



Right Guidance: the Dīn of Islam

Allah Swt reveals this in the Holy Qur'an. He is speaking to the Prophet Muhammed (sal).

Seek thee other than the way of the religion of Allah, when unto Him submits whoever is in the heaven and the earth, willingly or unwillingly? Unto Him they will be returned. (3:83)

And He has ordained for you the religion He has commended unto Nuuh (Noah), and that which We inspire in you [Muhammed], and that which We commended unto Ibrahim and Moses and Jesus, saying, “Establish the religion and be divided not therein.” Dreadful for the idolators is that to which thou callest them. Allah chooses for Himself whom He wills, and guides to Himself who turns to Him. (42:13)

The key phrase in this last ‘*āyat* is “...**We inspire in thee, Muhammed...**” The other phrase is “**be not divided**” in the *dīn* / religion. What is important to realize in anything that has life, is that life alone is not sufficient. That is to say, if you are lying in a hospital and being held to this physical world by respirators, and do not have the ability to act or to think or engage in a process of life other than the basic physical life, a lot of us would say that is not living. To have a past and a history and not apply it to modern day is also not Islam – or any religion or philosophy for that matter. Allah is telling us about a process, a dynamic process of revelation.

The life blood is obviously not the blood and not the oxygen alone, but the cognitive, interactive, social, and appropriate abilities that make our lives worthwhile. So too, the life blood within Islam is not just what is written, but it is the ability to understand and apply what is written, to apply what is said. [It is] not just [to understand] history, but to understand what the relative meaning of that history is. It's not just the implication of science, but how you apply what is implied. It's not just the stories of the mystics or *ambiyā*, but it is the enlightenment that makes life worthwhile, and what is provided to us by this. There is no denying the fact, for example, that *ijtihad* is the life blood of the system of Islam from the very beginning. The system remains alive. It is moving and interfacing, as long as there is a flow of new ideas, impulses, and needs based on a very clear means and track.

Just like anything else, these ideas and impulses feed the system, feed the life of the Muslim community. Just as if the gears on a machine stop working, they get rusted because no one is taking care of them and keeping them going. So too, the society itself can get very rusty and decadent if the source, lubricant, life, or regeneration process dries up or is unavailable. This is true for Islam, for a house, and for our own physical being. No system (be it biological, material, or spiritual), no society as a whole can exist and maintain its existence, let alone develop and ascend in ideas, grasping the hearts of human beings generation after generation, with only old ideas or old inappropriate methods, or even old ideas that are still good, that are presented in ways that are not acceptable.

There are those within each system, each society, each philosophy that would take us back to old ways and deny reality as it is today. We see it in our own social/political system today, turning back the clock on civil rights and health care. We live in a country that right now considers itself to be enlightened. Well, I won't go into the statistics. When we see things happening in the courts, or in legislation (or lack thereof), it's precisely for this reason that Allah Swt sent messengers after messengers. He sent the

Prophet Mohammed (sal) to give right guidance to humanity, so that humanity would continue, or at least have the opportunity to have choices and make progress. That guidance was based on *akhlaq*. It was not based on rules and regulations. It was based on the character of the individual. It is not just progress in some kind of etheric, spiritual sense. But it is social progress, moral progress, ethical progress, scientific progress, intellectual progress, emotional progress in all fields of life.

The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) really made it quite clear and quite obvious that is only through guidance that is attuned to the world, to life, to the possibilities, through managing the resources, that progress can be made. He spoke of date palms. He spoke of marriages and divorces. He spoke of births and deaths. He spoke of whole societies, loyalty, and honesty. When he sent his representative to Yemen, he said, *“You are going to make choices. They may be wrong. We will find out later if they are or not, and we will adjust them. But you have to make them based on what you know is the truth.”* This is *ijtihad*. It is not to just utilize resources, but to sustain resources. We have come to realize in the latter part of the 20th century and now in the 21st century that this is a very important thing. Yet, there are forces that would turn back the clock.

This is right guidance: to consider the time, place, people, and circumstances. Only that which is right guidance can be called the Dīn of Islam. This is not just some historical reality; it is something that lives. It is something that humanity achieves, and can consistently depend on. It is something that humanity and all living things can continuously advance through in all fields of life, if you keep in mind that our existence depends [on this]. [It is a reality that lives] if we follow the ways of al Islam and submission to Allah, but we follow them according to the time, the place, and the circumstances. If we don't, then we can't accept that this is the essential Islam. Nor will it be a force conducive to development of general good, the commonwealth, the commonweal, the common good of humanity, or the community itself. By not following

this kind of dynamic understanding of Islam, we will not be conforming to the patterns and schemes of the universe and creation itself, which obeys all the laws of Allah Swt.

Do they seek other than the Dīn of Allah, while all creations of heaven and earth, willingly or unwillingly, bow to His will? And to Him shall they all be brought back.

It's a very clear statement. The Holy Qur'an stresses and implies that there is no other way but the way of Islam that is accepted by Allah Swt, and says that if anyone desires a way other than Islam, never will they be accepted by Him. Well, that's food for a lot of argumentation and aggravation, if you don't understand what it really says – also [food for] doubt, feelings of fear, pain, neuroses and psychoses, even, in the minds of people! What does that mean? You have to define things in a broader scope, not in a narrow scope. If I saw you upset, I could define you as always seeing you upset. If you see a child being bad, then the child is bad all the time. But the laws of the universe don't allow us to hold things in that kind of rigidity. And yet, what's happening in Mali, in Pakistan, in Afghanistan? I don't want to say because children are here.

Remember the story I tell about seeing the man throw the child across the room, and the wife gets very upset and berates him and says, "What's wrong with you! I turn my back for a minute and there you are abusing our child!" He calls the child over and picks him up and throws him again to the couch. They are playing a game. He throws him a little distance to the couch, and the child bounces. Maybe it's not a good idea, but you understand. Then there is the whole issue of horizontal escalation. You see one thing and escalate it, until every known adjunct to that immediate state has been resurrected. A hundred years of errors. "Twenty-five years ago you said this to me! You did that to me!" But I'm not giving a *khutbah* on marriage today.

In the same way, when we hear “Islam is the only way,” we have to realize that it doesn’t mean what the fanatic fundamentalists think it means – some useless, brainless, message. It means that until we realize what this ‘*āyat* tells us, that willingly or unwillingly, wittingly or unwittingly, we are under the thumb of Allah. We can pray, work, do all the things we do to utilize all the choice we are given, but ultimately, there are forces that will determine our feeling for how we live our lives, and the time we spent here, and birth and death, and what we have accomplished here. Until we submit to that fact, we cannot really exercise the freedom and the will. We have to consider ourselves at doorways, openings. This is not a very good explanation for such a profound concept, but Islam is not just about change. Islam is also about permanence.

The permanence of change is a very real thing in all of our lives. The one thing we know is going to happen is change. That’s part of His creation and universe. The way, which was revealed, that came before the Prophet (sal), is the same way that was sent down with His guidance. It is the same *dīn* which He enjoined upon Noah, and which He enjoined on Ibrahim and Musa and Isa. This *dīn* is that you should remain steadfast in the *dīn*, and make no decision outside of its parameters. It’s not that it’s something so different. The Prophet himself said, “I have not come to bring a different message.” The point is it must be something that is alive that we can dedicate ourselves to. Christianity, Judaism, as long as they are based on the universal, unitive principle that there is only one truth and one reality, Allah tells us we are to respect those paths.

Al-dīn refers to the fundamental principles of truth and of unity, the fundamental principles that govern this universe. If they are indeed fundamental, they must pervade everything. They can’t be here and not there. There is no place where there isn’t gravity in this physical world; they have to be always present. We can feel at ease that these principles we are following are with us; they are guiding us. They are for us to use just like energy and forces in nature. We are asked to follow the same eternal truth, the same universal values, which are based deeply on our own free will and our own choices. But

they have to be in conformity with the rest of creation, and will therefore reap the same rewards and benefits as any aspect of creation. Any deviation from this truth will damage only ourselves. It doesn't damage the truth. To help us make it easier, Allah sent His guidelines, His path: a broad boulevard which also has on it a well-trodden pathway, Shar'īah.

To you We sent the Book and truth, confirming the Book that came before it, the Torah and the Gospels, and guiding it in safety. So judge between none that which Allah has revealed, and follow not their vain desires diverging from the truth that has come to you. To each among you, We have prescribed a law, an order, and an open way, if Allah has willed. And if He had willed, He would have made you one single nation, but His plan is to test you in what He has given you. That is, to see what you know. So strive in the race of virtue. The goal of all of you is toward Allah. (5:49)

The main aim of that guidance is to assist us to conform to some basic principle of unity, which we can find in the revelation. But the details vary according to time, community, needs, place, people, and circumstances. The spirit in the Shar'īah and the reality of today together form a spirit and a reality of how to apply that truth or light or teaching in the moment. Without the ability to apply to today, or to make *ijtihad*, or addressing things without guidance makes the process useless. It makes it irrelevant. The Shar'īah provides the means to keep the spirit and reality of Allah, and the values and practical systems of day to day life, and our families and work and spiritual lives. They have to always be adjusted. The ability to adjust and make real for this time and place, our decisions, and determinations give it its presence and life.

This is the core of Islam. When you put that with the personal desire to have a personal relationship with Allah, and to be able to see that 'wheresoever you turn, there is the face of Allah,' you understand where Islam, Shar'īah, and Tasawwuf fit together. The Qur'an

refers to this also. **“They have been commanded no more than this: to obey Allah, offering Him sincere devotion, being true in their faith, establish prayer, and practice regular charity.”** Well, that sounds easy. You know it’s not easy! And there has to be motivation to do it correctly. You can say, “That’s the *dīn*. That’s the *siratal mustaqim*. That’s the right way.” It’s not complicated. It talks about unity of principles that prevail everywhere. It talks about rules and laws that we all live by. This is only a linear way of describing something, of course, and does not talk about the *himma*. That comes in other places. You don’t do things just because you are supposed to, that’s the lowest level. If you have real *himma*, real desire, then you have to do more than just throw the seeds on the ground. You have to water them, fertilize them, pull the weeds, watch the changing weather. Everything can be overcome by circumstance, unless we know how to deal with those circumstances. These elements are really the elements of *ibada*.

Prayer is a spiritual exercise that brings us closer to Allah. The other practices, like *zakat* and *sawm* that are coming to us this week, give us the message to reform our social fabric and personal lives again and again. Don’t get complacent. Change is coming.

Opportunity is coming. How are you going to look at it? In the course of time, this worship we experience within our community, within the Islamic community, within the national community, by whatever names they call themselves, allow us to adjust and make new, and bring greater relevancy to the values that we hold. These are the exact same values that the Muslims of the early days held. Those are the real *salaf*, the people of values.

One finds this in the decisions of Rasūlu-Llāh, as an example. The Prophet (sal) would offer general instructions on matters, explaining fundamental principles involved, and he would go over the explanations so that the Sahaba would have no doubt. One man was sent to Yemen to be the governor, as I told you earlier. He asked how to judge. What is

important is that he is trying to act in accordance with the Sunnah of Rasūlu-Llāh (sal). That, we know, is in accordance with the Qur'an and the Revelation.

The Prophet (sal) told him that the best way to form an opinion, ijihad, was to spare no effort in finding the right answer. Don't just give an answer. Try to find the right answer. Then he tapped him on the breast and said, "Praise be to Allah Who has disposed His Messenger's messenger toward something with which Allah's Messenger is pleased with."

Umm Salma reported that the Prophet (sal) said, "I am only a human being. You bring your disputes to me. Some perhaps are more eloquent in their plea than others, so I give judgment on their behalf according to what I hear from them." In other words, how eloquently you present your argument may even influence the Prophet himself. "Therefore, if ever I decide for anyone something that by right belongs to his brother, he must not take it, for I would be granting for him in that case only a portion of hell."

In Qur'an, Allah says, **"Do not usurp one another's property by unjust means or offer to the judges so that you may devour knowingly or unjustly a portion of the good of others."** It is clear here that one, things will change. Second, there are guidelines and rules we have to follow. There is the Sunnah of the Prophet Mohammed (sal) and the Qur'an. Yet at the same time, they are telling us that things will change. So as we apply to our very best knowledge the right thing to do, we are always seeking to make sure that it was right. Whether it is through our *shaykhs*, parents, guides, teachers, or scholars, we look for the right judgment. Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him) was very happy when Murad Abjal replied that he would do his best to form an opinion and spare no pains to arrive at the correct answer. This is why *ijihad* is still alive.

There are those who say the doors are closed. How can the doors be closed? No two circumstances are exactly the same. We have to understand that we will never fully understand, but at the end of all of this, it is the sincerity of our search. The sincerity of the fasting, of finishing this month, of the *dhikr* throughout the month of fasting, the sincerity of our prayers during that time, the sincerity of our *zakat al fitr*, and the sincerity of pleading with Allah Swt to keep us in *sirr*. Allah is not unmindful of what we do. We have to say, **“I put my trust in Allah. There is not a moving creature but He has grasped his forelock. Verily, it is my Lord who is on the straight path. I have submitted my whole self to Allah, and so have those who follow me.”** *Inshā’a-LLāh*, this is a way to begin the remembering of our journey in Ramadan when it arrives, and in the daily decisions we have to make. *Asalaam aleikum*.