

Core Curriculum

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1 God, Religion and Islam: An Introduction

1.1

The Problem of Evil, Suffering and Pain

Question : What is the emotional problem of evil?

Answer : It is people's dislike or even hatred of God who permits suffering in the world. They are angry that God doesn't do anything about it.

Question : What is the intellectual problem of evil?

Answer : This problem sees God and evil as mutually incompatible from a logical perspective.

Question : What is one of the main reasons why God allows evil in this world?

Answer : Human evil is produced by free will. By preserving human free will, God allows humans to flourish and reach their highest potential of the good. But free will also means that humans can choose the wrong path.

Question : Why doesn't God punish people who do evil?

Answer : He does punish them, but that can take place in this world (if they are lucky) or take place in the Hereafter if they are unlucky as punishment in the next life is much worse.

Question : Are there rewards for people who suffer from evil in this world?

Answer : Yes, one of the rewards is having sins forgiven.

1.2

God, Allah and Religion

Question : What does Allah mean?

Answer : It is the Arabic word for God.

Question : Why did God send down revelation and religion?

Answer : In order to guide humankind to salvation and purify their hearts from evil and heedlessness of Him.

Question : Does God want us to enter hell?

Answer : No, His will is that we enter heaven through our free will.

Question : Why does God punish us?

Answer : In order to wake us up and realize our mistakes.

Question : What is the difference between deism and God in Islam?

Answer : In deism, God is distant from humankind and does not get involved in their affairs, whereas the God of Islam is closer to us than our jugular veins. He does all that is possible to guide us to salvation whilst maintaining our free will.

1.3

Introduction to Islam

Question : What is the purpose of the Qur'an?

Answer : It is to gear the human mind towards God and offer a social commentary for the purpose of reshaping human behavior in accordance with the Good life.

Question : Does Islam accept the Old and New Testament Prophets?

Answer : Yes, it accepts them for the most part.

Question : Does Islam believe in angels?

Answer : Yes, it believes in the Biblical angels like Gabriel and Michael.

Question : Is Islam a religion of belief or practice?

Answer : Both.

Question : Why was the Qur'an revealed in Arabic?

Answer : Because it was revealed to the Arabs who at the time were the worst of people in the Prophetic region of the Middle East. Furthermore, the Qur'an was revealed in that region as it was the center of the world where Africa and Asia connected together and thereby being an ideal place for the spread of Islam's message.

1.4

What is "Religion" and What's the Point of it Anyways?

Question : What is religion?

Answer : A way of life, a constitutive activity in the world

Question : What is the function of religion?

Answer : There is no agreement on this, but the Islamic view is that it functions as a system of knowing and desiring that guides and determines all of one's ways of looking at and acting in the world and all its various commitments and ways of organizing.

Question : Why is religion failing?

Answer : There is no agreement on this, but according to the Islamic view, religion, if seen as a way of life, is not failing. What is failing is our way of life in the form of a relationship with God.

Question : Why are we losing faith then according to Islam?

Answer : There is never a simplistic answer to these things. But one major reason is our state of heedlessness caused by the plenitude of distractions in the modern world, including TV, computers, internet, blind pursuit of a career etc.

Question : What is the Arabic word for religion?

Answer : Dīn

1.5

A Brief Introduction to the Prophet Muhammad (s), the Prophet of Islam

Question : What is a Hanif?

Answer : A person in the Arabian Peninsula who rejected idolatry and followed the religion of Abraham.

Question : What was the purpose of the Qur'an?

Answer : To change people's beliefs and attitude about God and teach them how to lead the good and moral life.

Question : Did pre-Islamic Arabs believe in Allah?

Answer : Yes they believed in God as the creator of the universe (Allah), however they also believed that He had children and had partner gods who ran the universe.

Question : Does the Qur'an acknowledge Old Testament Prophets?

Answer : Yes

Question : Does the Qur'an acknowledge the Torah and Gospel?

Answer : Yes, although it believes some of it may have been changed by people. The Qur'an is therefore a corrective to the tampering of the texts.

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2 Foundations of Islam - Theology

2.1

Entering Islam: The Shahada

Question : What is shahāda?

Answer : The shahāda is the Islamic Creed, the fundamental key of entering Islam.

Question : How is the shahāda pronounced and what does it mean?

Answer : Ash-ha-du... an Lā ilāha ...illAllāh ...wa Ash-ha-du ... anna ... Muhammadan ... rasūlullāh. These Arabic words can be translated in the following way: I testify that there is no deity but Allah and I testify that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.

Question : Does the shahāda differ among Muslims?

Answer : All Muslims believe in the same shahāda, Muslims also acknowledge an extended version in which they testify to the vicegerency and sainthood of Imam Ali (as) Ash-ha-du... an Lā ilāha ...illAllāh ...wa Ash-ha-du ... anna ... Muhammadan ... rasūlullāh. wa Ash-ha-du ... anna Aliun waliullah Translation: I testify that there is no deity but Allah and I testify that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah and I testify that Ali is the vicegerent and saint of Allah.

Question : How is Imāmah an extension of the Prophet Muhammad's (s) message?

Answer : After the Prophet Muhammad, the Imāms of the Ahl al-Bayt (as) preserve the authentic interpretation of Islam as intended by the Prophet (s).

Question : What is inner transformation?

Answer : It is changing your whole life and personality in accordance with what Allah wants from us.

Question : What does it mean to follow the Prophet as a role model?

Answer : Among other things, it means to adopt his compassion and love for God's creation and to acquire inner peace in God.

Question : Why do I have to perform ghusl after converting to Islam?

Answer : It is a ritual purification that enables you to perform ritual practices like prayer or fasting, which are obligatory in Islam.

Question : What can I do to treat the shahāda as a fact rather than just a belief or opinion?

Answer : Consider the Afterlife as more important than this one. That is the first step of knowing God.

2.2

The Usūl al-Dīn: The Fundamental Beliefs of Islam

Question : How many usūl al-dīn are there?

Answer : 5

Question : Do I need to believe in all of the usūl al-dīn in order to be a Muslim?

Answer : No, you need to believe in all so that your understanding of Islam, and your subsequent responsibilities that come thereof, is complete. There are some aspects of the usūl al-dīn that a person does not need to believe in in order to be a Muslim as long as it is done in good faith and out of innocent ignorance of the truth.

Question : What are the usūl al-dīn?

Answer : They are the foundational beliefs of a Muslim. They are: Tawhīd (Oneness of God), 'Adāla

(Divine Justice), Nubuwwa (Prophethood), Imāma (Divinely Guided Leadership) and Ma'ād (Resurrection on the Day of Judgment)

Question : If the God of Islam is One and has no partners, then what do angels and prophets do? Aren't they partners that help God manage the world of creation?

Answer : A partner is someone who is your equal and you are in need of them in order to do things. Angels and prophets are servants of Allah who by His choice, enact His will in the world of creation. He does not need them to manage the world or create it, He simply chooses them as His servants to enact His will although He can do this without them.

Question : Will the resurrection on the Day of Judgment be physical or spiritual?

Answer : Physical.

2.3

Tawhīd: The Unity and Oneness of God in Islam

Question : Why is tawhīd the most important part of the uṣūl al-dīn?

Answer : Without tawhīd, none of Islam, let alone the uṣūl al-dīn, would make sense for all of Islam depends on the concept of the Absolute Oneness and Unity of God.

Question : Are idols statues only?

Answer : No, our desires and egos can be idols as well for idols are simply entities which we enslave ourselves to.

Question : What is worship in Islam?

Answer : Worship in Arabic is 'ibāda, meaning to "enslave oneself to something." From an Islamic perspective, we may worship objects like money, or people like our bosses if our hearts and minds are totally submitted to them.

Question : What is shirk

Answer : Shirk is associating partners with Allah, either in creation, or in His attributes. For example, thinking that your parents are your sole providers is shirk since only Allah holds the attribute of sole Provider and Sustainer (al-Razzāq).

Question : Is tawhīd compatible with the Christian notion of the Trinity?

Answer : No, tawhīd means that God is absolutely one where He is not only one in essence, but is one person only and not three persons.

2.4

Adala: Divine Justice in Islam

Question : What is the Good?

Answer : The Good is that which leads human beings to salvation in the Afterlife.

Question : What is ‘Adāla?

Answer : ‘Adāla is a balance in the form of Divine Justice which God makes obligatory upon Himself and on His creation

Question : What is Evil?

Answer : Evil is the absence of Good, it corrupts the heart, corrupts one’s beliefs and actions, and ultimately leads people to damnation.

Question : Why does transgression of the balance lead to corruption?

Answer : The world is carefully designed, and there are special boundaries put so that people are led to salvation in the Afterlife. Transgression from these bounds means that one deviates and goes the wrong way. The wrong way leads to corruption.

Question : Why does Allah make justice obligatory upon Himself?

Answer : Because Allah, in His nature, is good, and justice is the result of God’s good nature.

Question : Why does God allow evil?

Answer : Because He allows free will, without free will, there is no real good or evil.

2.5

Nubuwwa: The Purpose of Prophethood in Islam

Question : What is the purpose of Prophethood in Islam?

Answer : Its purpose is to give humankind the blueprint on how to attain salvation in God as well as providing a human example on how to put that blueprint into practice.

Question : What’s the difference between wahī and ilhām?

Answer : Ilhām is usually a form of private inspiration from God, but wahī is revealed through the medium of the Archangel Gabriel (as) and is conditioned upon propagation to the public. Wahī is usually something new, often in the form of a new law.

Question : What’s the difference between a nabī (Prophet) and a rasūl (Messenger)?

Answer : A nabī receives basic revelation from God, usually in the form of a specific law whereas a Messenger receives a whole new system of laws which other nabī-only prophets usually follow.

Question : Why is the Prophet Muhammad (s) the last Prophet?

Answer : Because he is the prophet for the end of times, meaning that his message was perfect, complete and universal. Universal means for all times, all places and all peoples. As such, there is no more need for a new nabī.

Question : What’s the difference between Sunnah and hadīth?

Answer : Sunnah is the tradition, practice or culture of the Prophet. The sunnah is preserved in a oral tradition called the ḥadīth, which are sayings of the Prophet, or sayings about him, as in his actions.

Question : What is salvation?

Answer : Salvation is to purify the heart from sins and evil and to fill it with the remembrance of God and surrender to the divine.

2.6

Imāmah or divinely guided leadership in Islam after the Prophet Muhammad.

Question : What is an Imām?

Answer : A divinely guided leader (after the Prophet) tasked to guide humankind and protect the message of Islam.

Question : What does the Qur'an say about Imāms?

Answer : It is the final state of spiritual ascension. A sinner (ẓālim) cannot be an Imām. See Q2:124.

Question : Who are 'Alī and the Mahdī?

Answer : 'Alī is the first of the 12 Imāms, and the Mahdī is the 12th and last of the Imāms.

Question : What is the difference between Imāmah in Sunnism and Shi'ism?

Answer : For Shi'ism, Imāmah is a form of divine leadership after the Prophet Muhammad in which God tasks Imāms in question to guide mankind. For Sunnism, Imāmah is more "secular", that is, it is a fallible enterprise and is not selected by God. Imāms for Sunnis can include Friday Prayers, or high ranking jurists.

Question : What is the difference between Imāmah after the Prophet Muhammad and Prophethood in general?

Answer : The Imāms of the Ahl al-Bayt (as) who succeeded the Prophet (s) do not receive direct revelation (wahī) from God which comes through the medium of the Archangel Gabriel, they only receive ilhām or divinely inspired knowledge without a medium, this form of knowledge is largely private and not conditioned upon propagation, as is the case with wahī.

Question : Do the Imāms have to be present in order to guide us?

Answer : No they can from a distance through their light, they instill good thoughts and guidance in our hearts.

Question : Can God enforce Imāmah upon mankind?

Answer : Allah does not do that, He gave mankind the choice to accept it or reject it.

Question : How is it possible for an Imām to indirectly guide so many people via his light?

Answer : How do computers compute so much information? How does Satan deviate so many people on his own (without the need for his legions)? Is a divinely appointed Imām any less?

2.7

Ma'ād: The Day of Judgment in Islam

Question : What is the Day of Judgment?

Answer : The day all humans and jinns are resurrected and put to trial before God and questioned about the kind of life they led when they were alive. Did they worship God? Did they commit evil deeds or good deeds? The Day of Judgment will decide whether or not humans will enter heaven or hell.

Question : What is the difference between Qiyāmah and Ma'ād?

Answer : They are both the same thing, they refer to the resurrection on the Day of Judgment. Qiyāmah literally means to rise up, and Ma'ād means to return back to life.

Question : Who is Isrāfīl?

Answer : The archangel who will blow his trumpet and bring about the Day of Judgment.

Question : What is one way we will be judged on the Day of Judgment?

Answer : We will be presented with two books, one which recorded our good deeds and the other which recorded our bad deeds. Depending on the balance of deeds and God's mercy, we will either enter hell or heaven.

Question : Who are munkir and nakīr?

Answer : They are the angels in our grave that will ask us about our relationship with God.

2.8

The Sharī'a: Purpose and Practice

Question : What is the literal meaning of the Sharī'a?

Answer : It means "way," as in the way to God and salvation in Him

Question : Can we enforce Sharī'a in non-Muslim countries?

Answer : No

Question : What is the purpose of the Sharī'a?

Answer : To help guide us to spiritual discipline and serve God

Question : How is the Sharī'a universal?

Answer : You don't need to be in a Muslim majority country to pray or fast or feed the poor or abstain from sin. This can be done anywhere.

Question : According to the Sharī'a, am I allowed to disobey civil laws?

Answer : As long as they don't contradict the foundations of Islam, you are not allowed to disobey them.

2.9

The Islamic Concept of the Nafs: Battling the Human Ego

Question : What is the nafs?

Answer : It can refer to the inner self, or the base self and ego that commands to evil.

Question : What is the fitrah?

Answer : The fitrah is our spiritual nature, the realm within us that commands towards the good and Allah.

Question : What is the pure heart?

Answer : The pure heart is a heart that is empty of sin and completely submerged in the remembrance of God.

Question : What happens when we refuse the whims of the nafs?

Answer : Your fitrah or spiritual nature becomes stronger. You become more disciplined in life.

Question : How do we win the battle against the Nafs?

Answer : By starving it and feeding the fitrah instead.

2.10

Satan, Jinns and Angels: Their Influence in the World

Question : Is Satan an angel according to Islam?

Answer : No, he is a Jinn. According to Islam, angels cannot sin or disobey God.

Question : How do the Jinn deviate us from the right path?

Answer : By whispering in our hearts and putting evil thoughts, or thoughts that eventually lead to evil.

Question : What's the difference between Angels and Jinns?

Answer : Jinns have free will and desires, they can disobey God. Angels either don't have desires, or don't have free will, or don't have either. Either way, they cannot disobey Allah nor sin.

Question : Why did Satan turn bad?

Answer : Because of his pride and arrogance, he refused to prostrate to Adam (as) - as per the command of Allah - whom he thought was an inferior being.

Question : How do whispers affect our psychological makeup?

Answer : Our minds, or psychological makeup, is shaped by the habits and choices we make. Through their whispers, the Jinn try to influence our habits and choices and thereby change our psychological makeup.

2.11

The Problem of Evil, Suffering and Pain

Question : What is the emotional problem of evil?

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Answer : This problem sees God and evil as mutually incompatible from a logical perspective.

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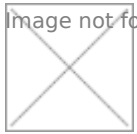
Question : Why doesn't God punish people who do evil?

Answer : He does punish them, but that can take place in this world (if they are lucky) or take place in the Hereafter if they are unlucky as punishment in the next life is much worse.

Question : Are there rewards for people who suffer from evil in this world?

Answer : Yes, one of the rewards is having sins forgiven.

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3 Foundations of Islam - Obligatory Acts

3.1

Accepting Islam: Putting Faith into Action

Question : Can I be punished in the after life if I don't perform my religious obligations?

Answer : Yes

Question : What is one of the prime distinguishers between someone who is a real Muslim and someone who is not?

Answer : Putting belief into action.

Question : Can I still be a Muslim if I don't believe in religious obligations?

Answer : No

Question : What is Islam?

Answer : Islam is a verb, and action; it means submission.

Question : Is belief enough for salvation in Islam?

Answer : Belief must always translate into action. Without action, a person has no Islam.

3.2

Jihād in Islamic Law and Spirituality

Question : What is the best way to struggle against my evil nafs?

Answer : Develop the habit of saying “no” to it.

Question : What is al-Nafs al-Ammārah?

Answer : It is the self or ego which commands us to do evil. It is what Muslims must struggle against.

Question : What is Jihad al-Asghar?

Answer : It is the minor Jihad, it is defending oneself or one’s community against warring aggressors.

Question : What is Jihad al-Akbar?

Answer : It is the greater Jihad, it is the jihad against one’s evil desires.

Question : What is Jihad?

Answer : Jihad is struggle against evil

3.3

Salāt: Obligatory Ritual Prayers in Islam

Question : What is the difference between du‘ā and the five daily salāt?

Answer : Du‘ā is a supplication and not obligatory on its own, salāt is a ritual prayer and is obligatory.

Question : How many daily obligatory prayers/salāt do we have?

Answer : Five

Question : Is salāt performed at the same time every day?

Answer : Not exactly, the daily prayers follow the movement of the sun.

Question : Can I be a Muslim and not pray?

Answer : If you dismiss it entirely, no you cannot.

Question : Is it ok that I perform salāt on my own time if I’m too busy?

Answer : No, you must pray on God’s time. The various times can be found in Muslim prayer calendars.

3.4

Ritual Purity in Islamic Law: Understanding Tahāra and Najāsa

Question : What is tahāra?

Answer : Tahara is ritual purity. Tahāra is necessary for ritual practices like prayer.

Question : What is najāsa?

Answer : Najasa is ritual impurity. Excrement, blood or semen are considered najis or ritually impure in Islam.

Question : What is tayammum?

Answer : Tayammum is a form of ritual purification with the same effects of ghusl. It is performed when one does not, for example, have water.

Question : If I perform ghusl, do I have to perform wudū as well?

Answer : Generally no. There are cases which it may be needed, but this is subject to disagreement among Muslim scholars.

Question : Does najāsa or janāba mean dirty?

Answer : No, it means ritual impurity. Something may be ritually impure, but be considered clean in the conventional sense. The same applies to tahāra.

3.5

The Five Categories of Islamic Law

Question : What is the difference between wajib and fard?

Answer : Fard is a subcategory of wajib, it is a Quranic obligation, i.e. an obligation explicitly found in the Quran.

Question : What is mustahab?

Answer : Mustahab is a recommended act in Islam which one gains a lot of reward for doing, but no sin for not doing it.

Question : What is Makruh?

Answer : Makruh is a hated act in Islam, but one gains no sin in doing it, but gains rewards from God for desisting from it.

Question : Can something mubah become wajib?

Answer : Yes, regularly drinking water is mubāh. However, if regularly drinking water means saving your life because of some condition you have, mubāh becomes wājib.

Question : How many categories of law do we have in Islamic practice?

Answer : Five. They are wājib, mustahab, mubāh, makrūh and haram.

3.6

Tawalla and Tabarra, its Basics and Purpose

Question : What is Tawalla?

Answer : Love for the Prophet (s) and his Ahl al-Bayt (as).

Question : What is Tabarra?

Answer : Disassociating from the enemies of the Prophet and his Ahl al-Bayt (as)

Question : What is wrong with associating with the enemies of the Prophet and his Ahl al-Bayt (as)?

Answer : It is not pleasing to Allah, and associating oneself with bad people will have a negative influence on us. The Prophet (s) said: "a person follows the religion of his friends." If one has enough learning in Islam, one may try to change them, but one cannot befriend them.

Question : What role does Tabarra play in the world?

Answer : It forces us to speak out against evil in this world and not be complacent to it.

Question : What's the connection between tawalla and tabarra and amr bi al-ma'rūf and nahī 'an al-munkar?

Answer : Tawalla and tabarra are inner dispositions, they guide the actions of amr bi al-ma'rūf and nahī 'an al-munkar.

3.7

The Purpose of Zakat and Khums in Islamic Law

Question : What is Khums?

Answer : Khums is the 1/5th tax one must pay on one's final sitting income after one's total expenses.

Question : What is Zakat?

Answer : Zakat is a 2.5% tax one pays from one's tangible income (like gold and silver) and it is generally meant to help the poor

Question : What is khums money usually used for?

Answer : Khums is usually used to fund Muslim organizations and institutions like Mosques, religious programs or seminaries.

Question : Who do I pay khums to?

Answer : A Muslim center that has been approved for khums collection by a Marja'

Question : Can I pay zakat in dollars?

Answer : No

3.8

The Hajj Pilgrimage

Question : What is the Ka'ba?

Answer : Cube shaped building which is the direction for Muslim prayers. It is also the building around which Muslims circumambulate during the Hajj pilgrimage.

Question : Did the Hajj rituals begin with the Prophet Muhammad? (s)

Answer : No, they began with the Prophet Abraham (as).

Question : How many times do Muslims have to walk around the Ka'ba for?

Answer : Seven

Question : What is the tawāf?

Answer : Circumambulation around the Ka'ba seven times in counter-clock wise fashion.

Question : What is the Hajj?

Answer : Pilgrimage to Mecca that all Muslims must perform at least once in their lifetime.

3.9

The Furū' al-Dīn: The Fundamental Practices of Islam

Question : What is the furū al-dīn?

Answer : The most fundamental core practices of Islam

Question : Telling the truth is not part of the 10 furū' al-dīn, does this mean it's not important?

Answer : Telling the truth is part of the 7th furū' al-dīn, i.e. commanding the good. The furū' al-dīn are umbrella practices, they are general points that cover most Islamic practices.

Question : What's the difference between usūl al-dīn and furū' al-dīn?

Answer : The former are the fundamental core beliefs of Islam, the latter are its fundamental core practices.

Question : If I don't believe in practicing the furū' al-dīn, can I still be a Muslim?

Answer : If you do so knowing that Islam makes it obligatory, then no, you cannot be considered a Muslim.

Question : Are the furū' al-dīn obligatory or recommended?

Answer : Obligatory.

3.10

Fasting in Islam, its Purpose, Dos and Don'ts

Question : Is fasting during the month of Ramadan obligatory?

Answer : It is obligatory for all eligible Muslims.

Question : Can I choose which month I want to fast for the 30-day obligatory fast instead of the month of Ramadan?

Answer : No, it must be during the month of Ramadan.

Question : Can I fast half of the month of Ramadan, take a break and fast some other time during the year?

Answer : You cannot do that without a valid reason.

Question : What is the purpose of fasting during the month of Ramadan?

Answer : It is to produce God consciousness by helping your mind and will detach itself from your daily desires that are often compulsive.

Question : Can I fast if I am sick?

Answer : As long as it does not pose a health danger

3.11

Other Obligatory and Forbidden Acts in Islam

Question : If an Islamic obligation or prohibition is not part of the furū' al-dīn, does it mean it is less important?

Answer : Not necessarily. The furū' al-dīn are the basic platform of Islamic law. Other things are its details. They can be just as important.

Question : How many laws and commandments are there in Islam?

Answer : Perhaps infinite! As many situations and conditions humans have, there are Islamic rulings pertinent to them!

Question : If I stay single but don't sin, or am not tempted to sin, is marriage still obligatory?

Answer : No, but it is still highly recommended.

Question : Can I yell at my parents if I'm angry?

Answer : No, Islam forbids disrespect to one's parents.

Question : Can I force my wife to get a job and pay the bills in Islam?

Answer : No, you are not allowed. Only the husband is obligated to work and provide for his family

3.12

Niyya: Religious Intention as the Foundation of Islamic Practice

Question : What is niyya?

Answer : Niyya is the proper intention of reaching closeness to God that one must make before most religious practices are undertaken.

Question : What is good niyya?

Answer : Good niyya is qurbatan ila-Allāh, wanting to reach closeness to God and nothing else.

Question : What is bad niyya?

Answer : Performing a religious action or duty for the sake of something or someone other than Allah.

Question : Is niyya outward or supposed to be from the heart?

Answer : Heart

Question : What is one way of learning how to have good niyya?

Answer : Gaining Islamic knowledge, learning what is truly right and truly wrong in Islam.

3.13

Commanding the Good and Forbidding Evil in Islam

Question : What is Commanding the Good?

Answer : It is encouraging in ourselves and others what Allah has deemed as good in Islam, like prayer or fasting.

Question : What is Forbidding Evil?

Answer : It is discouraging ourselves and others from committing what Allah has deemed as evil, like lying or gossiping.

Question : Is Commanding the Good and Forbidding Evil obligatory?

Answer : Yes, as long as there is a possibility of an effect. There are some cases where it is obligatory in any case, please refer to your Marja'.

Question : If I see someone not praying, and I know me telling them to do it won't do any good, do I still have to Command what is Good?

Answer : If you are certain he or she won't change, it is not obligatory to do it in most cases.

Question : What is the difference between Jihad and Commanding the Good & Forbidding Evil?

Answer : The latter is the direction, the former is the effort or struggle.

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4 Prophethood in Islam

4.1

A Brief Biography of the Prophet Muhammad (s): The Prophet's Childhood (PART I of III)

Question : Why did the Prophet migrate to Medina?

Answer : To flee persecution and assassination attempts on his life

Question : Did Abū Ṭālib convert to Islam?

Answer : Yes, he was of the best of Muslims, however, in order to preserve his power so that he could defend the Prophet, he kept his Muslim identity secret from most people.

Question : Did the King of Abyssinia convert to Islam?

Answer : We are not 100% sure, but we know he respected Islam and the Qur'an very much.

Question : Did the Prophet ever go on offensive wars?

Answer : No, all of his wars were defensive in nature. He never began wars.

Question : Why did the Prophet marry multiple women after the death of Khadījah?

Answer : The Prophet only married them in order to create tribal alliances so that he could defend Islam which, at the time, was under threat. At the height of his power after the conquest of Mecca, he did not take any additional wives.

4.2

Bio: The Prophet Muhammad as a Prophet of God (PART II of III)

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Answer : No, all of his wars were defensive in nature. He never began wars.

Question : Why did the Prophet marry multiple women after the death of Khadījah?

Answer : The Prophet only married them in order to create tribal alliances so that he could defend Islam which, at the time, was under threat. At the height of his power after the conquest of Mecca, he did not take any additional wives.

4.3

A Brief Biography of the Prophet Muhammad (s): The Prophet's Character (PART III of III)

Question : Why did the Prophet migrate to Medina?

Answer : To flee persecution and assassination attempts on his life

Question : Did Abū Ṭālib convert to Islam?

Answer : Yes, he was of the best of Muslims, however, in order to preserve his power so that he could defend the Prophet, he kept his Muslim identity secret from most people.

Question : Did the King of Abyssinia convert to Islam?

Answer : We are not 100% sure, but we know he respected Islam and the Qur'an very much.

Question : Did the Prophet ever go on offensive wars?

Answer : No, all of his wars were defensive in nature. He never began wars.

Question : Why did the Prophet marry multiple women after the death of Khadijah?

Answer : The Prophet only married them in order to create tribal alliances so that he could defend Islam which, at the time, was under threat. At the height of his power after the conquest of Mecca, he did not take any additional wives.

4.4

The Prophet Muhammad (s) as Messenger and Teacher

Question : What's the difference between a prophet and messenger?

Answer : A messenger is a prophet who receives a new system of laws and (usually) a scripture.

Question : As a doctor, what does the Prophet Muhammad (s) heal?

Answer : He heals people's hearts and souls. The disease he heals is separation from God.

Question : Did the Prophet Muhammad (s) force belief on people?

Answer : No, he was a teacher, not a dictator. He taught them good and bad, as well as their consequences. But he left the choice to people to accept his message of healing or reject it.

Question : What are some of the ways the Prophet (s) was truthful?

Answer : He never cheated or lied in business while he was a merchant. He also always remained truthful even if it went against himself.

Question : What does it mean to be the "Seal of Prophets"?

Answer : It means that the person in question is the last of all prophets.

4.5

The Prophet and his Relationships

Question : What was the Prophet's relationship with the Qur'an?

Answer : He was the Qur'an in action.

Question : Why did the Prophet (s) show compassion to people?

Answer : By showing compassion, the Messenger of Allah (s) not only expressed to them the love that was in his heart, but by doing so he also opened their hearts to him and in turn, their hearts to Allah.

Question : How was the Prophet's relationship with Allah?

Answer : It was founded on absolute trust, obedience, sincerity and love to Him. The relationship was that of total servitude.

Question : Why did the Prophet (s) not disown the companions he knew would deviate after him?

Answer : He did not want to take away their chance of guidance as everyone must have a chance at salvation.

Question : What's the point of an Ummah?

Answer : To break down tribal, geographic and racial barriers. These identities that people have, whether they are racial or tribal, are all mental creations and often beget hatred towards others and eventually alienation from God.

4.6

The Prophet's Sunnah and Hadith

Question : Are all hadiths equal?

Answer : No, some are reliable but others are fabricated

Question : What is Sunnah?

Answer : Sunnah are the sayings and actions of the Prophet

Question : What is a hadith?

Answer : A hadith is a report concerning the saying or action of the Prophet that has been orally transmitted to later generations.

Question : What is a Sanad?

Answer : Arabic term for a hadith's chain of transmission.

Question : Who narrated hadiths from the Prophet?

Answer : His companions and his Ahl al-Bayt (as)

4.7

Ghadīr and Arafah: The Two Last Sermons of the Prophet

Question : What is the sermon of Ghadīr?

Answer : Sermon where the Prophet designated his successor and religious leader for mankind, namely Imam Ali (as) and the Ahl al-Bayt (as).

Question : What is the sermon of Arafah?

Answer : One of the Prophet's (s) last sermons where which contained a series of exhortations for Muslims in terms of their treatment of people.

Question : What was the Prophet's (s) last sermon?

Answer : Ghadīr

Question : What is mawla?

Answer : Mawla means master, that is, divine guide and master of the Muslim ummah.

Question : How many people were present at the event of Ghadīr?

Answer : Over a 100 000

4.8

Jesus and Mary in Islam

Question : Is Jesus God in Islam?

Answer : No, Islam considers him a Prophet and Messenger only.

Question : Does Islam believe in the Trinity?

Answer : No, Islam believes in Tawhīd, meaning that God is One Person and not Three Persons.

Question : Does Islam believe Mary was the Mother of God?

Answer : Since Islam does not consider Jesus to be God, naturally then Mary is not the Mother of God either.

Question : What was Jesus' Divinely Revealed Book?

Answer : The Injīl (Gospel)

Question : According to Islam, was the Injīl changed over time?

Answer : Yes, its original message was distorted, although some of it still remains.

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5 The Qur'an and Hadith

5.1

Islam and Other Religions

Question : Who are the Ahl al-Kitāb?

Answer : They are the People of the Book, that is, people who belong to a religion that was divinely revealed within the line of the Prophet Abraham (as). They are Jews, Christians and Sabians.

Question : Is a polytheist an idol worshiper?

Answer : Generally yes, but some polytheists do not worship outside idols but are simply polytheistic in their beliefs.

Question : If a non-Muslim insults Allah or Islam, can I insult him or her back?

Answer : No, in 6:108, Allah teaches us to keep our manners. That produces an atmosphere of respect.

Question : Why is idol worship bad?

Answer : Because it keeps people from worshiping the true God and creator of the universe.

Question : What is a mushrik?

Answer : Someone who worships idols or gods other than Allah and associates partners with Allah who help Him maintain the world.

5.2

What is the Qur'an? A Short Introduction to Islam's Holy Book

Question : Is the Qur'an the literal word of God, or simply the divinely inspired teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (s)?

Answer : Literal word of God

Question : What's the point of the Qur'an, what is it trying to do?

Answer : Guide mankind to salvation in the Hereafter.

Question : Is the Qur'an alone enough for us?

Answer : No, it needs teachers that are appointed by its author (Allah).

Question : Who are the teachers of the Qur'an?

Answer : The Prophet Muhammad and his Ahl al-Bayt (as)

Question : Is all knowledge in the Qur'an?

Answer : No, all knowledge of existence is in the divine tablet of God, which is different from the Qur'an

5.3

The Structure of the Holy Qur'an

Question : Is the Qur'an in chronological order?

Answer : No

Question : What month was the Qur'an revealed in?

Answer : Ramadan

Question : What is Layat al-Qadr?

Answer : The Night of Power, the night in which the Qur'an was revealed

Question : Was the Qur'an revealed all at once?

Answer : No, it was revealed gradually in a span of two decades.

Question : How many chapters does the Qur'an have?

Answer : 114

5.4

The Quran and Islamic law

Question : Does the Qur'an contain all of Islamic law?

Answer : No, it contains the general moral principles of the law

Question : What's the relationship of hadiths and the Qur'an in Islamic law?

Answer : The hadiths explain the details of the Qur'an's law which are not available in the book

Question : Who interprets the Qur'an?

Answer : The Prophet Muhammad (s) and his Ahl al-Bayt (as)

Question : What is Islamic law's most important source of law?

Answer : The Qur'an

Question : What is the second most important source of law after the Qur'an?

Answer : The hadiths of the Prophet (s) and his Ahl al-Bayt (as)

5.5

The Qur'an, Allah and Humankind

Question : Is the Qur'an for Muslims only?

Answer : No, it is for all of mankind

Question : What's the relationship between the Qur'an and the Prophet (s)?

Answer : The Qur'an, as a miracle, is proof of the Prophet's truthfulness.

Question : Is the Qur'an the literal word of God, or is it the inspired word of the Prophet (s)?

Answer : It is the literal word of God

Question : What's one of the primary purposes of the Ahl al-Bayt (as)?

Answer : As explainers of the Qur'an

Question : Is the Qur'an by itself complete?

Answer : No, it needs the Sunnah of the Prophet and the Ahl al-Bayt (as)

5.6

Hadith and Sunnah, difference and variations

Question : What is a hadith?

Answer : Hadith is a transmitted saying of the Prophet or the Ahl al-Bayt

Question : What is a hadith qudsi?

Answer : Saying of Allah as related by the Prophet but not in the Qur'an

Question : What is Sunnah

Answer : Sunnah is the practice and tradition of the Prophet (s)

Question : What is Sunnah Mustahabba?

Answer : A recommended practice of the Prophet

Question : Are hadiths available in books?

Answer : Yes

5.7

The Reliability of Hadiths

Question : What is a hadith?

Answer : Saying of the Prophet

Question : What is a chain of transmission?

Answer : A chain of narrators who relate a hadith from the Prophet or the Ahl al-Bayt (as)

Question : What is a sahih hadith?

Answer : Authentic, reliable hadith

Question : What is a weak hadith?

Answer : A hadith that has a questionable chain of transmission, like a liar among its narrators

Question : What are the major compendiums of hadith in the Shia Muslim world?

Answer : Kitab al-Kafi Man Lā Yahduruhu al-Faqih Tahdhib al-Ahkām Al-Istibsār

5.8

A Reflection on Verses of the Holy Qur'an

Question : Why do some people find the Qur'an boring?

Answer : For many reasons. Sometimes it is because their prime focus is their sole love of the world and as a consequence, they lose interest in matters of salvation.

Question : What are other reasons why the Qur'an seems unattractive to people?

Answer : People must focus on making their writings relevant and understandable, especially when it comes to communicating the Qur'an to the masses. Too much abstract discussion and pedantic writing alienates people from Islam's Holy Book.

Question : What is the greatest lesson we learn from Ya'qūb's (as) relation to his sons, especially after they got rid of their younger brother Yusuf (as)?

Answer : Patience instead of immediate punishment

5.9

Hadith al-Thaqalayn

Question : What is hadith al-Mubahala

Answer : It refers to an incident in history where the Prophet and his family and a group of Christians were to pray against each other to see whom God would favor and thereby establish the truth of Islam.

Question : What is Hadith al-Thaqalayn?

Answer : One of the last sermons of the Prophet where he designated the Qur'an and his Ahl al-Bayt (as) as his guiding successors after his death.

Question : How many did the Ahl al-Bayt (as) number during the lifetime of the Prophet (s)?

Answer : Five

Question : Who were the five members of the Ahl al-Bayt (as) during the lifetime of the Prophet (s)?

Answer : The Prophet, Fatima, Imam Ali, Imam Hasan and Imam Husayn (may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon them all)

Question : What's the main purpose of the Qur'an and Ahl al-Bayt (as)?

Answer : To guide mankind to salvation after the Prophet (s

5.10

Imam Ali (as) and Nahj al-Balagha.

Question : Who compiled Nahj al-Balagha?

Answer : Al-Sharif al-Radi

Question : What kind of book was Nahj al-Balagha primarily meant for?

Answer : Arabic literature, but it also became a book of guidance for many Muslims due to its spiritual contents

Question : What are the contents of Nahj al-Balagha?

Answer : Sermons, letters and sayings of Imam Ali (as)

Question : When were most of Nahj al-Balagha's contents delivered?

Answer : During the Caliphate of Imam Ali (as)

Question : Is Nahj al-Balagha available in English?

Answer : Yes

Question : What does Nahj al-Balagha mean?

Answer : Peak of Eloquence

5.11

Taqlid and Tawḍih Al Masail Genre of Literature

Question : What is a Marja

Answer : A marja is a scholar whom one refers to as a source of reference for Islamic law

Question : What is Taqlīd

Answer : Taqlīd is the process of following the rulings of whom one thinks is the most knowledgeable scholar

Question : What is Tawzīh al-Masā'il?

Answer : It is a book that contains all the major answers to legal issues in almost all the major areas of Islamic practice and ritual by a Marja.

Question : What is Minhāj al-Ṣaliḥīn?

Answer : The Arabic version of Tawzīh al-Masā'il, which are usually in Persian.

Question : Are the Tawzīh al-Masā'il available in English?

Answer : Yes, for most major Marjas in today's world, there exists English translations of their works.

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6 Measuring Good and Bad in Islam

6.1

The Effects of Our Actions in this World

Question : What is one way of defining sin?

Answer : It is choosing a pleasure over friendship with God

Question : How does sin affect one's children?

Answer : Our children imitate and inherit the way we act. Sinful behavior is often inherited from parents.

Question : How does sin affect society?

Answer : People directly or indirectly copy what we do, just like people imitate famous stars.

Question : What is primary effect of sin?

Answer : It distances a person from God.

Question : What is the effect of distance from God?

Answer : Our souls become disturbed and more vulnerable to Shaytān.

6.2

The Gray Areas of Islamic Law and Morality

Question : Are halal and haram moral categories?

Answer : Yes, they can be moral categories in two ways, in our relationship with others and in our relationship with God. Disobeying God while not directly harming others is still immoral.

Question : What is a gray area in Islamic law?

Answer : It is an area where it isn't clear cut whether an action is morally good or bad, but in the law, it may be a point where we're not sure about, or be something that is reprehensible but permissible (makrūh)

Question : Can you name an example of a makrūh act which God dislikes but allows anyways?

Answer : Divorce

Question : If there is a gray area in Islam, should we approach it or leave it?

Answer : The Prophet (s) taught us to leave it as it risks leading us into sin

Question : How does something mubāh become mustahab?

Answer : By changing one's intention in wanting to please God.

6.3

Heaven and Hell in Islam

Question : Why does the Qur'an mention Heaven so much?

Answer : To encourage people to be good, patient and know that they will be rewarded infinitely more than what they sacrificed in this world.

Question : Why does the Qur'an mention Hell so much?

Answer : So that people would be warned and refrain from sinning

Question : Is the hellfire real?

Answer : Yes, but it is not the same kind of fire as in this world.

Question : Is the description of heaven imagery, or really real?

Answer : Like hell, the description of heaven is real and not metaphorical.

Question : Is hell forever?

Answer : Only for those who truly do not want to repent

6.4

Life and Death in Islam

Question : What is the meaning of life in Islam?

Answer : Life is a test for the Hereafter

Question : What is the meaning of death in Islam?

Answer : Death means the end of the test in this world, and beginning of eternal life in the Hereafter

Question : What is the purpose of human life in this world?

Answer : It is to establish a good relationship and friendship with God.

Question : Is belief in God and performing rituals enough in order to pass the test of this life?

Answer : No, one must also lead a proper moral life?

Question : What are the consequences of not believing in life after death?

Answer : It leads to nihilism where nothing has ultimate objective purpose or meaning. The absence of ultimate meaning and purpose is the strict definition of nihilism.

6.5

Guidance According to Islam

Question : What is Sirāt al-Mustaqīm?

Answer : It is the Straight Path to God

Question : What is guidance?

Answer : Guidance is closeness to, and intimacy with God

Question : How can the moral life be summarized?

Answer : Being good to people, even when it goes against a person's selfish interests

Question : Who decides what is right and what is wrong?

Answer : Allah

6.6

Fate and the Consequences of our Choices in Islam

Question : Do we have karma in Islam?

Answer : If you mean karma in the sense that God makes us see the consequences of our actions in this world, then yes.

Question : Does Islam believe in free will?

Answer : Yes

Question : Does the environment affect our the range of our free choices in this world according to Islam?

Answer : Yes

Question : If our free will and range of choices are limited, as Islam teaches, how can we increase them?

Answer : Through prayer and repentance. By growing closer to God, we unshackle ourselves from the cultural dictates that unconsciously shape so many of our choices.

Question : Who does our actions and deeds impact the most?

Answer : Our own souls

6.7

The Effect of Culture and Environment in Shaping our Religious Choices

Question : According to Islam, does the environment affect our choices?

Answer : Yes, these include our parents, friends and culture we were raised in

Question : What are some of the environmental factors that influence our choices?

Answer : Among many other things: our culture, language, economic circumstances, parents, friends, opportunities we had in life etc.

Question : Does Allah punish us for things which are out of our control?

Answer : No

Question : Does Allah judge everyone the same way even if they were raised in different environments?

Answer : No, Allah is Just, He judges everyone according to the circumstances they were brought up in.

Question : If many of us are victims of our circumstances, what will Allah judge us upon?

Answer : He will look at our awareness and knowledge of truth and in accordance with that, judge us based on our sincerity and effort to strive towards that truth.

6.8

Major Sins in Islam

Question : Is shirk believing in more than one god?

Answer : Not necessarily, it is to take something or someone as an object of worship, to the exclusion of, or in addition to God Himself.

Question : What is a major sin?

Answer : A sin that leads to direct damnation in the Hereafter

Question : Why is disobeying parents so bad?

Answer : It is a sign of ungratefulness to those who gave life and nurtured us. Our relationship with our parents is a testing grounds for our obedience and gratefulness to Allah.

Question : Why does the Qur'an mean when it says murdering one person is like murdering all of humanity?

Answer : Human beings are all interconnected, we live in societies and in families, murdering one person affects all those around him or her.

Question : What is worship in Islam?

Answer : To take something as the greatest point of devotion and love

6.9

Why Allah Allows People to Sin

Question : Why doesn't God stop us from sinning?

Answer : Because He would have to take away our free will, which is from where we do good.

Question : What is free will?

Answer : It is the power to take action, or make choices, without constraint or fate.

Question : Why does God test us by allowing us to sin?

Answer : By testing us, Allah gives us an opportunity to learn and grow spiritually.

6.10

Repentance and Forgiveness of Sins in Islam

Question : What is full and complete repentance?

Answer : It is to cease that particular sin and turn towards Allah in regret for one's actions

Question : What does tawbah literally mean?

Answer : It means to turn back to Allah

Question : Is it enough to just say "God forgive me" after one sins?

Answer : It is a good start, but it must be followed with the cessation of that sin

Question : Does Allah forgive all sins?

Answer : With repentance, He forgives all sins

Question : Can people who are in hell be forgiven?

Answer : Yes, through true and sincere repentance

6.11

The Three Kinds of Rights in Islam

Question : What are the three kinds of rights in Islam?

Answer : The rights of the self, the rights of others and the rights of God

Question : What are the right of the self?

Answer : To dignify and respect oneself, both bodily and in what we spend our time in.

Question : What are the rights of others?

Answer : It is to dignify and respect others, both in their absence and in their presence, in ease as well as in hardship.

Question : What are the rights of God?

Answer : It is to dignify God by not associating any partners with Him in this world.

Question : What is shirk?

Answer : It is believing that others have powers to do things independent of God.

6.12

Sinning Against Others and their Delayed Punishment

Question : Why does God delay punishment?

Answer : Delay of punishment is meant for the worst of people, as punishment in the next life is worse than the one in this world.

Question : What is delay in punishment?

Answer : It is a delay in full punishment, but people see the punishment partially in this world.

Question : Why are sins like backbiting or lying so bad?

Answer : They erode the trust in the Muslim community, and the community is essential for salvation as it is the spiritual cradle of people.

6.13

Kufr in Islam

Question : If someone is a kafir, does it mean they don't believe in God's existence?

Answer : According to the Qur'an, a being can believe in God's existence but still be a kafir because a kafir is someone who opposes the truth even though he or she may acknowledge its truthfulness.

Question : Does the Qur'an ever call the Devil a Kafir?

Answer : Yes, in Q2:34

Question : How is the Devil a Kafir in the Qur'an?

Answer : By rejecting God's commands

Question : Where does Kufr come from?

Answer : Arrogance, that is, thinking you are above the God's commands.

Question : Since Iblis or the Devil is a Kafir, is possible that he stopped believing in God's existence?

Answer : No, he fully experienced God before his fall. He is 100% certain that God exists.

6.14

Trivializing the Harām

Question : What does it mean to trivialize the harām?

Answer : It is to believe that either God doesn't really care if we commit sins, or believe that He will forgive no matter what.

Question : Can we be sure that God will forgive us of our sins on the Day of Judgment?

Answer : Never

Question : What is an example of an act that our cultures may consider ok but is haram in Islam?

Answer : Backbiting

Question : When we do something harām, who do we harm the most?

Answer : Our souls

Question : If God forgives us for our sins, do we still lose something?

Answer : Yes, the chance to grow spiritually. Obedience to God would naturally take us forward.

6.15

Benefits of Islamic Law in this World

Question : Can we abstain from making a choice in religion?

Answer : Abstaining is itself a form of choice

Question : Does Islamic law only benefit us in the Hereafter?

Answer : No, it also benefits us in this world

Question : What are some of the benefits of Islamic law in this world?

Answer : Our mental wellbeing, family cohesion and giving us discipline

Question : What is the purpose of Islamic law?

Answer : It is to discipline our lives and make sure that all we do is in accordance with God's will.

Question : Who are the best sources for Islamic law?

Answer : Our Marjas, that is, experts in Islamic law

6.16

Good and Bad Deeds: The Spiritual Consequences of our Choices

Question : Does Islam believe in free will?

Answer : Yes

Question : If we don't choose right or wrong, does this mean we didn't make a choice?

Answer : That's impossible, not choosing is itself a choice. Not choosing good means giving way to evil.

Question : What is redemptive suffering?

Answer : It is the kind of suffering that helps us grow spiritually by making us return to God by asking for His help.

Question : What is a pure heart?

Answer : A heart that only has Allah in it

Question : Why doesn't Allah give us a good life all the time?

Answer : Because it is through suffering that we learn the most

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7 The Legacy of the Prophet Muhammad (s) and his Ahl al-Bayt (as)

7.1

Islam and Knowledge: the Importance of Islamic Education

Question : What is knowledge in Islam?

Answer : It is a form of awareness that leaves an imprint in the soul. That is, it is an act of knowing that transforms a person and gets him or her closer to God.

Question : What is education in Islam?

Answer : It is rearing and nurturing a person on spiritual and moral grounds

Question : How does knowledge differ from information?

Answer : Knowledge is there to transform people's souls so that they may grow closer to God.

7.2

The Ahl al-Kisa

Question : Who are the Ahl al-Kisa?

Answer : The Prophet (s), Imam Ali (as), Fatima al-Zahra (as), Imam Hasan (as) and Imam Husayn (as).

Question : What does Kisa mean?

Answer : A cloak

Question : Why aren't the Ahl al-Kisa 14 in number? Why are only 5 mentioned?

Answer : Because only the five were living when the event of Kisa happened.

7.3

Imamah in the Qur'an

Question : Name me one example of an Imam in the Qur'an

Answer : Ibrahim (as), according to Q2:124

Question : Is every Prophet an Imam?

Answer : No

Question : Is every Imam a Prophet?

Answer : No

Question : Who is the first Imam ever?

Answer : The Prophet Ibrahim (as)

Question : What is the difference between Imamah and Prophethood?

Answer : Prophethood is where a person receives direct revelation from God in order to carry out a particular task in the world, such as conveying a message or fulfilling a specific mission. Imamah is a cosmic status, it is where a person becomes the metaphysical vehicle of guidance for all of the world and acquires power over all of creation. One does not necessarily need to be a Prophet in order to acquire this status.

7.4

Fatima al-Zahrah (as)

Question : Who was Fatima al-Zahra?

Answer : Only living child of the Prophet Muhammad (s) and wife of Imam Ali (as).

Question : Why was Fatima (as) important?

Answer : She is the mother of all the Imams, that is, all the 11 Imams, aside from her husband, were her descendants.

Question : What is the Tasbih of Fatima?

Answer : A contemplative and meditative practice with prayer beads (or counting with fingers) where one remembers and glorifies God.

Question : How did Fatima (as) die?

Answer : She was attacked in her home and sustained fatal injuries at the hands of her home invaders.

Question : What is Fadak?

Answer : Fadak was a garden which the Prophet (s) gifted to Fatima (as). It was later stolen from her from the powers-that-be after her father's death.

7.5

A Brief Look at the Lives of the Imams (Imam al-Hasan until Imam Muhammad al-Baqir)

Question : N/A

Answer : N/A

7.6

A Brief Look at the Lives of the Imams (Imam Jafar al-Sadiq until Imam Hasan al-Askari)

Question : N/A

Answer : N/A

7.7

A Brief Look at the Life and Importance of Imam al-Mahdi (aj)

Question : Why was Imam al-Mahdi hidden from public during his mother's pregnancy and during his birth?

Answer : Because the political authorities wanted to kill him.

Question : Why did the political authorities of the time want to kill Imam al-Mahdi?

Answer : Because they wanted to end the Imamah of the Ahl al-Bayt from its roots and rid themselves of an Imam before he grew into adulthood. They also feared, and rightfully so, that the 12th Imam would be a global revolutionary who would overthrow oppressors all around the world (including Muslim oppressors) and establish justice all around the world.

Question : Why did the Imam go into the minor occultation?

Answer : Because he wanted to slowly prepare the Muslim community for the major occultation which would last until the End of Days.

Question : How can a human being live for more than a thousand years?

Answer : Allah has power over all things, including life, aging and death. He can do whatever He pleases.

Question : Will Imam al-Mahdi (aj) establish global justice and overthrow evil oppressors alone, or with help?

Answer : He will do so with help, including Jesus (as) as well as a legion of 313 generals.

7.8

Salawat and Atonement in Islam

Question : What is salawat?

Answer : It is conveying blessings upon the Prophet (s) and his Ahl al-Bayt (as)

Question : How does one say the salawat?

Answer : One says: Allahumma Sallī ‘Alā Muhammad wa Āli Muhammad

Question : What are the effects of saying the salawat?

Answer : Allah and the angels respond by conveying their blessings upon the person who said the salawat.

Question : Is saying the salawat enough for salvation?

Answer : No, salawat must be combined with obeying God in all matters and doing good deeds.

Question : Is the salawat obligatory?

Answer : The salawat are obligatory during prayers, but they are recommended in all else.

7.9

The Companions (Sahaba) of the Prophet According to the Qur’an

Question : According to the Qur’an, are all sahaba good?

Answer : No, the Qur’an is critical of many of the Prophet’s companions and casts doubt on their long term loyalty to Islam and monotheism.

Question : Did previous Prophets according to the Qur’an have their companions betray them and apostate from religion?

Answer : Yes, a good example are the companions of Musa (as) who worshiped a calf after he went away for 40 days.

Question : What is the distinction between sahabi and muttabi‘?

Answer : A sahabi is a companion, a muttabi‘ is a faithful follower of the Prophet (s). A companion can be good or bad, but a muttabi‘ is always good.

Question : Why did some companions turn bad?

Answer : Because they either converted to Islam based on the belief they would get worldly gains, or because they were spies for the enemies of Islam.

Question : Did the majority of the Prophet's companions turn his back on him, like Musa (as), after he died?

Answer : Yes

7.10

Clerical Hierarchies in Muslim Communities

Question : If I want to ask a Marja questions about Islamic law, where do I go?

Answer : You can visit his official website. Most Marjas have official sites where Q&A are emailed.

Question : How can I contact my local resident Imam?

Answer : Most Islamic centers have websites where relevant contact info is provided.

Question : What are the major hawzas or seminaries in the world?

Answer : Najaf and Qum

Question : If I want to join the hawza, what can I do to enter it?

Answer : Contact your local Islamic center Imam, he may be able to arrange for you to be trained in a hawza, either within the country or abroad.

Question : Why are highly ranked scholars called Signs of God (Ayatollah), isn't this a bit sanctimonious?

Answer : Clerics usually don't refer to themselves as Ayatollahs, its usually the people who call them such. However, according to the Qur'an, all of creation is a sign of God so in this sense, there is nothing wrong or sanctimonious about the term.

7.11

Mosques in Islam

Question : What is the primary purpose of a Masjid?

Answer : Prayer

Question : Can Mosques be used for functions other than prayer?

Answer : Yes, they can be used for conducting marriages, funerals and for educational programs.

Question : Can Mosques also be used as graveyards?

Answer : Yes, many Mosques have graves in them, including the Kaba itself.

Question : Is the Kaba and its surrounding building a Mosque?

Answer : Yes

Question : What is the first and oldest Mosque in the world?

Answer : The Kaba which was built by the Prophet Abraham (as)

Question : Is a Masjid and a Mosque the same thing?

Answer : Yes, Mosque is the English equivalent of Masjid, which means “place of prostration.”

7.12

The Philosophy of Karbala and Majalis

Question : What was the goal of Imam al-Husayn’s (as) sacrifice at Karbala?

Answer : To instill humility and moral behavior in humankind

Question : Who is the best source to tell us about the goal of Karbala?

Answer : Imam al-Sajjad (as)

Question : What is the best source for Imam al-Sajjad’s message?

Answer : Al-Sahifah al-Sajjadiyah

Question : What was the primary purpose of Imam al-Husayn (as) fighting in Karbala?

Answer : To get rid of haughtiness and pride in human beings

7.13

A Brief Biography of Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib (as)

Question : What is an Imam?

Answer : An Imam is a divinely appointed leader to guide humankind. The Prophet Muhammad (s) is the one who first announced who the Imam after him would be.

Question : Who was the first Imam?

Answer : Imam Ali (as)

Question : Can you be an Imam without political power?

Answer : Yes, the main function of an Imam is religious and spiritual. Political power is not a necessary condition for Imamate even though it is the sole right of an Imam.

Question : Why did people hate Imam Ali (as) so much?

Answer : The people who hated him were the rich elite. They hated him because he fought against their corruption.

Question : Aside Imam Ali (as), was anyone else born inside the Kaba?

Answer : No

7.14

The Battle of Karbala: A Brief History

Question : What made Yazid different from other corrupt rulers?

Answer : Yazid openly mocked Islam and took corruption to a level that no one previous to him had done before.

Question : Who was Yazid's father?

Answer : Muawiyah

Question : Who put Yazid in power?

Answer : Muawiyah

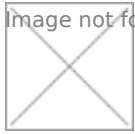
Question : What is the significance of Muawiyah appointing his son as the next Caliph?

Answer : It turned the Caliphate into a dynasty.

Question : Why didn't Imam al-Husayn (as) leave his family behind?

Answer : Because they would have been killed anyways and used as leverage if he had left them behind.

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8 Islamic Relationships, Sects and Conflicts

8.1

Misconceptions about Shi'ism

Question : Do Shias believe that the Qur'an has been changed?

Answer : No, most major Shia scholars in history believed that the Qur'an we have today is the exact Qur'an that was revealed to the Prophet (s) with nothing added or taken out or changed in any way.

Question : Do Shias worship stones in their prayer?

Answer : No, they use a turba (piece of baked clay) for their prostration as they cannot pray on things one can wear or eat - among other things.

Question : Do Shias believe Imam Ali (as) was God?

Answer : No, they believe that he was a servant of God. Anyone who believes that Imam Ali (as) was God is not a Muslim according to Shia Islam.

Question : Do Shias believe that Imam Mahdi (aj) is living in a cave?

Answer : No Shia scholar has ever been recorded to have believed in this.

Question : Do Shias consider Sunnis as non-Muslims?

Answer : Shias believe Sunnis are fully Muslim.

8.2

Major Sects of Islam

Question : What are the two major sects or denominations of Islam?

Answer : Twelver (Imami) Shi'ism and Sunnism

Question : Does Shi'ism have subsects?

Answer : Yes, in addition to Twelver Shi'ism, there is Ismailism, Zaydism and other branches.

Question : How do we know what the right sect or denomination is in Islam?

Answer : The Qur'an teaches us that on the Day of Judgment, people will be resurrected with their Imams or Leaders. This means that by following the right leader, one can follow the right sect. The Prophet taught us that these leaders are the Ahl al-Bayt (as).

Question : Who are the right Imams or Leaders one should follow according to Islam? Are they the companions of the Prophet (s) ?

Answer : The Prophet (s) taught us in Hadith al-Thaqalayn as well as in the hadith of Ghadeer that his Ahl al-Bayt (as) (Prophet's Holy Household) were the right leaders of guidance.

Question : How many rightful sects can we have?

Answer : As truth is one, there can be one truthful sect.

Question : Is it possible that there are no right sects in Islam? That is, they are all deviant?

Answer : No, as the inevitable result of this would be a crisis in divine providence. If Islam is the last religion, and there are no right sects, then this means that the earth will be locked out of access to the truth. However, the teachings of the Prophet (s) tell us otherwise as he explicitly taught that the earth will always have a guide until the Day of Judgment.

8.3

Islam and Religious Conflicts

Question : What is the reason behind religious conflicts?

Answer : There is no one reason, there are multiple reasons and they differ from situation to situation.

Question : What are some of the major reasons for religious conflicts?

Answer : The quest for political power, economic gain, or deviant religious views. These are some reasons out of many.

Question : How can we stop religious conflicts?

Answer : Conflicts are part of human civilizational nature, they will end when the human race ends its life in this world.

8.4

Islam and Rights

Question : What is haqq in Islam?

Answer : Haqq means truth, but it can also mean rights and responsibilities.

Question : How are rights understood in Islam?

Answer : Rights are understood in relationship with responsibilities in Islam and hence why the word haqq can mean both. Every right comes with a responsibility in Islam, and every responsibility comes with a right.

Question : Do we have rights and responsibilities to ourselves in Islam?

Answer : Yes, for example, our bodies have the right to be fed and hence we have the responsibility to feed ourselves.

Question : Are there inalienable rights in Islam?

Answer : Yes, for example, a free person can never make himself or herself a slave in Islam.

Question : Do men and women have the same rights in Islam?

Answer : No because they have different responsibilities.

8.5

Sunnism and Shi'ism, beginnings and historical developments.

Question : When did Shi'ism turn into an independent and self-contained school?

Answer : In the 7th-8th centuries under Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (as)

Question : When did Sunnism as we know it today officially begin?

Answer : 11th century during the Seljuq Dynasty

Question : When did the initial split between Shia and Sunni begin?

Answer : After the death of the Prophet (s) and the usurpation of Imam Ali's (as) caliphate

Question : What are the founding text books of Sunnism?

Answer : Sahih al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim.

Question : How and why is it that Sunnism as we know it today was created in the 11th century? What are the reasons?

Answer : Sunnism was established as a unifying body of people by the Seljuq Dynasty in response to threats from Ismaili Shias. They believed unity was the only way they could win the war that they themselves had begun against the Ismailis.

Question : How do you define Sunnism today?

Answer : The belief in the legitimacy of the Four Righteous Caliphs (Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman and Imam Ali), the righteousness of the Prophet's wives and the eternal nature of God's words in the Qur'an.