



The Way of Islam, the Meaning of the Dīn
And a Context for Life

Allah Swt says in Holy Qur'an:

Do they seek a religion other than that of Allah, when all that is in the heavens and the earth surrenders to Him, willingly and unwillingly, and to Him must return? Say, we believe in Allah and that which came down to us, and which came down on Ibrahim and Ismail, and Yitzhak and Jaqub, and the tribes of their descendants, and what was given to Musa and to Isa and the prophets from their Lord. And we do not discriminate between any one of them. And we surrender to Him. And whoever desires a religion other than the voluntary surrender of the self to Allah, it will not be accepted from him; and in the final life, he will be from the losers.

Allah also says in Surah Mai'dah:

And We have sent down to you a Book of the Truth, confirming that which came before it from the earlier Book, and as a protector over it. So judge between them by what Allah has sent down, and do not follow them in their desires and inclinations, forsaking that which has come down to you from that truth. To every one of you, We have prescribed a law and a way. And if Allah had so willed, He could have made you one community but so that He might test you by that which He has given you, He has made you as you are. So compete with one another in good works. You must all return to Allah, and He will inform you of that which you have differed. So judge between them by what Allah has sent

down, and do not follow their desires or inclinations, but beware of them lest they seduce you away from some of what Allah has sent down to you.

The key word in the previous *‘āyat* is “**that we inspire in you Mohammed.**” “**We commanded unto Noah that which we inspired in you, Mohammed, and that which we commanded unto Abraham and Musa and Jesus, saying, ‘Establish the religion and be divided not therein.’**” The other phrase is, “**not to be divided in the *dīn* / religion.**” What is important to realize in anything that is living and dynamic is that life alone, just this life, is not sufficient. That is to say, God forbid, you lie in a hospital, as some people recently have been doing here, and held to the physical world but, thank God, not by respirators or in some vegetative state, thank Allah. But sometimes people find themselves in that situation, as you know. They don’t have the ability to act, or think, or engage in the process of life other than a basic physical existence. And a lot of us would say that is not living. To have a past and a history, but not apply to the modern day what the truth is, is not Islam—nor any religion or any philosophy, for that matter. One has to have a context for life.

When we say, “that’s not living,” we mean there’s no memory, no future, no past. We need to have something like that. The same thing holds true with Islam. The life blood of life itself is obviously not the blood and the oxygen, but the cognitive, interactive, social, and appropriate abilities that make life worthwhile. So too, the life-blood within Islam is not just what is written, but it is the ability to understand it and to apply what is written. It’s not what is said, but it is the ability to apply what is said. It’s not just the history, but it is to understand the relative history and its meaning and its effect on us. It’s not just the implication of science, but it’s how you apply the science. It’s not just the stories of the mystics and mysticism, but it’s the enlightenment that makes those stories worthwhile to understand.

There is no denying the fact that *ijtihad* is the life blood system of Islam. The system remains alive and moving and interfacing as long as there is the flow of new ideas and impulses and changes that are necessitated by the world which we live in. These ideas and impulses feed a system in the life of Islamic society. Just like anything else, if the gears stop moving on the machine, they get rusted because no one is taking care of them, and no one is keeping them oiled and going. So too, the society itself can get very rusty and decadent, as long as the source of the regeneration process is dried up or restricted. This is true for Islam, for a house that sits empty, or for our own physical beings, because we are living a sentient life.

No system, be it biological, material, or some other form; no society as a whole can exist and maintain its existence, let alone develop and ascend in ideas and hearts of human beings with the help of only old ideas, or inappropriate and inapplicable methods. There are those within each system, society, and philosophy who would take us back to the old ways, and deny reality as it is today. We see it in our own social and political systems. In this country we live in right now, people are trying to take us backward. We see some of the things that are happening in the courts and in legislation, and we say, "Is this 2013 or is this 1913... or 1813?" It is precisely for this reason that Allah Swt sent a messenger, the Prophet Mohammed (sal), and all who came before him, to give right guidance to humanity, so that humanity would continue to make progress, because progress is a possibility for human life and human society, endless progress, up until the day of the Yawmi Qiyama.

It is not just progress in some kind of etheric, spiritual sense; but it's actually social progress, moral progress, ethical progress, scientific progress, intellectual progress, emotional progress, in all fields of life. The holy Prophet (sal) really made it quite clear that only through guidance that is attuned to the world, to life, to the

possibilities, to the resources and managing those resources that progress can be made. It's not just to utilize the resources, but to sustain the resources. We came to realize in the latter part of the 20th century, and now again in this century, that it's right to conserve and preserve. This is right guidance, and only that which is right guidance can be called the Dīn of Islam. It's not some historical reality; it's something that lives. It's something that humanity achieves, and something humanity can be consistently dependent upon to do.

It is something that humanity and all living things can continuously advance through in all fields of life and existence, if they follow the way of Islam, of submission to Allah. If not, it cannot be accepted, nor will the force be conducive to development. It won't be for the general good or the common good. By not following, we would not be conforming to the pattern and the science of the universe and creation, which is always changing, always dynamic, and still always obeying Allah Swt.

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

This holy Qur'an stresses and implies that there is no other way but the way of Islam that is accepted by Allah, and says that if anyone desires a way other than that, never will they be accepted by Him. What does that mean? It means to be in submission, to seek nothing other than the way of Allah, or God, or Truth. That's the food for a lot of discussion, and a lot of doubt, and a lot of feelings of fear, anxiety, pain, and questions. But it's the same thing as defining someone by saying, "I once saw Abu Bakr get upset." Actually, I've never seen him upset. "And as a result, I don't like him because he is a very upset person." Because one time you saw him get upset. You are ignoring then his love, his constant generosity, his tolerance, his

patience, his devotion, his dedication, and I would say his beauty, but I don't want to push the metaphor. They don't know the history of the upset. Maybe it's a reasonable upset.

Maybe it's like the story I tell of the man who was caught throwing the young child across the room. The wife comes in and sees the child [flying across the room, and then] lands on the couch, and the child is just screeching. She tells him what a miserable husband he is; she's going to divorce him. Not only does he throw the child across the room, but he leaves the toilet seat up, and some horizontal escalation comes about. All the things he's done wrong in his whole life come pouring out. None of us can relate to this; it's a story! At which point, the man claps his hands, the child comes running across the room, jumps into his arms and he throws him again. He runs, screeching, back to his father's arms to be thrown again and again, because it was a game they were playing.

In the same way, when we hear "Islam is the only way," we have to realize it doesn't mean what the fanatic/fundamentalist thinks it means – some useless, brainless message. It means that until we realize what these *'āyāt* I read tell us we cannot exercise our free will. Willingly or unwillingly we bow to the Creator, as everything in nature bows to the Creator. We can pray, and work, and do all the things we can do to realize and utilize the choices we were given. But ultimately, there are other forces that will determine our time for parting, our time for many things in our lives. Until we submit to that and accept it, we can't really exercise our freedom or our free will, because we are prisoners of our own self. We are prisoners of our own selves, because we consider ourselves the doer. We consider everything we are doing absolutely necessary.

This is an inadequate explanation for such a profound statement, and you have to forgive me for not taking the time right now to give an even more adequate explanation or example. But the truth is, when we bow and pray and rely on Allah Swt, things go better. We are healthier. We are better. Unfortunately, sometimes we learn that very late.

That way that was revealed, which came before the Prophet Mohammed (sal) is the same way that was sent down with His guidance, the same *dīn* which He enjoined on Nūh (as), which He sent an inspiration to, and enjoined on Ibrahim (as), and on Musa (as), and Isa (as). The *dīn* is, you should remain steadfast in the *dīn* and make no decision outside of it. It's not that it is something different. The point is we must find something that is alive to dedicate ourselves to. The point is it's the same guidelines in Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, as long as they are based on the unitive, reunitive, unifying principles that reflect science and reality and the universe we live in, in its most scientific form.

Al Dīn refers to the fundamental principles of truth, the fundamental principles of unity, of the universe and the interrelatedness of all things. Those principles, if they are fundamental, must pervade everything. They can't be here, but not there; up but not down; in but not outside of us; sometimes, but not now; in the past, but not in the present or the future. They have to be always there, always alive. We can feel at ease that these principles we are following are always with us, have always been there, and will always be there for anyone who turns toward them, who perceives them, who believes in them. Whether we leave or stay on this planet for a long period of time, there shouldn't be a day that we forget this.

Human beings are asked to follow the same eternal truth, the same universal values which are based deeply on our own free will and choices, but must be in conformity

with the rest of creation. We will therefore reap the same rewards and benefits as any aspect of creation does. Any deviation from this truth will damage only ourselves, and not the truth. To help make easier the tests for following the way, Allah sent the message to you:

We sent the Book in truth confirming the book that came before it, the Torah, and the Gospel, and guarding it in safety. So judge between them by what Allah has revealed. Follow not their vain desires to diverging from the truth that has come to you. Each among you We have prescribed a law, an order, and an open way. If Allah 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 as in a race of virtues. The goal of all you do is toward Allah.

And this is the point. Allah says also in Qur'an, **"They have been commanded no more than this: to obey Allah, offering Him sincere devotion, being true to their faith, establish prayer, and practice regular charity."** That's it. That's the *dīn*. That's the straight path. All the changes, and necessities for change in society, all the dynamics, and all the *ijtihad* that has to be made can be made if one does this. Not to be rigid, but it makes you open. It's not complicated. It talks about one truth. It talks about how you come into contact with it and how you stay in contact with it. Of course, when things hit us in our lives that are multidimensional, difficult, and demanding, it's very interesting that we defer to our own chaotic mental and emotional rituals, and we don't defer to the orderly, non-chaotic rituals that will get us out of that state. This is how strong the lower nature is. How strong our fears are, our illnesses are, our opinions are, our insecurities are, our doubts are, our judgments are and judgmentalness.

These simple principles are really the elements of *ibada*. Because prayer is a special experience and a special exercise that brings us close to Allah. The other practices, *zakat* and fasting, give us a message to reform our social fabric and our personal lives again and again. In the course of time, this worship we experience within our community, and within the Islamic community, and within the believers allows us to adjust, and to bring new and greater relevancy to the values we espouse. One finds this in the example of the decisions of the Prophet Mohammed (sal).

The Prophet would be given a question, and offer general instructions on matters explaining fundamental principles involved, and he would go over the explanation so that the Companions would have no doubt. One man was sent to Yemen as governor. He was asked how he would judge when the occasion arose. He replied, he would judge in accordance with Allah's Book. The Prophet (sal) asked him what he would do if he could not find guidance for a particular matter in Allah's Book. The man replied that he would act then in accordance with Allah's Messenger's Sunnah. The Prophet (sal) asked what he would do if he couldn't find any guidance in Allah's Messenger. The man replied that he would do his best to form an opinion and would spare no effort to find the right answers. So Allah's Messenger 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.**" In other words, the process goes on.

Umm Salma reported,

Allah's Messenger said, "I am only a human being. When 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, the eloquence of the words may influence him. Therefore, if 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.

Allah says in Qur'an, **"Do not usurp one another's property by unjust means, or offer it to the judges so that you may devour, knowingly and unjustly, a portion of the goods of others."** There are important subtleties that we should remember in this message about the dynamics of change in Islam. The only way out is through understanding. The only way of understanding is to follow those guidelines and principles, but follow them to their innermost core, not just externally. And [one must] understand that this *ijtihad* is always happening. For those who would deny it, they are stuck back in the 12th century somewhere. The only difference is, they have a megaphone, and in the 12th century they wouldn't have had it. But obviously they have followers, or we wouldn't be having the struggle we are having today. This is the way I think we should act, *inshā'a-Llāh*.
Asalaamu aleikum.