

THE Tradition *of* Gabriel

An Exposition of the
Basic Principles of Islām

FISABILILLAH



PUBLICATIONS

It has been related on the authority of `Umar ؓ that he said:

One day while we were with the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ, there appeared before us a man whose clothes were exceedingly white and whose hair was exceedingly black; no signs of journey could be seen on him and none amongst us knew him. He came and sat down by the Prophet ﷺ, then rested his knees against his and placed the palms of his hands on his thighs, and said: "O Muḥammad, tell me about Islām."

The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said, "Islām is to testify that there is no god but Allāh and that Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allāh, to establish prayers, to pay alms, to fast in Ramaḍān, and to make the pilgrimage to the House if you are able to make the way there."

He said, "You have spoken rightly," and we were amazed at him asking him and saying that he had spoken rightly.

He said, "Then tell me about Īmān."

He (the Messenger ﷺ) said, "It is to believe in Allāh, His angels, His Books, His messengers, and the Last Day, and to believe in destiny, both the good and the evil thereof."

He said, "You have spoken rightly."

He then said, "Now tell me about Iḥsān."

He (the Messenger ﷺ) said, "It is to worship Allāh as though you are seeing Him, for though you see Him not yet truly He sees you."

He said, "Then tell me about the Hour."

He (the Messenger ﷺ) said, "The one questioned about it knows no better than the questioner."

He said, "Then tell me about its signs."

He (the Messenger ﷺ) said, "That the slave-girl will give birth to her mistress, and that you will see the barefooted, naked, destitute shepherds competing in constructing lofty buildings."

Then he went away and I stayed for some time. The Prophet ﷺ then said, "O `Umar, do you know who the questioner was?"

I said, "Allāh and His Messenger know best."

He said, "It was Gabriel. He came to you to teach you your religion."

Muslim

"Tell me about Islām."

Islām literally means to submit and to surrender. It also means to enter into peace. The idea is that you're in peace with someone when you're not fighting or opposing them. Islām is to enter into submission before God and so to enter into peace with Him, the most Wise and all-Powerful, the One whose Will the whole universe obeys. This is what the purpose of true religion has always been and what every man of God has called towards. And this is the call of every person's nature too, and the reason you consider good as good and bad as bad. Islam is therefore to enter into peace with your own nature too.

"Islām is to testify that there is no god but Allāh..."

The beginning of this submission, Islām, in its outward form is to submit to the truth that you know inside yourself, that there is only one God, and bear witness to it. Everything apart from the Creator is, like yourself, a created being and always in need of its Maker, and therefore unworthy of your worship. It is only God who is in no need of anything outside Himself, Absolute and Independent.

The Arabic word for God, Allāh, is made up of *al*, the definite article in Arabic meaning *the*, and *ilāh* which means *God* or a *greater being that is the object of worship*. Allāh, then, simply means *the God*, in contrast to the false forms and images that people's minds have qualified for worship. It isn't, therefore, in any way the 'god of the Arabs' or Muslims but the same One and Only God to whom all true divine traditions called.

*Say: He, Allāh, is One and Alone,
Allāh, the Eternally Besought (of all),*

*None is born of Him and He is born of none,
And there is none comparable to Him.*

Qur'ān, 112:1-4

Since He is our Creator and the Creator of everything around us, the One who gave us life and all that we've ever had, it is His right upon us that we recognise Him and are grateful to Him. And since He is the ultimate One in control, it only makes sense that we obey Him and seek His pleasure; anything else that we live our lives chasing after is soon going to end while we, at the end of our road, have to go back to God.

“...and that Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allāh...”

Submitting to the truth that comes from God includes accepting the messenger who is sent by God to guide us towards him. In our case, this is Muḥammad ﷺ, the last of the many men sent by God towards humanity. (The ‘ﷺ’ means *peace and blessings of God be upon him*, a benediction Muslims make when mentioning the messengers of the Almighty.)

Muḥammad ﷺ was born in the city of Makkah in Arabia in the sixth century after Christ ﷺ. An orphan at birth, his mother, too, passed away when he was only six. He was then taken into the care of his grandfather who, at his death, entrusted him to his uncle, Abū Ṭālib. Muḥammad ﷺ belonged to the noble Banū Hāshim clan of the Quraysh tribe, who are direct descendants of the prophets Abraham ﷺ and his eldest son, Ishmael ﷺ.

He grew up to be an honest and trustworthy man, caring for orphans, widows and the weak. He was known for his generosity to the poor and also for his uprightness. His people soon came to call him aṣ-Ṣādiq (the Truthful) and al-Amīn (the Trustworthy).

At the age of forty, Muḥammad ﷺ would go to the cave of Ḥirā' to meditate. The injustices of the tribal communities of Arabia, their disregard for the poor and weak, and their foolish religion of many idols and rituals, all sorrowed him and he would come to this cave to get away from it all, wishing in his heart for guidance. It was in this cave that he received the first verses of the Noble Qur'ān from God, brought by the Archangel, Gabriel:

*Read! In the name of your Lord, who created,—
Created man out of a (mere) clot of congealed blood:
Read! And your Lord is Most Bountiful,
He who taught (the use) of the Pen,
Taught man that which he knew not.*

Qur'ān, 96:1-5

For the next twenty-three years, Muḥammad ﷺ was to receive by revelation the final Message of God. Though himself unschooled, unable to read or write, he presented before a world of great poets and orators a clear call so sublime and grand that its greatest men of letters could not meet the challenge the Qur'ān made to *"bring forth a chapter like it"* (2:23) if they doubted it was from God.

The revelation spoke of the creation of the heavens and the earth and the day they shall be brought to an end; the beginnings of man and his journey through the life of this world; the Hereafter and man's reckoning before God; that all people, men or women, black or white, rich or poor are equal in the sight of the God that made them, and that only in their obedience to Him and in doing good to His creatures did anyone gain virtue over another. It made mention of other great men and women of God in the past, like Jesus and his mother, Mary, as well as those who became proud in their power and wealth until it led to their destruction, like the Pharaoh. It taught of God's mercy and warned against His punishment, and contained His commandments

to humankind as well as His prohibitions. In short, it was so like the Divine revelation of the past that the Christian Negus of Abyssinia said when one of Muḥammad's companions read to him some of its verses, "Truly this and that which was brought by Moses are both rays from the same lamp."
Musnad Aḥmad

Within just over two decades of having received those first verses of the Qur'ān, Muḥammad ﷺ gave the call to his people of the Oneness of God and the oneness of the purpose of man, was turned out of his hometown of Makkah and forced to migrate to Madinah, established a state built on justice and equality made up of people of diverse colours and lands such as Persia, Rome, Abyssinia, and Arabia, re-entered Makkah as a conqueror with an army of ten thousand and no bloodshed, and was accepted as Messenger of God by near enough the whole of Arabia, leaving behind a faith that was to spread from the furthest reaches of East to West. In the words of Thomas Carlyle,

"These Arabs, the man Mahomet [sic], and that one century, – is it not as if a spark had fallen, one spark, on a world of what seemed black unnoticeable sand: but lo! The sand proves explosive powder, blazes heaven-high from Delhi to Granada! I said, the Great man was always as lightning out of Heaven; the rest of men waited for him like fuel, and then they too would aflame..." *Heroes and Hero Worship*

The life of Muḥammad ﷺ was recorded and preserved as that of no other leader in history because after the Word of God, the Qur'ān, it is his example and teachings, the Sunnah, that forms the core of Islām.

As the purpose of Divine revelation was now completed and the task of the apostleship fulfilled, Muḥammad ﷺ was declared the last Messenger sent by God; no new prophet will come after him.

Muḥammad is not the father of any man among you, but he is the Messenger of Allāh and the Seal of the Prophets...

Qur'ān 33:40

This concludes the first of the five pillars of Islām, to “testify that there is no god but Allāh and that Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allāh.” This is known in Arabic as the Shahādah, or the Testimony, the simple declaration with which one enters into Islām. Below are the Arabic words for the Shahādah:

أَشْهَدُ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَأَشْهَدُ أَنَّ مُحَمَّدًا رَسُولُ اللَّهِ

‘ASH-HADU ‘AL-LĀ ‘ILĀHA ‘ILLAL-LĀH, WA ‘ASH-HADU
‘ANNA MUḤAMMADAN RASŪLUL-LĀH.

*I bear witness that there is no god except Allāh, and
I bear witness that Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allāh.*

“...to establish the prayers...”

The second pillar of Islām is establishing Ṣalāh, or regular prayer. Spaced out into five different parts of the day, Ṣalāh is a physical expression of submission and devotion to the Almighty. At the time of prayer, believers detach themselves from whatever they may be doing, putting the chores of the life of this world on hold to worship God and to remind themselves that life and everything in it is fleeting, and only God and that which is with Him lasts for ever.

It is an expression of gratitude to God for His blessings under which we live every moment of our lives. Ṣalāh consists physically of standing, bowing, prostrating, and sitting, changing from one posture to another in the manner shown by the Messenger ﷺ. Verbally, it is made up of words of praise and glorification of God, and prayers for His blessings and mercy. Passages from the Qur’ān are recited while standing, and

with their foreheads against the ground like the messengers of the past, believers whisper, "Glory be to God, most High."

Ṣalāh is an obligation on every believer, male or female, from the age of puberty onwards. It is to be performed under all conditions, sitting if one is unable to pray standing, lying down if unable to pray sitting. Prayer may be offered individually or in congregation. When it is performed in a congregation, worshippers stand in completely straight rows, standing, bowing, and prostrating shoulder to shoulder, for all men are equal before God. It is best to perform all the five obligatory prayers in congregation at a mosque.

The five daily prayers are:

- 1) Fajr, performed at dawn before sunrise.
- 2) Ṣuḥr, performed at noon when the sun starts to decline from the meridian.
- 3) `Aṣr, performed in the late afternoon.
- 4) Maghrib, performed just after sunset.
- 5) `Ishā', performed at night before going to bed.

One can see that a Muslim's day starts and ends with prayer. This exemplifies the meaning of Islām, submission to God, by living in an intimate relationship with God.

On Fridays, the normal noon prayer is replaced by a special congregational prayer, the Jumu`ah Ṣalāh. Before the prayer, a sermon (khuṭbah) is delivered by the Imām containing advice on how to live our day to day lives to gain the pleasure of Allāh. Other problems faced in today's world are also addressed, such as the upbringing of children in modern society, caring for widows and orphans etc.

Before performing prayer, a person must make sure that his body, clothes and his place of worship are clean. Believers wash their faces,

arms and feet and pass wet hands over their heads, a ritual cleansing process called Wuḍū', in preparation for standing before the Lord of the worlds.

"...to pay the poor-due..."

The third pillar is Zakāh, a word which literally means "to purify". By giving a portion of their wealth to those less fortunate, believers who have been blessed with affluence seek to purify themselves of greed and their wealth from the rights of others. It is a reminder that a person's wealth is not his own, but its real owner is God. Since He has decreed that a part of it be spent on others, that amount of one's property now becomes the right of the poor and needy.

Zakāh is an annual payment made by Muslims. It becomes due on savings which have been kept for one full year. Two and a half percent of a person's assets, excluding basic necessities, are given to those in need.

Zakāh is an act of worship, it is a way of showing sympathy to those who are less fortunate, it is a means to take greed and the love of money away from our hearts, and it is a bridge between the rich and the poor.

Zakāh purifies one's wealth. Wealth on which Zakāh is paid is blessed by God, while that on which Zakāh has not been paid will be a source of punishment and something which one will have to answer for before God.

Take from their wealth alms in order that you may cleanse them and purify them thereby.

Qur'ān, 9:103

“...to fast in Ramaḍān...”

The fourth pillar is Ṣawm, or fasting. During the ninth month of the Islāmic calendar, Ramaḍān, it is an obligation on every able and mature believer to abstain from eating, drinking, and sexual relations from dawn till dusk.

God tells us:

O you who believe, fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may attain piety.

Qur’ān, 2:183

Fasting is therefore both a physical and spiritual exercise. The Arabic word for piety in the verse above, Taqwā, has many meanings, one of the most important of which is God-consciousness. Since fasting is an act of worship which spans over a whole day, it creates a strong awareness of God as believers go about the usual chores of life, but this time constantly reminded that they cannot eat or drink in obedience to God.

Acts which are always forbidden then, like evil speech and behaviour, have to be avoided with all the more diligence. Fasting teaches one discipline and trains one to control one’s desires. It develops endurance and steadfastness, and allows one to truly empathise with the hungry and thirsty. These are some of the ways in which Ṣawm helps a person “attain piety”.

Ramaḍān is a very spiritual month for Muslims as it was in this month that the revelation of the Qur’ān began. Muslims fast during the daylight hours of the month and offer a special prayer in its nights known as Ṣalāh at-Tarāwīḥ in which the whole Qur’ān is often completed over the month. The fasting subdues one’s desires while the extra worship nourishes the soul and refines one’s higher instincts.

The blessed month is concluded with a day of celebration called `Eid al-Fiṭr, a day of rejoicing and thanksgiving at the success of completing the month of fasting, and sharing with the less fortunate through charity. The Messenger ﷺ once said, "The person who fasts has two occasions of rejoicing: one at the time of ending his fast, and another at the time of meeting his Lord." It was related by al-Bukhāri and Muslim.

"...and to make the pilgrimage to the House if you are able to make the way there."

The fifth pillar of Islam is to make pilgrimage to the Great House built by Abraham ؑ for the worship of God in the Sacred Mosque in Makkah, known as the Ka`bah. This is the Ḥajj, an obligation on all who can afford the expenses and withstand the journey once in a lifetime.

And pilgrimage to the House (Ka`bah) is a duty that mankind owes to Allāh, those who can make the way there...

Qur'an, 3:97

Abraham ؑ was ordered by God to call people for pilgrimage. It is in response to his call that Muslims flock to Makkah every year. They carry out the acts of Ḥajj in the footsteps of Abraham ؑ with devotion and sincerity. They confirm their readiness to forsake worldly enjoyment and comfort for the sake of God.

Ḥajj is the largest annual gathering of Muslims. They come from all over the world to assemble in the Holy Land. It is a true demonstration of the universal nature of Islām and that all Muslims are brothers and equal to one another. Pilgrims wear the same simple sheets and gather on the plain of `Arafāt, a powerful reminder of the day that all mankind will gather before God for the final judgement. All will stand equal that day except by the degree of piety and righteousness.

“Then tell me about Īmān.”

Īmān literally means to believe, to have faith. After dealing within the outer aspects of Islām, we now come to the inner dimension: what it is that a believer must have faith in.

“It is to believe in Allāh, His angels, His Books, His messengers, and the Last Day, and to believe in destiny, both the good and the evil thereof.”

A Muslim believes in these six fundamental articles of faith:

1. The first is to believe in God, that He alone is the Creator, Sustainer and Lord of all things. He alone is Great, everything else derives its qualities and properties from Him. There is, therefore, no power or might but through Him, and He alone is worthy of worship.

2. The second is to believe in the angels, beings created by God from pure light. They are always in obedience to God, unable to sin. They have been assigned to various tasks which they carry out faithfully, like conveying revelation to messengers, recording the good and bad deeds of people, protecting people from harm, bringing the souls to babies in their mothers' wombs, etc. The number of angels is known only to God, but four who are well-known in Islāmic and Hebrew tradition are Gabriel (Jibrīl), Michael (Mikā'il), Raphael* and Azrael*.

(* these angels are recognised, however, their names are not confirmed)

3. The third is to believe in the messengers sent by God. These were men chosen by God to deliver His message to their people and call them towards goodness. They were all pious and upright people who lived their lives according to what they preached, often having to battle against evil and make great sacrifices for the truth. These include Adam, Noah (Nūḥ), Abraham (Ibrāhīm), Ishmael (Ismā'il), Isaac (Ishāq), Moses (Mūsā), David (Dāwūd), Solomon (Sulaymān), Jesus (ʿĪsā), and last of all, Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon them

all). A Muslim must believe in all who were sent by God and give them due respect, but they are not to be worshipped. Great as they were, they were but men sent to men to guide them towards God, not men.

4. The fourth is to believe in the Books of God which He revealed to His messengers with guidance to mankind. Of these, four are known to us: the Torah which was revealed to Moses, the Psalms (Zabūr) which was revealed to David, the Gospel (Injil) which was revealed to `Īsā, and the Qur'ān which was revealed to Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon them all). The earlier scriptures were altered over time with the additions and subtractions of men, until the divine became difficult to tell apart from the human. The Qur'ān, being the last revelation, has been preserved by God from any kind of distortion.

5. The fifth is to believe in the Last Day. Divine religion has always taught that all who live will one day be raised up again and assembled before God to be judged for their deeds. The faithful and true will inherit the Gardens of Paradise for eternity, God being well-pleased with them and they well-pleased with Him, while those who rebelled against the truth and chose to remain blind to guidance to follow their desires will enter the Fire. May God preserve us all from this, the ultimate and most devastating loss.

6. The sixth is to believe that everything that ever comes our way comes to us from God. Since God is the Creator of all things, He too is the One by whose will everything related to all things occurs. No atom is set into motion or becomes still, nor is a breath disturbed or quietened except by His allowing it to happen. Being complete in knowledge, He knew before creating things exactly what they would go on to do once created, and decreed accordingly. And so all that befalls us, whether we consider it good or bad, befalls us by His leave, and all of it has the potential to become both ultimately good or ultimately bad for us, depending on our response to it. The Messenger

of God ﷻ once said:

“How amazing is the affair of the believer – all of his affair is good for him, and this happens with none but the believer. If happiness befalls him, he gives thanks, so that becomes good for him; and if sorrow befalls him, he is patient, so *that* becomes good for him (too).”

Muslim

“Then tell me about Iḥsān.”

Iḥsān literally means to make beautiful, to do well. Having asked about the physical submission, Islām, and the internal affirmation, Īmān, the next question was about the achievement of excellence: what is the highest goal that the believer is to aspire towards in his relationship with his Lord, the closest a human can get to perfection, the ultimate state of beauty ?

“It is to worship Allāh as though you are seeing Him, for though you see Him not, yet truly He sees you.”

The highest state and peak of excellence that a worshipper can attain to, Iḥsān, is to behold the Worshipped. It is to fine-tune one’s senses to God, transforming worship from a set of motions to *seeing* the beauty and glory of the Almighty. And as worship in Islām goes beyond simply the ritual acts of prayer and fasting, etc. to encompass the whole of a life spent in obedience to God, so too is Iḥsān to be aspired towards throughout every part of life by becoming perceptive of the presence and beauty of the truly Magnificent and Majestic all around us.

A person in such a state of consciousness of God spreads beauty and goodness everywhere he or she goes, because of the beauty and goodness that they are constantly in touch with. Achieving excellence, Iḥsān, in one’s relationship with one’s Maker takes one to excellence in everything that he or she does and is; one becomes a Muḥsin, a doer

of good, of beauty. If you live “as though you are seeing Him”, or at least, with the awareness that “truly He sees you”, you become anxious of choosing what is pleasing and beautiful in His sight in everything you do: the way you speak to those around you and interact with them, the way you respond to different situations, the way you treat even animals and nature. Effectively, you are always with God.

Surely Allāh is with those who keep their duty (to Him) and those who do good.

Qur’an 16:128

“Then tell me about the Hour.”

“The one questioned about it knows no better than the questioner.”

The appointed time of the Final Hour of Reckoning, or Judgement Day, is amongst the best kept secrets in existence. Its knowledge was not vouchsafed to either angel or messenger.

They ask thee about the (final) Hour - when will it be established? Say: “Knowledge thereof is with my Lord: none can expose it but He at its (due) time.” Heavy is its burden through the heavens and the earth! Only of a sudden will it come to you...

Qur’an, 7:187

“Then tell me about its signs.”

“That the slave-girl will give birth to her mistress, and that you will see the barefooted, naked, destitute shepherds competing in constructing lofty buildings.”

Two of the signs of the imminence of the Hour are mentioned. The first has been understood to mean various things, including that mothers would give birth to overbearing and oppressive children. It is worthy to note that the civilisation of Islām went on to give rise to the Modern World by introducing Europe to learning and culture when it was in its

‘Dark Ages’, thereby planting the seeds of Europe’s Renaissance. And it was this same Modern World that was to then colonise and enslave virtually all of the Muslim World.

The second sign is one that has physically been witnessed in our times all over the world, but most literally in Arabia, as those who were shepherds for generations suddenly found themselves sitting on oil. Sudden wealth may be a great gift, but it is also a great test.

Both the signs mentioned relate to social wrongs: the mistreatment of the powerful of those who brought them to power, and the gross materialism that infects those of wealth who had, until not long ago, been needy themselves. It has to cause concern, then, that the age we live in is characterised above all else by social injustice and the lavish extravagance of the wealthy while millions struggle with poverty.

“Do you know who the questioner was? ...It was Gabriel. He came to you to teach you your religion.”

And so was this exchange between the Archangel Gabriel and the Seal of Messengers, Muḥammad ﷺ, concluded. It took place, we now learn, for our benefit: to encapsulate for us comprehensively the guidance sent for the last time from the heavens to humanity. Islām is a declaration of the truth and worship according to it; it is a teaching of pure beliefs and a clear creed; it is an instruction of beauty in word and deed, and of spreading beauty by living in consciousness of the Source of Beauty. And in the end, lest we should become distracted by the world and its pursuit, we are reminded of the reality of the Final Reckoning before God.

And guard yourselves against a day in which you shall be brought back to Allah. Then every soul will be paid in full that which it earned, and they will not be wronged.

Qur’an 2:281

TRANSLITERATION GUIDE

Please take note of the table below as our transliteration method may be different to those adopted by others.

The transliterated symbols are unvarying in pronunciation, e.g. the representation “s” will remain pronounced as “s” and not distort to “z” in any circumstance, e.g. Islām is *not* pronounced Izlām.

While every effort has been made to ensure the transliteration is as close to the Arabic as possible, no alphabet can ever fully represent another.

This is all the more true where recitation of Qur’ānic verses is concerned as this must adhere to the very precise science of Tajwīd. It is therefore imperative that the readers do not consider a transliteration a substitute for learning to read Arabic correctly from a competent teacher.

VOWELS

A / a	SHORT “A” AS IN “AGO”	I / i	SHORT “I” AS IN “SIT”
Ā / ā	LONG “A” AS IN “HAT”	Ī / ī	LONG VOWEL AS IN “SEE”
AY or AI	DIPHTHONG AS IN “PAGE”	AW or AU	DIPHTHONG AS IN “HOME”
‘	ABRUPT START/PAUSE DOES NOT OCCUR IN ENGLISH	U / u	SHORT “U” AS IN “PUT”
		Ū / ū	LONG VOWEL AS IN “FOOD”

CONSONANTS

ب	B	“B” NO “H” ATTACHED	ض	Ḍ	“DH” USING SIDES OF THE TONGUE
ت	T	“T” NO “H” ATTACHED	ط	Ṭ	“T” WITH RAISED TONGUE
ث	TH	“TH” AS IN THIN	ظ	Ẓ	“TH” AS IN THEN, SOUND IS WITH RAISED TONGUE
ح	Ḥ	“H” GUTTURAL SOUND	ع	‘	GUTTURAL SOUND - ACCOMPANIES VOWEL
خ	KH	“KH” VERY GUTTURAL NO TONGUE USAGE	غ	GH	“GH” VERY GUTTURAL NO TONGUE USAGE
د	D	“D” NO “H” ATTACHED	ق	Q	“K” WITH BACK OF TONGUE RAISED
ذ	DH	“TH” AS IN THEN	و	W	“W” READ - NOT SILENT
س	S	“S” ONLY - NOT “Z”	ي	Y	“Y” ONLY - NOT “I”
ش	SH	“SH” AS IN SHIN			
ص	Ṣ	“S” WITH RAISED TONGUE			

Note: Double consonants must be pronounced with emphasis on both letters without pause, e.g. **ALLĀHUMMA** should be read **AL-LĀHUM-MA**.

SYMBOLS

SUBHĀNAHŪ WA TA`ĀLĀ FOR ALLAH “GLORIFIED AND EXALTED IS HE”	ṢALLALLĀHU `ALAYHI WA SALLAM FOR MUHAMMAD “PEACE BE UPON HIM”
RAḌĪYAL-LĀHU `ANHU FOR COMPANIONS “ALLAH BE PLEASED WITH HIM”	`ALAYHIS-SALĀM FOR PROPHETS “PEACE BE UPON THEM”