

True Islam—True Devotion

True Islam from a Christian Perspective

The first Surah in the Qur'ān speaks of the knowledge planted in every person's heart by God that He is the highest, to whom alone all praise is due. It contains a prayer to be led on the right path:

*In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.
Praise belongs to God, the Lord of all Being,
the All-merciful, the All-compassionate,
the Master of the Day of Doom.
Thee only we serve; to Thee alone we pray for succour.
Guide us in the straight path,
the path of those whom Thou hast blessed,
not of those against whom Thou art wrathful, nor of those who are astray.
(Sūrah 1: Al-Fātihah)¹*

Everyone who seeks God with his whole heart and with a sincere attitude will find Him. In this article we would like to offer help in recognizing the straight path which God revealed through his prophets and through Jesus.

Who teaches us true Islam?

What, do they desire another religion than God's, and to Him has surrendered whoso is in the heavens and the earth, willingly or unwillingly, and to Him they shall be returned? Say: 'We believe in God, and that which has been sent down on us, and sent down on Abraham and Ishmael, Isaac and Jacob, and the Tribes, and in that which was given to Moses and Jesus, and the Prophets, of their Lord; we make no division between any of them, and to Him we surrender.' Whoso desires another religion than Islam, it shall not be accepted of him; in the next world he shall be among the losers. (Sūrah 3: Ali 'Imrān 83-85)

This passage from the Qur'ān uses the term "Islam" not in the sense of belonging to a particular religious community. Here it means devotion and surrender to God. It is the faith of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses, the faith of the prophets and of Jesus, Mary's son. A person who wants to devote himself to God with his whole heart will, therefore, follow the examples of Abraham and the prophets and the example of Jesus of Nazareth. They devoted themselves completely to God and were, in this sense, the true Muslims, those who surrendered to God. Through them the Almighty spoke to the world and revealed his will and his being. To follow their devotion is true Islam, perfect submission to the will of the one and only God.

Surely We sent down the Torah, wherein is guidance and light; thereby the Prophets who had surrendered themselves gave judgment for those of Jewry ... (Sūrah 5: Al-Mā'idah 44)

And We sent, following in their footsteps, Jesus son of Mary, confirming the Torah before him and We gave to him the Gospel, wherein is guidance and light, and confirming the Torah before it, as a guidance and an admonition unto the godfearing. So let the People of the Gospel judge according to what God has sent down therein. Whosoever judges not according to what God has sent down — they are the ungodly. (Sūrah 5: Al-Mā'idah 46-47)

And when Jesus came with the clear signs he said, 'I have come to you with wisdom, and that I may make clear to you some of that whereon you are at variance; so fear you God and obey you me. (Sūrah 43: Az-Zukhruf 63)

Everyone who wants to submit to God follows the word of the Torah, the Prophets and the words of Jesus confirming the Torah. A true Muslim desires to get to know the whole revelation of God. Therefore he cannot ignore the Torah, the Prophets and the Gospel. A true Muslim will obey the words of Jesus. It is only in this way that he can receive guidance and light from the Almighty. This is also testified by those very scriptures:

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. (Psalm 119:105)

For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light, and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life. (Proverbs 6:23)

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (John 8:12)

So the Qur'ān testifies unanimously with the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments that we can find light and guidance in both the Torah and the Gospel. Can anything then hinder a Muslim from getting to know the whole revelation of God, devoting himself to the intensive study of the words of the Torah and the Gospel?

What does devotion mean?

God said to Abraham,

I am God Almighty, walk before me, and be blameless, that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly. (Genesis 17:1-2)

For Abraham devotion meant living in God's presence and striving for a blameless life.

In the Torah we find following commandment:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart... (Deuteronomy 6:4-6)

God spoke through the prophet Micah:

He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8)

Jesus confirmed the commandment of the Torah and called it the greatest commandment:

And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law? And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets. (Matthew 22:35-40)

Jesus' own life was the best realisation of this commandment. He was totally filled with love for God. He was faithful to God in everything and, unlike any other person, was able to ask his adversaries without any pride,

“Which one of you convicts me of sin?” (John 8:46)

Jesus' life was a demonstration of God's compassion and mercy. The Qur'ān also relates how these characteristics were evident in the lives of his followers:

Then We sent, following in their footsteps, Our Messengers; and We sent, following, Jesus son of Mary, and gave unto him the Gospel. And We set in the hearts of those who followed him tenderness and mercy. (Sūrah 57: Al-Hadeed 27)

The Bible describes how this compassion and mercy became reality in the lives of the followers of Jesus in the following words:

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers... And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing their proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favour with all the people ... (Acts 2:42,44-47)

Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. (Acts 4:32)

For the first Christians, devotion to God also meant devotion to the brothers. That was their reason for sharing their lives in daily fellowship and even sharing their goods with one another.

If anyone says, “I love God”, and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother. (1 John 4:20-21)

Even as the official Christian religion moved away from the path of Jesus and adapted more and more to the world, there remained a number of faithful followers of Jesus who continued to honour God faithfully, reading the Bible and praying together every day:

Yet they are not all alike; some of the People of the Book are a nation upstanding, that recite God's signs in the watches of the night, bowing themselves, believing in God and in the Last Day, bidding to honour and forbidding dishonour, vying one with the other in good works; those are of the righteous. (Sūrah 3: Ali 'Imrān 113-114)

The “Five Pillars” of Islam

According to Islamic tradition, Islam, i.e. devotion to God, is primarily expressed by living according to the 'five pillars' of Islam.² :

Narrated Ibn 'Umar: Allah's Apostle said: Islam is based on (the following) five (principles):

- (1) To testify that none has the right to be worshipped but Allah and Muhammad is Allah's apostle.
- (2) To offer the (compulsory congregational) prayers dutifully and perfectly.
- (3) To pay Zakat (i.e. obligatory charity).
- (5) To perform Hajj (i.e. Pilgrimage to Mecca).
- (4) To observe fast during (the month of) Ramadan.

What did God declare to us through Jesus concerning these five points, and what corresponding practices can we find in the life of the first Christians?

1) **The Confession of God's unity and uniqueness** forms the unmovable basis of the doctrine of Jesus and his disciples. There is no other God than the One and Only, He who created the universe and revealed Himself to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to all the prophets, and to him who will judge mankind on the Last Day. No disciple of Jesus ever accepted him as a deity beside God (as Sūrah 5:116 suggests). We believe in him

“who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honour and eternal dominion.” (1 Timothy 6:15-16)³

Christians, however, don't confess God mainly by a ritual recitation, but by living their lives according to his commandments and by constantly striving to help lead others to the knowledge of God in living according to his will.

None of the Muslims (i.e. people who surrender to God) from Abraham until the seventh century AD ever confessed Muhammad as the prophet. Of course, he didn't even appear on the scene until much later. On the other hand, all the believers who lived after the time of Jesus understood clearly that God's revelation to mankind had reached its climax in Jesus and they did not expect any new revelation in the future.

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son... (Hebrews 1:1-2a)

Jesus promised to send his Holy Spirit to the disciples:

“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.” (John 14:26)

Jesus fulfilled this promise to his disciples approximately 50 days later. The Holy Spirit led the disciples to a deeper understanding of the words of Jesus by reminding them of the very words he had spoken to them.⁴

2) For every believer **prayer** is the daily essence of his spiritual life.

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God! (Philippians 4:6)

... praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints!⁵ (Ephesians 6:18)

Jesus himself lived a life of prayer. Again and again he turned to his Father in prayer:

In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God. (Luke 6:12)

His disciples followed his example:

All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer ... (Acts 1:14)

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. (Acts 2:42)

For the first Christians, and for all Christians since, prayer was and is the basis and the expression of their constant relationship with God. Having spiritual life means having a relationship with the God who loves us. Our prayer is our loving response to His love for us. Therefore prayer cannot be pressed into the rigid forms of a ritual. Love surpasses all rituals. The prayers of Jesus and his followers are not bound to special forms, times, places or directions. We are constantly surrounded by the eternal God. The content of all our words and our whole life is the praise of his love.

3) Christians don't have a **tax for the poor**. The Old Testament contained different regulations for the care of the poor. E.g. every third year the whole tithe should be at the disposal of the poor. (Deuteronomy 14:28-29) The basic rule was:

You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land. (Deuteronomy 15:11)

The believers in the New Testament far exceeded this regulation. God's love filled their hearts and compelled them. So they did not merely give alms to their brothers and sisters, but they shared with them:

And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. (Acts 2:44-45)

There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of land or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. (Acts 4:34-35)

Your abundance in the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness. (2 Corinthians 8:14)

When various 'Christian' groups later reintroduced the Old Testament tithe (giving a tenth), they departed from the standard taught in the New Testament. Similarly the 'zakat', while admittedly having a positive effect on many Islamic nations, is in fact a backward step from the level of devotion shown in the New Testament. The readiness of a Christian to give is directed by love and cannot be regulated by percentages.

4) There is no rule about **fasting** in the New Testament. Jesus spoke against the public demonstration of fasting practised by the Pharisees:

And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. (Matthew 6:16-18)

God requires our complete devotion and love, being ready to serve Him and our brothers every day, all the year round. This devotion also requires self-discipline. A Christian's spirit controls his body and overcomes its desires. We eat our food with gratitude, knowing that we can abstain from food if the tasks we have from God demand it. This discipline is our way of life regardless of time or season. Addictive drugs (such as nicotine) have no place at all in the life of a Christian.

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body! (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

5) The believers in the Old Testament had the command of a **pilgrimage** to Jerusalem three times a year:

Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God at the place that he will choose: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Booths. They shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed. Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD your God that he has given you. (Deuteronomy 16:16-17)

In the time of Jesus there was disunity between the Jews and the Samaritans concerning the “place that the LORD will choose”. The Jews made their pilgrimage to Jerusalem. For the Samaritans, however, Mount Gerizim was the mount of worship.

While Jesus confirmed the Jewish viewpoint as being the original one, he went a step further by saying to a Samaritan woman,

“Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father ... But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and truth.” (John 4:21-24)

Christians, therefore, have neither holy places nor holy times. Every place and every hour, day and year are sanctified by the presence of the Almighty God. Our whole life is a pilgrimage to the heavenly Jerusalem.

... but you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect ... (Hebrews 12:22-23)

Soon you can find more information about the place of worshipping God here.

A closer investigation of these ‘five pillars’ shows that Jesus did not teach precise rules about various religious practices, but that he brought love – love that far surpasses all religious rules and which leads us to perfect devotion to the eternal God in the service of the believers. He leads us to true ‘Islam’, a true submission to God’s will that will fulfil us for all eternity with the abundant joy of fellowship with our Creator. True Islam is the way that Jesus showed us. Indeed he himself is the way. We want to invite all Muslims to walk this way and so to become true Muslims.

We sent not any before thee, except men to whom We revealed: ‘Question the people of the Remembrance, if it should be that you do not know. (Sūrah 16: An-Nahl 43)

At that time Jesus declared,

**“I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth,
That you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding
and revealed them to little children;
Yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.**

**All things have been handed over to me by my Father,
and no one knows the Son except the Father,
And no one knows the Father except the Son
and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.
Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden,
And I will give you rest.
Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me,
For I am gentle and lowly in heart,
And you will find rest for your souls.
For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”
(Matthew 11:25-30)**

ps. The term ‘Christians’ is used in this article exclusively to refer to people who have decided to devote their whole life to walk the way of Jesus. We certainly cannot call our sinful western consumer society ‘Christian’. Furthermore we have to make it clear that all institutions generally known as ‘Christian Churches’ are far from biblical Christianity.

Footnotes:

1. Qur’an quotations taken from: [“The Koran Interpreted: A Translation”](#) by Arthur John Arberry (1955)
2. According to M. Muhsin Khan’s translation of Sahih al-Bukhari’s Hadith collection, Vol. 1, Book 2, Number 7. In this hadith the 4th and 5th pillars are placed in a different sequence from that which is usual today.
3. From our article about the [Trinity](#) it can be clearly seen that faith in the Trinity does not contradict the faith in the one and only God.
4. The term “remembrance” presupposes that those who are led to this “remembrance” were eyewitnesses of Jesus. Others could not be reminded of his words by the Spirit. We must, therefore, exclude *a priori* any interpretation of this promise of Jesus as referring to Muhammad.
5. The New Testament uses the term “saint” not in the Roman-Catholic sense. The New Testament calls all Christians saints (holy ones) because everyone who follows Jesus is sanctified by him.

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