

culmination of a very old one. Nor does it think of itself as a "religion," if by that word we mean a set of beliefs and actions sealed off from the rest of our worldly business. Rather, Islam sees itself as an all-embracing way of life. Contained within its teaching of the path to God is guidance for the entire range of human life—social, political, and economic.

The two basic sources for the Islamic tradition are the *Qur'an*¹ itself and the hadiths or "traditions" of Muhammad. The latter are reports of the sayings and deeds of the Prophet by those who knew him. Accordingly, most of the selections below belong either to the *Qur'an* or to the hadiths, with a final section of Grace Notes paying tribute to the spirit of Islamic mysticism or Sufism.

THE QUR'AN: Suras of Mecca and Medina

Over the twenty-three-year period in which the *Qur'an* was revealed to Muhammad, he resided first at Mecca as the embattled Prophet of embryonic Islam, and then at Medina as the respected leader of an established Islamic community. The suras, or chapters, of the *Qur'an* are often classified according to these two loci of revelation. The earlier Meccan suras are highly oracular utterances concerning the unity, glory, and power of God, the moral responsibility of human beings, and the coming end of the world and judgment of humankind. The later Medinan suras, while including these themes, are more prosaic dictates regarding legal and social matters and the general conduct of life. Unlike its cousins, the Hebrew Bible and the Christian New Testament, the holy *Qur'an* contains little narrative. There is no story of a people's movement across time and space as there is in the Hebrew Bible, no story of God's incarnation as we find in the New Testament.

The reader should note that in the *Qur'an* God refers to himself interchangeably as "We," "He," and "I." All of the verses of the *Qur'an*

1. Throughout this book I have tried to select passages that edify as well as instruct. One feels that nowhere is this task more difficult than in the case of the *Qur'an*. Its power resides not only in the meanings of its words but in the untranslatable lyrical beauty of its Arabic original. Anyone trying to get a feel for Islam is well advised to hear the *Qur'an* recited.

are to be understood as the direct speech of God, not of Muhammad. Muhammad was the *Qur'an's* conduit, not its author.

1. Suras of Mecca

Of the headings in this section only numbers a and h reflect the actual titles of the suras in the *Qur'an*. The other headings are mine, used for descriptive purposes.

a. The Fatihah (Opening)

This sura has been called the very essence of the *Qur'an*.

In the Name of God, the merciful Lord of mercy.
Praise be to God, the Lord of all being,
The merciful Lord of mercy,
Master of the Day of Judgment.
You alone we serve and to You alone we come for aid.
Guide us in the straight path,
The path of those whom You have blessed,
Not of those against whom there is displeasure,
Nor of those who have gone astray.

b. The First Verses Revealed to Muhammad

RECITE, in the Name of your Lord who created,
Created man from a sperm-cell.
Recite, how altogether gracious is your Lord,
who taught by the pen, taught man what he knows not.

c. God Celebrates the Night of His First Revelation to Muhammad

Truly we revealed the *Qur'an* on the night of authority.
Would that you knew what the night of authority means!
Better than a thousand months is the night of authority.
Thereon come the angels and the Spirit down,
By leave of their Lord, for every behest.
It is a night of peace until the breaking of the day.

d. God Begets Not, Nor Is He Begotten

In the name of the merciful Lord of mercy. Say:
 "He is God, One, God the ever self-sufficing,
 He begets not, nor is begotten.
 None is like unto Him."

e. Say: I Take Refuge in God

In the name of the merciful Lord of mercy. Say:
 "I take refuge with the Lord of men,
 The King of men, the God of men,
 From the evil of the whispering insinuator
 Who whispers in the hearts of men,
 From jinn² and men."

f. God, the Creator, Knows All

Praise the Name of your Lord most high, He who created and fashioned, He who measured and guided, who caused the pasture to spring forth and then turned its green to decay. We will cause you to recite: so forget not, except as God wills. For He knows what is uttered and what is concealed. . . .

g. Death and Judgment

. . . Death to man! how thankless he is! From what did God create him? From a drop of sperm He made him and ordered his being, facilitating his course, and then of God comes his dying and his being laid in the grave. Then, when he wills, He brings him forth to life again.

. . . When the resurrection trump is heard, on a day when a man shall flee from his brother, his mother, and his father, from his wife and children—on that day every human living will have more than enough on his hands. On that day there will be shining faces, blithe

2. Invisible demons and spirits, mainly malevolent but sometimes helpful to human beings. The English word *genie* originates here.

with joy, and there will be faces blackened with dust—the faces of the faithless and the graceless.

h. The Earthquake

When Earth is rocked in her last convulsion; when Earth shakes off her burdens and man asks, "What may this mean?"—on that day she will proclaim her tidings, for your Lord will have inspired her.

On that day mankind will come in broken bands to be shown their labours. Whoever does an atom's weight of good shall see it, and whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it also.

2. A Sura of Medina

Medinan suras tend to be much longer than Meccan suras. Below are selections from the longest Medinan sura, Sura 2, with my own sub-headings. Other examples of the content of Medinan suras may be found in selection 10, "Social Matters."

a. On Eating

Believers! Eat of the good things with which We have provided you and give thanks to God—if indeed it is His worshippers you are! However, carrion, blood, and the meat of swine are prohibited to you as well as that over which any other name than God's has been invoked. But if anyone is driven by necessity, without deliberate intent and not going beyond his need, there will be no sin incurred by him. God is forgiving and merciful.

b. On Wills

. . . It is decreed that when death approaches, those of you that leave property shall bequeath it equitably to parents and kindred. This is a duty incumbent upon the righteous. He that alters a will after hearing it shall be accountable for his crime. God hears all and knows all.

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

c. On Fasting

You who have believed, fasting is decreed for you as it was for those who came before you, with a view to a deep sense among you of devotion to God. . . . When anyone, of his own free will, outdoes what is enjoined that is certainly to his own good. For when you fast, you do good to yourselves, did you but realise it.

d. On Almsgiving

Whatever alms you give shall rebound to your own advantage, provided that you give them for the love of God. And whatever alms you give shall be paid back to you in full: you shall not be wronged.

As for those needy men who, being wholly preoccupied with fighting for the cause of God, cannot travel the land in quest of trading ventures: the ignorant take them for men of wealth on account of their modest behavior. But you can recognize them by their look—they never importune men for alms. Whatever alms you give are known to God.

Those who give alms by day and by night, in private and in public, shall be rewarded by their Lord. They shall have nothing to fear or to regret.

e. On Debts and Transactions

Those that live on usury shall rise up before God like men whom Satan has demented by his touch; for they claim that trading is no different from usury. But God has permitted trading and made usury unlawful. . . .

God has laid His curse on usury and blessed almsgiving with increase. God bears no love for the impious and the sinful.

. . . If your debtor be in straits, grant him a delay until he can discharge his debt; but if you waive the sum as alms it will be better for you, if you but knew it.

. . . Believers, when you contract a debt for a fixed period, put it in writing. Let a scribe write it down for you with fairness; no scribe should refuse to write as God has taught him. Therefore, let him write; and let the debtor dictate, fearing God his Lord and not diminishing the sum he owes. If the debtor be a feeble-minded or

ignorant person, or one who cannot dictate, let his guardian dictate for him in fairness. Call in two male witnesses from among you, but if two men cannot be found, then one man and two women whom you judge fit to act as witnesses; so that if either of them commit an error, the other will remember. Witnesses must not refuse to give evidence if called upon to do so. So do not fail to put your debts in writing, be they small or big, together with the date of payment. This is more just in the sight of God; it ensures accuracy in testifying and is the best way to remove all doubt. But if the transaction in hand be a bargain concluded on the spot, it is no offence for you if you do not commit it to writing.

See that witnesses are present when you barter with one another, and let no harm be done to either scribe or witness. If you harm them you shall commit a transgression. Have fear of God, who teaches you: God has knowledge of all things.

If you are travelling the road and a scribe cannot be found, then let pledges be taken. If any one of you entrusts another with a pledge, let the trustee restore the pledge to its owner; and let him fear God, his Lord.

You shall not withhold testimony. He that withholds it is a transgressor. God has knowledge of all your actions.

THE QUR'AN: Selections Thematically Arranged**3. The Unimpeachability of the Qur'an**

This Book is not to be doubted. It is a guide for the righteous, who have faith in the unseen and are steadfast in prayer.

People of the Book! Our apostle has come to reveal to you much of what you have hidden in the Scriptures, and to forgive you much. A light has come to you from God and a glorious Book, with which He will guide to the paths of peace those that seek to please Him; He will lead them by His will from darkness to the light; He will guide them to a straight path.

And to you [Muslims] We have revealed the Book with the truth. It confirms the Scriptures which came before it and stands as a guardian over them.

4. The Inimitability of the Qur'an

Muslims emphasize that the Qur'an came through Muhammad, not from him. God alone is its author.

If you are in doubt of what We have revealed to Our Servant, produce one chapter comparable to it.

If they say: "He [Muhammad] invented it himself," say: "Bring me one chapter like it. Call on whom you may besides Allah to help you, if what you say be true!"

5. The Five Elements of Islamic Faith (*Iman*)

Islamic faith affirms and celebrates five holy realities: The Godhead Itself and Its Unity; Angels; Scriptures, and Messengers; the Last Day; and the Divine Will and Providence.³

Believers, have faith in God and His apostle, in the Book He has revealed to His Apostle, and in the Scriptures He formerly revealed. He that denies God, His angels, His scriptures, His apostles, and the Last Day, has gone far astray.

a. The Nature of God

One and Infinitely Aware

Say: "God is One, the Eternal God. He begot none, nor was He begotten. None is equal to Him."

Say: "Praise be to God who has never begotten a son; who has no partner in His Kingdom; who needs none to defend Him from humiliation." Proclaim His greatness.

Are sundry gods better than God, the One who conquers all? Those whom you serve besides Him are nothing but names which you and your fathers have devised and for which God has revealed no sanction. Judgement rests only with God. He has commanded you to worship none but Him. That is the true faith: yet most men do not know it.

³ The Arabic is *al-qada wa'l-qadar*, "divine decree and predestination."

God, there is none but He, the alive, the ever real. Slumber takes Him not, nor sleep. Everything in the heavens and earth is his, and who—His leave apart—shall intercede with Him? He knows everything that mankind have presently in hand and everything about them that is yet to be. Of a knowledge like His they are entirely uncomprehending—unless he gives them leave to know. In the vastness of the heavens and the earth His Throne is established. Tirelessly He preserves them. So great is His majesty.

God is his own witness that there is no God but He. Angels bear witness also and those of discerning mind. He is the arbiter of justice. There is no god but He, infinite in power and wisdom.

Such is God your Lord. There is no God but He, Creator of all things. Then worship Him who is guardian over all there is. No human perception comprehends Him, while He comprehends all perception. He is beyond all conceiving, the One who is infinitely aware.

All that is in the heavens and in the earth magnifies God. He is the all-strong, the all-wise. To Him belongs the kingdom of the heavens and of the earth. He gives life and He brings on death and He is omnipotent over all things. He is the first and the last, the manifest and the hidden, and has knowledge over all things. It is He who created the heavens and the earth in six days and then assumed his Throne. He knows all that permeates the ground and all that issues from it, what comes down from the heaven and what ascends thither. He is with you wherever you are. God is aware of all you do.

His is the kingdom of the heavens and of the earth and to Him all things return. He makes the night to give way to the day and the day to the night and He knows the innermost heart.

Closer than Our Jugular Vein

We created man. We know the promptings of his soul, and are closer to him than his jugular vein.

God's Glorious Names

God has the Most Excellent Names. Call on Him by His names and keep away from those that pervert them.

Say: "It is the same whether you call on God or on the Merciful: His are the most gracious names."

He is God, the Creator, the Originator, the Modeller. . . . All that is in heaven and earth gives glory to Him. He is the Mighty, the Wise One.

From the Traditional Ninety-nine Names of Allah:

Al-Qabid (<i>The Constrictor</i>)	Al-Basit (<i>The Expander</i>)
Al-Khafid (<i>The Abaser</i>)	Ar-Rafi' (<i>The Exalter</i>)
Al-Hadi (<i>The Guide</i>)	As-Sabur (<i>The Patient</i>)
Al-Muntaqim (<i>The Avenger</i>)	Al-'Afuw (<i>The Pardoner</i>)
Al-Mumit (<i>The Creator of Death</i>)	As-Samad (<i>The Eternal</i>)
Al-Mujib (<i>The Responsive</i>)	Al-Wadud (<i>The Loving</i>)
Al-Wakil (<i>The Trustee</i>)	Al-Ghafur (<i>The All-Forgiving</i>)
Al-Wali (<i>The Protecting Friend</i>)	Al-Muhyi (<i>The Giver of Life</i>)
Al-Muhsi (<i>The Reckoner</i>)	Al-Mubdi (<i>The Originator</i>)
Al-Awwal (<i>The First</i>)	Al-Akhir (<i>The Last</i>)
Az-Zahir (<i>The Manifest</i>)	Al-Batin (<i>The Hidden</i>)
Al-Khaliq (<i>The Creator</i>)	Al-Bari' (<i>The Evolver</i>)
Ar-Rahman (<i>The Beneficent</i>)	Ar-Rahim (<i>The Merciful</i>)

Bismi'llah and Insha'llah

Every sura of the *Qur'an* begins, "In the name of God [Allah], The Compassionate, the Merciful"; likewise, Muslims undertake many daily actions with the invocation "bismi'llah," "In the name of Allah." When speaking about their intentions for the near or distant future Muslims often append the phrase "insha'llah" or "If Allah wills it."

Bismi'llah Ar-Rahman Ar-Rahim (In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful)

Do not say of anything: "I will do it tomorrow," without adding: "If Allah wills" [*insha'llah*]. When you forget, remember your Lord and say: "May Allah guide me and bring me nearer to the Truth."

b. Angels

Whoever is an enemy of God, His angels, or His apostles, or of Gabriel or Michael, will surely find that God is the enemy of the unbelievers.

The Apostle believes in what has been revealed to him by his Lord, and so do the faithful. They all believe in God and His angels. . . .

c. God Reveals Scripture and Sends Messengers and Prophets

Scriptures

We have revealed the Torah, in which there is guidance and light. By it the prophets who surrendered themselves judged the Jews . . . according to God's Book which had been committed to their keeping and to which they themselves were witnesses.

. . . After them We sent forth Jesus, the son of Mary, confirming the Torah already revealed, and gave him the Gospel, in which there is guidance and light, corroborating what was revealed before it in the Torah, a guide and an admonition to the righteous. . . .

. . . And to you [Muslims] We have revealed the Book with the truth. It confirms the Scriptures which came before it and stands as a guardian over them.

A Prophet for Each Nation

An apostle is sent to every nation. When their apostle comes, justice is done among them; they are not wronged.

We raised an apostle in every nation, saying: "Serve [the One] God and keep away from false gods."

Islam's Continuity with the Prophetic Traditions of Judaism and Christianity

Say: "We believe in God and that which is revealed to us; in what was revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the tribes; to Moses and Jesus and the other prophets by their Lord.

We make no distinction among any of them, and to Allah we have surrendered ourselves."

God Recognizes the Righteous Irrespective of Sect

There are among the People of the Book some upright persons who all night long recite the revelations of God and worship Him; who believe in God and the Last Day; who enjoin justice and forbid evil and vie with each other in good works. These are righteous people: whatever good they do, its reward shall not be denied them. God knows the righteous.

d. The Last Day and Final Judgment

There are well over one hundred mentions of the Judgment Day in the Qur'an. They underscore Muslims' profound belief in a divine and universal justice that weighs every human act.

Every soul shall taste death, and in the end you shall return to Us.

The day will surely come when each soul will be confronted with whatever good it has done. As for its evil deeds, it will wish they were a long way off.

God will wrong none by an atom's weight. A good deed He will repay twofold.

They ask you about the Hour of Doom and when it will come. Say: "None knows except my Lord. He alone will reveal it—at the appointed time. A fateful hour it shall be, both in the heavens and on earth. It will overtake you without warning."

They will put questions to you as though you had full knowledge of it. Say: "None but God has knowledge of it, though most men are unaware of this."

To God belong the secrets of the heavens and the earth. The business of the Final Hour shall be accomplished in the twinkling of an eye, or in a shorter time. God has power over all things.

The fate of each man We have bound about his neck. On the Day of Resurrection, We shall confront him with a book spread

wide open, saying: "Here is your book: read it. Enough for you this day that your own soul should call you to account."

Tell of the day when We shall blot out the mountains and make the earth a barren waste; when We shall gather all mankind together, leaving not a soul behind.

They shall be ranged before your Lord, and He will say to them: "You have returned to Us as We created you at first. Yet you supposed We had not set for you a predestined time."

Their book will be laid down, and you shall see the sinners dismayed at the content. They will say: "Woe to us! What can this book mean? It omits nothing small or great: all is noted down!" and they shall find their deeds recorded there. Your Lord will wrong none.

... But on the Day of Resurrection He will hold the entire earth in his grasp and fold up the heavens in His right hand. Glory be to Him! Exalted be He above their idols!

The Trumpet shall be sounded, and all who are in heaven and earth shall fall down fainting, except those that shall be spared by God. Then the Trumpet will be blown again and they shall rise and gaze around them. The earth will shine with the light of her Lord, and the Book will be laid open. The prophets and witnesses shall be brought in, and all shall be judged with fairness: none shall be wronged. Every soul shall be paid back according to its deeds, for He best knows all that they did.

When the sky is rent asunder; when the stars scatter and the oceans roll together; when the graves are hurled about; each soul shall know what it has done and what it has failed to do.

It is We who will resurrect the dead. We record the deeds of men and the marks they leave behind. We note all things in a glorious book.

For the Believers: Paradise

These shall have a blissful end. They shall enter the gardens of Eden, together with the righteous. . . . From every gate the angels will come to them, saying: "Peace be to you for all that you have steadfastly endured. Blessed is the reward of Paradise."

Every ellipsis in the following passage marks a place in the original where the question "Which of your Lord's blessings would you deny?" is repeated.

But for those that fear the majesty of their Lord there are two gardens. . . . They shall recline on couches lined with thick brocade, and within reach will hang the fruits of both gardens. . . . Therein are bashful virgins whom neither man nor jinnee [spirits] will have touched before. . . . Virgins as fair as corals and rubies. . . . Shall the reward of goodness be anything but good? . . . And beside these there shall be two other gardens. . . . of darkest green. . . . A gushing fountain shall flow in each. . . . Each planted with fruit-trees, the palm and the pomegranate. . . . In each there shall be virgins chaste and fair. . . . Dark-eyed virgins sheltered in their tents. . . . whom neither man nor jinnee will have touched before. . . . They shall recline on green cushions and fine carpets. Which of your Lord's blessings would you deny?

God will deliver [the righteous] from the evil of that day, and make their faces shine with joy. He will reward them for their steadfastness with robes of silk and the delights of Paradise. Reclining there upon soft couches, they shall feel neither the scorching heat nor the biting cold.

. . . They shall be served with silver dishes, and beakers as large as goblets; silver goblets which they themselves shall measure: and cups brim-full with ginger-flavored water from a fount called *Sal-sabil*. They shall be attended by boys graced with eternal youth, who to the beholder's eyes will seem like sprinkled pearls. When you gaze upon that scene, you will behold a kingdom blissful and glorious.

For the Faithless: Hell

Those who have denied the Book and the message We sent through Our apostles shall realize the truth hereafter: when with chains and shackles round their necks, they shall be dragged through scalding water and burnt in the fire of Hell.

They will be asked: "Where are the gods whom you have served besides God?"

"They have forsaken us," they will reply. "Indeed, they were nothing, those gods to whom we prayed." Thus God confounds the unbelievers.

And they will be told: "That is because on earth you took delight in falsehoods, and led a wanton life. Enter the gates of Hell and stay therein for ever. Evil is the home of the arrogant."

Those that deny Our revelations We will burn in fire. No sooner will their skins be consumed than We shall give them other skins, so that they may truly taste the scourge.

. . . Scalding water shall be poured upon their heads, melting their skins and that which is in their bellies.

. . . Whenever in their anguish, they try to escape from Hell, back they shall be dragged, and will be told: "Taste the torment of the Conflagration!"

e. The Divine Will and Providence

Creator of the heavens and the earth! When He decrees a thing, He need only say "Be," and it is.

Say: "Grace is in the hands of God: He bestows it on whom He will. God is munificent and all-knowing. . . . God's grace is infinite."

If God afflicts you with a misfortune none can remove it but He; and if He bestows on you a favour, none can withhold His bounty. He is bountiful to whom He will. He is the Forgiving One, the Merciful.

We charge no soul with more than it can bear. Our Book records the truth; none shall be wronged.

If you reckoned up God's favors you could not count them.

God alone has knowledge of the Hour of Doom. He sends down the abundant rain and knows what every womb contains.

No mortal knows what he will earn tomorrow; no mortal knows where he will breathe his last. God alone is wise and all-knowing.

Have they never observed sky above them, and marked how We built it up and furnished it with ornaments, leaving no crack in its expanse?

We spread out the earth and set upon it immovable mountains. We brought forth from it all kinds of delectable plants. A lesson and an admonition to penitent men.

We send down blessed water from the sky with which We bring forth gardens and the harvest grain, and tall palm trees laden with clusters of dates, a sustenance for men; thereby giving new life to some dead land. Such shall be the Resurrection.

6. The Five Pillars of Islam

These are the five religious practices enjoined upon all Muslims.

a. Recitation of the *Shahadah* (Testimony)

La ilaha illa'llah (There is no god but God)

Muhammadan rasulu'llah (Muhammad is His Messenger)

b. *Zakat* or Alms-Levy: The Compulsory Annual Giving of a Portion of One's Holdings to Those in Need

The alms-levy, an annual duty, is different from ordinary charity (sadaqah), which the Muslim is enjoined to give generously and often. Compare with selections 10b and 23 below.

Attend to your prayers and render the alms-levy. Whatever good you do shall be rewarded by Allah. God is watching over all your actions.

Alms shall be only for the poor and the helpless, for those that are engaged in the management of alms and those whose hearts are sympathetic to the Faith, for the freeing of slaves and debtors, for the advancement of God's cause, and for the traveller in need. That is a duty enjoined by God. God is all-knowing and wise.

To be charitable in public is good, but to give alms to the poor in private is better and will atone for some of your sins. God has knowledge of all your actions.

Believers, give in alms of the wealth you have lawfully earned and of that which We have brought out of the earth for you; not worthless things which you yourselves would but reluctantly accept.

c. *Salat* or Daily Prayer

Exhortations to Prayer

Fortify yourselves with patience and prayer. This may indeed be an exacting discipline, but not to the devout, who know that they will meet their Lord and that to Him they will return.

Glory be to God in the evening and morning of your days. His be the praise in the heavens and in the earth, alike in the day's decline and when high noon is upon you.

Remember your Lord deep in your soul with humility and reverence, and without ostentation: in the morning and in the evening; and do not be negligent.

Praise him day and night, so that you may find comfort.

*The Call to Prayer (Adhan)*⁴

Allahu akbar (God is most great) (four times)

Ashhadu an la ilaha illa Allah (I testify that there is no god but God) (twice)

Ashhadu anna Muhammadan rasul Allah (I testify that Muhammad is the Messenger of God) (twice)

Hayya 'ala al-salat (Hurry to prayer) (twice)

Hayya 'ala al-falah (Hurry to betterment) (twice)

Allahu akbar (God is most great) (twice)

La ilaha illa Allah (I testify that there is no god but God)

The Prayer Itself

In the course of the day some prayers are said silently, some aloud. During each prayer time the Muslim moves through the postures of standing, bowing, prostrating, and sitting on one's heels, while reciting one or more rak'a or units of prayer. These rak'a center in the Fatihah; the introductions and conclusions that bracket it can vary from the one given here.

God is Most Great.

Recitation of the Fatihah or opening sura of the Qur'an (see 1a).

4. This is a basic *adhan*. There are variations according to whether one is a Sunni or Shi'i Muslim.

Recitation of another short passage or sura from the Qur'an.

God is most great (aloud)
 Glory be to my Lord, the Almighty (three times silently)
 God hears those who call upon him (aloud)
 Our Lord, praise be to Thee (silently)
 God is most great (aloud)
 Glory be to my Lord, the Most High (silently, three times,
 while prostrating)
 God is most great (aloud) (lifting to a sitting position)
 Glory be to my Lord, the Most High (silently, three times,
 while prostrating)

The Direction of Mecca

Many a time we have seen you [Muhammad] turn your face towards heaven. We will make you turn towards a *qiblah* [direction] that will please you. Turn your face towards the Holy Mosque; wherever you [the faithful] be, turn your faces towards it.

Dhikr: Repeated Invocation of God's Name

Perhaps the important practice of Muslim contemplatives, or Sufis, is the continuous invocation of Allah's name. (See number 19.) Verses of the Qur'an that mention "remembrance of God" authorize this practice.

Believers, be ever mindful of God. . . .

Surely in remembrance of God are all hearts comforted.

When you forget, remember your Lord and say: "May God guide me and bring me nearer to the Truth."

Remember Me, then, and I will remember you.

d. Sawm, or Fasting, During the Month of Ramadan

The month of Ramadan was the time in which the Qur'an was sent down as guidance for mankind. . . . So then, any of you, observing the incidence of the month, let him take up the fast throughout it. . . .

. . . The fast proceeds through a set period of days. Any of your number who is sick or on a journey must observe a like sequence of other days and, in the event of their being able to undertake the

feeding of some needy person, that may be for them a way of making it good.

e. Hajj: Pilgrimage to Mecca and the Ka'ba

The Founding of the Ka'ba

For Muslims the holiest place in creation is a cubical building, the Ka'ba, in the center of the Great Mosque at Mecca. Islamic tradition attributes the founding of the Ka'ba to the biblical Abraham and his son Ishmael. The culmination of the pilgrimage to Mecca is a ritual circumambulation of the Ka'ba.

We made a House [Ka'ba], a resort and a sanctuary for mankind, saying: "Make the place where Abraham stood a house of worship." We enjoined Abraham and Ishmael to cleanse our House for those who walk round it, who meditate in it, and who kneel and prostrate themselves. . . .

Abraham and Ishmael built the House and dedicated it, saying: "Accept this from us, Lord. You are the One that hears all and knows all. . . ."

Injunctions to Perform the Hajj

Make the pilgrimage and visit the sacred House for His sake.

Exhort all [people] to make the pilgrimage. They will come to you on foot and on the backs of swift camels from every distant quarter; they will come to avail themselves of many a benefit, and to pronounce on the appointed days the name of God over the cattle which He has given them for food. Eat of their flesh, and feed the poor and the unfortunate.

Then let the pilgrims spruce themselves, make their vows, and circle the Ancient House. Such is God's commandment.

7. Shirk (Idolatry): The Cardinal Error

Islam, like Judaism and Christianity, condemns idolatry, a condemnation that at its deepest level is a warning not to enslave oneself to anything less than God.

God will not forgive those who serve other gods besides Him; but He will forgive whom He will for other sins. He that serves other gods besides Him is guilty of a heinous sin.

God has said: "You shall not serve two gods, for He is but one God. Fear none but Me."

Set up no other deity besides God. I come from him to warn you plainly.

Say: "I will pray to my Lord and worship none besides Him."

8. *Jihad* (Exertion, Struggle, Holy War)

Muslims are commanded not to be aggressors. Moreover, a well-known saying attributed to Muhammad states that the lesser jihad is the struggle with an external enemy, while the true or greater jihad is the struggle with oneself. See no. 21j.

Fight for the sake of God those that fight against you, but do not attack them first. God does not love the aggressors.

Permission to take up arms is hereby given to those who are attacked, because they have been wronged.

[But if they attack you] slay them wherever you find them. Drive them out of the places from which they drove you. Idolatry is worse than carnage. . . . Thus shall the unbelievers be rewarded: but if they mend their ways, know that God is Forgiving and Merciful.

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

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

God's Promise to Martyrs

As for those who are slain in the cause of God, He will not allow their works to perish. He will vouchsafe them guidance and en-

noble their state; He will admit them to the Paradise he has made known to them.

9. There Shall Be No Compulsion in Religion

The following verse is often cited to correct the mistaken impression that Islam has a mandate to convert by force. The historical record of Islam's tolerance of other faiths is uneven, but the religious freedoms of Jews and Christians, for example, have on balance fared well under Islamic rule.

There shall be no compulsion in religion. True guidance is now distinct from error. He that renounces idol-worship and puts his faith in God shall grasp a firm handle that will never break. God hears all and knows all.

10. Social Matters

a. Believers Are a Single Community

Your [community] is but one [community], and I am Your only Lord. Therefore serve Me. People have divided themselves into factions, but to Us they shall all return.

b. Supererogatory Charity (*Sadaqah*)⁵

Your wealth and your children are but a temptation. God's reward is great. Therefore fear God with all your hearts, and be attentive, obedient and charitable. That will be best for you.

Those that preserve themselves from their own greed will surely prosper.

If the debtor be in straits, grant him a delay until he can discharge his debt; but if you waive the sum as alms it will be better for you, if you but knew it.

5. Compare with nos. 21 and 23.

Show kindness to parents and kindred, to orphans and to the helpless, to near and distant neighbors, to those that keep company with you, to the traveller in need . . . God does not love the arrogant and boastful men, who are themselves niggardly and enjoin others to be niggardly; who conceal the riches which God of His bounty has bestowed upon them . . . and who spend their wealth for the sake of ostentation. . . .

. . . The righteous . . . give sustenance to the poor man, the orphan, and the captive, saying: "We feed you for God's sake only; we seek of you neither recompense nor thanks."

c. Kindness to Parents

Your Lord has enjoined you. . . to show kindness to your parents. If either or both of them attain old age in your dwelling, show them no sign of impatience, nor rebuke them; but speak to them kind words. Treat them with humility and tenderness and say: "Lord, be merciful to them. They nursed me when I was an infant."

d. Rights of Women

The Qur'an improved the situation of women in the ancient Arabian world. Girl-child infanticide was outlawed (see 10m[7] and 28), protections including divorce rights were sanctioned (see 10f[11]), and women were given inheritance rights for the first time (see 10i).

It would be wrong to say that Muslim feminists see the Qur'an as unproblematic. Nevertheless, many see it as an ally rather than an enemy: "Muslim thinkers, and especially feminists . . . have found [the Qur'an] often to be at odds with the frankly male chauvinist institutions and customs of Islamic societies since early times."⁶ The Qur'an

6. Frederick M. Denny, *An Introduction to Islam*, 2d ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1994), 352. Professor Denny rightly adds, "The emancipation of women in Western countries is a relatively recent development and is still unfolding. So when Westerners heap criticism on Islam and Muslims for their sex and gender customs and practices, they often forget that their own histories have contained similarly unjust and abusive assumptions and practices that do not reflect the highest aspirations of their faiths' teachings" (352).

explicitly asserts that men and women are equal before God and enjoy the same religious duties and privileges, as per the first selection below.

For Muslim men and women—
For believing men and women,
For devout men and women,
For truthful men and women,
For men and women who are
Patient and constant, for men
And women who humble themselves,
For men and women who give
In charity, for men and women
Who fast (and deny themselves),
For men and women who
Engage much in Allah's praise—
For them has Allah prepared
Forgiveness and great reward.

Believers, it is unlawful for you to inherit the women of your deceased kinsmen against their will, or to bar them from remarrying. . . . Treat them with kindness. . . .

• Lodge them in your own homes, according to your means. You shall not harass them so as to make life intolerable for them. If they are with child, maintain them until the end of their confinement; and if, after that, they give suck to the infants they bore you, give them their pay and consult together in all reasonableness.

Believers, if you marry believing women and divorce them before the marriage is consummated, you have no right to require them to observe a waiting period. Provide well for them and release them honourably.

Widows shall wait, keeping themselves apart from men for four months and ten days after their husband's death. When they have reached the end of their waiting period, it shall be no offence for you to let them do whatever they choose for themselves, provided that it is decent.

The following selection will seem out of place under "Rights of Women." It is cited to avoid misrepresenting the complexity of this issue and also

to lead the reader to its footnote, a fine example of contemporary Qur'anic commentary.

Men have authority over women because Allah has made the one superior to the other, and because they spend their wealth to maintain them. Good women are obedient. They guard their unseen parts because Allah has guarded them. As for those from whom you fear disobedience, admonish them and send them to beds apart and beat them.⁷ Then if they obey you, take no further action against them.

e. Marriage Restrictions on Men

You shall not marry the women whom your fathers married: all previous such marriages excepted. That was an evil practice, indecent and abominable.

Forbidden to you are your mothers, your daughters, your sisters, your paternal and maternal aunts, the daughters of your brothers and sisters, your foster-mothers, your foster-sisters, the mothers of your wives, your step-daughters who are in your charge, born of the wives with whom you have lain (it is no offence for you to marry your step-daughters if you have not consummated your marriage with their mothers), and the wives of your own begotten sons. You are also forbidden to take in marriage two sisters at one and the same time: all previous such marriages excepted. God is Forgiving and Merciful.

[Forbidden also are] married women. . . . Such is the decree of Allah. All women other than these are lawful to you, provided you seek them with your wealth, in modest conduct, not in fornication.

7. Many Traditions (*hadith*) suggest that the Prophet himself detested the idea of husbands beating their wives. According to the Qur'an scholar M. Asad: "He forbade the beating of any woman with the words, 'Never beat God's handmaidens.' . . . On the basis of these Traditions, all the authorities stress that this 'beating,' if resorted to at all, should be more or less symbolic—'with a toothbrush or some such thing' . . . or even 'with a folded handkerchief' . . . and some of the greatest Muslim scholars . . . are of the opinion that it is just barely permissible, and should preferably be avoided: and they justify this opinion by the Prophet's personal feelings with regard to this position." See Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an* (Gibraltar: Dar Al-Andalus, 1980), 109–10.

Give them their dowry for the enjoyment you have had of them as a duty; but it shall be no offence for you to make any other agreement among yourselves after you have fulfilled your duty. God is all-knowing and wise.

Polygamy

If you fear that you cannot treat orphans [girls] with fairness, then you may marry such women as seem good to you: two, three, or four of them. But if you fear that you cannot maintain equality among them, marry one only. . . . This will make it easier for you to avoid injustice.

Try as you may, you cannot treat all your wives impartially. Do not set yourself altogether against any of them, leaving her, as it were, in suspense.

f. Divorce

The Prophet said, "The thing which is lawful but disliked by God is divorce."⁸

Provisions Protecting Women

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

When you have renounced your wives and they have reached the end of their waiting period, either retain them in honour or let them go with kindness. But you shall not retain them in order to harm them or wrong them. Whoever does this wrongs his own soul. . . . It is unlawful for husbands to take from them anything they have given them. . . .

You shall bequeath your widows a year's maintenance without causing them to leave their homes. . . . Reasonable provision shall also be made for divorced women. That is incumbent on righteous men.

8. Allama Sir Abdullah and Al-Mamum Al-Suhrawardy, *The Sayings of Muhammad* (New York: Citadel Press, 1990), 69.

g. Modesty in Women

Enjoin believing women to turn their eyes away from temptation and to preserve their chastity; to cover their adornments (except such as are normally displayed); to draw their veils over their bosoms and not to reveal their finery except [to members of the household]. . . . And let them not stamp their feet when walking so as to reveal their hidden trinkets.

Prophet, enjoin your wives, your daughters, and the wives of true believers to draw their veils close round them. That is more proper, so that they may be recognized and not be molested.

Women who are past child-bearing and those who have ceased to anticipate marriage incur no blame if they leave off their garments, provided they are not flaunting charms. Yet to refrain from doing so is better.

h. Modesty in Men

Enjoin believing men to turn their eyes away from temptation and to restrain their carnal desires. This will make their lives purer. Allah has knowledge of all their actions.

i. Inheritance

Men shall have a share in what their parents and kinsmen leave; and women shall have a share in what their parents and kinsmen leave: whether it be little or much, they shall be legally entitled to their share.

A male shall inherit twice as much as a female. If there be more than two girls, they shall have two-thirds of the inheritance; but if there be one only she shall inherit the half. . . .

You shall inherit the half of your wives' estate if they die childless. If they leave children, a quarter of their estate shall be yours after payment of any legacy they may have bequeathed for any debt they may have owed.

Your wives shall inherit one quarter of your estate if you die childless. If you leave children, they shall inherit one-eighth, after payment of any legacy you may have bequeathed or any debt you may have owed.

j. Economic Justice

Do not devour one another's property by unjust means, nor bribe with it the judges in order that you may wrongfully and knowingly usurp the possessions of other men.

Do not interfere with the property of orphans except with the best of motives, until they reach maturity.

God commands you to hand back your trusts to their rightful owners, and, when you pass judgment among men, to judge with fairness. Noble is that to which God exhorts you. God hears and observes all.

Believers, do not live on usury, doubling your wealth many times over.

k. The Status of Animals

All the beasts that roam the earth and all the birds that wing their flight are but communities like your own. . . . They shall all be gathered before their Lord.⁹

l. Other Social Virtues Enjoined by Islam

Right Speech

God does not love harsh words, except when uttered by a man who is truly wronged.

There is no virtue in much of their counsel: only in him who enjoins charity, kindness, and peace among men. He who does this to please God shall be richly rewarded.

Do not confound the truth with falsehood, nor knowingly conceal the truth.

A kind word with forgiveness is better than charity followed by an insult.

⁹ Compare with selection no. 30, below.

Integrity and Circumspection

Believers, if an evil-doer brings you a piece of news inquire first into its truth, lest you should wrong others unwittingly and then regret your action.

Do not follow what you do not know. Human eyes, ears, and heart—each of these senses can be closely questioned.

Earnestness

God is watching over His servants . . . who are steadfast, sincere, obedient, and charitable.

. . . Be steadfast in prayer, enjoin justice, and forbid evil. Endure with fortitude whatever befalls you. That is a duty incumbent upon all.

Forgiveness

. . . The righteous . . . curb their anger and forgive their fellow men.

That which you have been given is but the fleeting comfort of this life. Better and more enduring is God's reward to those who . . . when angered, are willing to forgive . . . and conduct their affairs by mutual consent.

Humility

Do not treat men with scorn, nor walk proudly on the earth: God does not love the arrogant and the vainglorious. Rather let your gait be modest and your voice low: the harshest of voices is the braying of the ass.

Do not walk proudly on the earth. You cannot cleave the earth, nor can you rival the mountains in stature.

Fairness

Give full measure, when you measure, and weigh with even scales. That is fair, and better in the end.

m. Acts Forbidden in Islam

Social mores are everywhere in flux. Yet since almost one-fifth of the world's population are Muslims, it is appropriate to note some of the Qur'an's specific proscriptions.

Adultery

You shall not commit adultery for it is foul and indecent.

The adulterer and the adulteress shall each be given a hundred lashes. Let no pity for them cause you to disobey God . . . and let their punishment be witnessed by a number of believers.

The adulterer may marry only an adulteress or an idolatress; and the adulteress may marry only an adulterer or an idolator. True believers are forbidden such marriages.

Homosexual Acts

If two men among you commit indecency, punish them both. If they repent and mend their ways, let them be. God is forgiving and merciful.

Will you fornicate with males and abandon your wives, whom God has created for you? Surely you are great transgressors.

Fornication

Blessed are the believers . . . who restrain their carnal desires (except with their wives . . . for these are lawful to them) and do not transgress through lusting after other women. . . .

If any of your women commit fornication, call in four witnesses from among yourselves against them; if they testify to their guilt confine them to their houses till death overtakes them or till God finds another way for them.

Infanticide

Losers are those that in their ignorance have wantonly slain their own children and made unlawful what God has given them, inventing falsehoods about God. They have gone astray and are not guided.

You shall not kill your children for fear of want. We will provide for them and for you. To kill them is a great sin.

Suicide

Do not destroy yourselves. God is merciful to you, but he that does that through wickedness and injustice shall be burned in fire. That is easy enough for God.

Murder

You shall not kill any man whom God has forbidden you to kill except for a just cause. If a man is slain unjustly, his heir shall be entitled to satisfaction. But let him not carry his vengeance too far, for his victim will in turn be assisted and avenged.

Pilferage

As for the man or woman who is guilty of theft, cut off their hands to punish them for their crimes. That is the punishment enjoined by God. God is mighty and wise. But whoever repents after committing evil, and mends his ways, shall be pardoned by God. God is forgiving and merciful.

Drinking and Gambling

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

11. Objections to Christianity

The Qur'an pays special respect to Jesus:

Of these messengers We have exalted some above others. To some Allah spoke directly; others He raised to a lofty status. We gave Jesus, the son of Mary, veritable signs and strengthened him with the Holy Spirit.

But Jesus is said to be an apostle, not God:

The Messiah, Jesus the son of Mary, was no more than God's Apostle.

Muslims therefore decry the notions that God has a son or that Jesus is God:

Say: "God is One, the Eternal God. He begot none, nor was He begotten. None is equal to Him."

Say: "Praise be to God who has never begotten a son; who has no partner in His Kingdom; who needs none to defend Him from humiliation." Proclaim His greatness.

Unbelievers are those that say: "God is . . . the son of Mary." For the Messiah himself said: "Children of Israel, serve God, my Lord and your Lord."

For Muslims, then, the Christian doctrine of the trinity smacks of polytheism:

So believe in God and His Apostles and do not say: "Three." Forbear, and it shall be better for you. God is but one God. God forbid that He should have a son!

The Qur'an also asserts that it was not Jesus who died on the cross.

They denied the truth and uttered a monstrous falsehood against Mary. They declared: "We have put to death the Messiah, Jesus the son of Mary, the Apostle of God." They did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, but they thought they did.

12. Objections to Judaism

Though the Qur'an affirms Islam's profound connection to Judaism, saying, "We believe in the faith of Abraham" (2:136), it charges Judaism with having corrupted its own scriptures, broken its covenant, and erroneously claimed exclusivity.

God made a covenant with the Israelites and raised among them twelve chieftains.

. . . But because they broke their covenant We laid on them our curse and hardened their hearts. They have tampered with words out of their context and forgotten much of what they were enjoined. . . . But pardon them and bear with them.

Those to whom the burden of the Torah was entrusted and yet refused to bear it are like a donkey laden with books. Wretched is the example of those who deny God's revelations. . . .

Say to the Jews: "If you claim that of all men you alone are God's friends, then you should wish for death, if what you say is true!" But, because of what their hands have done, they will never wish for death. God knows the wrongdoers.