

Core Curriculum

2 Foundations of Islam - Theology

2.8 **The Sharī'a: Purpose and Practice**

INTRODUCTION

Bismillāhir Rahmānir Rahīm, As-salāmu ‘Alaykum wa rahmatullāhi wa barakātuh. Peace be upon you brothers and sisters.

Welcome back to the Muslim Converts Channel! So far we've been dealing with the usūl al-dīn or fundamental beliefs of Islam. We have discussed the central role they play in the salvation of humankind.

Islam is not just about theory nor is it just about beliefs. Throughout our discussions so far, especially in the introduction of this section where shahāda was discussed, we learnt that Islam is about testifying to a fact concerning the reality of the world, namely that there is one God who is the Creator and Sustainer of all of humankind and that the Prophet Muhammad (s) is His Messenger.

He is our role model and guide in helping us attain salvation in God. The shahāda, as we saw, has various entailments, the most important of which are the usūl al-dīn.

Yet the usūl al-dīn also has its own important implications and entailments in the real world. In other words, Islam is not just about having particular beliefs in your mind. Islam also has a set of responsibilities that are meant to discipline the human heart and help humans find salvation on the Day of Judgment.

These set of responsibilities that the usūl al-dīn entail coalesce under an

institution called the Sharīʿa. In this lesson, we will overview the meaning of the Sharīʿa, its purpose and the scope of its practice.

BODY OF TEXT

And obey Allah and obey the Messenger and be on your guard [against evil]. And if you turn away - then know that upon Our Messenger is only responsible for conveying the message. (Chapter 5, verse 92 of the Holy Qurʿan)

The term Sharīʿa literally means “way” as in the way to God. Sharīʿa is generally associated with Islamic law, but this is only partially correct. The Sharīʿa is a general term denoting God’s general will upon humankind of which “law” is a part of.

From the time of Adam (as) to the Prophet Muhammad (s), Allah has revealed to humankind the “how to” of successfully living in this world and attaining salvation in the next.

These instructions are comprehensive, and the supreme manifestation of this message is the Qurʿan, the authentic sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (s) and their explanations by the 12 Imāms.

Islam means submission or surrender. It is the surrendering of one’s will to that of Allah. The Sharīʿa shows us how God wants us to surrender to Him.

The Sharīʿa is there principally to show how a Muslim should live his or her life by surrendering to Allah’s will. If followed correctly, the Sharīʿa upholds human and civil rights and greatly encourages compassion, peace and tolerance of human beings.

Unfortunately, the wrong interpretation of the Sharīʿa or Islamic law has created a number of unIslamic practices which fundamentalist Muslims have adopted worldwide.

Sadly enough, these practices often result in the loss of human rights,

respect, dignity and life which are fundamental parts of Islam and Islamic law in general.

It is important that a person chooses an educated and compassionate scholar as a source of Islamic teachings. Please send us an email and we can help connect you with proper scholars.

The God of Islam not only establishes laws for our betterment, such as prayer, or abstinence from evil deeds, such as murder, but He also establishes them in order to test us on whether or not we are ready to set aside our own will and selfish desires and surrender to Him instead.

The Sharī‘a as such is a way of life. It is a beautiful and joyful surrender to God.

When we speak of the Sharī‘a as a way of life, we speak of it in terms of its universality. It is applicable to all individuals and can be lived anywhere in the world. Even if one lives in a non-Muslim country, one can still live the holy life of surrender.

One does not need to be in a Muslim majority country to pray, feed the poor, fast, show kindness and gratitude to one’s parents, or abstain from evil deeds such as murder, theft, lying, fornication and so on and so forth.

For example, the Qur’an says the following:

[The true servants of Allah are] they [who] fulfill their vows, and stand in fear of a Day which is bound to spread far and wide, and they give food in spite of their need intense want for it unto the needy, the orphan and the captive [saying in their hearts] “we feed you for the sake of Allah alone: we desire neither reward nor gratitude from you”

"They (the true believers) give food, out of love for Allah, to the poor, the orphan and the slave, saying: We feed you only for Allah's pleasure - we desire from you neither reward nor thanks." (Chapter 76, verses 7-9 of the Holy Qur'an)

These responsibilities can be fulfilled anywhere in the world. One does not need to be in a Muslim majority country to feed the poor or fulfill a vow!

One important question that is often asked is if the Sharia can be implemented in non-Muslim countries. By this they mean the implementation of specific laws at the governmental level.

According to mainstream understandings of Islamic law, there is no necessity to establish the Sharia in this way in non-Muslim countries. One can go on living a full life of surrender without having to enforce the Sharia's codes on others.

If anything, mainstream Islamic law makes it obligatory upon Muslims to follow and obey the laws of non-Muslim countries when they are living in them as long as the laws do not contradict the explicit foundations of Islamic practice.

For example, if a Muslim were asked not to pray anymore, he or she would be under no obligation to obey such a command. However, a Muslim would, according to the mainstream understandings of Islamic law, have to obey civil laws, such as stopping at red lights, obeying copyright laws, etc.

In conclusion, the Sharī'a is a way of life to God. Ideally speaking, it is a life of joyful and blissful servitude to God and a process of inner purification through which one attains salvation. It is universal and can be lived in almost every circumstance.

The commands of the Sharia are meant to instill obedience to God. Without commands, how can there be obedience?

Until Next Time, Thank you for watching. As-salāmu ‘Alaykum wa rahmatullāhi wa barakātuh