



“Surely My Mercy overtakes My Wrath”

Islam: The Straight Path to God

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Introduction

I come to you in the Name of that Benevolent, Most Merciful God Whom you and we worship and serve, and Whose Name in the Arabic, Aramaic, Hebrew and other Semitic languages is ALLAH; so in Arabic I say “Bismillahir-Rahmanir-Raheem,” which means “In the Name of God, the Benevolent, the Most Merciful;” and in His Name I greet you by saying “as-salaamu ‘alaikum,” which means “God’s peace for you.”

You have invited me here to represent to you a Faith which belongs utterly to God and not to men, which He in His Wisdom has entrusted to men for their benefit and as a guide for the conduct of their daily affairs. God has then enabled me to know of and to bring here some brief fraction of that faith in one God, who offers salvation to all human kind. It is God therefore Who has created this occasion, making me responsible to Him for expressing to you some of His guidance as recognized by muslims. I ask God to enable me to fulfill this responsibility and to protect me and you from the harm of any error I may make.

We know from the teachings of Islam, and hold as a tenet of faith, that Jesus, whom we call “the Word of God,” proclaimed God’s Unity and Singularity before he proclaimed anything else; and that he called upon his companions and followers to announce to all humanity an everlasting covenant with God into which every person, Jew or Gentile, could enter unto salvation. We therefore recognize your movement as founded on true Christian premises, and the Law of Islam requires the muslims to aid you in your religious endeavors arising from those premises.

It is a sad consequence of history that both muslims and Christians have forgotten this for the most part, for both were fully informed; however, it is human nature to be forgetful, and it is a blessed thing when one of us can remind another one of us of some benefit that God has bestowed on us mutually. This I do, here today, and note that Islam and the muslims were made known to your spiritual ancestors in the pages of the Holy Bible and again by the testimony of Jesus, just as you are made known to us by the words of the Holy Qur’an and by the testimony of the learned men of the religious sciences in Islam.

Islam: The Everlasting Covenant

A great deal of what is today called Islam did not come from the prophet Muhammad sallallahu ‘alaihi wa sallam or his companions. This is not a unique aspect of Islam, rather whenever God has made His Law known, it has been quickly confounded with a religion of some other design. This is what Jesus ‘alaihi as-salaam taught of the Pharisees and scribes, who with their tradition sought to set the Law aside; and this is the heritage of Christendom as well, which adopted in the first few centuries a number of alien attributes. So also have the muslims elaborated the demands of faith, and we see that practices specifically set apart, as well as some pertaining to other cultures, have been added to Islam and given the force of tradition. Thus we see that in the time of the prophet, the public dress of the women of Medina was not unlike the semi-nudity we see in the world today – yet only among the faithful was more modest dress the rule, and the veil was not required of the muslims at large but only of the household of the prophet. So it is that practices required of the few have been demanded as well of the many, while the weightier matters of law and faith have been obscured by the mass of ritual.

But Islam as originally set forth has been miraculously preserved intact – beneath the glaze of historical distortion the Law and Tradition remain. While the Holy Bible attests to the crime of the ancients in tampering with the Holy Writ, the changes in the record of Islam consist of addition alone: the actual and original texts of the Law and the true reports of the Prophet’s words have come down to us unaltered. It is not that the realities of faith and Law have been lost from the Holy Bible – for they decidedly have not – but that the clear practice of Islam is so readily brought forth from the morass of pious presentments.

Islam arises as practical religion from that unique quality of humanity which places into its care the whole of God’s creation. Humanity has possession of the universe in trust, to do with as it will: it has been entrusted and the trust will not be revoked; and humanity individually and collectively have accepted that trust as irrevocable. But man is accountable for that, and this is his burden. To abdicate responsibility is a disaster of unimaginable proportion, a heedlessness beyond comparison because the trust is of such awesome magnitude and the consequences of failure are so immeasurably devastating for those involved. For man has the capacity to make of the world a semblance of paradise or a hell; and in fact does, in distinct measure, and there exist side-by-side in the world those whose lives are paradisaical and those whose lives are hellacious.

This is not to say that this world in which we live is paradise or even that paradise is contained within it – for this world is accurately described as “a prison for the faithful and a paradise for the deniers of faith.” Rather paradise is a separate creation – the other creation wholly in the care The Almighty. It is not given over to the ravages of mankind’s willfulness but is a realm in which all may enjoy the peace of accepting His gracious invitation to dwell therein. And the way of accepting that invitation lies in the way we care for that which has been entrusted to us, which is the world in all it contains.

For the responsible, the consequent which arises from their responsible care is residing in the Gardens of Paradise. For others, the invitation departs from view, becoming increasingly remote and inaccessible as they themselves become removed from responsible pathways. This responsibility

to proper care of the trust is called piety; it is demanded in some degree by every religion of every worshipper.

Essential to proper care of man's trust is his relationship with his Creator by which he receives His Guidance. Without the constant help of God, man becomes enmeshed in his awesome responsibility so that the magnitude of his charge along with his utter incapacity become manifest to him, leading to the dark of despair. Or the pleasures that God has provided for His creatures in His kindness take on a greater importance than the Provider or the trust man has accepted from Him. And with surprising frequency men abandon the path of rectitude for the sake of that which seems to them more attractive.

It is thus a function of religion to keep man's worldly focus on the fact of his accountability, to enable him to sense the Presence of his Lord and to be receptive to His Guidance and inspiration. These are the matters which tradition has labeled piety, and it is this that most call religion. In truth, however, it is that awesome trust that demands that man seek God's Guidance; it is the care of that trust in the Presence of God that constitutes the demand of piety; and it is the fulfillment of that responsibility to be God's servants according to His pleasure that characterizes the pious.

But the tragedy to which mankind alone is heir is that of failing to accept God's invitation to be His. For of a surety we belong only to Him, we are each and all like everything else the exclusive possession of God. But we are also ourselves a part of that creation which He has entrusted to our care – our responsibility includes humanity as well, and each of us is indeed his brother's keeper; we have been entrusted with and keep possession of ourselves, and must choose for ourselves a path to balance desire and duty.

Thus man encounters the risk of choosing for himself the bad in preference to the good – and it is his blessing and his bane that he recognizes the good he ought to choose. So to protect us from that most tragic error of failing to choose God in preference to anything and everything else, God hides Himself and discloses Himself only to those who will choose Him. For this, the most Merciful Creator provides for man pathways of varying clarity so as to lead them gradually into that Truth which is His Inescapable Presence – lest the faint of heart should perish or the strong mistakenly resist – and what differs among the religions is the facility with which the people of each can sense and delight in that Presence.

For each is given the measure of his satisfaction, and is led in the pathway that will bring him nearest to his Lord; and each of His pathways possesses an end in clarity, each fulfills its promise to lead to the Presence of God those who faithfully seek Him. Such is the providence of God that there is no door barring the sincere from Him and that the light of each path is shown to those who seek its End.

Thus it is that muslims do not deny the truth contained in the Holy Bible; indeed, muslims recognize that it describes the path of seeking the guidance of God. For a muslim, the Torah and the Gospel are God's designs by which He enables the Children of Israel and the followers of Jesus to care for their responsibilities: as the trust was placed with all humanity – to respect or to abuse – so also are the Holy Scriptures a statement of the design of God and His Will concerning those of His

servants who read them. Islam, which pursues the example of Muhammad and the Message of God he brought, bears witness as well to the truth that was given to Moses and the Word of the Messiah Jesus: and attests that the pathways of rectitude are available as well to followers of faiths besides Islam.

There are, of course, those who reject the ways of faith, and they are entitled – God permits them – to do so. How they then proceed to fulfill whatever they perceive as their responsibilities may or may not accord with the true nature of reality; but however much pleasure they seem to derive from their intercourse with the life of the world, they have lost the dimension of the eternal Presence of God: and heedless of His invitation to Himself, their pleasure is made all the more shallow in that it has an abrupt and unavoidable end. In fact, it is the lament that the delights of the world will perish that states the torment of the inhabitants of hell – for the Presence of God has no end, and it is that Holy Presence that delights the hearts of those who enter the Garden by walking on His pathways.

Islam: The Clear Path

Man's relations to his Lord that constitute the beginnings of walking in His Presence are the essence of simplicity. We must confess the Reality of God and the fact that He has sent to us men who have taught us of His ways. We must call upon the Creator in earnest, and establish that practice as a regular feature of our lives. We must be generous, spending the dues of the bounty He has given us and sharing it with others. We must fast from the pleasures of the flesh to maintain ourselves beyond the influence of desire. And we must prepare to seek Him as Pilgrims, to abandon all that is familiar with no expectation of return, for the quest of reaching His Presence and gazing upon His Face.

These are the commonalities of the pathways of faith, the links of the chain with which we bind ourselves to God; and if we fulfill these, then God will enable us to carry on that greater responsibility, to care for His creation that He has entrusted to us. But the question that has perennially troubled humanity is the question of specifics in these five observances: what constitutes prayer? What are the dues of wealth? Where is the line which separates responsible renunciation from unnecessary asceticism? And to where should the pilgrim repair in search of the proof of God's Presence?

But even more than these, and underlying any success that we might obtain in those works, is the question of witness and faith – how does helpless man, who is born naked, ignorant and hungry, attain to the knowledge of God, to certainty concerning his Maker, and to communion with those God has sent, the example they have left, and the faith and witness they have borne?

For the matter of witness is not so slight as to pronounce a credo of faith, although this may suffice to enter one onto God's pathways. But rather that which He has taught us of the ways He has made for us – through the example and teaching of those He has sent to walk among us – that also is essential to the proper care of that which has been entrusted to us. And in a very vital sense, these teachings of the written Word of God, these articles of faith and practice, of Law and custom, these religious canons, are our salvation from the dread of failure in caring for God's creation which has

been entrusted to us all with our varying capacities for understanding.

For who can testify that humanity unaided by God has properly cared for even itself? Let alone the soil and the trees and the birds, how has mankind abused itself, with war, captivity and greed? And where is the plan of human design that enables us to resolve our disputes? But within the Scriptures of every faith ordained by Almighty God, there are contained His basic designs for human harmony and responsible care of the creation. In these designs the five fundamentals of witness, prayer, dues, fast and pilgrimage are the means of establishing personal submission to His Will, acceptance of His design; and in the pursuit of God's acceptance and application of His design reside the ways of peace and success with responsibility. This path of responsibility entails observance of His proprieties and judgment by His criteria – not the formulation of standards and values apart from those that He has woven into the fabric of creation.

Islam itself as practical religion arises from humanity's fundamental responsibility – but nowhere is it stated that only the muslims apply these concepts to life. Rather the faith of Muhammad describes the whole of humanity as the trustee of God in the earth: and those who keep faith with that trust are responsible only to God, according to the pathway in which He leads each to Himself.

Islam is the path of complete clarity – not an end but rather the entire path lies clear and undisguised. The five fundamentals of faith are clarified in Islam, to easily comprehensible duties by which to seek God's Guidance: and when these are faithfully pursued, the pathway of clarity is open and leads directly to God.

The muslim witness entails observance of God's Will as expressed in the Holy Qur'an and by Muhammad and his example and through his teaching. The positive way of seeking the Guidance of God is described in detail – acceptable prayer and how it is established; proper dues and how they are to be spent; the necessary fast and elements of pilgrimage – all are set forth as clear practice with their fruit the guidance of God. The Law and Judgment of The Almighty are readily intelligible to the reader of the Qur'an; and while readers of the Holy Scriptures may derive therefrom the true ideals, the Qur'an describes practical applications: the muslim need only apply them.

The social responsibility of the muslim extends over the community of all the faithful; over all women without husbands who have children; over all children when they are out of their homes, or within a house when asked; over the aged and the oppressed, the weak and the destitute, and the illiterate and the insane; and, possessed of a prior claim, over his own household and family. Similarly the accords afforded by Islam to people of other faiths are clearly written and easily comprehensible – that which the muslims are charged in support of the people of Scripture is not a mere expedient but a matter of Law. Yet the focus of the muslim's attention is his own observance of duty, his immediate personal conduct and manner, and his relationship and covenant with his Lord – according to clear and recognizable, well-known and establish guidelines for every human activity.

In Islam the right is clearly distinguishable from error, the path is clearly defined and free of crookedness, and the ends of every pathway whether of righteousness or of heedlessness are clear and in view and undeniable: the follower of Islam has only to choose the right path or the error.

But in Islam the danger is greater that one might choose the tragedy of failing his responsibility – for often error appears the ease, while truth appears surrounded by trial and trouble. The path of responsibility is not always easy to follow, although it is always less difficult than the consequence of pursuing error. Accordingly the muslim is told to struggle with patience and insight to enhance his own salvation – and reminded at every hour of the day that he will account for himself to his Lord.

The trust of man to care for the world is only fulfilled through God – the path of that fulfillment of necessity leads toward Him. And as the Presence of God knows no end, so also are we ultimately and always His possession that returns to Him. Yet on every path are His Signs, directing toward the ways He would have us choose – and it is proof of His love for humanity that He continues to allow Himself to be known, and His Unity shown, and His Mercy and Compassion enthroned.

And praise belongs to ALLAH, may He preserve us from error!