (Prophet Muhammad) and adhering to Islamic teachings are sufficient to make one a Muslim before God.

In Singapore it is a practice for a non-Muslim to take a Muslim name upon conversion. The non-Muslim is encouraged to retain their family name in their Muslim name. For example, a convert by the name of Lim Ai Lin who takes the name "Norashikin" upon conversion. Her name can be registered as Norashikin Binti Abdullah alias Lim Ai

Lin or Norashikin Lim Binti Abdullah in her conversion certificate. (“Binti” in Arabic means “daughter of”, “Bin” means “son of” and “Abdullah” means “servant of Allah”.) Sometimes “Bin” or “Binti” is not used when the name can be easily identified as being a male or female name.

Muslims are encouraged to have meaningful names. For example “Ah Kow” which means “dog” in a Chinese dialect is not allowed to be adopted as a Muslim name. Cat Stevens, the former pop idol of Britain, when he embraced Islam, adopted the name “Yusuf Islam” without retaining his former name “Cat”. A Convert is free to adopt a Muslim name of his or her choice.

## **52. Would a convert’s culture and identity be affected by his conversion to Islam?**

A convert to Islam:

- Say, if, he is a Chinese without a religion or already has one but wishes to convert to Islam, will not lose his “Chineseness” or identity as a Chinese upon becoming a Muslim. He also need not abandon his family, community and heritage. For instance, he would realise that Islam advocates filial piety just as Confucianism does. A Chinese convert to Islam can still use the chopsticks when eating, and wear any traditional Chinese attire. These are not against Islam. In China, for instance, the Chinese Muslims do not differ in their outlook from their non-Muslim fellow countrymen. In Islam, a Muslim is a brother to another Muslim of any race, and culture. Converting to Islam is not converting to a race, which is impossible. “Muslim” is not a race, nor people of one race. Muslims are people of many races bound together by a universal code of brotherhood and understanding. Islam promotes the brotherhood of mankind.

- Can take part in the festivals of his culture, such as the Chinese New Year, the Lantern Festival and Deepavali so long as he does not involve himself in the worship of deities or ancestors, if this has to be done during the festival. This is because in Islam, the worship of deities or persons is a great sin. Only God is to be worshipped.
- Should love his parents and relatives and visit them even though they are non-Muslims.
- Can visit his non-Muslim parents even on festive occasions like the Chinese New Year, and even join them in the reunion dinner but he would eat only halal food, especially cooked or bought for him (and his wife, if he is married).
- Can invite his non-Muslim parents and relatives to his home for Eid-ul Fitri, Eid-ul Adha and other Muslim celebrations.

A Muslim (convert or born):

- Can help non-Muslims who are in need. Prophet Muhammad said: "A Muslim sins if he eats his fill and leaves his neighbour hungry even if the neighbour is a non-Muslim."
- Can eat food of any race as long it is halal. (See Question 73 for what is meant by "halal".)
- Should be friendly and promote friendliness and harmony with non-Muslims of all races.

### **53. What is understood by the term brotherhood?**

Islam preaches the institution of world brotherhood of man. It recognizes no barrier to race, language or colour. As such, while almost all Malays may be Muslims, not all Muslims are Malays. There are

English Muslims, Indian Muslims and Japanese Muslims. A Chinese or a French or a Nigerian or a Filipino who is or becomes a Muslim is a brother or sister to another Muslim who may be an American or an Australian or an Indonesian or a Thai.

The common vein that runs through Muslims of all races in the world is the result of inculcation of the principles of Islam that serve as a unifying factor. Some of these principles are:

- The belief in the same One and Only God called “Allah” by Muslims of all races in the world.
- Reading of the same Quran in one language – Arabic.
- Offering the five obligatory prayers five times a day at the same specified periods.
- Performing the various movements of the prayer in the same way; and in a congregation, performing them simultaneously together with the imam (prayer leader).
- The rich, the poor, the lowly, the famous – all sit side by side and stand shoulder to shoulder as equals before God during the congregational prayers.
- Offering the prayers (at home or in the mosque) facing one direction – the Ka’aba in Mecca.
- Fasting for one month during daylight hours in the month of Ramadhan.
- Consuming only halal (permissible) food. Muslims would not take pork, for instance, as it is prohibited.
- Going for the Haj at least once in a Muslim’s lifetime. This is the culmination of Islamic brotherhood, where Muslims of any status or race in the world converge in Mecca wearing only the pilgrimage garb which has no adornments.

- Even in death, all Muslims, no matter of what race or status, are buried in the same manner – with only a white piece of unsewn cloth wrapped around the body, as a shroud, and laid in the grave without any (fanciful or expensive) coffin.

Islam requires its adherents to practise tenets that promote brotherhood among all Muslims of all races in the world. The acquisition of such values makes all Muslims brothers.





Purity and Righteousness

MCAS

## Purity and Righteousness

54. What is the significance of the prayer call that is made from the mosque?
55. Why do Muslims pray five times a day?
56. What is the purpose of ablution? (Why is it compulsory for Muslims to wash themselves before they perform their prayers?)
57. What do the different postures in prayer represent?
58. What is the significance of the Ka'aba to Muslims? (Muslims face towards the Ka'aba during their prayers. Does this mean that they worship it? What is inside the Ka'aba? Are pilgrims allowed to enter it to take pictures?)
59. What does the Mosque represent?
60. Why must Muslims go to the mosque for prayers on Fridays?
61. Why don't Muslim women go to the mosque for prayers together with the Muslim men?
62. Is there such a term as "Muslim clergy"?
63. What is the significance of fasting during Ramadhan?
64. What is the significance of Eid-ul Fitri (Hari Raya Puasa)?
65. What is the significance of the Haj?
66. Why do Muslims go round the Ka'aba in Mecca?
67. What is the significance of Eid-ul Adha (Hari Raya Haji) and the sacrificing of animals like cattle and sheep on this day?
68. What are Muslims supposed to achieve from the Haj?

69. In a Muslim marriage, how do we understand culture vis-à-vis Islam?
70. Marriage is sacred, so why does Islam allow divorce to take place?
71. Why do Muslims refrain from eating pork?
72. Why does Islam prohibit drinking (and gambling)?
73. What really is halal food?
74. Muslims do not keep dogs as pets. Why?
75. Is the niqab (face veiling) enjoined by Islam? Why are Muslim men advised against wearing silk clothing and gold rings?
76. Why do Muslim women wear scarves?
77. What is the Islamic code of dressing for women in Islam? Why is it important?
78. Are Muslim men imposed with any Islamic dress code?

MCAS

#### **54. What is the significance of the prayer call that is made from the mosque?**

The Islamic prayer, called solat, is a formal way of worshipping God. The prayer is performed five times a day, each at specified period.

Instead of using the bell, drum or gong, the Muslims use the human voice to announce the point of entry of the prayer period. This prayer call, known as azan, is made in Arabic throughout the world, as taught by Prophet Muhammad.

God says: "O you who believe! When the call is made for prayer... hasten to the remembrance of God." (62:9)

The azan, translated in English, goes thus:

*God is the Greatest. (4 times)*

*I bear witness that there is none worthy of worship except God. (2 times)*

*I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of God. (2 times)*

*Come to prayer. (2 times)*

*Come to success. (2 times)*

*God is the Greatest. (2 times)*

*There is none worthy of worship except God. (1 time)*

Muslims pray five times a day, at specified times, at dawn (Subuh), afternoon (Zuhur), late afternoon (Asar), immediately after sunset (Maghrib) and night (Ishak), the periods being mentioned in the Quran (at 20:130). All prayers must be performed within the stipulated period. While the prayer period for the afternoon, late afternoon and night prayers are long, that for the dawn and after sunset prayers are very short.

The entry point for each of the prayer periods changes slightly (according to the pace of the sun). For instance, in November and December of a recent year, the entry point for the early afternoon prayer (Zuhur) progressively advanced from 1250 hours in the first week of November to 1310 hours in the final week of December.

A Muslim begins his prayer any time after the entry point of the prayer period and not before it. Hence, to hear the azan is essential. Nowadays however, copies of the prayer time-table (determined mathematically) are available and if one does not hear the azan, one can refer to the time-table to ascertain the time of prayers. The azan is particularly essential if one wants to perform one's prayer in the mosque, in congregation, because the congregational prayer begins after a few minutes from the call of the azan. (However, a Muslim who reaches the mosque late can still join the congregation at any point during the prayer, and then completing whichever part he has missed. If the congregational prayer is over when he arrives, he can still perform his prayers individually.)

The azan, in a way, is Islam's international anthem. Anywhere in the world, whether in Britain, Canada, China, India, Indonesia, Morocco, Nepal or Singapore, the azan is made in exactly the same words as used and taught by the Prophet. This uniformity gives Muslims of any race, colour or culture the sense of belonging, brotherhood and unity in their belief and worship of the One God.

The person who calls out the azan from the mosque is the muezzin. The first person in Islam to be given the honour of calling out the azan was not an Arab but an African Black, a freed slave, named Bilal. Any Muslim can be the muezzin.

## **55. Why do Muslims pray five times a day?**

The Islamic prayer, comprises recitation of chapters of the Quran and glorification of God. A supplication to God for goodwill, called doa, is made as a conclusion to the prayer. The Islamic prayer is performed exactly as taught, shown and performed by Prophet Muhammad.

The prayer was not instituted by later Muslims through their own will and scheme. It is performed in obedience to God's very own instruction and Command. God says: "Enjoin prayer on thy people, and be constant therein" (20:132) and "be steadfast in your prayer" (2:110) so that people "may have spiritual joy." (20:130)

The Islamic prayer has the effect of removing one's sins. A Hadith relates that when some people asked the Prophet why Muslims need to pray five times a day, the Prophet said: "Tell me, if there is a stream at the door of one of you, in which you bathe five times every day, wouldn't it then remove all dirt from your body? They said: "It would." The Prophet said: "This is the likeness of the five prayers, with which God blots out all faults."

Muslims perform the prayer as a gratitude to God for giving them His Favour in whatever form and however small or insignificant. The prayer makes a Muslim remember God every moment of the day and helps him keep away from committing faults intentionally or unintentionally.

In a way, the prayer is food for one's soul. As such, no Muslim can ask another to do the prayer for him, just like no hungry person can ask another to eat for him. Just as we eat a few specified times a day to keep our physical body nourished, a Muslim does the prayer five times a day to keep his soul nourished.

The Islamic prayer, whether performed in the mosque or at home, is an occasion of communication with God. As such, it is never performed with the accompaniment of drums, gongs, bells, musical organ or any other musical instrument. The public address system is used in modern times to allow the voice of the prayer leader (imam) to be heard by the large number of worshippers in the congregation.

## **56. What is the purpose of ablution? (Why is it compulsory for Muslims to wash themselves before they perform their prayers?)**

Prophet Muhammad said: "Purity is half of the faith." He also said: "Purify yourself because Islam is a religion of purity."

Islam puts great emphasis on the purity and cleanliness of the body, clothes, home, the environment and in all other aspects of living, including in business dealings and government administration.

God says: “Allah loves those who turn to Him constantly and He loves those who keep themselves pure and clean.” (2:222)

It can be seen from this verse that God urges Muslims not only to “turn to Him constantly” (that is, prayer) but also to “keep themselves pure and clean”. Thus, when the time comes for a Muslim to perform his prayer (the five prayers of the day and even any other voluntary prayer), he will take the ablution first as instructed by God. God says: “O you who believe, when you rise up for your prayer, wash your faces and your hands up to the elbows, and rub your heads, and (wash) your feet up to the ankles. If you are in a state of ceremonial impurity, bathe your whole body.” (5:6)

In Islam, ablution (purification before prayer) is part of worship. The Prophet said: “The key of prayer is purification (through ablution).” He also said: “If a person purifies himself for prayer, he expiates all of his sins and his prayers are considered an extra reward for him.”

For his ablution, the Muslim uses clean water, usually running water. In a set and fixed sequence, he washes his hands up to the wrists, his mouth, nostrils and face. He then washes his arms up to the elbows, wets his head above the forehead and cleans the ears and all around the neck. Finally he washes his feet up to the ankle. He washes all these parts of the anatomy three times consecutively for thoroughness, but at the same time, he uses the water sparingly to minimise wastage. (This prescribed sequence for taking the ablution was taught by the Prophet himself.)

Thus, when approaching God (for prayer), a Muslim is already in the best state of purity – both physically and spiritually – having been bodily cleansed and having ceremonially removed all traces of sins gathered, if any, through the senses of sight, hearing, touch and smell, from the time of the last prayer up to the end of the current prayer. Islam teaches Muslims to be always hygienic, clean and tidy. Even the clothes one wears during prayers should be clean. God says: “Wear

your beautiful apparel at every time and place of prayer.” (7:31)

When a person appears for a job or interview, he tidies himself to look smart. In the same way, Muslims make themselves presentable and clean when in communication with God as the Islamic prayer (solat) is a planned regular action, not impromptu or one that is uttered in the spur of the moment when faced with danger or difficulty.

Fasting, consuming halal food, circumcision (Prophet Moses, Jesus Christ and Prophet Muhammad were all circumcised according to Islamic narrations) and seeking forgiveness from people for any wrongs done knowingly or unknowingly are all part and parcel of purification of the body and soul.

Cleanliness is also observed when a Muslim dies. It is obligatory for his dead body to be bathed thoroughly and a prayer conducted for it before the burial.

In Islam, a person should always be pure in mind, body and soul. God says: “God loves those who make themselves pure.” (9:108)

### **57. What do the different postures in prayer represent?**

The Islamic prayer is a standardised but versatile form of worship of the One God. Action oriented, it consists of several movements, as taught and shown by Prophet Muhammad.

God says: “O you who believe! Bow down and prostrate yourselves and serve your Lord, and do good that you may prosper.” (22:77)

The Bible also describes various Prophets, including Jesus Christ, in different states of postures when doing their prayers. The following references point to this fact:

- “And he (Jesus) went a little further and fell on his face, and prayed...” (Matthew 26:39),

- “...he (Daniel) kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed...” (Daniel 6:10),
- “...And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship...” (Joshua 5:14)
- “And he (Elijah) bowed himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees.” (1 Kings 18:42),
- “And they (Moses and Aaron) fell upon their faces...” (Numbers 20:6), and
- And Abraham fell on his face...” (Genesis 17:3).

Throughout the ages, the “falling on the face” or the prostrating posture is regarded by followers of many religions as the supreme form of expressing total submission to God. Islam, as a completed Deen (God’s Way of life) provides further postures. The Islamic prayer, consists of four main postures, namely standing, bowing, prostrating and sitting (without the aid of chairs, unless the person is invalid.)

The postures, together with the prayer recitation made during each posture, involve the mind (concentration), the heart (morality) and body (effort). Eyes are not closed as consciousness is required in every action of the prayer. (Going into a trance, for instance, is forbidden in Islam.)

Like a strict programme of exercise or skills development, the prayer, also known as namaz, is a formal activity of worship with innumerable gains. In his book, “Namaz, the yoga of Islam”, Ashraf F. Nizami, says: “It is worthy to realise that gymnastic exercises are relevant only to the physique or body whereas the influence of namaz postures is four-fold. It has effect on the body, mind, intellect and soul and helps the brain and the nervous system to function efficiently.”

After the prayer, as a befitting conclusion to it, a Muslim, while in the sitting posture, makes a supplication (doa) with his hands raised at chest-level, palms open, seeking God’s Favour in blessing those who had done good to Muslims and Islam and seeking His Guidance to lead all Muslims in His Way – the Straight Way.

**58. What is the significance of the Ka'aba to Muslims? (Muslims face towards the Ka'aba during their prayers. Does this mean that they worship it? What is inside the Ka'aba? Are pilgrims allowed to enter it to take pictures?)**

The Ka'aba is a cube-like structure standing majestically right in the centre of the quadrangle of the Sacred Mosque (Masjidil Haram) in Mecca in Saudi Arabia. It is a point on the globe towards which Muslims around the world face during all their prayers. But they do not regard it as an object for worship.

God says: "Turn thy face towards the Sacred Mosque, and (O Muslims), wheresoever you may be, turn your faces towards it (during prayers.)" (2:144)

According to the Quran, the Ka'aba is the first House of God (place of worship) erected in ancient times for the worship of the One God. The Ka'aba, "the first House (of worship) appointed for mankind" (3:96), is also called "the House that is much frequented" (52:4), "the Ancient House (of worship)" (22:29) as well as "the Sacred Mosque". (17:1)

It was God who instructed Prophet Abraham to build the Ka'aba from its foundation which had been lain before his time. Although Prophet Abraham built it as a place where people could worship the One God, as time passed, the Ka'aba became a place where the pagans placed their gods (in the form of idols) for worship.

However, history tells us that although the Ka'aba did become a place for idol-worship, the Ka'aba itself never became an object of worship. This is because the House had always been recognised as a House for worshipping and not to be worshipped. Right up to the time when Muhammad attained Prophethood, the Ka'aba contained hundreds of idols which the pagan Meccans worshipped. It was the Prophet who put a stop to this practice, cleared the Ka'aba of the idols and rededicated it to the One God.

Today, the Ka'aba stands, in all its splendour and glory, in the middle of the huge Sacred Mosque, the biggest mosque in the world. People in every part of the mosque around the Ka'aba face towards it (Ka'aba) when doing their prayers. As Muslims do their prayers positioning themselves in rows, this (circular) pattern, like that of a circle with the Ka'aba acting as the centre point, goes in widening circles from this point to the outside world, like the circular ripples of the water in a pond when a stone is dropped into it.

There is a door leading to the inside of the Ka'aba, but there is nothing in it. It is not a forbidden place but pilgrims, rich or poor, of high status or low education, are seldom allowed to go inside. About three million pilgrims from all over the world converge in Mecca for the Haj. If pilgrims were allowed to enter the Ka'aba whenever they wish to, it will become a place of (futile) attraction, where pilgrims would jostle their way to enter it to satisfy their curiosity. This would indeed create great chaos and disturbance in the Sacred Mosque, a place strictly for prayers and not for curious attraction. This is also the reason why pilgrims are not allowed to take photographs in the Sacred Mosque.

The black cloth covering the Ka'aba has Quranic verses inscribed on it. It is replaced yearly with a new one in the presence of Muslim representatives from other countries. The interior walls and floor of the Ka'aba are washed twice yearly.

Muslims revere the Ka'aba because it is a House of God (mosque) just as they do other mosques anywhere in the world. But this mosque (the Ka'aba) is special because it is mentioned in the Quran as the first House of God. So this first mosque has aptly become the focus of concentration point for Muslims the world over during the prayers and a place for the grand annual assembly – the Haj and the Umrah – fulfilling the Quranic statement: “the House that is much frequented.” (52:4)

The Ka'aba is unique in that it is a structure (1) towards which Muslims perform their prayers from inside the Grand Mosque, outside it and throughout the world, and (2) round which pilgrims walk seven times at each undertaking, called tawaf, during their Haj or Umrah trip. Day or night, people go round it in an unbroken chain of movement.

The Ka'aba is a symbol of formal uniformity and singleness of devotion over and above the spiritual unity of faith of the Muslims in the One God.

### **59. What does the Mosque represent?**

A mosque, also referred to as a “House of God” in the metaphoric sense, is a place where Muslims pray to God. Being a clean place for the worship of God, no shoes are worn in the mosque building. There are no chairs in the prayer hall. All worshippers sit on the carpeted floor side by side in orderly rows and during certain parts of their prayer, they stand shoulder to shoulder, again in orderly rows. The rich, the poor, the fair, the dark, the labourer, the honoured, all sit and stand side by side, facing towards the Ka'aba in Mecca. Whoever comes early takes his place in the front rows and whoever comes late takes his place in succeeding rows. During prayers all marks of distinction are obliterated because all men are equal before God.

God says: “One who joins other gods with God, has strayed far, far away (from the Right Path).” (4:116) There are therefore no images, idols, statues or pictures of anyone or anything, not even of Prophet Muhammad, in the mosque. All one would see are Quranic verses in calligraphic forms adorning the upper portions of the mosque walls.

A mosque, although essentially a sacred building meant for the performance of prayers, can be used as a centre for Islamic religious education for children and adults and Islamically-allowed social activities. These non-prayer related Islamic activities are conducted outside prayer times.

The first mosque built by Prophet Muhammad, who himself helped in the construction, was Masjid Quba near Madinah and the second was Masjidil Nabi in Madinah.

Non-Muslims can visit a mosque. But, so as not to cause distraction to the worshippers, they would be allowed entry into the mosque only before or after the prayer session. Visitors wearing skirts and shorts would not be allowed in unless the mosque has overall long robes for

loan for their use while in the mosque premises. Shoes should also not be worn in the mosque. The same rule on modesty and etiquette applies to Muslims.

## **60. Why must Muslims go to the mosque for prayers on Fridays?**

A Muslim prays five times a day, not only on Fridays. He can pray in congregation or individually, not only in the mosque but anywhere, in the home or at the workplace, in the field or even in the desert – so long as the place is clean and does not pose any form of interference (noise or smell) to his concentration. Prophet Muhammad said: “The whole earth is a mosque.” However a mosque building is preferred because Islam wants Muslims to get together in a congregation in order to know one another better and build up rapport. Congregational prayers foster and enhance Islamic brotherhood.

A good Muslim must have a congenial relationship with his surroundings – his family members, neighbours, friends and relatives. Islam enhances the importance of brotherhood among all races. The best way of initiating and maintaining this objective is by coming together during the worship of the Creator. Thus, if Muslims are unable to come for the congregational prayers everyday, at least they should do it once a week on Friday, as ordained by God.

God says: “When the call is proclaimed to prayer on Friday (the Day of Assembly) haste earnestly to the remembrance of God...” (62:9)

The importance of congregational prayers was expressed by the Prophet thus: “It is good to do your prayers in the mosque. If you are within the hearing distance of the azan (prayer call) from the mosque, go to the mosque; but, if by performing the prayer at home (other than the Friday midday prayers) your family members can join in together with you, then do the prayer at home.”

God, knowing that it is difficult for Muslims to pray in congregation at every prayer session of the day because of their work commitments, has made it obligatory to do it only once in the 35 prayer sessions of the week (5 x 7 days) and He has chosen the noon prayer of Friday

as the time and day for the congregational prayer. The Friday prayer replaces the afternoon (Zuhur) prayer of the day for men.

If a man misses the Friday congregational prayer because of some unforeseen circumstances, he prays the afternoon (Zuhur) prayer instead, which can be performed anywhere till the time of the next prayer of the day, the late afternoon (Asar) prayer.

### **61. Why don't Muslim women go to the mosque for prayers together with the Muslim men?**

Muslim women are not prohibited from doing their prayers in the mosque. Prophet Muhammad had said: "Do not prevent your women from coming to the mosque." They could pray in the mosque, but not together with the men, to safeguard their modesty.

In congregational prayers in the mosque, Muslim men sit and stand very close together, shoulder to shoulder, in rows. The presence of a woman beside a man or in front of him would certainly distract him. Thus, to avoid such distractions, the women are advised to do their prayers at home as the merit and benefits obtained are just the same.

The mosque is strictly a congregational place for the worship of God. Thus, if 300 men went for the prayer in the mosque, it is very certain that all of them had gone (to the mosque) for the sole purpose of prayers and not for other motives like a family outing, socializing, looking for life partners or to meet lovers.

Modern mosque buildings not only have classrooms for religious studies and other facilities but also have a separate ablution place and separate prayer hall for the womenfolk. With such convenient facilities, women (when they are not having their menstruation) can do their prayers in the mosque comfortably.

Women worshippers in the mosque, even among themselves, observe strict modesty. They wear no tight-fitting clothes or skirts which expose the legs. When performing their prayers, they typically wear (over their clothes) a white prayer garb which covers the whole body

except the face and the hands below the wrists.

For Islamic socialising, there are ample opportunities for this during the Eid (Hari Raya) visits, casual calls to relatives and friends and attendance at weddings and family functions, which Islam encourages. This is termed “Silatur-rahim” or strengthening of Islamic bond. Prayer times at the mosque are strictly for the worshipping of God.

## **62. Is there such a term as “Muslim clergy”?**

In Islam, there is no such thing as a priest or a person who mediates between God and human beings. Every Muslim communicates with God directly without the necessity of a middleman to relay his supplication or repentance to God. In Islam, contact with God is direct, hence Muslims need no priests or other agencies in between. God listens to anyone who approaches Him for help or repentance.

God says: “I am indeed close (to people): I listen to the prayer of every supplicant when he calls on Me...” (2:186)

The person who may be employed in the mosque to lead the daily prayer sessions is called the imam. He is an ordinary, righteous, mature and respectable Muslim who is well-versed in Quranic knowledge. In his absence, anyone, even a young man, who is capable of leading a congregational prayer, can take the role of the imam. Islam forbids voluntary celibacy. As such, an imam does not practise celibacy. He is free to lead a family life.

What one hears of “Muslim clergy” from the English newspapers is actually a misnomer; there is no clergy in Islam. The newspapers were referring to a committee of religious scholars who issue the “fatwa” or a religious ruling on new issues, based on the interpretation of the Quran and the Hadith. Such religious rulings may differ from country to country as the issue may be peculiar to the needs and exigencies of that country.

### **63. What is the significance of fasting during Ramadhan?**

Islamic fasting is an intense form of personal act, observed by Muslim daily from the morning twilight (before the Fajar prayer, the first prayer of the day) to the evening twilight (after the Maghrib prayer, the fourth prayer of the day) the whole month of Ramadhan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar.

Fasting is ordained by God. He says: “O you who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you...that you may learn self-restraint.” (2:183)

Details of what one should do and should not do during fasting are given in verses 184 to 187 of Chapter 2 in the Quran.

Fasting is undertaken in Ramadhan because this month is special in many ways. Prophet Muhammad said:

“There came to you in Ramadhan, a blessed month, when Allah provides refuge for you and showers His Mercy upon you, cleanses you of your sins and grants you your requests. Allah truly sees all your good deeds, and the Angels welcome you. Expose yourself, therefore, to all things good.”

For Muslims, the fasting month, Ramadhan, serves as a period once a year to train and develop themselves to be good Muslims attitudinally, mentally, physically and spiritually. Fasting is also a form of worship in Islam.

A Muslim's fasting day is spent as follows:

- He wakes up during the early hours of the morning (at about 5am) to eat a pre-dawn meal called sahur,
- He says the intention after the sahur, thus: “O Allah! I intend to fast from now on as an act of worshipping You.”,
- He begins the fasting by refraining from consuming

even a morsel of food or even a sip of drink, from habitual indulgence, like smoking, chewing tobacco or betel leaf, from marital sexual activity, from “bad” thoughts and talks, like backbiting and gossiping, and from emotion and passion, like anger and lust,

- He works for his livelihood just like during any non-fasting days,
- He breaks fast when the azan (prayer call) for the after sunset prayer (the fourth prayer of the day) is announced,
- He does additional prayers. Apart from the five obligatory daily prayers, he usually goes to the mosque to perform the formal voluntary prayers called tarawih, after the night prayer (Ishak),
- He reads the Quran, usually in the mosque after the tarawih prayers, a few sections a night until the whole Quran is read by the end of Ramadhan. (Ramadhan is the month in which the Quran was first revealed), and
- He stays up late, particularly in the mosque, to read the Quran and do more prayers in the last ten days of Ramadhan because the blessed night, called Lailatul Qadr or the ‘Night of Power’, occurs in one of these nights, a night which, according to Prophet Muhammad, is better than 1,000 nights. Hence, mosques and Muslim houses are lighted up till late into the night from the twenty-first night of Ramadhan onwards.

A Muslim becomes more charity-conscious in Ramadhan. Apart from the sadaqah (voluntary charity), every Muslim is obliged to give to the poor the religious tithe (fitrah) in the form of rice or money. In Singapore, money, to the equivalent of 2.3 kg of rice, is collected by the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore for distribution to the poor. This amount typically ranges from between 4 to 7 Singapore dollars.

A Muslim is exempted from fasting if he is ill or mentally unstable or on a long journey. A Muslim woman is also exempted from fasting if she is menstruating or pregnant or has just given birth.

He or she, except for the permanently ill or mentally unstable cases, will have to make up for the days missed any time before the next fasting month.

Fasting, apart from helping one in the upliftment of one's spiritual values, also helps one keep healthy. It "cleanses" the stomach and makes it "rest from work". The Prophet said: "Observe the fast and you will be a healthy person" and "Fasting is a shield from ill-health."

Muslims gain much from fasting, both physically and spiritually. Some of the benefits include constant consciousness of God, strengthening of faith, development of discipline, patience and determination, development of goodwill and compassion for the less fortunate and development of the spirit of sacrifice, self-reliance and self-restraint.

Fasting would therefore enable the Muslim to be better prepared to cope with the stress and crises of life and, at the same time, gain spiritual benefits. The Prophet said: "For the fasting man, there are two rejoicings: one rejoicing is at the time of his breaking the fast and the other is at the time of meeting his Lord (in the Last Day)" and "The prayer of one who fasts will never be rejected by God."

Fasting, being ordained by God, provides an opportunity for Muslims to better themselves.

#### **64. What is the significance of Eid-ul Fitri (Hari Raya Puasa)?**

Eid-ul Fitri or often spelt in Malay as Aidil Fitri (Festival of Charity) or Hari Raya Puasa falls on the first day of Shawal, the month following Ramadhan which is commonly referred to as the fasting month. Aidil Fitri is not a Muslim New Year. (The Muslim New Year is on the first day of the month called Muharram in the Islamic calendar which is lunar-based, hence it is not fixed on the Gregorian calendar.)

Aidil Fitri is the culmination of a month of discipline, self-sacrifice and

self-control to purify the heart and soul: a month of total abstinence not only from food and drink but also from all habitual desires and indulgence, like smoking. Aidil Fitri therefore signifies success and achievement and it is celebrated with dignity. As it is a religious occasion, there is no extravagant and noisy feasting, gambling or merry-making with dancing and alcoholic drinks. Indeed Muslims are forbidden from celebrating any occasion in such manner.

The occasion is a time for thanksgiving and more charity. It is also a time for the cultivation of unity and fraternity among the members of the community and society. This happy occasion is therefore celebrated with the following activities:

- Performing a special Aidil Fitri prayer in the mosque at about eight o'clock in the morning,
- Visiting relatives and friends to renew personal contacts. Traditionally the occasion also serves as a time to ask for forgiveness from them for any wrongs that might have been committed either knowingly or unknowingly, and
- Receiving guests for the same reason.

As these visits cannot be completed in just one day, the Aidil Fitri celebration may take a week or more. Some Muslims, particularly the elderly, fast for another six days following the Sunnah (practice) of the Prophet in the month of Shawal.

## **65. What is the significance of the Haj?**

The Haj is the annual pilgrimage to Mecca. It is a re-enactment of the experience of Prophet Abraham and his wife, Hagar, and of the Hijrah (migration) of Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Madinah and of his triumphant re-entry into Mecca eight years later. It is also an acknowledgement of the re-establishment of the Ka'aba as the House of worship of the One God and the heart and centre of all the Muslims of the world. Religiously, the Haj provides spiritual solace.

Although Prophet Muhammad was born in Mecca, and the first light of the completed religion of God called Islam issued forth from this city, Mecca became the city for the Haj not because of these factors but because of the existence of the Ka'aba and the sacredness of the City of Mecca.

Mecca is a city described in the Quran as a "City made secure." (90:1-3 and 95:3) The sacredness and security of Mecca is mentioned in the Quran, thus: "And Abraham said: 'My Lord! Make this City secure and save me and my sons from worshipping idols.'" (14:35)

The Haj has been instituted not because of any superstitious happening or supposed miracles but because of the Ka'aba which acts as the focal point of the Islamic world and the sacredness and security of Mecca.

God tells Muslims to go to Mecca to "accomplish the Haj and the Umrah (minor pilgrimage) for God." (2:196)

The Haj has been proclaimed to be an institution of Islam by God Himself, thus: "And proclaim among mankind the Haj: they will come to thee on foot and (mounted on every kind of camel (that is, modes of transport), lean on account of journeys through deep and distant mountain highways." (22:27) (This is a prophecy which has been and is being fulfilled.)

The sacredness of the city is further enhanced by the rules of conduct which are to be observed by people making the pilgrimage to Mecca. God says: "Whoever determines the performance of the pilgrimage therein, there shall be no foul speech, nor abusing, nor disputing." (2:197)

Mecca is a forbidden city for tourists and non-Muslims because it is a sacred place meant for the sole purpose of the worshipping of the One God, a place where the pilgrim feels himself to be near to God. It is during the Haj that a Muslim goes through the highest level of his spiritual experience. The Haj is obligatory on every Muslim adult who has the means to perform it at least once in his lifetime.

**66. Why do Muslims go round the Ka'aba in Mecca?**

Muslims on pilgrimage in Mecca, do the “Tawaf” (the encircling of the Ka’aba – that huge cube-like structure in the middle of the Sacred Mosque in Mecca) as part of the many religious activities of the pilgrimage. While the major pilgrimage (Haj) is performed annually, the minor pilgrimage (Umrah) can be performed on any day of the year. Thus, on any day and at any time of the day or night, there are Muslims circumambulating (going around) the Ka’aba.

The Tawaf is a request made by God in the Quran. It is performed in an anti-clockwise motion. That is, the circumambulator keeps the Ka’aba on his or her left and walks round it seven times in each undertaking.

Dr Muhammad Ali Al-Barr, elaborating on the relationship between the Tawaf and the universe in his article “One Direction and Universal”, says: “On examination, it will be found that the entire universe which is in constant circular or elliptical rotation, is moving in the same fashion as the Tawaf.

“The electrons of an atom revolve around its nucleus in the same manner as the Tawaf, in an anti-clockwise direction. The ovum, surrounded by the sperms, turns remarkably in anti-clockwise direction prior to fertilisation actually taking place, thereby resembling the Tawaf. The ovum, in this rotation at the formation of the zygote which represents the start of man’s formation, is just like a circumambulator who encircles the Ka’aba in humility and prayer.

“Leaving aside atoms, electrons and cells, if we consider the globe as a whole, it could be found that the earth has two movements. It rotates on its own axis in 24 hours causing day and night. The various seasons of the year are due to the earth’s simultaneous revolution around the sun in 365 days. It is really astonishing to note that the earth, in both these movements, takes an anti-clockwise rotation.

“The story is no different when we consider the moons, stars, and galaxies which are in constant rotation in their respective orbits. These rotations, in circular or elliptical orbits resemble the Tawaf. Each atom of the circumambulator’s joins the universal movement – from the atoms to the galaxies.”

“What an astonishing mystery it is that has been revealed today! The entire universe from the atom to the galaxies is in constant circular or elliptical rotation like a circumambulator who encircles the Ka’aba in the anti-clockwise direction. Each and every object in the universe, the electrical current, atoms, moons, stars, galaxies, etc, are rotating in the same way as Muslims circumambulating the Ka’aba.”

God says: “Seest thou not that to God bow down in worship all things that are in the heavens and on earth: the sun, the moon, the stars, the hills, the trees, the animals, and a great number among mankind?” (22:18)

So, the whole universe praises God. Every object of nature is yielding and is submissive to His Will in its own way. Thus, those who circumambulate the Ka’aba and offer prayers in humble prostration to God are in complete harmony not only in each and every cell of their own body but also with each and every atom in this universe.

### **67. What is the significance of Eid-ul Adha (Hari Raya Haji) and the sacrificing of cattle on this day?**

Eid-ul Adha or often spelt in Malay as Aidil Adha (Festival of Sacrifice) or Hari Raya Haji is celebrated on 10th Zulhijjah (tenth day of the twelfth month) of the Muslim calendar. It is celebrated in relation to the performance of the annual pilgrimage (in Mecca), known as the Haj.

Eid-ul Adha is a day when Muslims performing the Haj assemble in Mina, near Mecca, to perform religious rites. Those who have the means also sacrifice animals like sheep, cattle or camel. The meat is deep-frozen and donated to the poor in other countries. In other parts of the world, Muslims also slaughter sheep and cattle and the meat is distributed to the poor and charitable homes.

The slaughtering of these animals is done not because God wants the meat or blood but because it is a way of expressing the inner feeling that, if need be, a Muslim will sacrifice his most loved possession for God.

The slaughtering of an animal for sacrifice is a practice done in commemoration of the sacrifice undertaken by Prophet Abraham. His faith was tested by God when he was asked to sacrifice his son, Ishmael. Though his love for his son was great, his love for God was greater. Ishmael's faith in God was no less intense and he (Ishmael) readily consented to be sacrificed. But when Prophet Abraham placed the knife on his son's throat, a sheep appeared before them and God, through the voice of Archangel Gabriel, told Prophet Abraham that he had passed the test of his complete faith in God and that he need not sacrifice his son but instead, the sheep that had appeared as a gesture of faith. God says: "It is not their meat nor their blood that reaches God. It is your piety that reaches Him." (22:37)

Like Eid-ul Fitri, Eid-ul Adha begins with the performance of congregational prayers in the mosque in the morning. The slaughtering of the sheep and cattle and the distribution of the meat are done after the Aidil Adha prayers.

### **68. What are Muslims supposed to achieve from the Haj?**

The Haj is the greatest annual assembly of people on earth. This assembly comprises Muslims from diverse cultures and languages; people from every country of the world with different colour, background, ranks and status – all converge on one spot on earth (Mecca) for the one and same noble objective of serving God. The Haj also doubles up as a great motivator and promoter of learning. It provides the opportunity for the pilgrims to travel, see places and meet people and learn from them.

When the pilgrims reach this point, everyone is equal in status. Every male discards his garment and headgears and puts on a simple, common uniform of the same design – two pieces of unsewn white cloth, called ihram.

Here, everyone reads from the same Quran (in one language, Arabic). During prayers, everyone sits, rises, bows down and prostrates himself at the command of one man, the prayer leader.

The Haj obliterates the difference of nationality and race. Instead, a universal community of God-worshippers and a bond in faith is initiated and instituted.

### **69. In a Muslim marriage, how do we understand culture vis-à-vis Islam?**

A Muslim marriage must have the solemnisation (nikah) ceremony during which a man and a woman legally become husband and wife. In Singapore, most Muslim marriages also include a ceremony where the married couple, after the solemnisation, sit on a dais to receive blessings from elderly relatives and friends (bersanding), a drum-beating procession (hadrah or kompong) and a feast – all these serve as publicity for the marriage. In Islam, illicit and secret relationship is forbidden.

The nikah is conducted by the kadi (marriage officer). In the nikah ceremony, at least two Muslim men or one Muslim man and two Muslim women must be present as eye-witnesses. The witnesses must also clearly hear the declaration of mutual acceptance of marriage by the parties concerned.

The significance of the drum-beating is to publicise the marriage. Prophet Muhammad said: “Publicise the nikah (marriage), and have it declared by the beating of drums.” The bersanding ceremony is another activity for publicity, so is the invitation for the feast. Regarding the importance of inviting people for the marriage, the Prophet said: “Arrange a marriage feast even if it be a single goat you can offer your guests.”

Islam does not allow a marriage to be kept secret because some people, out of ignorance or malice, might spread rumours about a couple living together. Also, if a man and a woman have become husband and wife lawfully, they should have no cause to be embarrassed about their spouse or afraid of their marriage being known to people. God forbids a man and a woman to live together immorally. He says: “Desire chastity, not lewdness, not secret intrigues.” (5:5)

## **70. Marriage is sacred, so why does Islam allow divorce to take place?**

Divorce is allowed in Islam only when the conjugal harmony between the married couple is destroyed so much so that it is no longer possible for both the husband and wife to live together in peace and harmony.

In married life, there are bound to be friction and quarrels between the couple, which, they would both, in the good attitude of give-and-take and forgive-and-forget, keep their marriage intact. However, if the situation becomes explosive to such an extent that their lives become miserable in every way, it would be better for them to be divorced to provide opportunities for each of the parties to live a renewed life, even with the possibility of marrying new partners.

Divorce in Islam is undertaken as a last resort when all efforts for reconciliation fail. Its implementation is safe-guarded by three talaq (divorce pronouncements.) In an application for a divorce, the Islamic (Shariah) Court will not allow the third and final talaq to be exercised immediately. Only the first and the second talaq will be allowed, to give time for the affected parties to think over or “cool down” during the separation period for reconciliation possibilities.

Details of divorce and maintenance procedures and other advice are given in Chapter 2 of the Quran from verses 228 to 239.

The right to seek a divorce is given to both the man and woman. Although divorce is allowed, it is detested by Islam because it not only destroys a sacred bond but also affects the life and happiness of their children, if any. Prophet Muhammad said: “Of all things permissible, the most displeasing to God is divorce.”

## **71. Why do Muslims refrain from eating pork?**

In Islam, eating pork is sinful because God prohibits it. However, the Quran does not give the exact reason for its prohibition. It goes without saying that if one believes in God, one should obey Him without question. In a command, no reasons are given. The reasons

are “hidden”. For instance, no reasons need be given to such notices as “No Parking”, “No Smoking”, “No Swimming”, etc, although there are valid reasons for putting up these notices.

Although God knows what is best for his creation, it is good for Muslims to find out the reasons for the prohibition. In the Quran, the prohibition of eating pork is mentioned in four chapters, namely, Chapters 2, 5, 6 and 16. In Chapter 5, for instance, God says: “Forbidden to you (for food) are: dead meat, blood, the flesh of swine...” (5:4)

The Bible too prohibits the eating of pork. The prohibition is mentioned in two books in the Old Testament, in Leviticus: Chapter 11, Verses 7 and 8 and in Deuteronomy: Chapter 14, Verse 8. In Leviticus, for instance, the Bible says: “And the pig...it is unclean for you. You must not eat their meat or touch their carcasses; they are unclean for you.” (Leviticus, 11:7-8)

According to Muslim scholars, pork is bad for the soul. It is also bad for one’s nature and health. Food, when eaten, does not merely enter the intestines and become excreta. It is absorbed and metabolised into the system and circulated to all parts of the body, including the brain. So, if pork is consumed, it will in some way affect the human body physically and his nature. How? The natural characteristics of a pig, presented below, should give some answers.

Normally people would tend to disassociate with someone with bad character. For instance, parents would warn their children from mixing with bad hats for fear of getting them into trouble. The same applies to eating pork in the realm of the soul.

Rev C.L. Vories, in his booklet “The Hog”, says: “See the brute as he wallows in the mud. See him in the very height of his glory, on top of manure pile, with his head buried in the dung from which exalted site he gives expressions to his joy and satisfaction by his rhythmical grunts.” Dr. Marvin Harris, an anthropologist, writes in “The Human Strategy”: “...it will cover its skin with its own urine and faeces.”

Furthermore, people use derogatory remarks such as: “As lazy as a pig”, “As fat as a pig”, “As dirty as a pig” and “As thick skin as a pig”.

Ibrahim Ma Tien Ying, a Chinese Muslim scholar, diplomat and educationalist, in his booklet, "Islam and pork", says: "The pig is naturally lazy and indulgent in sex; it dislikes sunlight and lacks the spirit and will to 'fight'. It eats almost anything, be it faeces or anything dirty. Amongst all animal flesh, pork is the greatest cradle of harmful germs. Pork also serves as a carrier of diseases to mankind."

Explaining that pork eating can transmit germs, Dr Rizvi in his booklet on pork, says: "In short, the pig, the supreme germ carrier, is the cause of many serious and fatal diseases, among them dysentery, trichinosis, tape worms, jaundice, pneumonia, suffocation, intestinal obstruction, acute pancreatitis, enlargement of the liver, diarrhoea, high fever, hindering the growth development in children, typhoid, lameness, heart trouble, sterility and sudden death."

An article, "Pork linked to cirrhosis", which appeared in the April 1986 issue of the Plain Truth, published by Worldwide Church of God, California, says: "Researchers at the University of Ottawa have linked pork consumption with cirrhosis, a chronic degeneration of the liver. Dr Amin Nanji and Dr Sammuel French found a correlation between eating pork and the incidence of cirrhosis of the liver – an even higher incidence when both pork and alcohol were consumed."

H.L. Hastings, a noted Bible expositor, in his book "Will the Old Book Stand", says: "Swine were designed to be scavengers, to eat up filth and abominations; but when they had done their work it was not designed that men should turn around and eat the swine."

And finally, Rev Vories, again in his booklet "The Hog", warns: "The Bible so clearly and definitely forbids the eating of pork that all who love the word of God and would follow its teachings can have no question at all as to whether or not they should abstain from feasting on the unclean creature."

Muslim obey God's Words and therefore, they abstain from pork. But what about during emergency?

During an emergency, Muslims can eat pork. God says: "He has only forbidden you dead meat, and blood, and the flesh of swine...But if

one is forced (to it) by necessity, without willful disobedience, nor transgressing due limits, then he is guiltless. For God is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful.” (2:173)

Elaborating on the phrase “If one is forced (to it) by necessity, without willful disobedience”, Ma, in his booklet “Islam and pork”, says: “In other words, during famine when there is nothing else to satisfy the hunger, pork can be eaten. If someone with a gun in hand forces a Muslim to eat pork when the latter is unable to resist, he can eat pork, too; but a Muslim would prefer death if one forces him to worship an idol. The question here is no longer that of hygiene, but one’s life or death. From this, we are once more convinced of the reasonableness and broadmindedness of the religion of Islam. There is no sin if a Muslim is forced by necessity or circumstances to eat pork.”

## **72. Why does Islam prohibit drinking (and gambling)?**

To consume intoxicants is sinful. In the Quran, the term “intoxicants” is used to include liquor, drugs and glue sniffing. The warning against intoxicants is mentioned together with gambling, because of their common negative consequences. Some non-Muslims proclaim that gambling with small amounts of money should be alright. They also say that it is alright to enjoy alcoholic drinks in small quantity.

But the point is, who would ever start with big amounts? Even a chain-smoker started off by smoking one or two cigarettes a day. The compulsive gambler and drunkard actually started small, initially swearing that they would never be the ones to get “hooked” to it. But they did. Prophet Muhammad warned: “When something could cause addiction, avoid taking even small amounts of it.”

In Islam, alcohol is totally prohibited, because its harm is greater than its gain. God says: “In them (intoxicants and gambling) is great sin, and some profit, but the sin is greater than the profit.” (2:219)

Since alcohol is forbidden in Islam, Muslims would also not serve liquor to their non-Muslim friends and guests. If they do this, they will bear the sin because they are encouraging others to commit sins, as seen from the Islamic point of view.

Apart from the spiritual reasons involved in making drinking and gambling haram (forbidden), drinking and gambling also pose negative social consequences. They have been responsible for landing people in a host of troubles – public nuisances, arrests, fights, accidents, killings, suicides, split marriages, alienating children, families, relatives and friends and ruined careers. The newspapers are full of such stories.

A believer would therefore avoid drinking and gambling. God says: “O you who believe! Intoxicants and gambling are abomination of satan’s handiwork. Eschew such abomination that you may prosper. Satan’s plan is but to incite enmity and hatred between you, with intoxicants and gambling, and hinder you from the remembrance of God, and from prayer. Will you not then abstain?” (5:90-91)

### **73. What really is halal food?**

Halal means lawful and halal food are food items and drinks prepared under strict Muslim dietary laws.

Haram (unlawful) items include blood, beasts of prey like hawks and tigers, food that has been offered to idols, the flesh of animals that are already dead before slaughtering and certain animals like monkeys, frogs and rats. The common food which are prohibited to Muslims include liquor, pork, lard and by-products of pork like ham and bacon.

Halal (lawful) animals, like chicken, sheep, cattle, must be slaughtered by Muslims because a short prayer is said when they are being slaughtered. Also, these animals are slaughtered with very sharp knives and in such a way as to effect (1) quick death and (2) thorough drainage of blood. Aquatic animals like fish need not be slaughtered because (1) they die quickly when they leave water and (2) they do not have much blood as birds and land animals.

Food items with animal gelatin and cakes and fruit punch with liquor added are also not permissible.

Islam teaches people to eat to live and not live to eat. Eating moderately and wisely is related to other undertakings of the life of a Muslim, like performing the daily prayers and fasting in Ramadhan. All these are instructions from God. So, if a Muslim eats haram (unlawful) items purposely, it is just the same as to say that he has no confidence in or respect for God's Advice; he is even defiant. Thus, Muslims obey God's Advice and consume only halal food to remain pure in body and soul as far as possible.

Non-Muslims who invite their Muslim friends to their homes for a gathering, for instance, should assure them that the food is halal with all sincerity, having completely understood the meaning of halal in all circumstances as explained earlier. However, some Muslims may tend to exhibit reservation and a feeling of uneasiness with the crockery or utensils used, fearing that the food, though halal, could have been cooked in utensils and served on crockery previously used to cook and serve non-halal items, though these kitchen items could have been thoroughly washed with soap.

The best way to serve food to Muslims is to buy the food from Muslim stalls or caterers and serve them on disposable paper plates and cups.

The point of contention in the subject of halal food is not the non-Muslim person who cooks the food but the food itself, whether it is halal or not, and the cooking environment and kitchen utensils.

Thus, if a non-Muslim cooks in the kitchen of a Muslim home or in a "Muslim" kitchen of a restaurant, using halal ingredients, the food is halal. As an example, Muslims do eat at Hindu vegetarian restaurants. The food, like tosai, fish curry and rice, though cooked by Hindus, is free from haram (prohibited) items. Their kitchen and utensils are never used for cooking pork. They also do not use lard in their cooking; nor do the cooks themselves consume haram items, like liquor and by-products of pork, in the kitchen.

As for a medicine which contains haram ingredients, like alcohol, a Muslim will decide whether that medicine is really necessary for the cure of the sickness or disease he has. If it is, then the medicine becomes obligatory for the Muslim to take (in contrast to facing death, which, in this case, might be synonymous with committing suicide, a sin). The logic is that the patient is not taking the medicine because of the “haram” ingredient in it, like people consuming alcoholic drinks to enjoy it, but here, he is taking the mixture or tablet/capsule as a medicine as a means to attaining a cure for his ailment.

#### **74. Muslims do not keep dogs. Why?**

In general, Muslims do not keep dogs for two reasons:

- a. Because of their saliva, and
- b. Because they create nuisance.

Dogs are by nature creatures that love to lick people whom they are familiar with. It is their way of showing affection.

Dogs even lick household utensils. The saliva left on the plate when a dog licks it must be really harmful to the user for Prophet Muhammad to give this advice: “If a dog licks a plate, clean it seven times.”

Muslim scholars say that the saliva of a dog could carry germs of infectious diseases like rabies.

Also, Muslims prefer not to keep dogs because of the nuisance they create. Some of the nuisances are:

- They bark at visitors,
- They create irritable noise as they tend to bark unnecessarily. (As the saying goes: “One dog barks at something or someone and the other dogs in the neighbourhood join the barking blindly.”),

- They scare away the needy,
- They scare passers-by, and
- They bite people, even children at times.

Islam prohibits Muslims from hurting dogs (as well as other animals), except harmful animals like snakes and scorpions. A Hadith says that the Prophet praised a person who gave water to a thirsty dog. Cruelty to any animal is against Islam.

### **75. Why are Muslim men advised against wearing silk clothing and gold rings?**

Silk clothing and gold ornaments are normally worn by women to adorn themselves – to look more feminine. This is therefore the basis for the advice given by Prophet Muhammad against men using them.

The Prophet said: “Gold and silk are permitted to the females among my people, but prohibited to males.”

In Islam, it is a sin for a man to impersonate a woman and vice versa. The Prophet said: “God dislikes men who imitate women and women who imitate men.”

Taking this advice a little further, it also applies to a woman who wears pants and a shirt and sporting very short hair so much so that she could be mistaken for a man. Likewise, a man sporting long hair (and wearing ear-rings) can be mistaken for being a person of distasteful character. In Islam, a Muslim sins even if his/her attire (or behaviour) becomes a subject of talk that may give a bad image of Muslims and Islam.

### **76. Why do Muslim women wear scarves?**

Muslim women wear scarves to cover their hair. Muslim women are not only wearing scarves but also other kinds of Islamically-approved

dresses because they are becoming more aware of the importance of the proper dress code of Islam.

In Islam, women are encouraged to “cover-up” those parts of their anatomy which can attract men’s gaze. Therefore, wearing transparent or translucent clothes, body-hugging apparel or short skirts and sleeveless blouses are discouraged.

God advises the believers to be modest in the way they dress. Hence, Muslim women, who are aware of the Islamic dress code, heed the advice, wearing long-sleeved blouses, long skirts or sarongs and scarves. They leave their faces and hands uncovered following the advice of Prophet Muhammad. The Prophet said: “A girl who has attained puberty should cover up her whole body except her face and hands.”

Women who cover up Islamically earn spiritual merit points. Therefore, the earlier in their lives they begin wearing Islamically approved attire, the more points they gain. However, it is possible to see, for instance, two sisters walking together with one sister strictly keeping to the Islamic code of dress while the other is not. The idea here is that each person is answerable to God for her choices in life.

The rule of modesty for women also applies to men. But on account of the difference in nature of the women, a greater degree of privacy is required for women than for men, especially in the matter of dressing.

A Muslim woman, commenting on the dress code imposed on women, said: “We Muslim women are like the Catholic nuns. They cover their heads and wear long gowns. Surely there is good in covering the head and body, otherwise why should they do that? In Islam, every woman is given the opportunity to wear modestly and be pious. We can wear the Islamic attire, which is very modest and decent, in any fashion and colour we like. And we can still be very religious. Also, wearing a headgear does not mean that we are old fashioned. The headgear does not deter our thinking ability or our intellectual capability.”

## **77. Is the niqab (face veil) enjoined by Islam? What is the Islamic code of dressing for women in Islam?**

Some Muslim women wear the niqab, an attire that completely covers up the body from head to toe, leaving only the eyes uncovered.

Muslim historian and scholars say that:

- Wearing the niqab is not an instruction from the Quran,
- The niqab was not introduced or enjoined by Islam, and that
- The niqab was in existence in some Middle Eastern and Asian communities even before the advent of Islam because of desert dust or female suppression.

However, had the niqab been a totally unIslamic dress, the Quran would have prohibited its use. God's advice to the "believing women to guard their modesty" (24:31), is heeded by Muslim women in different ways, depending on how strictly they interpret the verse. But certainly the Quran does not encourage the use of the niqab. Even when a woman is in ihram, the most religious and trying period of the Haj, it is strictly forbidden for her to use the face veil. She has to leave her face and hands (below the wrists) uncovered.

Women in Islam are encouraged to dress modestly and not to incite lust. A man, upon seeing a scantily or sexily dressed woman, would seldom jump on her immediately to commit a molest or rape. But such sights could stir up sexual feelings in him and unconsciously "storing" them up in his mind. He might even entertain some sexual fantasies in his mind. The "pent up" feelings or imagination in him might build up to an eventual "release" later on in the form of some criminal offence when the opportunity arises. This "release" might not always be in the form of rape and molestation but also through such ventures as going to the prostitutes, or even initiating sexual activities with one's girlfriend or other sexual misbehaviour, leading to unpleasant consequences.

All these crimes, sexual ventures and misbehaviour, of course, depend on the conscience and spiritual standing of the man, the “weaker” he is, the easier he succumbs to them.

A Muslim woman, who keeps away from wearing revealing clothes, is merely following the Commands of God that she should “lower her gaze and guard her modesty and not display her beauty,” (24:31) If by the flaunting of her body – by wearing bikinis, mini-skirts, blouses with plunging necklines, skin-tight clothing, etc – a man’s sexual desire is aroused, the woman earns a sin (demerit point). (And the man who ogles at her also earns a sin).

Thus, this Islamic prohibition is meant not only to guard the weaker sex but also to guard the spiritual good of the stronger sex.

It should be remembered that it is easier for a woman to arouse the sexual feeling of a man (by just uncovering some parts of her body) than the other way round. Hence, a greater restriction is imposed on women in the way they dress. The believing woman who truly understands the implication of the Command of God regarding modesty would not hesitate to dress modestly.

### **78. Are Muslim men imposed with any Islamic dress code?**

Yes, Muslim men, too, have to follow certain dress codes for the sake of modesty. For instance, a Muslim man is discouraged from wearing shorts. If he has to, his shorts should cover his navel right down to his knees. His navel and thighs should not be exposed.

The advice of God “to guard their modesty” is applied not only to women but also to men. God says: “The believing men should lower their gaze and guard their modesty: that will make for greater purity for them.” (24:30) (The next verse advises the believing woman in the same way.)

In this verse, God, apart from advising Muslim men to “guard their modesty” also advises them to “lower their gaze”. Thus it goes without saying that a Muslim man sins if he ogles at a scantily-clad woman. Men, too, need to practise self-restraint in sexual matters.



## Islamic Interaction

79. Why is it that the followers of Prophet Muhammad are called “Muslims”?
80. What is the difference between Sunni Muslims and Shia Muslims?
81. What is the difference between the various sects of Islam?
82. Was Islam spread by the sword?
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85. Why do some Muslim men wear head-gears, beard and robes?
86. Why do Muslims often use phrases such as “Assalamu-alaikum”, “Alhamdulillah” and “Insha-Allah” in their conversation?
87. Why are some religious rites, like prayers and the pilgrimage, performed at fixed periods?
88. Why are paintings, images and statues of Prophet Muhammad prohibited?
89. What is sin in Islam? Does Allah forgive a person’s sins?
90. Are Muslims allowed by Islam to (1) enter a temple or church, and (2) attend funerals of non-Muslims?

91. Why is it that in some Islamic countries, Muslims are punished for going against some practices of Islam, like not fasting during Ramadhan? Faith is a personal matter, so why should those not following some of these practices, be punished?
92. Do Muslims condone superstition?
93. What does Islam say about black magic and fortune-telling?
94. How does the Muslim calendar work? What is its significance? How and when did it start?
95. Why do some Muslims refer to the Bible as the Injil?
96. Since Muslims believe in Jesus Christ, why don't they become Christians?
97. What does Islam say about the existence of inequality in this world?
98. If a country suffers a calamity, say, a flood in which thousands perish, is this the result of God's displeasure on the country's people?
99. What is understood by the term 'Hudud Law'?
100. I understand that Islam prohibits the drinking of alcohol, gambling and the eating of pork. However, if a Muslim indulges in any of these, how would you explain the non-conformity of his actions with Islam?
101. Does Islam instruct its followers to live a healthy life? If it does, how?
102. What are the factors that help attract people to Islam?

## **79. Why is it that the followers of Prophet Muhammad are called “Muslims”?**

The terms “Muhammadans” and “Muhammadanism” are usually used by Western non-Muslim writers. The terms were actually coined through innocent ignorance or by following the terms used by other religions, like Christ-Christians-Christianity and Buddha-Buddhists-Buddhism. The terms “Muhammadans” and “Muhammadanism” are irrelevant and a misnomer in Islam.

The followers of Prophet Muhammad worship God: they do not worship Prophet Muhammad. Hence they are not and should not be called “Muhammadans”. Also, the religion the Prophet delivered to people came from God, not from the Prophet’s own thinking or design, hence it is not called “Muhammadanism”. The Prophet was only a Messenger of God to mankind. He is revered but never to the point of being worshipped.

When asked, any follower of Prophet Muhammad would say that he is called a “Muslim” and that his religion is called “Islam”. The terms “Muslim” and “Islam” are mentioned by God in the Quran. In other words, the two terms are God-given names, not invented by people.

“Muslim” means “People who submit to the One God” or “Followers of Islam” while “Islam” means “Total Submission to the Will of God” or “Establishment of Peace”.

## **80. What is the difference between Sunni Muslims and Shia Muslims?**

Sunni and Shias (or spelt as “Shi’tes” sometimes by the English media) are Muslims recognised by each other. Their differences are only political, not religious. Both parties use the same Quran, without any addition or deletion to its chapters. Both believe in the Sunnah (traditions of Prophet Muhammad).

The differences between Sunnis and Shias originated from a central issue: Who should rule the Islamic state after the death of Prophet Muhammad?

What happened in history was that, after the death of the Prophet, Abu Bakar, being the respected elderly Companion of the Prophet, was selected by the people as the first Caliph of Islam to lead the increasing number of Muslims. Then, after the death of Abu Bakar, three others – all Companions of the Prophet, succeeded one after another, again by people's choice. They were Umar, Othman and finally Ali. Ali was the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet.

A section of the Islamic community (now referred to as Shias) believe that Ali should have been the first Caliph after the Prophet's death without any argument or contest. They believe that the leaders of the Islamic state, called Imams, should not be selected by people's choice, but should be automatically installed from the Prophet's descendants.

This political issue formed the basis of the differences between the Shias and the Sunnis. Shias and Sunnis refer to themselves as Muslims.

### **81. What is the difference between the various sects of Islam?**

There are four sects in Islam, usually referred to as “schools of thought” and several off-shoots from them. However, the followers of each of them call themselves Muslims and they recognise the followers of the other sects as Muslims too. For instance, almost all Malays are of the Shafii school of thought while many Muslims in India are of the Hanafi school of thought. Yet, no Shafis would quarrel with the Hanafis over their doctrinal thoughts when they meet anywhere in the world during prayers or social gatherings. Muslims of all sects pray in the same mosque in their home country or elsewhere and perform the Haj in Mecca together.

The differences of the various sects are actually minor, so much so that a Muslim from one sect would not argue with another from another sect over a point of difference.

The Shia, for instance, is based on political differences, while Sufism is not a sect but an intense form of Islamic practice which is concerned with the upliftment of the soul by practising virtues like patience, sincerity, humility and love for God.

The most important unifying factor is that the various sects believe in the same common fundamentals – belief in the One God (Allah), belief in the Quran as God’s Words and belief in Prophet Muhammad as the final Messenger of God.

The existence of the Islamic type of sects is the result of democracy and freedom in the interpretation of Islamic teachings within the norms of the divine wisdom. It also enriches Islamic tradition, practice and intellectualism.

## **82. Was Islam spread by the sword?**

God says: “Let there be no compulsion in Religion: Truth stands out clear from error.” (2:256)

Here, God is telling people that a true religion needs no forcing for acceptance. The steadfastness of the adherents and the beauty of the teachings of the religion would attract followers naturally. Indeed this was how Islam spread so fast worldwide, not by compulsion.

Take the case of Indonesia, the country with the largest Muslim population in the world. Was there any invasion of Indonesia by Arab Muslims? Certainly no. Islam spread throughout Indonesia peacefully through Arab and Indian Muslim traders. The non-violent advance of Islam was also experienced in other parts of the world. Many well-known non-Muslim historians have testified to this fact in their writings, like T.W. Arnold in “The Preachings of Islam” and Sir William Muir in “Life of Muhammad.”

But, does the Quran prohibit Muslims from participating in wars? Muslims are prohibited from initiating unjust wars or being the aggressor. But, if Muslims are oppressed, persecuted or attacked (even by other Muslims), they can fight and such fighting is undertaken

in the cause of God (commonly referred to as Jihad). (Jihad means striving for excellence in the cause of God in spiritual and worldly matters.) God says: “Why should you not fight in the cause of God and those, being weak are ill-treated (and oppressed)? Men, women and children whose cry is: ‘Our Lord! Rescue us from this town whose people are oppressors, and raise for us from Thee one who will protect and help.’” (4:75) God says: “Permission to take up arms is given to those against whom war is made, because they have been wronged.” (22:39)

During a war, Muslims are prohibited from any heartless acts against the enemies. God says: “Fight them until there is no persecution. But if they desist, then remember no hostility is allowed except against the wrong-doers.” (2:93) and “Fight in the cause of God those who fight you, but do not transgress limits, for God loves not transgressors.” (2:193)

All battles undertaken during the life-time of Prophet Muhammad were never for the purpose of propagation of Islam but for justice. For example, the war against the Roman Empire in 628 AD began by a fatal breach of International law on the part of the Government at Constantinople who killed the innocent Arab envoy sent to their court.

Even in just wars, the Prophet forbid infliction of any cruelty to the vanquished. The Prophet addressed his followers, when they were ready for a battle, in these words: “In fighting back for the injuries inflicted upon us, disturb not the harmless votaries of monastic seclusion, spare the weakness of the female sex, injure not the infant, or those who are ill in bed. Abstain from demolishing the dwellings of the unresisting inhabitants, destroy not the means of their subsistence, nor their fruit trees and touch not the palm.”

Islam detests aggression and loves peace and the doing of good. These are mentioned by God in numerous ways. Some of them are:

- “Eat and drink of the sustenance provided by God but do no evil nor mischief on the (face of the) earth.” (2:60),

- “Whoever recommends and helps a good cause becomes a partner therein and whoever recommends and helps an evil cause shares in its burden.” (4:85),
- “Strive together (as in a race) towards all that is good.” (2:148), and
- “Those who seek gain in evil, they are companions of the Fire. But those who have faith and work righteousness, they are companions of the Gardens.” (2:81-82)

Islam, by its nature, was not spread by force nor does Islam condone or encourage aggression. The remarkable advance and success of Islam, in its early history and even right to this day, is mainly due to its beautiful and rational teachings.

Today, Islam is spreading very fast far and wide among the educated. This is due to the availability of information on Islam both in print and online.

### **83. What does Islam say about earning a living and accumulating wealth?**

Muslims have two important duties to do – duty to God and duty to people, one is spiritual, the other worldly. Regarding the latter, God says: “...do not neglect your share in this world.” (28:77)

Islam says that all the resources of the world are for man’s use. It advises Muslims not to shun the world but to make full use of God’s Bounties to improve their economic life. God says: “When the prayer has been performed, disperse you through the land and seek the Bounty of God...that you may prosper.” (62:10) Prophet Muhammad, too, said: “Next to the obligatory prayer is the obligation of earning an honest living.”

In Islam, earning money and seeking wealth are not discouraged so long as the Muslim does his work honestly and, at the same time, does

his duty to God (that is, performs his prayers, fasts in Ramadhan and gives charity). Thus, accumulation of wealth through Islamic means is not discouraged by Islam. However, accumulation of wealth through gambling, prostitution, bribing, misappropriation, etc, is prohibited.

Islam also discourages indulgence in lavish spending and miserliness. Hoarding and squandering wealth is an abuse and therefore a sin. Muslims are advised to avoid these extremes and be neither extravagant in spending nor niggardly.

Accumulation of wealth solely for the sake of loving wealth is meaningless in Islam. Wealth has to be spent. The Quran insists that Muslims should not hoard wealth but must spend it in a wise and moderate way. The praiseworthy people, God says, are: “Those who, when they spend, are not extravagant and not niggardly, but hold a just (balance) between those extremes.” (25:67). God further points out: “Any who are niggardly are so at the expense of their own soul.” (47:38). This means that being niggardly can also affect the spiritual well-being of a person.

Charity is honourably upheld in Islam. There are three main types – zakat, fitrah and sadaqah. The zakat, an annual obligatory charity contributed by Muslims to help their poor brothers, is so vital that it is placed as the third principle of Islam as an act for cleansing the heart. The fitrah, another obligatory contribution, is usually paid in Ramadhan, while the sadaqah, a voluntary charitable contribution, is highly encouraged any time and often for good causes.

#### **84. What is meant when Muslims say that Islam is both a spiritual and practical religion?**

Islam teaches people how to live a balanced life, allowing people to indulge in worldly and spiritual pursuits at the same time. This is because there are two modes of existence – the worldly existence and the spiritual one after death. First of all, according to Islam, this world's existence is the gateway for the next. How one lives in this world will determine one's fate in the Hereafter. Prophet Muhammad said: “This world is the cultivation ground of the Hereafter.”

People are urged not to be totally pre-occupied with the preparation for the Hereafter as to deny their lives on earth. God says: "...do not neglect your share in this world." (28:77)

God wants people to enjoy the bounty He has provided for them in this world. God says: "It is He who has made the earth manageable for you: so traverse you through its regions and enjoy of the sustenance which He furnishes." (67:15)

Islam teaches that while one enjoys the bounties God has given on earth, one should not be so pre-occupied with one's own material pursuits as to forget that life in this world is just temporary. One should, at the same time, be spiritually prepared to enter the Hereafter. The Prophet said: "It is not meritorious that one casts this world for the Hereafter or casts the Hereafter for this world. Endeavour for both, for this world is the path to the Hereafter."

In his book, "Islamic Way of Life", Syed Abul A'la Maududi, says: "Islam rejects and condemns the ascetic view of life, and proposes a set of methods and processes for the spiritual development of man not outside this world but inside it, one that passes through the rough and tumble of life. According to it, the real place for the growth, upliftment and elevation of the spirit lies right in the midstream of the activity of life and not in solitary places of spiritual hibernation."

A good example is the life of the Prophet himself. The moment he received prophethood, he left the cave where he used to spend his time meditating and became the most active and busiest man in history. The ideal life in Islam is one that comprises worldly as well as spiritual development.

### **85. Why do some Muslim men wear head-gears, beard and robes?**

A Muslim is taught to be a good citizen of his country by following the teachings of Islam.

As he matures, he would begin to take Prophet Muhammad as his guide and example in aspects that include the Prophet's gentleness and kind-

heartedness as well as his nature of always forgiving and striving hard for justice and peace. This is, in fact, a part of the teachings of Islam. God says: “You have indeed in the Apostle (Prophet Muhammad) a beautiful pattern (of conduct) for any one whose hope is in God and the Final day and who engages much in the praise of God.” (33:21)

Mature Muslims, therefore, try their best to follow the foot-steps of the Prophet in those aspects of his conduct (called Sunnah) which they can emulate. Some also emulate his physical appearance like wearing a beard, head-gear (sarban or turban), and the robe (jubbah). The wearing of these items, however, is not compulsory in Islam. It is simply a matter of individual taste, for Islamic piety is not reflected in what a man wears but in how he conducts himself. However, a good Muslim man will ensure that his clothing is within the norms of Islamic modesty as well.

### **86. Why do Muslims often use phrases such as “Assalamu-alaikum”, “Alhamdulillah” and “Insha-Allah” in their conversation?**

These words are common in everyday usage among Muslims all over the world. They are used as part of Islamic courtesy and personal humility and humbleness.

“Assalamu-alaikum” means “Peace be upon you.” This is a phrase of Islamic greeting used at any time of the day or night when Muslims meet and take leave of one another.

“Alhamdulillah”, which means “Praise be to God”, is said in gratitude to God whenever someone receives whatever he wants or whenever he hears any good news. For instance, a man will say “Alhamdulillah” on hearing that his friend’s wife has given birth before proceeding to ask whether the baby is a boy or a girl.

When a man meets the son of his friend, for instance, after he has exchanged a few words with him and before they part, the man may ask the boy to convey his salam (greeting of peace) to his father. The boy, in reply, usually would not say “I will”. Instead he would say, “Insha-Allah”, which means “God-willing, I shall”. This is based on

the premise that anything can happen to him (the boy) between the time he parts with the man and the time he meets his father. He could be killed, involved in an accident or even forget to convey the greeting. So, he places his trust in God (to enable him to convey the greeting to his father) for he is taught that his life and actions are not controlled by him, but by God. Thus, a Muslim says “Insha-Allah” when an action is to be accomplished in the future as a mark of humility. “I hear, you’re going for the Haj next year,” someone says and the reply will be “Insha-Allah, I shall”.

These and many other common words and phrases are used by and among Muslims anywhere in the world in their daily lives. Muslim children are taught these phrases as part of Islamic ethics.

### **87. Why are some religious rites, like prayers and the pilgrimage, performed at fixed periods?**

The major formal religious rites in Islam are performed at certain times of the day and certain days of the Islamic year.

Examples are:

- Each of the five daily prayers is fixed at a certain time of the day,
- Fasting is undertaken during the whole month of Ramadhan (9th month of the Muslim calendar),
- Muslims on Haj must be in Arafah and Mina in the Holy Land on 9th and 10th Zulhijjah (12th month of the Muslim Calendar) respectively.

A Muslim can pray (personal prayer), fast (special fast) or do the pilgrimage (minor pilgrimage called Umrah) at any time. However, the formal ones as mentioned above are performed at fixed periods – to enhance universality and brotherhood apart from spiritual development. This is the beauty of Islam.

Imagine when worshippers in a mosque are performing, say, the Zuhur (afternoon) prayer, worshippers in all mosques in Singapore are doing this prayer at the same time. Extending this point further, Muslims living in the same latitude, like in Thailand, West Malaysia and Sumatra, will also be performing the Zuhur prayer at about the same time, the exact time depending on geographical factors. This time difference goes on like ripples in a pond according to geographical distance. Again, imagine the situation when Muslims from every part of the world, north, south, east, west, face towards the same point – the Ka’aba in Mecca – when performing their prayers. This is another factor that serves to unify worshippers in the One God.

Muslims are urged to perform their prayers in the mosque so that a congregational prayer can be undertaken. If a man does it at home, he is encouraged to perform it together with his family members. Everyone doing the congregational prayers arranges himself in rows, shoulder to shoulder, and performs the same movements – standing, sitting, bowing, prostrating – in unison, each movement done at the signal of “Allahu-akbar” (God is Great) by the prayer leader (imam). (At home, when the prayer is performed in congregation with the family members, any man, young or old, can take the role of the prayer leader.)

The fixed prayer time also has another benefit. It enhances discipline and time management. By keeping in mind the time for the prayers, one could also allocate his time usefully in other matters.

In Ramadhan, all Muslims in the world fast together from dawn to dusk and they are again, at the end of the fasting day, encouraged to break their fast together with family members and neighbours, sharing their food with one another.

The Haj is the culmination of this Islamic togetherness and brotherhood. It brings together people of diverse races, colour, languages and cultures to one spot on earth to worship God. This is a tremendously moving experience, an ultimate experience in brotherhood and spiritual undertaking.

## **88. Why are paintings, images or statues of Prophet Muhammad prohibited?**

Muslims worship God only. No Muslim worships Prophet Muhammad because of the fact that he is not God but a human being, though chosen by God to be the last in the line of Prophets sent to deliver His (God's) Message to man.

Prophet Muhammad was the most successful personality, one who has made the greatest achievements in the history of religions and this could have easily driven some over-zealous, over-enthusiastic people to regard him as a god and worship him.

The Prophet himself told his followers that Prophets and religious personalities of some earlier religions had been mistaken as gods or deities and worshipped upon after a lapse of time. He therefore cautioned his followers of this: that is, not to repeat the mistake of others. He therefore prohibited his portrait to be painted or an image of him made, lest some ignorant Muslims, out of love and over-enthusiasm, begin to frame up a painting of him, or place his image, or erect an altar with a statue of him in the confines of their homes and start to worship him (the created) instead of the Creator.

## **89. What is sin in Islam? Does Allah forgive a person's sins?**

Sin is the transgression of God's instructions towards righteousness. In simple terms, it is the accumulation of spiritual demerit points as a result of doing unrighteous acts. A person sins (gets a spiritual demerit point) when he does any act that goes against the Commands of God.

As Islam is a way of life in all aspects of living and that a Muslim lives for God and will one day return to Him, even a small, good or bad act, is recorded through Godly means and given the merit or demerit points accordingly. For example, regarding a small attitudinal matter as courtesy, God says: "When a (courteous) greeting is offered to you, meet it with a greeting still more courteous, or (at least) of equal courtesy. God takes careful account of all things (however small)." (4:86)

Thus, when one does not reply to a greeting (purposefully), one goes against the command of God and has therefore sinned (that is earned a demerit point). A sin can be big or small.

Generally sins comprise communal and personal sins. Communal sins include the committing of crimes such as theft, murder and other atrocities that harm people and the community, for which punishment (according to Islamic or secular law) are meted out. Those culprits who escaped from being punished on earth altogether or partially will be dealt with accordingly in the Hereafter. God says: "They hide (their crimes) from men, but they cannot hide (them) from God..." (4:108)

People who commit personal sins, like not performing the obligatory prayers or eating haram (disallowed) food, will be dealt with in the Hereafter.

The magnitude of a sin is dependent on the degree of harm it affects one's self or others. For example, to lie is a sinful act, but, if something unpleasant or disastrous happens because of the lie, the sin becomes magnified. In the same way, if a Muslim drinks liquor, he has sinned. But if, in a state of drunkenness, he causes an accident or one that results in injury, death or destruction to property, whether his or others, his sin magnifies accordingly. God says: "If any one earns a fault or a sin and throws it on to one that is innocent, he carries (on himself) (both) a falsehood and a flagrant sin." (4:112)

In Islam, personal sins can be forgiven by God by seeking God's forgiveness with sincere repentance. God says: "If any one does evil or wrongs his own soul but afterwards seeks God's forgiveness, he will find God Oft Forgiving, Most Merciful." (4:110)

God forgives all sins of a person except those that associate God with other elements. God advises: "Serve God and join not any partners with Him." (4:36) This is a straightforward command mentioned many times in the Quran. So, if a person associates a human being with God or takes others as gods, God will not forgive him for his sin.

God says: “God forgives not that partners should be set up with Him; but He forgives anything else... To set up partners with God is to devise a sin most heinous indeed.” (4:48)

However, since God forgives all sins, God also forgives a person who associated partners with Him, if done in ignorance, provided he repents upon receiving the truth. God says: “God forgives all sins; for He is Oft-Forgiving and Merciful. Turn you to your Lord (in repentance) and bow to His Will, before the Penalty comes on you: after that you shall not be helped.” (39:53-54)

God is never unjust. For a person who has committed a sin, all he needs to do is repent and never repeat the wrong he has done and, from then onwards, do good. God says: “God is never unjust in the least degree: if there is any good (done), He doubles it and gives from His own Presence a great reward.” (4:40)

## **90. Are Muslims allowed by Islam to (1) enter a temple or church, and (2) attend funerals of non-Muslims?**

Muslims are taught by Islam to respect all religions and even the body of a dead non-Muslim. A Muslim, who shows any disrespect in a church, temple or at a funeral of a non-Muslim, sins.

A Muslim can attend a non-Muslim's wedding in a church or temple. He can also attend the funeral service of a non-Muslim. However, he will not participate in the prayer sessions connected with these ceremonies or services. Instead he will remain quiet when the prayers are said. This is because the prayers may invoke the names of deities or god other than the One God worshipped by Muslims.

There is a Hadith which mentions Prophet Muhammad quickly taking a standing position and commanding his Companions to stand up when the funeral bier of a Jew passed by. When questioned, the Prophet replied: “Has he not got a soul?”

Another Hadith records the Prophet as saying: “When you see a funeral procession (even that of a non-Muslim), you should stand up as a mark of respect.”

**91. Why is it that in some Islamic countries, Muslims are punished for going against some practices of Islam, like not fasting during Ramadhan? Faith is a personal matter, so why should those not following some of these practices, be punished?**

A Muslim believes in God, and he worships Him only – “worship” meaning the adoration of God and following His Commands. Thus in Islam, worship encompasses everything and anything that one does for the good and well-being of himself, his family, his community, his country and the Ummah (the world’s Muslims taken as a family).

People need guidance as well as laws and regulations for their own good and that of the nation. Punishments are meted out to the wrongdoer to deter him as well as others from going against the laws and regulations of a country. For example, in Singapore, if a person spits or litters indiscriminately at public places or smokes in the bus, he would be fined; if he pushes drugs or steals, he would be jailed. Why are these punishments meted out? The answer is, the Singapore authorities want all Singaporeans to live in a clean, healthy and crime-free society. They also want to build up a good image of Singapore for the good of all Singaporeans.

In the same way, a Muslim who eats in public during the fasting month is tarnishing the good name of Islam and Muslims. But if he eats, for one reason or another, in the confinement of his home, then it becomes a matter between him and God, just like if a person smokes in his home, no external authorities would punish him for that harmful habit.

In Islam, as long as a person says that he is a Muslim, it becomes his responsibility to maintain the good image of Islam and Muslims. To have a good and praiseworthy attitude is by itself a part of Islamic worship, for which he will be rewarded by God.

## 92. Do Muslims condone superstition?

Islam does not condone superstition at all. Superstitious practices and beliefs are un-Islamic. If it is ever believed or condoned by some Muslims somewhere, it is due to ignorance about the true nature of Islam.

One of the earliest incidents that could have become a widespread superstition happened when Prophet Muhammad's son died. On that day, there was an eclipse of the sun and people began to say that even the sun mourned the death of the Prophet's son. The Prophet quickly pointed out that celestial phenomenon had nothing to do with the affairs of human beings, thus nipping the belief in the bud.

In Singapore, for instance, right up to 1965, some Malay Muslims went to the sea in the month of Safar (the second month in the Muslim calendar) to bathe. Some even soaked leaves on which were written verses from the Quran in pails of water and bathed with the water at home. This act, according to them, would wash away their sins.

This practice could have been a tradition passed down from past generations of the Malays who were non-Muslims. It has no basis in Islam as sins, if committed, could only be atoned by sincere repentance.

As the Malay culture includes Islamic as well as earlier animistic and Hindu beliefs, in recent times part of the Malay marriage ceremonies which contradict Islamic principles are also being weeded out. These include the plucking of the facial hair to test the bride's virginity and to bestow a special radiance on her.

Visits to the shrines of well-known pious personalities (keramat) to seek favours, like curing of a disease, are almost absent nowadays. Again the realisation, according to Islam, that dead people, however pious they had been when they were living, would not be able to help the living has been responsible for the decline in the visits to Muslim shrines. Only God can help people.

As Muslims become more aware of the teachings of Islam, all ignorantly condoned superstitious beliefs die away.

### **93. What does Islam say about black magic and fortune-telling?**

Fortune telling is forbidden in Islam because, in most cases, the knowledge of one's future is more distressful or disadvantageous than not knowing it. So too is black magic forbidden because the services of black magicians involve negative and harmful activities.

In fortune-telling, for instance, a negative "revelation" or prediction by the fortune-teller could be a cause for further distress to the person making the consultation. Also, the people propounding fortune telling could unscrupulously make use of their so-called "skill" and take advantage of people who, out of some distress or desperation, had come to them for consultation. People in desperation could be easily manipulated by black magicians, fortune-tellers and mediums.

However, predictions, say of natural disasters like earthquakes, by scientific means, are not prohibited.

Muslims are therefore advised not to consult fortune-tellers, black magicians or even mediums for their services. Prophet Muhammad said: "To learn black magic or fortune-telling and to practise it is a rejection of the faith of Islam."

The Prophet also warned: "He who goes to a monk, a sorcerer or a witch doctor, denies by his action what has been revealed to Muhammad." Such practices are sins in Islam. This does not only apply to the sorcerer or the witch doctor, but also to those who seek their advice or help as the Prophet's pronouncement quoted above, begins with "He who goes to..."

What Muslims are encouraged to do when they fall ill is to seek proper medical care. This is what the Prophet has taught them. He said: "Seek medical treatment, for God has created the illness and created its cure." He also said: "Seek medical help, for God has created a cure for every illness, although it may be known to some and unknown to others."

However, when all medical treatment fails, getting treatment from a reputable traditional healer, for instance, is permitted if it can be ascertained that the traditional healer has acquired his expertise from

Islamically condoned methods and not from black magic or with the help of spirits.

While seeking all these treatments, a Muslim should pray to and rely on God and accept any eventuality as coming from or ordained by Him.

#### **94. How does the Muslim calendar work? What is its significance? How and when did it start?**

Some non-Muslims mistakenly think that Eid-ul Fitri, commonly referred by Malay Muslims as Aidil Fitri (Hari Raya Puasa) is the Muslim New Year, and so wish their Muslim friends with the greeting “Happy New Year”. This is incorrect.

Aidil Fitri is celebrated on 1 Shawal, the tenth month of the Muslim year. It follows Ramadhan, the fasting month. The first month of the Muslim calendar is Muharram.

Muslims follow a lunar calendar which has 29 or 30 days a month. Hence, the Muslim year is shorter by 11 days than the solar year in the Gregorian calendar. Muslims do not allow a leap year to take place in their calendar because they want the Muslim months to rotate over the Gregorian calendar.

Taking Ramadhan as an example, the Muslim calendar allows Ramadhan (the fasting month) to rotate over all the months of the solar calendar. This is possibly due to the reduced number of 11 days in each year.

Thus, for instance, if the first day of Ramadhan falls on 14 February of a year, in the following three years it is on 3 February, 23 January and 12 January respectively. In other words, Aidil Fitri, which comes after the last day of Ramadhan, falls at least twice in any one month of the Gregorian calendar as it moves recedingly over 33 years before coming to the same or almost the same point again.

The advantage of the Muslim calendar is that no one religious festival will take place in the same season of the Gregorian calendar, year in and year out. For instance, a Muslim in London will experience the pangs of fasting and celebrate Aidil Fitri in the same month, that too in winter, year in and year out. Likewise, in December, Muslims in Sydney will always fast and celebrate the festival in summer! The Muslim calendar therefore removes the monotony of celebrating a festival or observing a religious function in the same month or in any one of the natural seasons of the solar calendar every year. The Muslim calendar allows variety.

The Muslim calendar began from the date of the Hijrah which means the Migration of Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Madinah, a historic event in the success of Islam. The Hijrah marked the Prophet's founding of the brotherhood of Islam and of a state based on the principles of equality, liberty and fraternity, until then unknown in Arabia.

The Prophet, born in 570 AD in Mecca, received God's first Revelation when he was 40 years of age. When the Prophet began to preach about the One God, the Meccans were alarmed because, though the Message was simple and rational, it struck at the root of their beliefs in polytheism.

However, the number of converts to Islam grew, so too was the opposition to Islam. Many attempts at stopping the Prophet from preaching Islam failed. So, the Meccans began to plan ways to get rid of him altogether.

This was the situation when a group of men from Yathrib, some 500 km from Mecca, embraced Islam. Having heard of the Prophet's persecution, they invited him and his followers to Yathrib to settle there. But, the Prophet waited for some time until he received a Revelation telling him to go to Yathrib.

So, one night, the Prophet left Mecca and reached Yathrib to the welcome of the people of that town. (Yathrib henceforth became known as Madinatul-Nabi or simply Madinah – City of the Prophet.)

This event, called Hijrah, took place on 2 July in the year 622. The Muslim or Hijrah calendar began from this date to mark the beginning of Islam's success.

## **95. Why do some Muslims refer to the Bible as the Injil?**

Some Muslims do refer to the Bible as the Injil, and this is incorrect.

One of the principles of Islam is the belief in the Revelations of God received by the Prophets. Muslims believe that Prophet Moses received the Taurah (Law), Prophet David received the Zabur (Psalm), Prophet Jesus (who is commonly known as Jesus Christ) received the Injil (Gospel) and Prophet Muhammad received the Quran. All of them received their respective Revelations through the Archangel Gabriel, the Angel whose duty was to convey the Divine Revelations to the Prophets.

Muslims believe that none of the Revelations received by Prophet Moses, Prophet David and Prophet Jesus was preserved exactly as revealed in the written form, seen and the contents approved by these Prophets themselves (except in the case of the Quran). Thus, although Muslims believe that these Prophets received God's Revelations, they do not believe in the present record such as the Bible because of the reason given.

To elaborate, a hard copy of the Injil would be one that would have been printed if only the Divine Words conveyed to Jesus Christ (by the Archangel Gabriel) were taken down verbatim as and when he uttered them to his people and produced into a Book in the way as was done for the Quran. (Refer to Question 2 on how God's Revelations to Prophet Muhammad came into being as the Quran.)

Following this argument, the Bible should not be called the Injil. The Bible comprises two parts – the Old Testament and the New Testament – and only in the New Testament is found some direct quotes of words spoken by Jesus Christ. Some of these words could be the revealed Words of God while the others were Jesus Christ's own words.

Now, as the Injil refers only to God's Revelations to Prophet Jesus, so, at most some of what Jesus uttered could be considered as part of the Injil whereas the other parts of the New Testament are not the Injil but Jesus's words and the writers' words. (The New Testament contains a number of books and letters written by people like Mark, Luke, Matthew, John, Paul and so on).

An example of Jesus Christ's words which were really not the revealed Words of God is as follows: "My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me!" (Mark 15:34) uttered by Jesus Christ when he was put on the cross for the crucifixion. These were certainly not God's Words or Revelation meant for instruction or guidance for all mankind, but they were really Jesus Christ's own personal words, uttered in despair, not as a guide for people. (Refer to Question 1 on how Prophet Muhammad's words, available in the Hadith, are different from God's Words in the Quran.)

The whole Bible therefore is not the Injil which, according to Islam, would refer only to the exact Words of God received by Prophet Jesus. Muslims should therefore call the Bible, "Bible"; not Injil.

## **96. Since Muslims believe in Jesus Christ, why don't they become Christians?**

Islam is the only religion, other than Christianity, that makes it an article of faith to believe in Jesus Christ. Although Muslims believe in Jesus Christ, they do not become Christians because of the following reasons:

- The Quran says that Jesus Christ was a Prophet and every bit a human being in the same nature as all the other Prophets, including Prophet Muhammad,
- Jesus, as well as the other Prophets, brought the same religion – Islam, each bringing part of it or the essence of it to certain places or people, but each message or teaching was by itself sufficient or wholesome for the target group of people or place of those times.

However, Prophet Muhammad, as the final Prophet, came to complete the one religion of God, that is, Islam. “Islam” is indicated in the Quran as a religion for all mankind,

- To the Muslim, Jesus Christ and all prophets of God, including Prophet Abraham, Prophet Noah and Prophet Moses, were Muslims. They were all Prophets of Islam, Muslims treat every one of the Prophets with respect and reverence. Just as they would for Prophet Muhammad, Muslims say “Peace be upon him” whenever they mention the name of Jesus Christ or the names of other Prophets,
- Muslims believe that the Quran is the Final Message or Testament. It is a Book of “quality control”; it accepts those Revelations to the earlier Prophets that are still intact and rejects those that had become distorted or corrupted (through misreporting, misunderstanding, misinterpretations, etc) over the passage of time,
- The whole of the Quran comprises God’s Words. Hence, Muslims need not take other religions’ holy books for their guidance. (Prophet Muhammad’s words are not reported in the Quran (God’s Words) but reported separately in many volumes called the Hadith.),
- The Quran has a concise definition of God (in Chapter 112, verses 1-4). Hence, Muslims need not rely on interpretations and be divided in the belief of His Divine Personality, and
- Muslims believe that Islam is a completed religion, one that is a culmination or evolution of all religions. Muslim scholars have found that whatever worldly good taught by other religions are taught in Islam in greater depth. In addition, Islam teaches one not only to believe but also to practise righteousness for

one's well-being in both this world and the next. Thus, to take another religion after being a Muslim is going backwards, like taking a step or two down the ladder of religious progress after moving up.

### **97. What does Islam say about the existence of inequality in this world?**

In Islam, this world is a place for the tests and trials of a person's attitude towards life, how he faces life's ups and downs and how he strives to achieve a desired end Islamically.

God says: "And most certainly We will try you until We have known those among you who exert themselves hard, and the patient." (47:31)

For instance, to a man who says: "O God! Why am I born with one leg?", God replies: "Let not the life of this world deceive you." (35:5) God advises: "O you who believe! Persevere in patience and endurance and remain steadfast." (3:200)

However, in Islam, the onus falls not only on the individual, but also on the people around him to overcome these tests and trials. Thus, if a boy is born blind, it is for his parents and the community to find the means and ways of curing his blindness. Everyone stands to be judged for helping or not helping this blind person.

So, in a way, the boy's blindness provides opportunities for people to do good in one way or another. It makes the parents strive to find ways to send the boy for medical examination; it encourages the community to raise the funds to help him get medical treatment and it spurs the doctors to use their expertise to help the boy gain his eyesight.

Generally speaking, without such a thing as blindness, there will be no branch of learning in this area. Also, if there are no such things as toothache, fever or Siamese-twins, there will be no dentists, doctors or surgeons. So, actually, sicknesses, diseases and deformities are catalysts for medical research, development and accomplishments.

Again, there would be other problems. Someone might wonder why he is short and ugly while his friend is tall and handsome; why his sister is dark while his friend's sister is fair; why his child lacks talents while his neighbour's child is a prodigy, and so on. But then, could human life exist if every person is equal in every respect. Could people recognise one another if everyone looks alike? For instance, regarding why God created so many different races, God says: "(We) made you into nations and tribes that you may know each other." (49:13)

In Islam, human life in whatever form serves a purpose. Thus, whatever situation a person is placed in, whether at birth or later in his life, Islam requires him to lead his life to the best of his ability. Equality can only be exercised in the Hereafter after meting out the due punishments and rewards.

Attainments, whether for this world or the next, could only be achieved through individual effort and righteousness, and this is why the Quran is replete with advice to the believers to be patient and righteous, and to persevere. God says: "(For) those who show patience and constancy and work righteousness: for them is...great reward." (11:11)

**98. If a country suffers a calamity, say, a flood in which thousands perish, is this the result of God's displeasure on the country's people?**

Earthquakes, floods, droughts are natural phenomena that happen in certain places at certain times. They depend on geographical factors. In Islam, such occurrences are not regarded as God's wrath on the people. Instead they should be regarded as a means for the country's people to find ways to alleviate the situation. For instance, Japan, an earthquake-prone country, has marvellously made all its high-rise buildings earthquake-proof through its technological ingenuity. Such disasters also give opportunities for other people to render their assistance to the afflicted in whatever ways they can afford, financially, materially or with their expertise. This is really a test and trial for the people, the afflicted as well as those who are not.

Islam says that the Bounties of God are given to both Muslims and non-Muslims and to the good and wicked as well. Thus, Islam teaches people to reject any belief that the natural laws can change in favour of any people or community. God says: “Of the Bounties of thy Lord are not closed (to anyone). See how We bestowed more on some than on others; but verily the Hereafter is greater in rank and gradation and more in excellence.” (17:20-21)

Islam teaches people to strive to improve themselves for both material and spiritual benefits. Thus, the situation in a society is not a sign of God’s approval or disapproval. A community’s worldly success and affluence or happy and easy-going lives do not mean that God approves them. This world is a place of test and trial, not of judgement.

### **99. What is understood by the term ‘Hudud Law’?**

Indeed the Quran mentions the cutting off of the hand as a punishment for theft. But this should be seen as being the maximum penalty for incorrigible people who commit the offence as an example to deter others from committing theft. Still, forgiveness, perhaps by giving a lighter punishment instead of cutting off the hand, would suffice. God says: “But if the thief repents after his crime, and amends his conduct, God turns to him in forgiveness; for God is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful.”(5:39)

If a man steals, say, a \$20 item, which is indeed a petty theft, the authorities executing the Islamic law would not mete out the maximum punishment because elsewhere in the Quran, it mentions that punishment should be meted out carefully and with full justice. The Quranic penalty for theft should be taken as a warning sign, just like the warning signs for littering found in Singapore, a common sign being “No littering. Fine \$1000.”

It would be of no effect if a penalty is not substantial enough to deter people from committing an offence. In Singapore’s context, instead of a \$1000 fine warning for littering would \$5 have any deterrent effect?

Would a man who throws a used ticket on the road get the maximum penalty of \$1000? No. The warning for a punishment and the actual meting out of the punishment do differ according to circumstances and the nature and intensity of the offence.

Arabia is one of the Islamic countries where the amputating of hands is a punishment for theft. There, a goldsmith needs no security guard for his shop. He can even leave his shop wide open while he goes inside to perform his prayers, and nobody would dare steal even a small ring!

Other seemingly harsh penalties, particularly for adultery, fornication and sexual indulgence that could tear apart and harm the social fabric of the family or society, and which can result in broken marriages, venereal diseases and AIDS, are all meant for righteous and gracious living and for the good of everybody in the country.

In Singapore, for instance, anyone convicted of possessing or trafficking more than 15 gm of heroin faces the mandatory death sentence, by hanging. Thus these punishments should be viewed against the well-being of the whole community and nation.

Punishments are meted out to deter not only the offender from repeating the offence, but also other people from committing it. So, it is of no effect if the maximum penalty is imposed on an individual in secret or silence. The public should know about it. For the incorrigible thief, a maimed hand, for instance, may serve to meet the objective for this publicity.

**100. I understand that Islam prohibits the drinking of alcohol, gambling and the eating of pork. However, if a Muslim indulges in any of these, how would you explain the non-conformity of his actions with Islam?**

The behaviour of a Muslim is governed by some basic guiding principles as follows:

- ***Fardhu***: that which is obligatory, like the daily prayers and fasting in Ramadhan,

- **Halal:** that which is clearly permissible,
- **Haram:** that which is clearly prohibited, like eating of pork,
- **Mubah:** that which should be done in times of need, danger or emergency, such as the saving of lives by whatever means, mass donations or offering help for people of any race or religion afflicted by calamities,
- **Sunnat:** that which is not obligatory to do but praiseworthy to do, like the performance of the tarawih (night) prayers during Ramadhan or blood donation, and
- **Makrub:** that which is not haram, but good to avoid, like consuming too much sugar or salt because of their obvious dangers to health.

These guidelines are given by Islam to guide a person to develop an upright character, behaviour and discipline, and, at the same time, to live happily and healthily. However, if some Muslims flout some of these guidelines, say, by drinking alcohol, eating pork or gambling, it does not mean that they are modern or progressive.

They have simply erred and sinned according to the norms set by Islam. They have not followed or obeyed the rules (of God), for which they will have to pay the penalty in the Hereafter. This is similar in nature to smoking. If a person smokes in a place where there is a “No Smoking” sign, he will have to pay the penalty, if caught. If he is not caught or if he smokes in his own home, he harms himself, as there is danger in smoking.

Drinking, too, is dangerous as can be seen from such slogans as “If you drive, don’t drink; and if you drink, don’t drive.” The newspapers are full of reports of people making a fool of themselves or getting into trouble with the law, causing accidents, even deaths, or even falling from high status – all because of drink-related offences.

An example of an incident in which the drinker made a fool of himself and got into trouble with the law was one reported in The Straits Times. Entitled “Passenger fined for biting buttock of SIA stewardess”, the report goes: “The (passenger) said he had taken four glasses of whisky when he bit the buttock of a Singapore Airlines stewardess... He pleaded guilty in a magistrate’s court yesterday to a molest charge and was fined \$1,200...In mitigation, (he) said that he was married about a month ago and had molested the stewardess while under the influence of drinks...”

This act was indeed a shameful one, not only to himself but also to his family and relatives. This incident would surely make him regret, and perhaps, he would even decide not to touch liquor again for the rest of his life.

So, if a Muslim is seen drinking or gambling or eating pork, the last being a remote case, it does not mean that he is progressive or superior to the other Muslims or that all Muslims should emulate his actions. If he does all these Islamically prohibited doings, he would most certainly not perform his daily prayers or fast in Ramadhan. In fact, if he still calls himself a Muslim, he should be ashamed of himself. He might as well not be a Muslim, so that he could free himself from having a guilty conscience.

If a Muslim fails to perform his duty as a Muslim in any way, be it a criminal offence or sexual misconduct, he is answerable for his (bad) actions to his community, country and God. This is a question of personal attitude or human failings. Every community has its black sheep.

Still, a person can change, as has happened to so many people. If non-Muslims can convert to Islam upon learning its beauty, why can't a non-practising Muslim become a practising Muslim later on in his life? Indeed, many have.

## **101. Does Islam instruct its followers to live a healthy life? If it does, how?**

To live in Islam is not merely preparing for the Hereafter, but also to live a complete way of life right here in this world. Hence, the question of gracious-living or healthy-living, which has become a much-discussed issue nowadays, is not new to Muslims. Healthy-living is part and parcel of Islam, introduced with the inception of Islam more than 14 centuries ago. As for the answer to this question, some of it are scattered throughout this book. However, to give a better focus to it, the following points are recapitulated:

### **Islamic Prayer**

The solat or Islamic prayer comprises both physical movement and mental concentration. Performed five times a day and at strategic points of the day, the obligatory solat and the voluntary solat, which are performed before and after the five obligatory solat, are a good means of promoting blood circulation as well as providing breathing and other physical exercises without any strenuousness, apart from the main objective of attaining spiritual upliftment. As the saying goes: anything done moderately and frequently is better than over-exertion at infrequent periods.

### **Prayer Ablution**

Before a Muslim performs his prayers, he does the ablution which comprises washing of the hands, arms right up to the elbow, face, mouth, nostrils, inside and behind the ears, all around the neck, part of the head above the forehead and the feet up to the ankle. Done five times a day, it not only cleanses these vital parts of the body from dust and dirt but also softens and refreshes them.

### **Eating wisely**

Muslims are urged to eat moderately. Prophet Muhammad said: "Muslims should be people who eat only when they are hungry." That is to say, unnecessary snacks taken in between meals should be avoided. The Prophet also said: "It is good to be always a little hungry." Thus over-eating can be avoided.

## **Forbidden food**

Pork is haram (forbidden) to Muslims for spiritual reasons. Incidentally pork has a high cholesterol level. Also, even non-Muslims affirm that it is dangerous to eat it if it is not cooked thoroughly because of the germs contained in the meat. Blood, of any animal, is also forbidden because of the germs it may carry. This is why Muslims slaughter livestock in such a way (with a deep slit at the neck's blood-vein using a sharp knife) as to drain off its blood.. Muslims also say a little prayer at the time of initiating the (sharp) knife to make their intention clear that the slaughtering is done for food (and not for sport, pleasure or some kind of offering as these are forbidden in Islam). If the animal is electrically stunned or plunged in boiling water, yes, it will kill the animal instantly but the blood will remain intact in its body. Halal (permissible) food, on the hand, is meant to enhance health and well-being.

## **Fasting**

The annual fasting in Ramadhan, apart from the spiritual and other self-control benefits derived from it, also has health benefits. It cleanses and relaxes the stomach and gives it a “rest from work”, for about 16 hours a day, for a month, once a year. Other than the Ramadhan fast, Muslims are encouraged to undertake voluntary fasting as much as they could at any time throughout the year. Some Muslims make it a point to fast every Monday and Thursday following the Sunnah (practice) of the Prophet. Fasting also makes a Muslim lose fat and unnecessary weight.

## **Circumcision**

Circumcision keeps the male organ clean and dry, and has hygienic and medical advantages. Silma Buckley, in her book “Islamic Parenting – the Natural Alternative”, says: “Circumcised men rarely suffers from the following: cancer of the penis, phimosis and para-phimosis – a swelling of the penis due to strictures of the foreskin and balanitis – inflammation of the gland of the penis.”

## **Cleanliness**

Muslims are urged to brush the teeth and bathe everyday. They are also urged to always wear clean clothes and keep the house neat and tidy.

Shoes and slippers are not only not worn in the mosque but also in the house because the under-side of these footwear (which have been worn outside) are never free from dirt and soil.

### **Washing after urination and defecation**

A Muslim is required to clean himself using water after urination and defecation. This has obvious great hygienic benefits. (This hygienic practice together with circumcision are responsible for the reduced number of cases of cervix cancer, piles and other diseases among Muslims.)

### **Insistence on marriage, modesty and chastity**

Islam advises its followers to adhere strictly to:

- **Modest dressing:** A woman's immodest dressing seen in person or depicted in pictures could heighten the sexual urge in spiritually weak men, and this could lead to rape, lewdness and other sexual corruption in society, and
- **No sex outside marriage:** this is why marriage is made obligatory on Muslims and sex outside marriage is forbidden. Sex outside marriage, namely pre-marital or extra-marital sex and other sexual relationships, is the cause of a host of sexually-transmitted diseases, including the deadly AIDS.

### **Prohibition on intoxicants**

Islam forbids indulgence in any intoxicants like alcohol, marijuana, drugs and glue-sniffing as all these can damage the well-being of a person in a number of ways. Alcohol, for instance, is reported to be the second most common cause of liver disease in Singapore. In the Straits Times article, "Alcohol No. 2 culprit in most liver diseases", Dr Roland Chong, says: "The people in the high-risk group include social drinkers, and people in the entertainment line who have to drink as part of their job." Intoxicants are not only harmful to the people indulging in it but also to other people and the society at large. Nowadays, Muslim scholars are also interpreting the Arabic word for "intoxicants" found in the Quran to include smoking because of its

dependence-inducing properties similar to the other intoxicants and inhalants as well as its obvious harm to the smoker and others around him.

If Muslims adhere to the teachings of Islam, they would automatically lead a healthy lifestyle.

## **102. What are the factors that help attract people to Islam?**

Briefly, the factors that help attract people to Islam are:

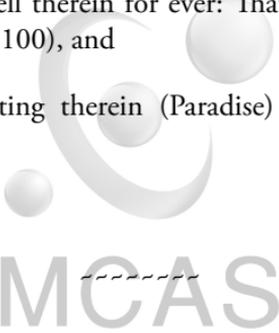
- Every aspects of Prophet Muhammad's life, even the exact date of his birth, is known. Nobody can say that his life was a myth,
- The people near to the Prophet and those of his own country were the first to acknowledge him and follow his teachings. This is important because logically they would be the ones who would understand him better. The first people to convert to Islam were his wife, Khadijah, his cousin, Ali, his closest friend, Abu Bakar, who later became the first Caliph, and one of his uncles, Hamzah. The Prophet's other Companions, too, converted to Islam soon after. The whole of Arabia, the country of the Prophet's birth, became Muslim within 30 years of the death of the Prophet,
- Rationality of the teachings of Islam. Islam is a simple and logical religion,
- The fact that Islam is not a new religion but the extension and completion of all the teachings of the various Prophets,
- The spirit of Islamic brotherhood and the absence of racial prejudice,

- The Quran has always been in the hands of the people (Muslims of all races). Although translations of the Quran are available, the word “Quran” only refers to the one in Arabic and Muslims usually have a copy of the Quran in their homes. In other words, the Words in this copy (in Arabic) found in Muslim homes are the same as revealed to and uttered by Prophet Muhammad and recorded as the Quran,
- The fact that today’s Quran (content wise) is the one and the same Quran seen and approved by the Prophet himself, with nothing altered or revised,
- The fact that the Quran could be read in a melodious way (hence, there is such a thing as Quran reading competitions) without the necessity of the accompaniment of musical instruments. There have been cases of non-Muslims being attracted to the sound of the Quranic words being read, thus furthering their interest in Islam,
- The conviction that the Quran is the (verbatim) Words of God after pondering over its contents and analysing the way it is rendered,
- The unnecessary of a priesthood class, mediators and intercessors between man and God. Every Muslim approaches God directly,
- Islam’s propagating message is: “Invite all to the way of thy Lord with wisdom.” (16:125) This is a gracious and intellectual way of inviting all people to God – by wisdom,
- In the final analysis, people realise that to be a Muslim is to be a good citizen (of any country) and, at the same time, believe in the One God with whom he would have to return at the end of his life on this earth.

Last but not least, God's promise of peace and felicity in the Hereafter is the most attractive feature of Islam. God knows that it is the nature of man to strive towards Him, and that he (man) yearns for an eternal life of peace and bliss.

God directly speaks to man thus:

- “O thou man! Verily thou art ever toiling on towards thy Lord – painfully toiling – but thou shalt meet Him!” (84:6),
- “To God is thy final return.” (24:42),
- “For them (those who believe and do righteousness) God has prepared Gardens under which rivers flow, to dwell therein for ever: That is the Supreme Felicity.” (9:100), and
- “Their greeting therein (Paradise) will be peace!” (14:23)



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# Notes



# Notes



Most Muslims feel that they have a responsibility to answer queries from non-Muslims adequately and sincerely to share Islam with them. They hope that sharing about Islam among their friends of other faiths will strengthen the friendship between Muslims and non-Muslims, enabling them to live in unanimity and wholesomeness.



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