

# **Our Faith**

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We believe in God. He is the essence of existence and the symbol of perfection and reason. He is the Absolute Truth, and this Truth is the source of our values. Without Him, existence would be futile, the universe would be at the mercy of random chance, and the human being would be nothing more than a developed super-animal.

This belief in God provides inspiration to the human soul. It is derived from His description in the Holy Qur'an. However, the descriptions we have of God in other monotheist books does not enrich this image of God; on the contrary, it may be harmful.

-II-

God's prophets are the real leaders of humanity. They must be taken as examples of leadership. Likewise, we should reject any admiration for other rulers, be they monarchs, emperors, tyrants, generals, etc.; they have imposed oppressive policies, thereby spoiling the ideals of rule and leadership, and causing much harm to humanity.

Religions are the revolutions that liberated people and set the foundations of civilization: liberty, goodness, justice, and knowledge.

We believe that we find the most complete image of God and the Prophet Muhammad in Islam. However, we also understand the images found in other religions, as we believe there was originally one religion, manifested in different faiths or religious beliefs. We believe in all of the prophets, and in the fact that God wanted plurality and diversity. (If He had wanted, he would have made one nation out of all people). The final word regarding the plurality belongs to God, at the Last Judgement.

-III-

We believe that religion is the major axis of Arab society, in that it is representative of history, civilization, and conscience. Ignoring religion would break communication with the people. We cannot deny that philosophy, literature, and art have replaced religion in Europe; each society has its own unique nature. However, this does not prevent the existence of religion alongside philosophy, literature, and art, nor does it prevent dialogue between civilizations: the exchange of ideas and convergence of religions. Wisdom is the goal of all believers.

We believe in the dignity of the human being, granted by God to all. No power can take this dignity away. It is for all people: men and women, rich and poor, black and white, etc. In the Holy Qur'an, this dignity is signified by the angel's prostration to Adam, and by human control over nature.

Islam has surpassed any international human rights conventions, both quantitatively and qualitatively. The least that can be done to ameliorate the human rights situation is the immediate application of these worldly conventions.

Also important is the liberty of will in Islam. The angels asked God, "Would Thou bring upon Earth whom might corrupt it and shed blood?" Satan's mission is to seduce human beings. However, humans have tools to help them overcome this seduction: a mind, a conscience, and the guidance of the Holy Scriptures. The final choice, however, is left for each human being himself.

This notion of liberty is what distinguishes humans from other creatures. Heaven and Earth both refused to assume the responsibility of liberty. The human being did choose to assume it, and life in Islam is therefore based on this free will.

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God ordered the angels to kneel before Adam because he possessed knowledge, i.e. that which distinguishes humans from

animals. Such knowledge saves the human being from superstition. The attainment of knowledge should be the main goal of Muslims, as should the honing of mental faculties, which in turn allows one to gain more wisdom. Every Islamic rule must spread knowledge and culture, as well as provide all with the means to access knowledge and skills of the modern age.

If religion did not consider wisdom and mind as primary foundations, it would be a tool for backwardness and deterioration, rather than one for progress and welfare. Superstitions would replace the truth, blind following would replace independent thought, and stagnation would replace progress.

This is the tragedy that befell Islamic society in its period of deterioration, and we should not allow this to be repeated. We cannot live in the 21st century with actual or intellectual illiteracy.

-V-

We believe that freedom of thought and expression is the basis for any kind of progress. Nothing should stand in the way of this basic liberty. We must face those who challenge the basic tenets of our faith by dialogue, rather than by dismissing their opinions, by terrorism, or by declaring them atheists. There is no contradiction between religion and the absolute liberty of thought; faith depends on will and conviction. Both of these need a friendly environment that encourages free exploration, free will, and critical examination. There are many verses in the Qur'an that call for the absolute liberty of faith and belief and that reinforce that it is a personal matter, one in which the ruling regime cannot interfere; e.g. "There is no compulsion in religion," "He that follows the right path follows it for his own good, and he that goes astray does so at his own peril."

Absolute freedom entails the liberty of the press, publication, political parties, trade unions, syndicates, and other social institutions. The liberty of such institutions enables them to work to achieve their goals as long as this done by peaceful means.

We absolutely reject the call of accusations of atheism or apostasy, and any punishment for rejecting one's faith. We leave this to God, at Doomsday, as ordained in the Qur'an and in the actions of the Prophet Muhammad.

As for the possible dangers and pitfalls of liberty, we believe that it is self-correcting; liberty itself would pave the way for redemption.

-VI-

For work and relationships to be stable, they must be based on justice. It must be the foundation of the interactions between ruler and ruled, employer and employee, capitalist and worker, man and woman. No group of people should be given authority that could infringe upon the rights and liberties of other groups. This injustice is akin to blasphemy; it should not be allowed.

Realization of justice entails the reevaluation of all religious texts concerned with worldly affairs, specifically with regards as to whether they achieve justice or not. Accepting justice and the general as criteria could result in the abolition or modification of an edict; the precedent for these changes are 'Umar Ibn Al-Khattab's interpretations.

-VII-

The real practical challenge faced by the Islamic countries today is economic, military, political, and social backwardness. This backwardness can be combatted by formulating development as a kind of *jihad*, i.e. a Islamic cultural battle. All people should be mobilized in this struggle for human development. The struggle begins with justice, followed by self-sufficiency.

Faith alone can generate enough energy to push progress and development forward, and at the same time overcoming all obstacles, thus negating the need for foreign investment that might lead to subordination to other powerful countries.

Any attempt at development that depends on the claims of the World Bank, or that imitates European and American patterns, will result in more backwardness, poverty, and confusion. Likewise, any attempt that is guided by rigid bureaucratic governments, without the basis of faith and public participation, and that benefits an elitist minority, is bound to fail.

-VIII-

Today, Muslims are stereotyped as passive, focused on rituals, and dwelling in the past. This is in direct contrast to the image of Muslims during the time of the Prophet Muhammad. Due to the short duration of this era, and that of the Prophet's four wise successors, the roots of the Islamic identity did not have time to sink deep enough. Immediately following this time was a corrupt and tyrannical hereditary caliphate, and for more than a thousand years, ignorance and tyranny spread. The result is the image of Islam that we have today, maintained by ruling regimes and religious institutions, characterized by a lack of efficiency and the promotion of acquired interests. We reject such an image and work for the Islamic revival.

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This Islamic revival can only be achieved by directly returning to the Holy Qur'an, by the rejection of old interpretations, by the reassessment of the *Sunna* vis-a-vis the Qur'an, and by the rejection of traditions that were influenced by historical contexts.

Our ancestors suffered through the ignorance and tyranny of rulers. This historical reality is reflected in their jurisprudence and interpretations of the Qur'an. This led to a conceptual imposition, contradicting the spirit of Islam. Originally, Islam was a call to bring people from the darkness of ignorance to the light of knowledge, as well as a call to set justice, goodness and liberty as values. These comprise the true spirit of Islam, whereas rituals are just an aspect thereof; their performance is useless without the underlying values.

As to the contemporary call for Islamic revival, it is more important re-revolutionize the Holy Qur'an than to reinterpret it, as per the example of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions. They did not occupy themselves with textual interpretation of the Qur'an, but rather established a movement had the most impact in reshaping the Old World. They also set the foundations of the Prophet Muhammad's divine and human civilization.

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Underscoring all of this is an elementary, yet often obscured, reality: every generation should live in its era without discarding the major values of Islam. We cannot resist the natural growth of people and nations, and indeed it is this growth that reinforces the universality, objectivity, and validity of Islam for all times and places. Islam does not monopolize wisdom, but rather tells us to seek wisdom wherever it is found: "The scum is cast away, but that which is of use to man remains behind." Hence, clinging to the past, isolation, blindly following old traditions, and the elevation of these traditions as ideal norms, the rejection of modern things (especially art and literature), and the treatment of women as inferior and their confinement to harems all contradict the essence of Islam and its universal validity. As well, they contradict God's will, as He says in the Holy Qur'an: "Men, we have created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you might get to know one another." A Muslim need not fear being overwhelmed by modern civilization, as a Muslim is bound to God and his prophet, and therefore has values that protect his identity.

## Epilogue

We are at the crossroads of history, as were our ancestors when they systematized Islamic knowledge (Qur'anic interpretation, jurisprudence, *Hadith* studies, etc.) in the first three centuries of Islam. This knowledge system was the foundation a flourishing Islamic civilization, but the system's shortcomings did not appear until later

eras, and partly led to the deterioration of the Islamic Society over hundreds of years. Old traditions and heritage cannot cope with contemporary problems. Today, we have to reestablish the system of Islamic knowledge, with the goal of concentration on the human being, i.e. to lead him from darkness into light, and to set the values of equality, justice, liberty, goodness, knowledge, etc., as the foundations of society. We believe that we are competent to assume this great mission; our culture and knowledge surpasses that of our ancestors. It is useless to undermine our abilities by clinging to the traditions of our ancestors; this contradicts the following Qur'anic verse "If it is said to follow what God has ordained, they say nay, we will follow what our ancestors did." As well, when blindly follow our ancestors, we do not fully use our mental faculties; these are an honorable gift from God to humans, particularly now, in the scientific era. We are not obliged to follow ancestral traditions, no matter how familiar they may be.

The reestablishment of the system of Islamic knowledge entails rejecting previous interpretations of the Qur'an, from Ibn 'Abbas to Sayed Qutb, and the engagement with the text of the Qur'an itself, as well as the use of the Qur'an to reassess the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, in order to identify false sayings.

The Holy Qur'an says that wisdom is a major tenet of Islam. It is the valid 'open door' between Islam and any era, and we can all share in it without fear. We should not fear deviance as long as we take the Holy Qur'an as our source of guidance.