

Bridges of Faith Between Mormons and Muslims

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Introduction

Since 1987, I have had the privilege of visiting and living in many countries in the Middle East for more than a decade. During this time, I was married to a Palestinian Muslim for nine years, spent nearly as long in gaining a Doctoral degree in Islamic Studies and have worked the majority of my professional life in the midst of Islamic society overseas. I also have always been a very active member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (known as the LDS or Mormon church), have served as a Mormon missionary and have come from strong Mormon pioneer ancestry and upbringing. For me, the two worlds co-exist peacefully in the harmony of shared divinely revealed principles and beliefs.

I have a strong testimony of the Book of Mormon as the Word of God and have a firm belief that it is “the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book.”¹ I have also read the Quran many times and have been able to increase the scope of my understanding of LDS gospel truths through its teachings. I delight in hearing and reading the words of our modern apostles and prophets and seek to follow their inspired counsel in leading me back into the presence of God. I also enjoy reading the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad as recorded in the *Hadith*² and applying their inspired truths to my life. For me, there is only submission to God’s will, whether this makes me a Muslim (by definition, one who submits to God) or a committed faithful Mormon. My path is only one- that of abiding by righteous precepts, obedience to God’s commandments, living up to covenants, loving, accepting and serving those around me and seeking to increase peace among us all as children of God.

The intent, therefore, in writing this book is to do the same- to help both Mormons and Muslims to increase in their knowledge of the divine truths we both share, to promote tolerance, understanding and peace between us all as offspring of our Heavenly Father, and to help further us along on our path to return to His presence. It is a difficult thing to write a book to a dual audience, neither of which who knows much, if anything about the other. In all my years overseas, I can count on my one hand the number of Muslims who have had any previous knowledge or dealings with a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints or who have ever even heard of the name “Mormon”. Similarly, whenever I have returned home to the States and tried to share my knowledge of Islam with family and friends, I get the same blank looks when I mention facets of Islamic teachings or lifestyles.

¹ The Book of Mormon is one of the books of scripture used in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. It contains accounts of prophets living on the American continent from 600 BCE to 400 CE. The quote comes from the Prophet Joseph Smith’s statement found in the Introduction to current editions of the book and is referred to as the “Keystone Statement”. See <https://www.lds.org/scriptures/bofm/introduction?lang=eng> or <https://www.lds.org/languages/ara?lang=eng>

Please also see B. H. Roberts, *History of the Church*, Vol 4, p.461.

² *Hadith* are the narrated and recorded sayings and traditions of the Prophet Muhammed which are considered an authoritative teaching in Islam.

Yet, there is so much we have in common with each other if only we could spend some time together to gain an awareness of it. Hopefully the pages of this book will allow some beginning acquaintance toward that end. I do not authoritatively speak for either side in the explanation of doctrine or parallels that I draw between the two faiths. What I see as commonalities are based only on my academic and personal studies of both beliefs and more importantly, the experiences I have had while living among both cultures that have allowed me to see these similarities in a very personal way.

I sincerely hope that any who read this will do so with the attitude of curiosity and open-mindedness rather than seeking to criticize and find points of dispute or reasons for rejection based on individual beliefs or biases. Yes, there are many things that we do not share in common and much that we can bring up that will permanently divide us into our two very separate religions. But as with the glass of water that is either half full or half empty, it depends on how you want to look at it as to how much you will be able to gain from it. I hope that Mormons will see the beauty and simplicity in many of the teachings of Islam, to consider the possibility of Muhammad in the role of a prophet to his people and how he was able to raise them to a much higher level of truth than they had previously and to recognize the many familiar gospel precepts that the Quran espouses.

I equally hope that Muslims will learn that there is a religion among the myriad of Christian faiths that does indeed know that there is One God who is a distinct and separate being from Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost, that the teachings of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon (as revealed also by angelic visitation) contain many of the same Quranic doctrines that they hold dear and that the Mormon lifestyle also requires total submission to God's laws.

Both faithful Mormons and Muslims are commanded to fast, pray, pay alms (tithing), be chaste in thought and action and modest in dress, follow similar dietary laws, read scriptures, worship God and submit to His will, serve and love their families and others, bear testimony, follow prophets and live pure lives. There is much that we can share and discuss with each other, rejoicing in what God has revealed to us through His messengers and words.

May we seek to grow in our respect of each other's beliefs, increase in our awareness of the truths we share, inspire in each other a further desire to lead righteous lives in submission to God's will and cultivate the spirit of unity as *ahla al-kitabi*³ and children of God is my prayer.

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³ In English, "people of the book" refers to those of the monotheistic Abrahamic religions prior to Islam who follow God's revealed scriptures. It is used in the Quran to describe righteous Christians who have not altered God's teachings.

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Spelling and Reference Notes

Arabic spellings in English have been simplified by trying to use the most common notations without adhering to any particular phonetic system.

Quranic references are taken from the Penguin paperback edition, *The Koran*, as translated by N.J. Dawood (1974) unless otherwise noted. Exact references are given by *Surah* (chapter) and *ayat* (verse), for example Surah 20: 32 refers to the twentieth chapter in the Quran and the 32nd verse. While each Surah in the Quran also has an Arabic name, they are not referred to in this text.

Latter-Day Saint scriptural references are also quoted by chapter and verse. There are four main books that constitute the LDS canon of scripture. They are the Bible (King James Version, 1611), Book of Mormon (1830), Doctrine and Covenants (1835) and the Pearl of Great Price (1851). References in the text give the book followed by the exact chapter and verse. For example, “BM 1 Nephi 4:6” refers to the Book of Mormon, the first book of Nephi, fourth chapter and sixth verse. “D & C 88:125” refers to the Doctrine and Covenants, the 88th section, 125th verse. “PGP Moses 1:39” refers to the Pearl of Great Price, book of Moses, first chapter, 39th verse. “KJV I Corinthians 1:10” refers to the King James Version Bible, the first Book of Corinthians, the first chapter and tenth verse.

Arabic translations are available of all four of these books. For information on ordering them, please see <http://www.ldscatalog.com> and use site search with keyword ‘Arabic’ (although please note that in respect of governmental import restrictions, it may not be possible to ship these books to some international destinations at present). Arabic online versions of the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants (which includes The Pearl of Great Price) are available in PDF downloadable format for free at <https://www.lds.org/languages/ara?lang=eng> The online Arabic translation of the Bible used for this 2015 revision is the 1865 Van Dyke translation and available in multiple places on the internet.

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Chapter One

Bridges of Faith

In recent years, many members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons) have come into more frequent contact with Muslims (followers of Islam) throughout the world. In the six Middle Eastern and Islamic majority countries where I have lived during the past several decades, there have been many branches and wards of our Church present with many hundreds of members living among their Muslim neighbors. Those of us who have had this enriching opportunity to be in these and other predominately Muslim countries have been able to see and understand what Islam really is, what it teaches and how the people live their daily lives. We have been able to share this unique perspective with family and friends when we go back home to our own cultures and countries.

Unfortunately, the tragic events of 11 September 2001 and the continuing media reports about the activities of such current organizations as Al-Qaida and ISIS have resulted in creating fears that have done little to promote a positive image of Islam or increase an understanding of its true precepts among those who are less informed. Focusing only on the propaganda promoted by extremist groups, many people mistakenly assume that the majority of Islam is solely a radical ideology full of intolerant brainwashed disciples who would willingly die in suicide attacks against innocent victims to further their cause. This media-driven stereotype could not be further from the truth.

Today, approximately one fifth of the world's population are members of the Islamic faith. These one and a half billion people are found in every country in the world, speak every language and come from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds. While most people connote Islam with Arab countries and culture, in reality, the majority of Muslims are non-Arab with over one billion adherents in South and Southeast Asia with the highest populations being found in Indonesia, India, Bangladesh and Pakistan.⁴ In the United States alone, there are over 5 million, as is evident by the growing number of mosques found in most major cities.

Islam is a global faith and has the highest rate of membership growth of all the major world religions.⁵ Because of its large numbers, there are of course off-shoot groups of dissidents that have withdrawn themselves away from the mainstream in order to follow their own stylized fundamentalist interpretation of Islamic teachings. Unfortunately, it is these factions that receive the highest public exposure due to their wanton acts of terrorism through which they profess their radical misuse of Islamic doctrines to achieve political aims of their own. But to assume that all Islam follows and condones these beliefs and actions is akin to believing in the oft-

⁴ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam_by_country and <http://www.pewforum.org/2011/01/27/table-muslim-population-by-country/>

⁵ See <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/>

publicized fallacious views that the Mormon LDS Church is racist against blacks, upholds polygamy today and that everyone from Utah has at least two wives.

Neither of these gross generalizations based on the actions of schismatic groups from our two religions are representative of even the original revealed doctrines that engendered them. It is a source of great frustration to all religions to be judged by what their splinter groups do. The fact that these groups are so far from the base-line truths is the very thing that draws public attention to them in the first place because their actions usually cause dramatic problems within society that monopolize the headlines in the day-to-day media. And unfortunately, it is much easier on the part of the naïve public to believe some rash generalization for such aberrant acts than to take the time to study the truth out for themselves.

The resulting attitudes and behavior toward Muslims and Mormons caused by these stereotypes creates intolerance and suspicion at the very least and more commonly outright persecution or prejudice against us. One of the saddest things in this world is when people falsely judge and condemn other religious beliefs than their own because they do not bother to look past such things as media reports or cultural and linguistic barriers to see the similarities that exist among all faiths. Many of our world's current "holy wars" could be eradicated if people would adopt an attitude of respect and open-mindedness toward the similar God-given principles by which most of us live.

By lowering our blinders and seeking to find the commonalities of belief between us, we can build bridges of faith rather than barriers of dispute. Far too many books have been written and articles published that delineate the canonical battle lines even further in the name of comparative analysis. By definition, the meaning of comparison is to look at two subjects to consider their similarities, not to focus on their differences which would come under the heading of contrastive research instead.

Obviously, there are variants on many doctrinal points and interpretations of sacred writings. If not, there would be no need to divide into different religions to begin with. The important point to recognize in our individual search for religious truth is that from God's standpoint, we are all equal. His view and love for all of us as His children allows for every variance of belief, every cultural expression and every lingual tone that a human being may employ to find their way to Him. We are not in any position to judge the path of belief or faith of another. But it is incumbent upon all of us to live in this world together in peace, regardless of any ideological differences that may exist between us.

The Mormon Prophet Joseph Smith wrote, "While one portion of the human race is judging and condemning the other without mercy, the Great Parent of the universe looks upon the whole of the human family with a fatherly care and paternal regard; He views them as His offspring, and without any of the contracted feelings that influence the children of men, causes 'His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.' He holds the reins of judgment in His hands; He is a wise Lawgiver, and will judge all men, not according to the narrow, contracted notions of men, but, 'according to the deeds done in the body whether they be good or evil,' or whether these deeds were done in England, America, Spain, Turkey, or India. He will judge them, 'not according to what they have not, but according to

what they have,' those who have lived without law, will be judged without law, and those who have a law, will be judged by that law. We need not doubt the wisdom and intelligence of the Great Jehovah; He will award judgment or mercy to all nations according to their several deserts, their means of obtaining intelligence, the laws by which they are governed, the facilities afforded them of obtaining correct information, and His inscrutable designs in relation to the human family; and when the designs of God shall be made manifest, and the curtain of futurity be withdrawn, we shall all of us eventually have to confess that the Judge of the earth has done right."⁶

As brothers and sisters belonging to this whole human family and offspring of God, we cannot allow ourselves to act in the role of judge or jury toward each other either by word or deed. That is God's privilege alone. The First Presidency⁷ of the LDS Church has called upon "all people everywhere to re-commit themselves to the time-honored ideals of tolerance and mutual respect. We sincerely believe that as we acknowledge one another with consideration and compassion we will discover that we can all peacefully coexist despite our deepest differences."⁸ One of our senior apostles recently stated, "No one should be criticized, persecuted, or attacked by individuals, or governments either, for what he or she believes about God.... The eleventh article of faith declares, 'We claim the privilege of worshipping Almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience, and allow all men the same privilege, let them worship how, where, or what they may.'"⁹

As members of the Church, we are further enjoined to "seek to bring all truth together. We seek to enlarge the circle of love and understanding among all peoples of the earth. Thus we strive to establish peace and happiness, not only within Christianity but among all mankind."¹⁰ A former prophet and president of the Church, Gordon B. Hinkley, has added that by looking for the strengths and virtues in other faiths that are similar to our own individual beliefs, we can increase in an "affirmative spirit of gratitude." By recognizing these common righteous precepts, we can add further spiritual dimensions to our own life. We should "Be respectful of the opinions and feelings of other people. Recognize their virtues; don't look for their faults. Look for their strengths and their virtues, and you will find strength and virtues that will be helpful in your own life."¹¹

⁶ Smith, Joseph Fielding. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 1976, p. 218

⁷ The First Presidency is the leadership of the LDS Church composing of the current prophet and two counselors.

⁸ Nelson, Russell M. "Teach us Tolerance and Love", *The Ensign*, May 1994, p. 71. *The Ensign* is a monthly magazine publication of the LDS Church. <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/1994/04/teach-us-tolerance-and-love?lang=hrv&clang=eng>

⁹ Hales, Robert D. "Preserving Agency, Protecting Religious Freedom", *The Ensign*, May 2015. <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2015/04/preserving-agency-protecting-religious-freedom?lang=eng>

¹⁰ Hunter, Howard W. "The Gospel- A Global Faith", *The Ensign*, November 1991, p.18. <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/1991/10/the-gospel-a-global-faith?lang=eng>

¹¹ Dew, Sheri L. *Go Forward with Faith: The Biography of Gordon B. Hinkley*, Deseret Book, SLC, Utah, 1996, pp. 536, 576.

Biblical scriptures speak of a similar attitude of acceptance needed among the early Christian saints who were converted from disparate religious and cultural backgrounds. In the book of Colossians, the Apostle Paul counsels to let these past differences go that previously caused separation and dispute between the followers. “Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all. Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.” (KJV Colossians 3: 11-14)

The Holy Quran, which is regarded as scripture to Muslims, also counsels to “not split up your religion into sects, each exulting in its own beliefs.” (Surah 30: 32) “Whatever the subject of your disputes, the final word belongs to Allah (God)... Yet men divided themselves through their own wickedness only after knowledge had been given them.” (Surah 42: 10,14)

It is this “exulting” attitude of religious superiority that is so poisonous to the struggling relationships of interfaith associations. Each group believing that their truth is the only truth that God will acknowledge at the last day. Joseph Smith stated that “One of the grand fundamental principles of Mormonism is to receive truth, let it come from whence it may.” He further encouraged the saints to “gather all the good and true principles in the world and treasure them.”¹²

Islam also upholds the same point as found in a saying of the Prophet Muhammad that “Wisdom is the lost treasure of the believer and he/she has the first right to it wherever it is found.”¹³ When all of us take the time to study these “good and true principles” that are found in each other’s religions, we not only further our own knowledge and understanding of that teaching, but more importantly, we gain a healthy respect and increase in charity towards those who also believe in these truths through a different avenue of faith.

For LDS members, we can in turn share with others our testimonies of the truth of the same principles that have been revealed through our modern day prophets and those of the Book of Mormon. Whether the commandment to “have no other Gods before me”¹⁴ is recorded in the Bible, Book of Mormon or Quran, it is still the same eternal truth. It does not make any of the commandments or revelations of God less true for anyone to read them in another book of scripture. In fact, it can only strengthen all our testimonies through the realization that these additional witnesses have recorded the same truths from God in another time through other religious messengers.

Professor James Mayfield, in a 1979 *Ensign* article on Islam, addressed this point of the mutual sharing of our common beliefs specifically with Muslims. He suggested “that a careful reading of the Koran may in fact provide insights and clues, even specific references from their scriptures, in how best to communicate our message. An understanding of Islamic theology will

¹² Smith, pp. 313,316.

¹³ Hadith, *Sunan At-Tirmidhi*, Book of Knowledge, Number 2687, Da’if

¹⁴ Compare KJV Exodus 20:3, Surah 17:22, BM Mosiah 12:35.

provide a common language for sharing insights and spiritual values... There will be increasing contacts between Arabs and Latter-Day Saints; but the growth of mutual understanding and respect will be discouragingly slow until we recognize the beauty and religious foundation upon which Arab civilization is built, that the concepts of justice, purity, and human progress are an integral part of both Islam and the gospel, and that an awareness of the similarities- and not just the differences- is the key to an acceptance and appreciation of what we have to offer.”¹⁵

It is toward this end of encouraging mutual respect and acceptance between our two faiths that the following chapters are offered. Some who read this book may see it as an attempt to compromise the separate beliefs to the point of saying that Mormonism and Islam are one in the same faith, that the differences between us are so small as to make us just sister sects of the same religion. There might also be criticism from the Mormon side that this book is too pro-Islam and not enough of our distinct doctrinal views are brought forward, or from the Muslim side that there is not enough context given for their point of view.

The intent is neither to convert one side into the total acceptance of the other’s faith as their own nor to illuminate or denounce the differences that do most certainly exist between us. Happily, each of us has the God-given right to believe that our religion teaches the truest and most correct principles on the face of this earth. Rather, it is hoped that by reading and learning of our common truths, there can be a bridge of understanding built between Mormons and Muslims that allows for positive interactions, dialogues, and discussions between us in the future and that there will be a healthy respect germinated out of these shared righteous principles that can dissipate the clouds of stereotype against which all religions fight.

In February 2000, diplomats from many Arab countries gathered at the United Nations in New York to be presented with copies of Brigham Young University’s newly translated English editions of two Islamic literary classics. One of our twelve Apostles, Elder Neal A. Maxwell, in representing the LDS Church expressed this exact view that “Between Mormons and Muslims, there are many touching points, and we would like to see the touching points become bridges of understanding.”¹⁶

This analogy of bridge-building was used some twenty years earlier in a talk given by another apostle, Elder Howard W. Hunter, to the students at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. Elder Hunter stated that “As members of the Lord’s church, we need to lift our vision beyond personal prejudices. We need to discover that indeed our Heavenly Father is no respecter of persons... The Church has an interest in all of Abraham’s descendants, and we should remember that the history of the Arabs goes back to Abraham through his son Ishmael... A cabinet member of Egypt once told me that if a bridge is ever to be built between Christianity and Islam, it must be built by the Mormon Church. In making inquiry as to the reason for his

¹⁵ Mayfield, James. “Ishmael, Our Brother”, *Ensign*, June 1979, pp. 30, 32.

<https://www.lds.org/ensign/1979/06/ishmael-our-brother?lang=eng>

¹⁶ *Deseret News*, 11 Feb 2000, <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/743209/Diplomats-hail-Ys-Islamic-translations.html?pg=all>

statement I was impressed by his recitation of the similarities and common bonds of brotherhood.”¹⁷

Only by looking for and understanding these common bonds can any bridges be raised between us. In our world today, we do not need to find further reasons to reject and fight each other. The Adversary (*shaytan*) will make sure that the spirit of enmity will always have a prominent place in our societies. Instead, we should focus on the areas that will build a unity of righteous deeds and faith between us “that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.” (KJV I Corinthians 1:10)

In turn, we will also gain a more tolerant and accepting viewpoint of cultural differences that are not all that significant when looked upon with a spiritual outlook toward the millennial reign to come when we will all be living together side by side in peace. If we are to live as one during Christ’s future reign, we must be able to overcome any attitudes or aversions that would separate us and cause friction or dissention. We must be able to live as the Nephites¹⁸ in the Book of Mormon did after Jesus Christ’s visit among them. They put aside all their differences, contentions, and disputations and had all things common among them “because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people.” (BM 4 Nephi: 2,3,15) This can only be possible if we will truly open our hearts beyond our own judgements, opinions or cultural attitudes and let charity dwell within us toward all men¹⁹. Only then we will be clothed “with the bond of charity, as with a mantle, which is the bond of perfectness and peace.” (D&C 88:125)

¹⁷ Hunter, Howard W. “All are Alike Unto God”, *Ensign*, June 1979.

<https://www.lds.org/ensign/1979/06/all-are-alike-unto-god?lang=eng>

¹⁸ The Nephites were a group of people who traveled from Jerusalem to the Americas in 600 BCE and are believed to be the ancestors of differing groups of the American Indians. The account of their journey begins the Book of Mormon. Also included later in the book is the account of Jesus Christ’s visit to them in 34 CE after his ascension to heaven.

¹⁹ D&C 121:45

Chapter Two

Prophetic Traditions

Contrary to most written histories on the subject, Islam did not begin in A.D. 570 with the birth of the Prophet Muhammad nor even with his revelatory call to be a prophet and bring forth the Quran in A.D. 610. To Muslims, the religion of Islam began with Adam and has continued with every prophet whom God has called to that office since then. This is because the word *Islam* is not a title of a religious group or belief. It is simply translated from Arabic as “submission”, meaning to submit one’s life to God. When you are living in obedience to God’s revealed laws through His prophets, you are in submission and therefore have become a Muslim or roughly translated, a submitter.

Throughout my years in various Middle Eastern countries and in conversing with many Muslims, I have been commonly asked if I have *aslami*, or submitted. In other words, is my focus in life to follow the one true God and have I accepted the truths revealed to all the prophets through the ages up through and including the Prophet Muhammad? In thinking of baptismal and temple covenants made and the laws of the gospel that I strive to follow daily, my reply has always been a resounding yes. I consider myself to be living a life that is in total submission to God and therefore, in the Islamic sense, a “true believer” (*saadaqua*) and one of the righteous “People of the Book” (*ahla al kitabi*) to which the Quran refers.

As members of the LDS Church, we also believe that our Heavenly Father restores His truths afresh in every dispensation through His prophets- that it is the same gospel, unchanging in content and tenet since Adam’s time, because God and His laws are unchanging. We believe that all truth together makes one complete whole whether it is revealed in our day and time or it was recorded over 5000 years ago. The purpose of our lives is the same as our brothers and sisters in Islam- to submit to God’s will, be obedient to His commandments and strive to live worthy of someday returning to live in His presence.

When judgment day comes, the righteous from every generation will sit down with Father Abraham, Moses, Enoch, Noah, Adam, and every prophet who ever lived on this earth. It will not matter in which time period or place we lived, which language we spoke or which prophet taught us. The fact that we submitted our lives to God while on earth will be the determining factor and the common bond that will bring us all together as one. Any deficiencies of knowledge or ordinances and discrepancies in truth or method of worship will be rectified and we will finally be united once again as we were in the beginning in our pre-existent relationship, as children of our Heavenly Father.

Regarding the generations of different prophets, times and places, the Quran states in at least six separate passages that “An apostle is sent to every nation” (Surah 10:47) and “... every age has its scripture.” (Surah 13:38) This is so that all of God’s children may hear His truths in their own time and tongue. “Each apostle We have sent has spoken only in the language of his own people, so that he might make plain to them his message.” (Surah 14:4)

The Book of Mormon also contains the same rationale. “For behold, the Lord doth grant unto all nations, of their own nation and tongue, to teach his word, yea, in wisdom, all that he seeth fit that they should have; therefore we see that the Lord doth counsel in wisdom, according to that which is just and true.” (BM Alma 29: 8)

Additionally, within every set of scripture, God makes it clear that it is not the only scripture He has revealed. There have been many prophets, of some we are aware and of others we have never before heard. The Bible, Quran and Book of Mormon have similar verses regarding this point. “And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.” (KJV John 10:16) “We have sent forth other apostles before you; of some you have already heard, of others We have told you nothing.” (Surah 40: 78)

“Wherefore, because that ye have a Bible ye need not suppose that it contains all my words; neither need ye suppose that I have not caused more to be written. For I command all men, both in the east and in the west, and in the north and in the south, and in the islands of the sea, that they shall write the words which I speak unto them; for out of the books which shall be written I will judge the world, every man according to their works, according to that which is written.” (BM 2 Nephi 29:10,11) This Book of Mormon scripture also mentions the important point that God will judge each group of people by their own scripture and prophet’s words.

Although the prophets’ teachings from any age contain the same basic truths, there are many specific revelations and laws given to individual groups of people depending on their situations, how much light they previously had, and what was expedient for them to know to progress “line upon line and precept upon precept”. (BM 2 Nephi 28:30) It makes sense, then, that each prophet will judge his own people according to their own revelations received and not in competition or comparison with other peoples, prophets or times. Mormons will be judged by the truths contained in our scriptures that we have received, by Jesus Christ and those whom we believe to be prophets. Muslims will be judged in the same way- by the prophets whose words and scriptures they have received.

Our LDS scriptures mention the twelve apostles judging the twelve tribes of Israel²⁰ and the twelve Nephite disciples judging the Nephites.²¹ The Quran also confirms this teaching. “You shall see all the nations on their knees. Each nation shall be summoned to its book and a voice will say to them: ‘You shall this day be rewarded for your deeds. This book of Ours speaks with truth against you. We have recorded all your actions.’” (Surah 45:28,29)

It is the prophet’s recorded words that will act as the standard for people during judgment day. Whether people have believed the prophet to be from God or not, whether they have made fun of his prophecies, ignored his teachings or even killed him, the revealed word will be what matters.

²⁰ D&C 29:12

²¹ BM 1 Nephi 12:9,10

So what proof exists that Muhammad, Moses, Joseph Smith or any of these messengers were really speaking God's words?

One proof is the books themselves. When the Lord reveals His word directly to His prophets, He asks any who doubt to make another record like unto it. Both Joseph Smith and Muhammad had similar revelations containing this challenge. "Now seek ye out of the Book of Commandments, even the least that is among them, and appoint him that is the most wise among you; Or, if there be any among you that shall make one like unto it, then ye are justified in saying that ye do not know that they are true; But if ye cannot make one like unto it, ye are under condemnation if ye do not bear record that they are true." (D&C 67:6-8)

"Do they say: 'He has invented it (the Quran) himself? Indeed, they have no faith. Let him produce a scripture like it, if what they say be true.'" (Surah 52: 33,34) In the case of the Quran, the style and consistency of the language and not just the meaning and content are part of the test. Each Arabic verse ends in a perfect rhyme, so that the spoken word carries an additional impact to the reader that would be beyond possible duplication or invention of man.

Another proof is that the Lord has said that He will reveal His will only through His prophets.²² In most instances, there is a special means of transmission that accompanies the message that allows it to remain intact. It is not important whether the words are received through angelic messengers, voices in the mind, dreams, visions or direct visitations. What is important is that the words are given in such a way as to be recorded verbatim when God speaks. "It is not vouchsafed to any mortal that Allah should speak to him except by revelation, or from behind a veil, or through a messenger sent and authorized by Him to make known His will." (Surah 42:51)

Muslims believe that Muhammad received the Quran word for word through visits by the angel Gabriel. Mormons believe that Joseph Smith received the Doctrine and Covenants by the Word of the Lord directly to his mind and through direct visitations and that the Book of Mormon prophets had dreams and visions and spoke or recorded their messages through the Spirit's inspiration. Prophets in the Bible had similar experiences and revelatory means by which to deliver God's word to their people.

The Quran mentions that God spoke to Moses directly. It also tells of angels bearing witness to the revelation of the Quran as His word. "We have revealed Our will to you as We revealed it to Noah and to the prophets who came after him; as We revealed it to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the tribes; to Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, Solomon, and David, to whom We gave the psalms. Of some apostles We have already told you (how Allah spoke directly to Moses); but there are others of whom We have not yet spoken; apostles who brought good news to mankind and admonished them, so that they might have no pleas against Allah after their coming. Allah is mighty and wise. Allah Himself bears witness by that which He has revealed to you that it has been revealed with His knowledge; and so do the angels. There is no better witness than Allah." (Surah 4: 163-166)

²² KJV Amos 3:7

Additionally, Islam does not differentiate between prophets of God. There are not some prophets who are more believable than others or whose words are more important. “Those that draw a line between Allah and His apostles, saying: ‘We believe in some, but deny others,’ - thus seeking a middle way - these indeed are the unbelievers.” (Surah 4:150,151) “Say: ‘We believe in Allah and that which is revealed to us; in what was revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the tribes; to Moses and Jesus and the other prophets by their Lord. We make no distinction amongst any of them, and to Allah, we have surrendered ourselves.’” (Surah 2: 136)

For Mormons, this goes along with our ninth Article of Faith²³ in that “We believe all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God” to His children through His prophets. This is why every week, members of the Church spend time studying the prophets’ words in Sunday school classes and other LDS Church related meetings (Relief Society, Priesthood, Young Men’s and Young Women’s, Seminary, Institute, Church Education programs, etc.). It is important to know and understand all of God’s words that He has given to His children on earth, regardless of place or time.

Perhaps one of the most difficult challenges all people face on this earth in the search for revealed truth is whether we will accept the teachings of prophets that are not in our generation or who do not speak our language. We must accept the fact that God loves all His children equally and therefore gives all of us a chance to come to know Him through His chosen servants’ messages. There is no place for an attitude of superiority in regards to scriptures.

Having said this, it also takes a spirit of discernment while reading other records to understand the differences between the culture-specific situations and commandments meant only for that time or group of people and the principles of righteous truth that are meant for all who may read the record at a future time and place. A good example of this are cases in the Bible, Book of Mormon and Quran where God commands a people to be destroyed or allows wars and bloodshed in defense of the truth. Many extremists in different religions use such scriptures as justifications at times to wage wars or *jihad* against different groups of people today. Conversely, to discount the whole of a prophet’s words solely on the fact that he is not from our time or place or that we have not heard of him before is only a testament to our narrow-mindedness and becomes a great loss for us in the end.

So what do Muslims think of Joseph Smith as a prophet and conversely, how should Mormons view Muhammad?

The attitude that Islam takes toward Joseph Smith is somewhat similar to how Latter-Day Saints would react to accepting Muhammad as a prophet and the Quran as part of our standard works. From the Muslim side, there is no problem in recognizing the truth of the fact that God works through angelic visitations to accomplish His purposes. All Muslims have a strong testimony of angels in their roles as messengers to prophets to bring forth God’s word. The

²³ *The Articles of Faith* were written in 1842 by Joseph Smith and are published in the back of most editions of the Doctrine and Covenants. See <https://www.lds.org/scriptures/pgp/a-of-f/1?lang=eng> for the complete text of all 13 articles.

visitation of the angel Moroni²⁴ to Joseph Smith in bringing forth the Book of Mormon is a close parallel to the visits of the angel Gabriel to Muhammad in revealing the Quran.²⁵

The obstacle to full acceptance lies in the belief among Muslims that Muhammad was the last prophet and there could not be any more after him. This comes from a passage in the Quran which declares that Muhammad is “the apostle of Allah and the seal of all the prophets” (Surah 33:40). This verse in combination with another one which states that “We have sent you forth to all mankind, so that you may give them good news and warn them.” (Surah 34:28) are interpreted as meaning that Muhammad’s teachings are the final seal of the prophets teachings to all mankind.

Through the years, I have discussed this concept many times with my Muslim friends and colleagues and in the end we usually agree to disagree. From my LDS point of view, given the numerous passages in the Quran quoted above that every nation and people has its prophet, it would make no logical sense for God to stop sending prophets with His message as of 632 CE. Additionally, there is no passage in the Quran which states in plain terms that Muhammad is the last prophet that God has sent to all the world. However, most editions of the Quran published today contain a commentary on these verses that include this interpretation as agreed upon by Muslim scholars. From the disciples and companions of the Muhammad in his time until today, all Muslims have understood this to be so. Muhammad’s message was to be preserved until the end of the world, which so far has been fulfilled, and with the advent of the Internet and modern technology, it can be spread to all people of the earth. So, why would there be a need for more prophets?

But from an LDS standpoint, every major prophet was the seal to his dispensation and to the prophets that preceded him for the people to whom he was sent. Yet God continued to send more prophets in further dispensations as time went on. And although we could agree that Muhammad’s teachings are for all the world in the same way that all God’s words through his messengers and inspired leaders are for everyone, we would have to attest that there are still living prophets even now who continue to receive God’s word for people today.

The challenge that I have left with my Muslim friends is to see what Joseph Smith taught. The proof of a prophet’s words is also in the consistency of the teachings and principles with those previously revealed through other prophets. Also, many prophets are able to bring forth miracles through the use of God’s power. Muslims believe the main miracle wrought by God through Muhammad was the conveying of the Quran. Additionally, it is no coincidence that to Mormons, the translation of the Book of Mormon by Joseph Smith constitutes a miracle as it was done also through miraculous means.

²⁴ Moroni was a Book of Mormon prophet who appeared to Joseph Smith in 1823 and revealed the location of ancient records written on gold plates containing the account of the Book of Mormon peoples which Joseph later translated into English. See <https://www.lds.org/scriptures/pgp/js-h/1.34?lang=eng#33>

²⁵ The Angel Gabriel appeared to Muhammad and recited verses of the Quran over the space of 22 years. Muhammad memorized the verses verbatim and spoke them to his followers who also memorized them. They were later compiled into the written Quran.

And what should Latter-Day Saints think of Muhammad? In the early days of the Church, Islam was a topic of discussion by our early apostles. On September 23, 1855, two sermons on Islam were delivered by Elders Parley P. Pratt and George A. Smith to the Saints in the Bowery in Salt Lake City, Utah. Elder Pratt spoke about the beginnings of Islam and the call of Muhammad to be a prophet who was “no doubt raised up by God on purpose to scourge the world for their idolatry.”²⁶

Elder Smith then followed with a wonderful statement still appropriate to our times. “I am aware it is not without a great deal of prejudice that we, as Europeans, Americans and Christians in religion and in our education, so called, have looked upon the history of Mahomet, or even the name; and even now we may think that Mahometanism [Islam], compared with Christianity as it exists in the world, is a kind of heathenism, or something dreadful, and the other we look upon as something very pretty, only a little crippled; and for my part, I hardly know which to call the idolatrous side of the question, unless we consider Mahometanism Christianity, in one sense, and that which has been called Christianity, heathenism.”²⁷

Elder Smith went on to say that compared with the corruption of the Christian faith through time, Muhammad was on the side of truth on the subject of Deity and worship and that Islam taught and established the truth of the true and living God.²⁸ He also discussed the lack of the fullness of the gospel being revealed because those blessings pertained to another branch of Abraham’s family and that “All a nation could have, without the keys of the everlasting gospel, without the gifts and powers pertaining to those keys, and without the fulness of the gospel, the people of the East seemed to have been blessed with, so far as the Lord saw fit to bestow upon them blessings during those dark ages.”²⁹

In modern times, our Church leaders have also come out in support of the righteous teachings found in Islam. In 1978, a First Presidency statement specifically mentions Muhammad as one of the great religious leaders of the world who “received a portion of God’s light. Moral truths were given to them by God to enlighten whole nations and to bring a higher level of understanding to individuals.”³⁰ In 1992, another First Presidency statement read, “As the Church grows around the world, Latter-day Saints find themselves in increasingly frequent contact with members of the Islamic faith. Islam teaches much that is inspiring, noble, and worthy of the highest respect.”³¹

Regarding the issue of whether Muhammad was a true prophet, James Mayfield in his article “Ishmael, Our Brother” raises the point that although “many may reject some of the teachings of Muhammad because they seem so inconsistent with the fundamental teachings of the gospel. Yet there may be as much difference between what Muhammad taught in the seventh century and what the Islamic community teaches today as there is between what the apostles

²⁶ Young, Brigham, et.al. *Journal of Discourses*, 1888 (2006 edition) vol.3 pp.30,32.

²⁷ Ibid, vol 3, p. 38

²⁸ Ibid, vol 3, pp. 38-39

²⁹ Ibid, vol 3, p. 40

³⁰ First Presidency Statement of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 15 Feb 1978.

³¹ First Presidency Statement published in *Church News Bulletin*, April 4, 1992.

taught and what Christian churches teach today.”³² Of course, Muslims would maintain that there is no difference between what is taught today and what was taught back in the 7th century and that the truths have remained intact and unaltered. They do acknowledge, however, that there have been variances in the cultural practice of their faith in varying countries and that errors do exist, though the original teachings are still very much accessible to straighten out any misconceptions.

The same challenge that I have offered to my Muslim friends I extend to all Latter-Day Saints as well- to look beyond the modern interpretations, deviations of practice or dogmatic commentary which surround Islam to the fundamental teachings of the Quran itself which is held to be the unaltered word of God. Assuming that the teachings are in line with our own revealed truth and complement the teachings of other scriptures, Muhammad would indeed qualify as a messenger of God in his time. And although there are many teachings in the Quran that are cultural and time specific, they in no way nullify the righteous and true gospel principles also contained therein. “What we have revealed to you in the Book [Quran] is the truth confirming previous scriptures.” (Surah 35:31)

One point to also consider is that the definition of the word “prophet” for Mormons and Muslims is very different. In Islam, a prophet is one who receives revelation from God to convey to those around him but who does not receive a new book of scripture- rather he revives or restores the truth that was given before but has since been distorted. The term ‘messenger’ is used more frequently when referring to Muhammad and his role. A messenger in Islam is one who does receive a new book of revelation. Therefore every messenger is also considered a prophet, but not every prophet was a messenger.³³ The Prophet Muhammad stated that there were over 100,000 prophets sent, but only 315 were messengers who received books of revelation.³⁴

For Latter-Day Saints, when we speak of a prophet today, we refer to a man who has been called and ordained of God, who holds the proper priesthood keys and authority to restore and administer the saving ordinances of the gospel³⁵ and to receive revelation for the Church and the world. Elder Bruce R. McConkie, in *Mormon Doctrine* further states that “A *prophet* is a person who knows by personal revelation from the Holy Ghost that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, ‘for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.’ (KJV Revelations 19:10)”³⁶ Obviously, for us, Muhammad would not fit in with this definition of a prophet at all.

However, if we consider the definition and role of a Hebrew prophet from Biblical times, there may be more room for acceptance. Some of the Hebrew prophets acted more as voices of warning and messengers rather than in restoring or performing priesthood ordinances (or at least there is not any mention of such in the Biblical accounts). Not all the prophets in the Bible held

³² Mayfield, James. “Ishmael, Our Brother”, *Ensign*, June 1979, p.30

³³ Abdal-Ati, Hammudah. *Islam in Focus*, World Assembly of Muslim Youth, 2000.

³⁴ Hadith as reported by Ahmad Ibn Hanbal in *Musnad*, 5, 169.

³⁵ “priesthood keys” refers to God-given ecclesiastical authority; “saving ordinances” refers to a sacred act essential for salvation, such as baptism; “restoration” refers to a practice or act that was corrupted through time and revealed again in purity by God to a later prophet.

³⁶ McConkie, Bruce R. *Mormon Doctrine*, Bookcraft, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1966, p.605.

the Melchizedek (or higher) priesthood or were able to perform the full ordinances of the gospel that we have today.

In our LDS Bible dictionaries, the entry under the word prophet states: “The work of a Hebrew prophet was to act as God’s messenger and make known God’s will... It was also the prophet’s duty to denounce sin and foretell its punishment... He was above all to be a preacher of righteousness. When the people had fallen away from a true faith in Jehovah, the prophets had to try to restore that faith and remove false views about the character of God and the nature of the Divine requirement.”³⁷ Nowhere in the entire definition does it mention that a prophet must hold the priesthood or administer ordinances. There is also the feminine form of the word, *prophetess*, such as in the cases of Deborah, Miriam, Huldah and Anna. Obviously, they did not either hold the priesthood or perform ordinances, yet they were addressed by that title, although the parallel between prophet and prophetess may not be exactly equal in meaning.

Here Muhammad certainly could qualify as a prophet in the sense of one who acted as a voice of warning, a preacher of righteousness and removed false views about the multiplicity of God. Elder Orson F. Whitney, speaking in a General Conference of the Church in 1921 said, “[God] is using not only his covenant people, but other peoples as well, to consummate a work, stupendous, magnificent, and altogether too arduous for this little handful of Saints to accomplish by and of themselves... All down the ages men bearing the authority of the Holy Priesthood- patriarchs, prophets, apostles and others, have officiated in the name of the Lord, doing the things that he required of them; and outside the pale of their activities other good and great men, not bearing the Priesthood, but possessing profundity of thought, great wisdom, and a desire to uplift their fellows, have been sent by the Almighty into many nations, to give them, not the fulness of the Gospel, but that portion of truth that they were able to receive and wisely use.”³⁸

The people of Muhammad’s era certainly needed a messenger of God to lift them out of their erroneous ideas and worship practices. At the time of his calling, pre-Islamic Arabia was full of misconceptions about God and idolatry was rampant. As is seen in Biblical times, whenever people have strayed so far from the truth so as to not even recognize the existence of God, He has been very quick to send a prophet to straighten them out. The Arabs of the early seventh century living on the Arabian Peninsula were no exception.

In an area which covers almost a million square miles, many tribal societies lived along the main frankincense trade route that ran along the western edge of the peninsula between the southern tip of what is now Yemen, up through Mecca and Ma’an where it then split into two branches, one Northeast to Egypt and Palestine, the other Northwest to Syria.³⁹ Mecca was perhaps the most important city along the route both because of its position midway and because it contained one of the most holy shrines of the times- the Ka’bah. Abraham and Ishmael were

³⁷ LDS *Bible Dictionary* is found in the King James Version of the Bible published by the Church as part of the LDS Scriptures. This entry is from p.754 in the print edition. Please see <https://www.lds.org/scriptures/bd?lang=eng> for the online edition.

³⁸ *Ninety-First Annual Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints*, Salt Lake City, 1921, pp.32,33

³⁹ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pre-Islamic_Arabia

said to have erected this shrine after the sacrifice and the Ka'bah became the center for the worshipping of all the various gods of the different tribes.⁴⁰

The word Allah in Arabic is made from two words- *Al* meaning 'the' and *ilah* meaning God.⁴¹ Although the word connotes that there is only one God, The God, and no other, the Pre-Islamic Arabs did not consider Him to be the main source of their worship. They were much more enamored by the lesser Gods who each had individual functions depending on what specific problem needed solving. There was a god for most occasions and many consisted of simply a rock, tree or some hand carved effigy. The pagan Arabs set up these idols in the Ka'bah and made offerings to them daily. They felt that these lesser gods would be more beneficial to them in their specific needs than praying to a general God like Allah.

The rulers of Mecca during this time were the Quraysh tribe and their central occupations centered around providing guide and protection services for the caravans that passed along the trade route (no doubt pocketing a goodly portion of the proceeds from the caravan for the services they offered along the way). In 570 CE, Muhammad was born into one of the clans of the Quraysh, the Benu Hashim, to his father Abdallah and his mother Aminah. Unfortunately, by the age of six, both parents had died and Muhammad was then raised by his grandfather, Abdul Muttalib, then a prominent leader in Mecca.⁴²

It was said that his grandfather loved him dearly and kept Muhammad with him during important business meetings. When asked by his other sons to take Muhammad out of the way, his grandfather replied "Let him be; my child will be leader of his people."⁴³ Later, upon his grandfather's death, Muhammad was under the guardianship of his uncle Abu-Talib who also cared deeply for him.

From his family, Muhammad learned the ways of trade and often traveled with caravans between Mecca and Syria. By the time he was in his mid-twenties, he was managing the caravans and was working for a rich widow by the name of Khadija to whom he was related. Muhammad was known for his integrity and wisdom and Khadija soon asked him to marry her. Khadija was fifteen years his senior at age forty, but the marriage was said to be prosperous and happy as they had four daughters and two sons from their union. Muhammad lived with Khadija for twenty-five years and did not take another wife until after her death. Of Khadija, Muhammad later said, "When I was poor, she enriched me; when they called me a liar, she alone remained true."⁴⁴

Muhammad, like Joseph Smith, was troubled by the inconsistencies and "tumult" of religious views during his time. Besides the pagan gods of the Ka'bah and the other main religions of the time, Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Judaism, there was also a group of people in Mecca known as the *hanifs* who had rejected idolatry and set up a viewpoint of their own. They had an influence on Muhammad's thinking and as confusing as it was, the one truth that he

⁴⁰ See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kaaba>

⁴¹ See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allah>

⁴² See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muhammad>

⁴³ 'Azzam, Abd Al-Rahman. *The Life of the Prophet Muhammad*, Islamic Foundation, U.K., 1987, p.8

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 9

had sorted out prior to his call as a prophet was the concept of a singular God (monotheism). He rejected idolatry and from early years was against worshipping images or idols. One story is told that when Muhammad was asked to perform an act in the name of the pagan gods al-Lat and al-Uzza, he replied, “Do not ask me anything for the sake of these idols. I have never hated anything more.”⁴⁵

It was in the year 610 CE at the age of forty that Muhammad received his calling as a prophet. He was in the habit of going to a cave near Mount Hira outside of Mecca to ponder these religious questions in prayerful solitude. It was during the month of Ramadhan (now considered a holy month of the Islamic calendar) on one such vigil that the Angel Gabriel spoke to Muhammad and said, “Recite.” Muhammad answered, “What shall I recite?” The angel replied, “Recite in the name of your Lord who created, created man from clots of blood. Recite! Your Lord is the Most Bountiful One, who by the pen taught man what he did not know.”⁴⁶

Muhammad rushed back home to Khadija in a great state of agitation and related the experience to her. She comforted him and told him he had nothing to fear and that God would never let him down. After a short period of time he heard the voice again declaring, “You are the messenger of God, and I am Gabriel.” He ran into Khadija again and asked that she cover him with a cloak as he was exhausted. He then heard the voice a third time saying, “O you enveloped in your cloak, arise and warn! Your Lord magnify; your raiment purify, pollution shun! And show not favour, seeking worldly gain! For the sake of the Lord, be patient!”⁴⁷ Muhammad then realized that he had a mission to perform and that he was to be God’s messenger to his people.

Over the next twenty-two years, he received continuous revelations that when compiled constitute the entire Quran, containing 114 chapters (surahs). He did not write the verses down but recited them to professional scribes whose job it was to memorize poems, stories or any words verbatim. This was a common method of keeping records or histories at the time as written Arabic was in its infant stages as a literary language. Later in his lifetime, verses were written on palm-leaves, bones, animal skins or any material that would hold ink. After his death, the verses were collected and collated into an authorized version which Muslims believe has been carefully preserved and re-copied exactly without change through 1400 years until today.

In addition to revealing a book of scripture and declaring the true character of the One God, there are other parallels between Muhammad’s and Joseph Smith’s missions. There are verses in the Quran that speak of Muhammad’s duty to speak with a voice of warning. “I swear by the Wise Koran that you are sent upon a straight path. This is revealed by the Mighty One, the Merciful, so that you may warn a nation who, because their fathers were not warned before them, live in heedlessness.” (Surah 36:2-6) “Prophet, We have sent you forth as a witness, a bearer of good news, and a warner; one who shall call men to Allah by His leave and guide them like a shining light.” (Surah 33: 45,46) These are similar to those received by Joseph Smith that preface the Doctrine and Covenants in the first section. “And the voice of warning shall be unto all people, by the mouths of my disciples, whom I have chosen in these last days.” (D&C 1: 4)

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 9

⁴⁶ Dawood, N.J., trans. *The Koran*, Penguin, U.K., 1986, pp. 9, 10

⁴⁷ ‘Azzam, op. cit., p.10

Another comparison is found in their humble birth and lack of formal education. Of Muhammad, the Quran states: “Therefore have faith in Allah and His apostle, the Unlettered prophet, who believes in Allah and His word. Follow him so that you may be rightly guided.” (Surah 7:158) While the Book of Mormon refers to Joseph Smith as “him that is not learned.” (BM 2 Nephi 27:19)

Both Muhammad and Joseph Smith never shirked their responsibilities to proclaim the revealed truths each had received. For thirteen years, Muhammad struggled and preached in Mecca and eventually had to leave with his followers due to the persecution that ensued. Many times his life was in danger. Joseph and the early Saints were also forced into exodus for their beliefs time and time again and eventually, Joseph met his death at the hands of an angry mob.⁴⁸

It was twenty years altogether before Muhammad could return in triumph with 10,000 followers to finally fulfill his mission of ridding his people of idolatry. As he came before the Ka’bah on the 10th day in Ramadthan, 630 CE, “Muhammad stood before the 360 idols and pointed to them with his staff saying, ‘Truth is come, and falsehood is fled away!’ and at these words his attendants hewed them down and all the idols and house-hold gods of Mecca and roundabout were destroyed.”⁴⁹

Two years later in 632 CE, the Prophet Muhammad died, having accomplished his work and leaving behind him a thriving community where the truths he taught could continue to spread throughout the region and eventually to the world. Today, one fifth of the world’s population believe in his words and use the Quran as their guidebook for life. Another test of any truth is how its teachings cannot be outdated. All the major world religions have withstood the test of time in this regard because of the amount of truth that each contains, including Islam.

Of the impact of Mohammad’s mission and teachings on his people, one Muslim scholar wrote, “He was the messenger of God in the world, and idol worship in his tribe and homeland must come to an end. His new nation would have to divorce itself from idolatry, usury, immorality, alcoholism and vain and sanguine pride in tribalism, and above all it would have to become Muslim, that is, submissive to God, the almighty One, Who has no partners, and to Whom we will return to be judged for whatever they have been.”⁵⁰ It would indeed take a messenger of God to effect this kind of permanent change among such entrenched pagan idol worshippers.

As God revealed to Muhammad, “This day have I perfected your religion for you and completed My favour to you. I have chosen Islam to be your faith.” (Surah 5:3) So should each of us accept the faith that has been given us and continue to seek out revealed truth from all sources available that will complement our righteous beliefs. As President Joseph F. Smith noted, “We believe in all truth, no matter to what subject it may refer. No sect or religious denomination in the world possesses a single principle of truth that we do not accept or that we

⁴⁸ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death_of_Joseph_Smith

⁴⁹ Ibid, p.24

⁵⁰ Ibid, p.20

will reject. We are willing to receive all truth, from whatever source it may come; for truth will stand, truth will endure.”⁵¹

⁵¹ Smith, Joseph F. *Gospel Doctrine*, 5th ed., Deseret Book, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1939, p.1

Chapter Three

Scriptural Traditions

While serving as a full-time missionary in Australia, my companions and I would frequently come across members of other Christian faiths who were active in their religions and content with their level of spirituality. They studied the Bible every week in their churches, obeyed the commandments and felt that they were walking on the right path back to God. They were good people who were living in accordance with the righteous truths they had received thus far in their lives.

Our approach as missionaries was to share with them the further testament and truths concerning Jesus Christ that were contained in the Book of Mormon. Surely anyone who was a practicing Christian and who loved to read Jesus' teachings in the Bible would be interested in reading other accounts of Christ's teachings and visits here on earth. Or so we thought. Our dialogue usually ran something like this.

Missionaries: "If you are a member of the _____ faith, you believe in the Bible, right?"

Christian: "Yes, I study the Bible regularly and try to live my life by its teachings."

Missionaries: "Do you enjoy reading Jesus Christ's words as recorded by His disciples?"

Christian: "Sure. I think it's great to have a record of his words to his followers. I probably enjoy the New Testament the most because it gives us Jesus' words exactly."

Missionaries: "Then if you knew that there were other books containing Jesus Christ's words that were not included in the Bible, would you also be interested in reading those scriptures as well?"

Christian: "Yes, I suppose I would if I knew they were really His words."

Missionaries: "We have a copy of the Book of Mormon which contains Christ's exact words and teachings to people who lived in the America's anciently. The Savior visited these people shortly after his resurrection and taught them His gospel, too. The people's prophets recorded His words to them and if you will read it, you will see that it is a second witness to Jesus Christ's teachings and role as our Savior. Would you like a copy to look at?"

Christian: "No thanks, I don't believe in the Mormon Bible. I think I will just stick to my own Bible and what I know is true already."

It would always amaze me that such strong Christian believers would reject even looking at the Book of Mormon without knowing one word that was in it. It was depressing as a missionary to see such close-mindedness when I could plainly see that these good people were trying to live righteously according to the truth they had received. What was it that stopped them from wanting more truth?

Prophets in the Book of Mormon in 500 BCE prophesy of this precise attitude toward receiving further truth in our day. In 2 Nephi chapter 28, the prophet Nephi sees our times and the divisions of religions that lead to rejection of the truth. “Wo be unto him that shall say: We have received the word of God, and we need no more of the word of God, for we have enough!” (BM 2 Nephi 28:29) “...Many of the Gentiles shall say: A Bible! A Bible! We have got a Bible, and there cannot be any more Bible.” (BM 2 Nephi 29:3)

What follows this verse is a very strong injunction from the Lord not to reject His further teachings to any people to whom He has spoken. “Know ye not that there are more nations than one? Know ye not that I, the Lord, your God have created all men, and that I remember those who are upon the isles of the sea; and that I rule in the heavens above and in the earth beneath; and I bring forth my word unto the children of men, yea, even upon all nations of the earth? Wherefore murmur ye, because that ye shall receive more of my word? Know ye not that the testimony of two nations is a witness unto you that I am God, that I remember one nation like unto another? Wherefore I speak the same words unto one nation like unto another. And when the two nations shall run together the testimony of the two nations shall run together also. And I do this that I may prove unto many that I am the same yesterday, today, and forever; and that I speak forth my words according to mine own pleasure. And because that I have spoken one word ye need not suppose that I cannot speak another; for my work is not yet finished; neither shall it be until the end of man, neither from that time henceforth and forever. Wherefore, because that ye have a Bible, ye need not suppose that it contains all my words; neither need ye suppose that I have not caused more to be written.” (BM 2 Nephi 29: 7-10)

The rationale behind giving so many diverse words to separate peoples is explained by the Lord as necessary because of the differences of level of understanding that each group has. The Lord will not give higher laws to those who are not yet ready to receive them, but gives “unto the children of men line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little; and blessed are those who hearken unto my precepts, and lend an ear unto my counsel, for they shall learn wisdom; for unto him that receiveth I will give more; and from them that shall say, We have enough, from them shall be taken away even that which they have.” (BM 2 Nephi 28:30)

In speaking about the differences in revealed truths between faiths, the Quran mentions that God has “ordained a law and assigned a path for each of you. Had Allah pleased, He could have made you one nation; but it is His wish to prove you by that which He has bestowed upon you.” (Surah 5:48) Additionally, God “will charge no soul with more than it can bear.” (Surah 23:62) Each revealed scripture contains what is necessary for the next step in spiritual understanding and progress for that people, not truths that are miles above their grasp or impossible for them to live by in the context of their current lives. Just because one group of people is not ready to receive more light and truth than another group, it does not mean their scriptures are any less true or that they should be discarded as something other than God’s word.

Not surprisingly, the Quran also includes similar passages in which God speaks about the rejection of the Quran by people who would say that they already have enough truth. “And now that a Book confirming their own has come to them from Allah, they deny it, although they know it to be the truth and have long prayed for help against the unbelievers... To deny Allah’s own revelation, grudging that He should reveal His bounty to whom He chooses from His servants!... When it is said to them: ‘Believe in what Allah has revealed,’ they reply: ‘We believe in what was revealed to us’. But they deny what has since been revealed, although it is the truth, corroborating their own scriptures.” (Surah 2: 89-91)

It seems that a common problem with people of all ages is the desire to walk only in the traditions of their fathers, whether they be righteous or not, according to what truth, if any, they have received. This was a major difficulty during the Prophet Muhammad’s time in overcoming the traditional pagan and idolatrous beliefs in pre-Islamic Arabia. It was also a recurring theme in the Book of Mormon that stood in the way of the efforts of countless prophets to declare the truth to the Lamanites.⁵²

The Quran further states: “When it is said to them: ‘Follow what Allah has revealed,’ they reply, ‘We will follow nothing but the faith of our fathers.’ Yes, even though Satan is inviting them to the scourge of Hell.” (Surah 31:21) “Thus, whenever, before you, We sent an apostle to warn a nation, those who lived in comfort said, ‘This was the faith our fathers practised; we are merely walking in their footsteps.’ Each apostle said: ‘What if I bring you a religion more enlightened than your fathers’?’ But they replied: ‘We deny the message you have brought.’ So we took vengeance on them. Consider the fate of those who disbelieved our warning.” (Surah 43:23-25)

Perhaps the reason for such narrow vision is the comfort that this verse mentions. We are all comfortable with the words of scripture we have received thus far because we know they are true and it is easy to believe in them because our fathers believed in them and taught us the truth of them. So why should we seek for more?

If one set of scriptures would have been sufficient for all of God’s children to learn the truth for all earthly time, then He would have revealed it only once in one language and that would have been adequate. Unfortunately, through time, many of the records have become changed, hidden, lost or mistranslated. The truths have become clouded and obscure and people do not have enough of the original truth left to follow. This is why it has been necessary for new prophets to come forth to restore the truths in their purity once again.

The Quran mentions the Biblical teachings of the Christians that had become altered by the sixth century and that the straight path could be found again through the teachings of the Book that Muhammad revealed. “People of the Book! Our apostle has come to reveal to you much of what you have hidden of the Scriptures, and to forgive you much. A light has come to you from Allah and a glorious Book, with which He will guide to the paths by His will from darkness to the light; He will guide them to a straight path.” (Surah 5:15,16) Considering the

⁵² The Lamanites were another group of early American peoples who split off from the Nephites shortly upon arriving in the Americas. For examples of difficulties in overcoming former false traditions, see entries under “tradition” in the LDS King James Version Bible *Topical Guide* and indices.

doctrine of the Trinitarian essence of God that came out of the counsel of Nicea in the fourth century and the various debates over which books should be included in the Bible compilation, it is little wonder that the Quran teachings as revealed afresh would be considered a more pure source for truth than the Bible during those times.

The Book of Mormon states that many plain and precious truths were taken out of the book that contained the record of the Jews and that “because of these things which are taken away out of the gospel of the Lamb, an exceedingly great many do stumble...” (BM 1 Nephi 13: 29) The Lord further declares that He will bring forth the truth once again to the gentiles (non-Jews) through other records that He will cause to be written.⁵³

Whenever doctrines have been lost or changed through men’s interference and corruption, the Lord has replaced them with a new book through a new prophet. But not every truth will be revealed to every group of people. Again, this depends on the level of their readiness and spiritual preparation. The main difference in what was given to Muhammad as compared to that which was contained in the original Gospel as taught by Christ and also the doctrines revealed to the people of the Book of Mormon is the doctrine of atonement⁵⁴ and the ordinances of salvation.

Given the Arabian peoples’ idolatrous beliefs and female infanticide (killing of babies), it makes sense that the first step would be to reintroduce the true character of the One God and a basic set of commandments to follow. The “Law of Moses”, also known as the “lesser law”⁵⁵, is what is taught in the Quran (with the modification of forgiveness being better than seeking just recompense under the law of retaliation and retribution), not the higher doctrines of atonement and priesthood keys.

The important point here for Mormons is that the lack of mention of these doctrines in the Quran does not in any way discount or invalidate the rest of the true Quranic teachings simply because they are not present. The same similarity exists between Old and New Testament teachings. Many tenets of the Mosaic Law as found in the Pentateuch (first five books of the Old Testament) were given as basic commandments and types fore-telling of the “higher law”⁵⁶ which was to come. When Christ came, as recorded in the New Testament, He referred to Himself as fulfilling the lesser law - not destroying it.⁵⁷ He then personally revealed the higher laws to the people, many of which are contained in the beautiful teachings of the Sermon on the Mount.⁵⁸

⁵³ BM 1 Nephi 13: 35-41

⁵⁴ “atonement” refers to Christ’s role as Savior and Mediator and will be discussed at length in chapter 6.

⁵⁵ The “lesser law” or “Law of Moses” dealt primarily with the doctrine of just retribution- an eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth, where mercy was not employed.

⁵⁶ The “higher law” was based on mercy through forgiveness of sins as brought about by Christ’s atonement. See BM Alma 34, BM Alma 42 and BM 2 Nephi 9 for further clarification on the LDS viewpoint and definition of atonement, mercy and justice.

⁵⁷ BM 1 Nephi 13: 35-41, Matthew 5:17

⁵⁸ KJV Matthew 5-7

Islam upholds all the teachings of Christ as found in the Bible as far as they have not been altered (or translated incorrectly) save those with reference to His divine nature. While the Quran speaks of Christ in His prophetic role in restoring and bringing the gospel light and truth to the Jews, it does not reveal Him in His divine role as the Savior. The responsibility that this knowledge carries and the higher laws that would result have not been included. However, the Quran does refer to Jesus as the Messiah which is a direct reference to His divine mission and Muslims believe that one day He will return to teach them once again.

So, if Islam requires a lesser law than what we feel we have been given, why should Mormons study its doctrines? What can be gained on our end by studying the Quran if it does not contain our basic principles regarding salvation and the atonement? The same question I asked my contacts as a missionary is a valid point to consider here. If Mormons believe and follow God's teachings and love His truths, should we not also be interested in anything He has said at any time to any people? Should we not take the time to study His words that He has deemed important enough to be recorded and that serve as His guidebook for one fifth of the world's population today? Or do we feel we have enough with our scriptures as they are and don't need any more? Are we as guilty as any other who would answer, "A Bible, a Bible! We have received the word of God, and we need no more of the word of God, for we have enough!"

The same set of questions could be asked equally of Muslims. Would it not be of benefit to read more of God's words that He has given through His prophets in different ages to different peoples? "Of some apostles We have already told you (how Allah spoke directly to Moses); but there are others of whom We have not yet spoken; apostles who brought good news to mankind and admonished them, so that they might have no pleas against Allah after their coming." (Surah 4: 163-166) If this surah is true, would it not be important and helpful to know more of the words of these other prophets whom Allah has also commanded to speak His words? The invitation to learn more truth from each other's scriptures is extended to of us.

Through my study of the Quran over the years of my tenure in the Middle East and through many conversations I have had with Muslims regarding its teachings, I have come to appreciate the beauty and power of many of the verses that teach gospel principles. It is like looking at the hub of a wheel through another spoke or the view of the valley from the opposite mountain height. I have gained a deeper understanding of the many fundamental aspects of the truths that our religions share. Several times in recent years, our LDS prophets have counseled us to stick to the basic teachings of the gospel and work on following them rather than delve for deeper mysteries. The Quran is full of these foundational principles that our Father requires all of His children to follow and we should be grateful for any additional insights we can gain by reading it. Similarly, such truths are also found in the Book of Mormon and would provide deeper understanding from a different perspective for Muslims as well.

This is not to say that either of us should neglect or supplant our daily study of our own scriptures or even attempt to read some other record before we have read and understood our own first. But we can enjoy and even strengthen our testimonies by looking at the same principles through different contexts and broaden our understanding by comparing them with our own revealed word.

For example, the first chapter of the Quran known as the *fatihah* (translated as “the opening”), is one of the most beautiful and comprehensive passages that has been given to man in any age. Muslims recite this chapter every time they pray and it is considered to be the essence of Islam contained in just seven verses. “In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful. Praise be to Allah the Cherisher and Sustainer of the Worlds: Most Gracious, Most Merciful; Master of the Day of Judgment. Thee alone do we worship, and Thine aid we seek. Show us the straight way, the way of those on whom Thou has bestowed Thy Grace, those whose portion is not wrath. And who go not astray.”⁵⁹

The commentary included in the Saudi Arabian King Fahed Center translation of the Quran explains the importance of this Surah by noting that when using these verses in prayer, “...we can pray aright, [and] it means that we have some knowledge of Allah and His attributes, of His relations to us and His creation, which includes ourselves; that we glimpse the source from which we come, and that final goal which is our spiritual destiny under Allah’s true judgment: then we offer ourselves to Allah and seek His light.”⁶⁰

The footnotes on these verses further state that “By universal consent it is rightly placed at the beginning of the Quran, as summing up, in marvelously terse and comprehensive words, man’s relation to Allah in contemplation and prayer. In our spiritual contemplation the first words should be those of praise. If the praise is from our inmost being, it brings us closer to Allah. Then our eyes see all good, peace, and harmony. Evil, rebellion, and conflict are purged out. They do not exist for us, for our eyes are lifted up above them in praise. Then we see Allah’s attributes better (verses 2-4). This leads us to the attitude of worship and acknowledgment (verse 5). And finally comes prayer for guidance, and a contemplation of what guidance means (verses 6-7).”⁶¹

By reciting this passage five times a day as a preamble to their prayers, Muslims are able to block out the world’s distractions and focus on the reality of the spiritual world and what all of us are really doing here on earth.

As far as LDS gospel teachings are concerned, the *fatihah* is a good example of how man should respectfully address God in prayer, praise and thank Him for His role in our lives and ask for His continued help in guiding us back to His presence. It is a powerful passage of scripture to ponder and from which to gain insights about our Heavenly Father’s character and dealings with us.

Other gospel truths addressed in the following 114 chapters in the Quran include the important topics of prayer, repentance, faith, the Holy Spirit, tithing (alms), word of wisdom (health law), fasting, family unity, resurrection, Day of Judgment, paradise and heaven, chastity and the ten commandments. There are also references to temples, covenants, Gog and Magog, the Books of Abraham and Moses⁶², eternal family (family relations in paradise) and what many

⁵⁹ *Quran*, King Fahed Translation Center, Saudi Arabia, pp. 3,4

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p.2

⁶¹ *Ibid*, p.3

⁶² The books of Abraham and Moses are contained in the LDS *Pearl of Great Price* and are considered scripture.

LDS scholars believe to be the Prophet Lehi (Hud in the Quran)⁶³ which are of special interest to Mormons.

Some of my personal favorites that correlate strongly with LDS scriptures and teachings include the passages on God's omniscience⁶⁴, our sins of ingratitude for His blessings⁶⁵ not living on borrowed light⁶⁶, the presence of guardian angels⁶⁷, enduring to the end⁶⁸, the need for trials and chastisement⁶⁹, sacrifice of the heart⁷⁰, and guarding against pride and arrogance⁷¹. Additionally, the Surah of Miriam (Mary, mother of Jesus) gives a beautiful account of the birth of the Savior starting with the story of Zacharias and John the Baptist's birth.⁷²

There is also a wonderful parable of two vineyards⁷³ (which seems to be a favorite topic for parables in most of the scriptures we have) and all the way through the Quran there are enlightening accounts of the lives of all the major dispensational prophets: Abraham, Moses, Noah, Adam, Enoch, and Christ. Examples and teachings from Lot, Job, Jonah, Elijah, David and Goliath, Solomon and David, Joseph in Egypt, Isaac and Ishmael, and Cain and Abel are also told in story form throughout many Surahs.

There are many spiritual insights that can be gained by reading the Quran prayerfully and with understanding. It is a good idea to also read the commentaries from Muslim scholars that are included in most fully translated copies. Four versions are recommended. The first, which is used primarily for reference in this book, is the Penguin paperback edition *The Koran*, translated by N.J. Dawood. Although this version only contains brief footnotes with no commentary, the English is very readable in modern language style and for a first attempt, might be easier to understand if you want to read quickly for general comprehension. Being a Penguin book, this version is usually the one most frequently stocked in bookstores without having to special order.

For comparisons and research into specific passages and commentary, two other versions are normally used world-wide. The first is a huge volume by Abdallah Yusuf Ali, *The Glorious Quran: Translation and Commentary*, and the second is by Mohammad Marmaduke Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*. Both of these volumes provide thorough commentary although the English translation is a bit more challenging (like reading Biblical English as compared to the more modern English found in the Doctrine and Covenants). They should be readily orderable through most bookstores sources and Amazon.com.

⁶³ Lehi was the Prophet Nephi's father at the beginning of the Book of Mormon who traveled with his family through Arabia to the Hadhramaut. His story in the Book of Mormon parallels the account of the prophet Hud in the Quran. See <http://rsc.byu.edu/archived/selected-articles/pre-islamic-arabian-prophets>

⁶⁴ Surah 64:1-4

⁶⁵ Surah 14:32-34 compare to BM Mosiah 4

⁶⁶ Surah 57:12-15 compare with parable of the virgins in KJV Matthew 25: 1-13

⁶⁷ Surah 13:8-11

⁶⁸ Surah 13: 20-24; Surah 3:199, 200

⁶⁹ Surah 2: 214, 216 compare D&C 122; Surah 57:22,23; Surah 32:21,22

⁷⁰ Surah 3:92

⁷¹ Surah 31:18, 19

⁷² Surah 19: 2-34

⁷³ Surah 18:32-44

The fourth version is entitled *Interpretations of the Meanings of The Noble Qur'an in the English Language*, published by Dar-us-Salam in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia 1996 & 2011 (available online at Amazon.com). The translation is said to be the most accurate and it contains a summary of commentaries and hadith from Al-Tabari, Al-Qurtubi, Ibn Kathir and Al-Bukhari, all of whom are notable historic names in Islamic doctrinal matters.

The Quran is organized in such a way that the longer chapters (surahs) are at the beginning while the shorter chapters are towards the end of the book. Surah number two is the longest at 286 verses and Surah number 114 only contains six verses.

Even the meaning of the Arabic words for chapter and verse have a religious focus implied. The word for chapter, Surah, translates to “degree or step by which we mount up” and the word for verse, *ayat*, means “sign” which refers to “a verse of revelation as a sign of Allah’s wisdom and goodness just as much as Allah’s beautiful handiwork in the material creation or His dealings in history are signs to us, if we would understand.”⁷⁴

Each verse of the Quran can be taken as a separate unit in which there is a teaching of truth that points to God. While the Bible and Book of Mormon are written principally in narrative form telling stories through the linking of several verses together (as befitting a journal or other written forms), the Quran is compiled primarily from many separate verses covering diverse topics arranged together by date of revelation rather than content. So, a verse addressing prayer might be sandwiched in between two verses addressing divorce and the treatment of widows.⁷⁵ Then, in a later revelation, there will be other verses addressing these same issues that are similar to the first ones. This may seem rather disjointed and hard to read for those of us accustomed to narrative scriptures.

The reason for this is two-fold, first because the Quran was revealed through oral transmission, that is, the Angel Gabriel speaking to Muhammad and then Muhammad reciting the words to others to memorize, it would have been nearly impossible to transmit that much information all at once. So, the Quran was given in many smaller separate parts that were easier to remember and could be reinforced by other verses later on after the first ones had been committed to memory. Also, in a discussion between two people, it is normal to jump from one topic to the next, so the Quran follows the format of human speech when having a conversation. All the topics are linked, however, to the main focus- that of man and his relationship to God, how to worship Him and be guided to live properly in this life.

The second reason deals with the principle of abrogation or replacement as explained in the Quran. The principle of abrogation came into play if there were any mistakes in the transmission and memorization by the prophet or his followers, or if there needed to be more information revealed in later years about that specific subject in addition to what had already been brought to light (keeping in mind that it was over the space of 22 years that Muhammad received the Quranic revelations).

⁷⁴ *Quran* King Fahed Translation, p.2

⁷⁵ Surah 2:237-240

The later verses do not nullify the earlier ones so much as make clearer the doctrines contained therein. But this is why there are so many verses that seem to be repetitive and speak about the same points in different places throughout the Quran. God declares, "If We abrogate any verse or cause it to be forgotten We will replace it by a better one or one similar." (Surah 2:106) It is interesting that God would cause verses to be forgotten, but if they were wrongly memorized, it makes sense to replace them with new ones that were more correct.

The Quran also has many verses that are intentionally ambiguous. This is explained by God as a means of separating the wise from the true disbelievers. "It is He (Allah) who has revealed to you the Koran. Some of its verses are precise in meaning - they are the foundation of the Book - and others ambiguous. Those whose hearts are infected with disbelief follow the ambiguous part, so as to create dissension by seeking to explain it. But no one knows its meaning except Allah. Those who are well-grounded in knowledge say: 'We believe in it: it is all from our Lord. But only the wise take heed.'" (Surah 3:7) This passage is similar to the reason the Savior taught in parables so that "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." (KJV Matthew 11:15)

But the Quran overall was initially revealed as "a book uniform in style proclaiming promises and warnings... We have revealed it in the Arabic tongue, a Koran free from all faults (crookedness), that they may guard themselves against evil". (Surah 39:23, 28) The Quran was given aurally, made to be heard rather than read. The matching intonation, rhythm and rhyme of the Arabic language in specialized recitation (*qira'at* in Arabic) is beautiful to listen to and causes the hearer to be "filled with awe as they listen to its revelations, so that their hearts soften at the remembrance of Allah." (Surah 39:23)

This is why the Quran is considered the literal word of God to Muslims if it is recited in Arabic, as any other language translation simply could not compare to the original spoken word of God that has power to pierce the heart. The fact that Muslims recite the Quran in their prayers five times daily also makes sense in order to insure the spoken retention of the original words as well as having to commit several verses to memory in order to pray. This perpetuates the oral tradition of the Quran from generation to generation and helps to maintain the consistency of the original text.

So, it is important when reading any English translation of the Quran to remember that it will only be a close approximation to the original Arabic words, but not really a literal one equal in meaning or style. In fact, even the three recommended translations mentioned above are widely diverse in their choice of words for any given verse. Discrepancies in translation can cause misrepresentations in meaning as well. The commentaries are helpful, but the best aid in reading the Quran is to do so with the spirit and an open heart toward understanding God's truths.

Similar difficulties will be presented for any Muslim who reads the Book of Mormon or other LDS scriptures in Arabic. Translations are proximal at best for words that are not found in Islamic texts and will be hard to gain exactness of understanding at first. There is a new translation currently in progress, but even when it is available, it will still take a certain familiarity with LDS terminology or Arabic approximations to be able to really comprehend the full meaning.

I have found that the more I read the Quran, the easier it becomes to understand. I am sure the same is true for a Muslim who reads the Book of Mormon. But the benefits far outweigh the difficulties and hopefully the understanding will follow without too much additional effort on either part.

There is much we can gain from reading each other's scriptures. Perhaps the biggest benefit of all is in developing an attitude of compassion and charity for each other in striving to live by the teachings of these books. If we understand what God has given us and see how closely these basic principles follow our own revealed truths, we can join together on a common righteous ground against the adversarial forces that confront us in today's world. We can work on building those bridges of respect, understanding and righteous commitment to revealed truth that will allow for positive interactions and dialogue between us. This will permit us to look past the individual points of doctrine that bear any discrepancies and focus instead on the true principles that we both uphold.

In the Quran, God proclaims, "Children of Israel, remember the favours I have bestowed upon you. Keep your covenant, and I will be true to Mine. Revere Me. Have faith in My revelations, which confirm your scriptures, and do not be the first to deny them." (Surah 2:40,41) If all people would be willing to accept all of God's words here on earth, it will be that much easier for us to accept the further revealed truths that He has yet to grant us through living prophets and in person when Christ will come again to teach us all as one.

Chapter Four

Articles of Belief

While living in Kuwait in the early 90's, I had an opportunity to study Islam in depth by attending a course for investigators and new converts run by the government sponsored Islam Presentation Committee. I had decided that it would be better to learn about the religion from first hand sources in an Islamic country rather than rely on books or outside opinions. So, I boldly asked the director and teachers if they would accept someone like me in their classes who was neither a new convert nor looking toward changing my religion. I told them I was interested in doing comparative research for a possible graduate degree and just wanted to listen and learn. Happily, they allowed me to attend on the condition that I would not disrupt the class with any of my renegade Mormon ideas during the course of discussions.

Truth be told, there were times when I had to shake myself to remember that the teacher was a Muslim rather than someone from our church giving an Institute class or Education Week lecture.⁷⁶ Some of the topics, particularly those dealing with living a righteous and obedient life, sounded like something straight out of our Sunday School manuals and there was definitely a strong spirit bearing witness to all present of the correctness of these principles. I was impressed by much of what I heard and it was through attending this course that I first came to appreciate and see how much truth our religions share. Sometimes after class, I would be drawn into discussions with the teachers about these common beliefs. We had many open positive dialogues between us over a period of many weeks that led to a strong mutual respect on both sides for each other's faith and values. It was a wonderful chance to share new perspectives on familiar gospel principles and many of our conclusions and ideas have led to writing this book.

For the course, we used an excellent text, *Islam in Focus*, by Hammudah Abdal Ati that presented the basic concepts in a very clear and easy to read format. The first chapter details the Islamic fundamental Articles of Faith which contain the core beliefs. These are taken from the verse in the Quran which states, "...The righteous man is he who believes in Allah and the Last Day, in the angels and the Scriptures and the prophets; who for the love of Allah gives his wealth to his kinsfolk, to the orphans, to the needy, to the wayfarers and to the beggars, and for the redemption of captives; who attends to his prayers and pays the alms-tax; who is true to his promises and steadfast in trial and adversity and in times of war. Such are the true believers." (Surah 2:177) Basically, every Muslim must believe in the one true God, prophets, angels, scriptures and Judgment Day including the resurrection. A sixth article that is frequently mentioned is an acceptance of the principle of foreordination.

⁷⁶ These are LDS educational programs for religious instruction of church membership world-wide.

Just as the thirteen *Articles of Faith* contain the nucleus of the LDS core beliefs of the gospel, so the study of these basic Islamic articles of faith provides a concise view of the most important doctrines that constitute Islam. A brief look at each one can only be attempted here, but is worthwhile in showing some interesting comparisons with LDS beliefs regarding these principles.

Belief in Allah (*tawheed*)

The most central belief in Islam is that there is only one God, Allah. He exists alone in His position as the Creator of the Universe and all things. He has no partners that are equal to Him and He is the sole object of our worship. This belief in the Unity, or *tawheed*, of God was the main message that Muhammad brought and the reason he was sent to the Arabian people - to root out the idolatrous beliefs of his times and to declare the true character of the One God.

The LDS Prophet Joseph Smith declared in *The Lectures on Faith* that “three things are necessary, in order that any rational and intelligent being may exercise faith in God unto life and salvation. First, The idea that he actually exists. Secondly, A *correct* idea of his character, perfections and attributes. Thirdly, An actual knowledge that the course of life which he is pursuing, is according to his will.”⁷⁷

This understanding is also held by Muslims. “Once man knows that God exists, he must know His attributes and names. Generally speaking every perfection and absolute goodness belong to Him, and no defect or wrong applies to Him.”⁷⁸ God’s names have direct reference to His attributes and powers. The Quran lists many of them and in Islam, there is a list of 99 attributes or names by which God is known.

Some of them are, “the Merciful, and the Compassionate, the Guardian and the True Guide, the Just and the Supreme Lord, the Creator and the Watchful, the First and the Last, the Knowing and the Wise, the Hearing and the Aware, the Witness and the Glorious, the Able and the Powerful, ... the Loving and the Provider, the Generous and the Benevolent, the Rich and the Independent, the Forgiving and the Clement, the Patient and the Appreciative, the Unique and the Protector, the Judge and Peace.”⁷⁹ Joseph Smith’s attributes coincide with this list as he gives details in *The Lectures on Faith* on the attributes of knowledge, faith, power, justice, mercy and truth.

One of the most oft quoted Surahs in the Quran is the one translated as *Unity or Purity of Faith* which reads, “Say: ‘Allah is One, the Eternal God. He begot none, nor was He begotten. None is equal to Him.’” (Surah 112: 1-4) This passage sums up the Islamic creed that there is no God but Allah. No other deity or idol can be put beside or in place of Him and He is not to be thought of as a product of this world through reproduction nor does He reproduce as such. The word ‘begotten’ as used above is in literal reference to the physical sexual act of creation by

⁷⁷ Smith, Joseph. “The Character of God, Lecture Third” and “The Attributes of God, Lecture Fourth” in *Lectures On Faith*, 1835. The full text is found at: <http://lecturesonfaith.com/>

⁷⁸ Ati, Hammudah Abdul

. *Islam in Focus*, 1999, International Islamic Publishing House, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 3rd ed., p.4

⁷⁹ Ibid, pp. 4, 5

which humans and animals reproduce. This distinction is an important one when considering Christ's position as the only begotten of the Father, which will be discussed later on.

Regarding God's relationship to us, while Muslims do not refer to Him as Our Heavenly Father (rather, we are considered a part of His vast creations), they do recognize His specific dealings and loving involvement in our lives. "God is High and Supreme, but He is very near to the pious thoughtful people; He answers their prayers and helps them. He loves the people who love Him and forgives their sins. He gives them peace and happiness, knowledge and success, life and protection. He welcomes all those who want to be at peace with Him and never rejects any of them... The door of His mercy is always open to any who sincerely seek His support and protection."⁸⁰

Like the Book of Mormon prophet Mosiah's plea, Islam upholds that we should "Believe in God. Believe that he is, and that he created all things, both in heaven and in earth; believe that he has all wisdom, and all power, both in heaven and in earth; believe that man doth not comprehend all the things which the Lord can comprehend. And again, believe that ye must repent of your sins and forsake them, and humble yourselves before God; and ask in sincerity of heart that he would forgive you; and now, if you believe all these things see that ye do them." (BM Mosiah 4: 9,10)

Belief in Prophets (*risalat*)

As mentioned in chapter two, Muslims believe in every prophet that God has sent through the ages regardless of time, location or language spoken. As all were called by God and given His authority to declare His truth, all are given equal consideration and status. Twenty-five prophets are specifically mentioned in the Quran although there were others of whom "... we have told you nothing." (Surah 40:78)

The words prophet and messenger are often used interchangeably even though there is a definite distinction between the words in meaning and qualification as was mentioned previously. The Arabic word for prophet, *nabi*, does not refer to one who foretells future events, although every prophet foretold of the coming of the AntiChrist.⁸¹ Rather, a *nabi* is "...one who is very near to God through the total surrender of his entire being to Him and who receives revelations from Him which constitute a source of guidance for men. If the revelation is in the form of a written scripture, the prophet is in addition a 'messenger' [*rasool*] as well."⁸²

This is why in the Quran we see Muhammad referred to as both a prophet and a messenger in the same verse.⁸³ For Mormons, Joseph Smith would also carry the same double designation. It is interesting that in reciting the *shahada*, or basic testimony in Islam, Muslims declare that there is one God and that Muhammad is His messenger (*rasool*). Whereas Mormons bear their testimonies that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God, not only a messenger. The

⁸⁰ Ibid, p.5

⁸¹ Compare BM Mosiah 8:15-17 for the LDS definition of a seer as differing from prophet.

⁸² Haneef, Suzanne. *What Everyone Should Know About Islam and Muslims*, Kazi Publications, Lahore, Pakistan, 1979, p.20

⁸³ Surah 7:158

differences in definition of the words prophet and messenger to each religion makes these testimonies valid points to consider within different contexts.

Islam teaches that the message and mission of all the prophets were identical, "...to serve God, to acquaint man with God and His Divine teachings, to establish truth and goodness, to help man realize the true purpose of his existence and help him to conduct his life in a purposeful way."⁸⁴ All prophets' teachings therefore are consistent and complementary and their books or writings are considered scripture and the word of God.

Additionally, the prophets' lives were exemplary to their followers and provided lifestyles worthy of emulation. "All the prophets were men of good character and high honor. They were prepared and chosen by God to deliver his Message to mankind. Their honesty and truthfulness, their intelligence and integrity, are beyond doubt."⁸⁵ This did not mean, however, that they were considered perfect. They were still men, although living righteously and "infallible in that they did not commit sins or violate the law of God. But as mortals, they might have made unintentional mistakes in some human affairs and decisions. Their private judgements were not necessarily always right."⁸⁶ However, when it was necessary, God corrected them because they acted as guides for their people. In the Quran, there are five or six instances where God redirected Muhammad when he made errors in judgment.⁸⁷ The Prophet Muhammad's life was recorded in great detail as to what he said and how he lived his religion. The transcribed sayings and traditions, or *Hadith*, are considered by Muslims to be a secondary source of authority next to the Quran on living Islam in daily life. They provide many of the specific dos and don'ts that the Quran does not include. Basically, the Quran contains the doctrines of Islam while the Hadith details the practical applications of its teachings. Many Islamic governmental laws today are based on the Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad. This follows the core belief of Muslims in prophethood and that by following the examples of the prophets, man will be guided to "the right way of belief and behavior."⁸⁸

Mormons likewise have the writings and sayings of our prophets contained in such volumes as *The Journal of Discourses*, *The Discourses of Brigham Young* and *The Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, in addition to the transcribed General Conference talks in the *Ensign* magazine.⁸⁹ These recorded words of our prophets provide us with practical applications and counsel in how to live our daily lives according to our doctrinal beliefs. And although we also do not hold them to be on the same level as our directly revealed scriptures from God, we are still required to obey their counsel because "...whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my

⁸⁴ Ati, p.28

⁸⁵ Ibid, p.27

⁸⁶ Ibid, p.27

⁸⁷ Surah 8:67 is an example.

⁸⁸ Ibid, p.27

⁸⁹ The three books mentioned are compilations of early discourses of the leaders of the Church given in the 19th century. The General Conference of the Church is held bi-annually today in Salt Lake City, Utah, where church leaders continue to give inspired guidance, direction and practical applications of scriptures to help in our time. See <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/conferences?lang=eng>

servants, it is the same.” (D&C 1:38) “...And whatsoever they speak when moved upon by the Holy Ghost shall be scripture, shall be the will of the Lord, shall be the mind of the Lord, shall be the voice of the Lord, and the power of God unto salvation.” (D&C 68:4)

Belief in Angels (*malaikah*)

The Islamic belief in angels strongly parallels the LDS view in both their description and duties. God’s angels are intelligent spiritual beings who neither eat, drink nor sleep, have no physical desires nor material needs.⁹⁰ They act as God’s agents, are totally obedient to Him and are engaged in worship and service to Him. They protect men, administer God’s punishments, carry His messages and serve as guardian angels.⁹¹ The Quran states that “...there are guardians (angels) watching over you, noble recorders who know of all your actions.” (Surah 82:10,11)

The angel Gabriel played an honored role in being the chosen one to reveal the Quran to the Prophet Muhammad. Other angels have been sent by God to His prophets to deliver His words. “By His will He sends down the angels with the Spirit to those of His servants whom He chooses, bidding them to proclaim, ‘There is no god but Me: therefore fear me.’” (Surah 16:2) Because of this vital role in bringing God’s revelations to His prophets, belief in angels is an essential doctrine in Islam important enough to be included as one of the fundamental articles of faith.⁹²

By way of comparison, the angel Moroni’s visits to the Prophet Joseph Smith in connection with bringing forth the Book of Mormon are in total harmony with the Islamic view of angelic roles and duties. It was Moroni who delivered the ancient gold plates to Joseph to translate. Moroni also delivered specific messages and instructions to Joseph to help him prepare for his role as a prophet. While most of the world would reject Moroni’s visits to Joseph based on their lack of belief in angels’ appearances to man in modern day, Muslims would acknowledge that it is a common means whereby God brings forth His words to the world.

The Book of Mormon also contains several accounts of appearances of angels to prophets and peoples. Angels came to chasten Alma the Younger, the four sons of Mosiah⁹³, Laman and Lemuel⁹⁴, to instruct Nephi in the interpretation of Lehi’s dream⁹⁵; to foretell Christ’s birth to King Benjamin⁹⁶ and to minister to the Nephite children at the time of Christ’s visit to them⁹⁷. They also appeared to Jacob, Samuel the Lamanite, Nephi son of Nephi and Amulek.⁹⁸ Angels have not ceased to visit men even in our day, but minister according to God’s commands, “...showing themselves to them of strong faith and a firm mind in every form of godliness. And the office of their ministry is to call men unto repentance, and to fulfill and do the work of the

⁹⁰ Ati, p.13

⁹¹ Haneef, p.16

⁹² Ibid, p.17

⁹³ BM Mosiah 27:11-17

⁹⁴ BM 1 Nephi 3:29

⁹⁵ BM 1 Nephi 11:14-14:30

⁹⁶ BM Mosiah 3:2-27

⁹⁷ BM 3 Nephi 17:24

⁹⁸ see multiple listings under the heading “angel” in Book of Mormon index.

covenants of the Father, which he hath made unto the children of men..." (BM Moroni 7: 29-31) They are a vital link in communication between this earth and the eternal realm and will always be involved in God's dealings with man.

Belief in Scriptures (*kutub*)

As mentioned in chapter three, Islam requires belief in all of God's revealed word through His prophets in every age including the Torah and Bible as far as they have not been altered. The Quran is the unquestioned source for comparison of any other writings and the "...standard or criterion by which all the other books are judged. So whatever agrees with the Qur'an is accepted as Divine truth, and whatever differs from the Qur'an is either rejected or suspended."⁹⁹ This is because the words contained therein were given through direct revelation by an angel to Muhammad and not as a third person record of an event or historical account similar to those teachings found in the Bible which have gone through multiple translations and versions.

Additionally, to Muslims the Quran is "...the greatest gift of God to humanity and its wisdom is of a unique kind. Briefly stated, the purpose of the Book is to guard the previous revelations and restore the eternal truth of God, to guide humanity to the Straight Path and quicken the soul of man, to awaken the human conscience and enlighten the human mind."¹⁰⁰ In the Quran, God states that He has "...revealed to you this Book so that, by the will of their Lord, you may lead men from darkness to the light; to the path of the Mighty, the Glorious One: the path of Allah, to whom belongs all that the heavens and the earth contain." (Surah 14: 1, 2) Recitation of the Quran therefore is considered a form of worship, a part of prayer and a daily remembrance of God. "It is incumbent upon every Muslim, man and woman, to recite a portion of the Qur'an every day in prayer and during night vigil. Recitation of the Qur'an is to Muslims a high form of worship and a daily practice."¹⁰¹

According to the LDS *Articles of Faith*, "We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly..."¹⁰² In 1830, Joseph Smith was divinely commissioned to work on a new translation of the Bible based on the King James Version, but did not finalize the work for publication by the time of his martyrdom in 1844. Although Mormons do not use this translation as part of our canonized scripture due to its lack of completion, we still consider it as a help in "restoring the plain and precious things that have been lost from the Bible (and as) an invaluable aid to biblical interpretation and understanding."¹⁰³

The eighth *Article of Faith* continues by stating that "...We also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God."¹⁰⁴ We have no concerns regarding the purity of translation or possible variance from the original text since Joseph Smith used God's power to directly translate the words. As such, we consider the Book of Mormon as a standard for comparison

⁹⁹ Ati, p.13

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p.191

¹⁰¹ Ibid, p.192

¹⁰² *Articles of Faith*, no. 8, <https://www.lds.org/scriptures/pgp/a-of-f/1?lang=eng>

¹⁰³ See LDS *Bible Dictionary* under heading "Joseph Smith Translation (JST)"

¹⁰⁴ Op. Cit. no. 8

against other records as well. Joseph Smith stated that "...the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book."¹⁰⁵

For Mormons, the Book of Mormon holds a special place in our hearts as it reveals so much more eternal truth than what previous records have contained. Many principles are taught that reveal a fuller knowledge of the Gospel and we would also attribute to it the enlightening power and position as God's greatest gift to humanity as quoted above. Because of his role in bringing forth this book and in restoring many of these lost truths, we believe that "Joseph Smith, the Prophet and Seer of the Lord has done more, save Jesus only, for the salvation of men in this world than any other man that ever lived in it. In the short space of twenty years, he has brought forth the Book of Mormon, which he translated by the gift and power of God, and has been the means of publishing it on two continents; has sent the fullness of the everlasting gospel, which it contained, to the four quarters of the earth; has brought forth the revelations and commandments which compose this book of Doctrine and Covenants, and many other wise documents and instructions for the benefit of the children of men..." (D& C 135:3)

While we do not recite our scriptures as a form of prayer (other than those that pertain to ordinances such as baptism or blessing the sacrament), it is also incumbent upon every member of the Church to spend time in studying the scriptures every day. Along with our Muslim brothers and sisters, using the scriptures daily will enable us to be in continual remembrance of God and our commitment to live our lives by His laws and words that have been revealed in His holy books.

Belief in Judgment Day and Resurrection (*qiya'amah*)

The Quran contains an interesting account of the pre-existent council in heaven where Satan was cast out because of his disobedience. Upon leaving, he was granted the right to seduce men on this earth until the appointed Day of Reckoning when the final judgment will take place and men will be assigned to their eternal reward.¹⁰⁶ The spirit beings that follow him in disobedience are part of the *jinn* (from which we get our English word genie) and their job is to cause "mischief of the slinking prompter who whispers in the hearts of men..." (Surah 114:4,5) The *jinn* were beings with free will who were created before the physical beings on earth. They are similar to the LDS belief of the one third of the host of heaven who were cast out along with Satan for rebellion, except that there are also good *jinn* as well who are believers. However, it is still the bad *jinn* who are responsible for influencing the beings on earth toward evil acts.

According to the Quran, whether we choose to follow Satan and the bad *jinn* or God, all of our actions are recorded in a book of deeds that will be opened before us from which to read on Judgment Day.¹⁰⁷ "This world will come to an end someday, and the dead will rise to stand for their final and fair trial. Everything we do in this world, every intention we have, every

¹⁰⁵ "Introduction" in current editions of *The Book of Mormon*. See <https://www.lds.org/scriptures/bofm/introduction?lang=eng>

¹⁰⁶ Surah 38:65-88, 15:26-44

¹⁰⁷ Surah 17:13,14

movement we make, every thought we entertain, and every word we say, all are counted and kept in accurate records. On the Day of Judgment, they will be brought forward.”¹⁰⁸

There is also an interesting passage in the Quran that speaks of our bodies testifying against us because we cannot hide ourselves “so that your eyes and ears and skins could not observe you.” (Surah 41:19-22) Additionally, the prophets will judge each people according to the scriptures that were given them. The righteous will then be rewarded with the blessings of heaven while the wicked will be assigned punishment in Hell along with Satan and the jinn.

Physical descriptions of heaven and hell are plentiful in the Quran, though not to be taken too literally.¹⁰⁹ Mostly, heaven or paradise is described in terms of a place of extreme beauty and comfort where food and drink are plentiful and there are beautiful servants. Accordingly, the greatest pleasure of paradise is to be in the presence of God. It is interesting to note that when the multitudes are judged, they will be divided into three different groups to receive their rewards - those on the left hand, those on the right hand and those in the forefront. These correlate with the Mormon belief of three degrees of glory as discussed in Section 76 of the Doctrine and Covenants¹¹⁰, the most righteous of which will be able to “be brought near their Lord in the gardens of delight...” (Surah 56:10,11) According to a hadith from the Prophet Muhammad, in heaven “there are things which no eye has ever seen, no ear has ever heard and no mind has ever conceived.”¹¹¹

Conversely, while hell is physically described as a place of scorching winds and pitch-black smoke¹¹², the suffering of the inhabitants there will more be a result of the “inescapable awareness that this is the destiny which they deserved and brought upon themselves by rejecting God and ignoring the guidance which He had conveyed to them through His messengers.”¹¹³

Concerning the resurrection, the Quran teaches that all shall rise from the grave in a physical body that God has the power to restore in exactness.¹¹⁴ The Book of Mormon also contains this teaching. The resurrection will bring about “...the restoration of those things of which has been spoken by the mouths of the prophets. The soul shall be restored to the body, and the body to the soul; yea, and every limb and joint shall be restored to its body; yea, even a hair of the head shall not be lost; but all things shall be restored to their proper and perfect frame.” (BM Alma 40: 22,23)

Both sets of scriptures teach that the soul will be joined to the new body and then brought forward to receive judgment. Before this great and last day, however, the sun and moon shall be brought together, the stars blotted out, the sky rent asunder, the mountains crumbled into dust

¹⁰⁸ Ati, p.13. Compare KJV Revelations 20:12; BM Alma 41:1-15; D&C 137:9

¹⁰⁹ Surah 56:1-56

¹¹⁰ The three degrees of glory are the telestial, terrestrial and celestial kingdoms to which all are assigned a place on Judgment Day depending upon levels of righteousness in earth life as detailed in D&C 76:96-98.

¹¹¹ Ati, pp.13,14. Compare 3 Nephi 17:16,17.

¹¹² Surah 56:42,43

¹¹³ Haneef, p.37

¹¹⁴ Surah 22:5-7; 75:1-40

and then the trumpet shall sound and all nations shall be on their knees.¹¹⁵ Both scriptures also declare that Christ will appear as a sign that the hour of judgment is at hand.¹¹⁶ Knowing the sequence of events that will come to pass helps us to develop a keener awareness of which life is the true reality- our mortal one or the eternal one- and to put all the hassles of this earthly life into perspective. “This clear reality of the future Life is always before the mind and consciousness of the devout Muslim. It is this awareness which keeps the present life, in the midst of the most intense happiness and deepest pain alike, in perspective: the perspective of a passing, temporary abode in which one has been placed as a test in order to qualify and prepare himself for his future home.”¹¹⁷

For both Muslims and Mormons, belief in resurrection and Judgment Day provides comfort and motivation as we pass through our mortal lives. We are assured that any unfairness in life will be rectified, goodness rewarded and promised blessings received. Because of this knowledge, we are able to have patience through trials while always looking toward the eternal happiness and joy that will ultimately be ours if we endure well. We are spurred onward to “be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of (our) own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness” (D&C 58:27) regardless of how difficult our path may be so that we may “enter into His eternal presence and into his immortal rest.” (D&C121:32)

Belief in Foreordination (*qadar*)

The Quran declares that “Every misfortune that befalls the earth, or your own persons, is ordained before We bring it into being. That is easy for Allah: so that you many not grieve for the good things you miss or be overjoyed at what you gain... The blessings that Allah bestows on man none can withhold; and what He withholds none can bestow. He is the Mighty, the Wise One.” (Surah 57:22,23; 35:2) The principle of foreordination spoken of here is not to be confused with that of predestination. Rather, *qadar* refers to the omniscience of God. He knows each of us so well that He has a perfect knowledge of what decisions we will make and what we will do even given full freedom of choice.

Islam teaches that God in His wisdom is able to foresee all that is necessary in order to maintain and sustain His creations in the universe. He orchestrates all things from the smallest to the greatest by His will and nothing can take place without his ordaining it to happen first.¹¹⁸ “...When He decrees a thing He need only say: ‘Be,’ and it is.” (Surah 19:35) This does not mean that man cannot choose or use his agency. Rather it “draws the demarcation line between what is God’s concern and what is man’s responsibility... He exhorts us to think, to plan and to make sound choices, but if things do not happen the way we wanted or planned them, we should not lose faith... because what is beyond our capacity and responsibility is the affair of God alone.”¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Surah 45:28; 75:8,9; 77:7-10; 78:18-20; Compare to D&C 29:9-28; 45:42-45

¹¹⁶ Surah 43:61; Compare D&C 45:39-45

¹¹⁷ Ibid, p.37

¹¹⁸ Haneef, p.38

¹¹⁹ Ati, p.15 Compare D&C 104:17

Also, whatever happens to us, we must believe that God is Wise and Loving and everything granted to us is a result of a good motive or meaningful purpose on His end.¹²⁰ “Such a belief gives the Muslim a tremendous degree of inner certainty, confidence and peace of heart, especially in the face of affliction, for he knows that since everything is under the control of the All-Wise, Most-Merciful God, the circumstances of his life are likewise under His control and direction, and hence are not without reason and a purpose... This inner certainty frees the Muslim from fear of anyone or anything other than God, for he knows that no one has the slightest power either to injure or to benefit him without His leave.”¹²¹

This does not imply that we should all just sit back and let fate or destiny take control of our lives without our doing anything at all to help or bring things to pass ourselves. We are to make sincere efforts, to strive and do our best in any situation.¹²² If we do not, we will not know if the result is God’s will or just the natural consequence of our own non-action. Islam teaches that after we have done all we can do and the inevitable occurs, we should receive it “with patient and trusting acceptance of what He in His infinite wisdom has seen fit to send, and with the expectation that it may prove to be a source of good and of ultimate blessing in the broader perspective of the Life-to-Come.”¹²³

Mormons also believe similarly in the doctrines of foreordination and agency, although in addition to what is taught in Islam, there is the concept of callings or missions from God to be performed in this life. The prophet Abraham was foreordained to be a prophet. He received a vision in which he saw “many of the noble and great ones” among the spirits in the preexistence. He said: “God saw these souls that they were good, and he stood in the midst of them, and he said: These I will make my rulers; for he stood among those that were spirits, and he saw that they were good; and he said unto me: Abraham, thou art one of them; thou wast chosen before thou wast born” (PGP Abraham 3:22-23). The Old Testament prophet Jeremiah was also foreordained. “Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations” (KJV Jeremiah 1:5)

It is not just the prophets of old who are foreordained to their roles in this life. “The doctrine of foreordination applies to all members of the Church, not just to the Savior and His prophets. Before the creation of the earth, faithful women were given certain responsibilities and faithful men were foreordained to certain priesthood duties. As people prove themselves worthy, they will be given opportunities to fulfill the assignments they then received.”¹²⁴

One of the most oft repeated phrases you hear while in the Middle East is *insha Allah*, or God willing. This comes from a passage in the Quran which states “Do not say of anything: ‘I will do it tomorrow,’ without adding: ‘if Allah wills.’” (Surah 18: 23,24) Accordingly, most Muslims will repeat this phrase at the end of any sentence that predicts the outcome of future events or in reference to a planned meeting, situation, or promise being fulfilled in the future. Because it is such a commonplace phrase, most foreigners assume it simply means the same

¹²⁰ Ibid, p.14

¹²¹ Haneef, p.39

¹²² Ibid, p.39

¹²³ Ibid, p.41

¹²⁴ The LDS official church website, <https://www.lds.org/topics/foreordination?lang=eng>

thing as saying “hopefully”. This is not quite the right comparison, however. To a Muslim, it literally means that if God is willing for the event to happen as promised, or for you to even be alive five minutes from now to plan anything further for your future life, then it is truly because God will let it happen to you. You can plan, organize, decide and prepare for things all you want, but only God has the ultimate power to agree with or in turn veto any of your decisions or actions. Therefore, you should always remember and acknowledge His hand in even the smallest daily plans you make in your life by saying these words.

Another common phrase for Muslims is *Al Hamdu Lillah*, or praise be to God, which comes from the *fatihah*, or opening passage in the Quran that Muslims use five times a day in prayer.¹²⁵ When someone greets you in peace and then asks how you are, this is given as the normal reply. These words are also uttered in response to all situations, both in thanksgiving for the good things as much as in recognition that God is ordaining all happenings in the event of bad things. Let me illustrate by way of personal experience.

Some years back, my husband and I were trying to come up with enough money to put down on our first house. We had struggled to meet the bank requirements of having so much balance left in our bank account for the period of at least the month prior to receiving our mortgage. With about a week to go, our car transmission died. We were both in school at the time and living on student loans. It was finals week and we were under a lot of strain to study for our tests as well as get ready to move into our new house within a week once the loan came through. We really did not need the car blowing up at that time. As I was throwing my “I can’t believe this is happening to us” fit, my husband listened to the tirade for a while and then calmly said, “al hamdu lillah.” I immediately countered with, “You’ve got to be kidding- what have we got to praise God about in all this current mess?”

He spent the next few minutes quietly teaching me a lesson I have never since forgotten- that no matter what happens, we should praise God for everything in our lives. He has given us everything we possess, both material and non-material blessings and we should continually be grateful to Him regardless of what situations come upon us as all things are subject to His plans for us. By having faith in the principle of foreordination while doing all we can to lead righteous lives, we will have the assurance that whatever happens, it will be a “part of God’s infinitely wise plan for His creation.”¹²⁶

We are told to indeed be grateful for ALL things. “And in nothing doth man offend God, or against none is his wrath kindled, save those who confess not his hand in all things, and obey not his commandments.” (D&C 59: 21) “...O how you ought to thank your heavenly King! I say unto you, my brethren, that if you should render all the thanks and praise which your whole soul has power to possess, to that God who has created you, and has kept and preserved you, and has caused that ye should rejoice, and has granted that ye should live in peace one with another— I say unto you that if ye should serve him who has created you from the beginning, and is preserving you from day to day, by lending you breath, that ye may live and move and do according to your own will, and even supporting you from one moment to another—I say, if ye

¹²⁵ Surah 22:5-7; 75:1-40

¹²⁶ Ibid, p.39

should serve him with all your whole souls yet ye would be unprofitable servants.” (BM Mosiah 2: 19-21)

Above all, we should be thankful and praise God that part of that divine plan is to provide us with all the necessary knowledge that will allow us to be rightly guided while in this life. When we believe in God, angels, prophets, scriptures, Judgment Day and foreordination, both Muslims and Mormons are able to walk further along on the path that leads back to God’s presence.

Chapter Five

Pillars of Faith

In addition to the fundamental articles of faith previously mentioned, Muslims must worship God through observance of the five foundations or “pillars of Islam”: bearing testimony (of the One God and Muhammad as His prophet), prayer, fasting, paying alms, and pilgrimage (to the Holy Shrine at Mecca). There is also the concept of *Jihad*, or Holy War, that is sometimes listed as a sixth pillar. A famous story from the life of the prophet Muhammad ties all these articles of faith and pillars together.

One day the prophet was sitting with some of his followers. One of them was his companion Omar who later recorded that “there appeared before us a man whose clothes were exceedingly white and whose hair was exceedingly black; no signs of journeying were to be seen on him and none of us knew him. He walked up and sat down by the Prophet... He said, ‘Oh Muhammad, tell me about Islam.’ The Messenger of Allah said, ‘Islam is to testify that there is no god but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, to perform the prayers, to pay the zakat (alms), to fast in Ramadan, and to make the pilgrimage to the House if you are able to do so.’” He said, ‘You have spoken rightly.’... He said, ‘Then tell me about faith.’ He (Muhammad) answered, ‘It is to believe in Allah, His angels, His books, His messengers, and the Last Day and to believe in divine destiny, both the good and the evil thereof.’ He said, ‘You have spoken rightly.’... Then he took himself off and I stayed for a time. Then he (Muhammad) said, ‘Oh Omar, do you know who the questioner was?’ I said, ‘Allah and His messenger know best.’” He said, ‘It was Gabriel, who came to you to teach you your religion.’”¹²⁷

Observance of each of the pillars is considered an act of submission before God. Like Mormons, Muslims believe that faith without works is a dead end. “The only way to enliven faith and make it serve its purpose is practice. Practice provides faith with nourishment, survival and effectiveness. In return, faith inspires man to be constant in his devotion and persistent in his practice.”¹²⁸ Only by exercising faith through obedience can we increase in the faith necessary to gain salvation. As Joseph Smith wrote in the *Lectures on Faith*, “A religion that does not require the sacrifice of all things never has power sufficient to produce the faith necessary unto life and salvation.”¹²⁹ Again, there are many similarities between our religions in what God has given us in order to practice and exercise our faith in Him. Only a few pertinent points can be brought out here, but further study from the works of scholars on both sides show how much truth and consistency we share in regards to these applications of faith.

The Pillar of Testimony (*shahada*)

¹²⁷ Hadith, known as “Hadith of Gabriel”, reported by Muslim in *Sahih Muslim*, translated by Dr. Mahmoud Matraji, Dar El Fiker, Beirut Lebanon, 1993, Vol. 1A, p.5

¹²⁸ *Ati*, p 55

¹²⁹ Smith, Joseph. “The Law of Sacrifice, Lecture Sixth”, verse 7, in *Lectures On Faith*, 1835.

<http://lecturesonfaith.com/>

To be considered a Muslim, it is necessary above all else to have a sincere testimony that there is only One God and that Muhammad was a Prophet of God. The Arabic words for this profession of belief, *la illaha illa Allah wa Muhammad rasool Allah*, is referred to as the *kalima*, or creed (lit. “words”) of Islam. By reciting the kalima, a person declares that they will submit their life to God and live according to His laws. It also acts as a shield against “every form and shade of disbelief, atheism and polytheism (idolatry).”¹³⁰

The meaning of the kalima in reference to the knowledge of only One God is “that in the whole of the universe, there is absolutely no being worthy to be worshipped other than Allah, that it is only to Him that heads should bow in submission and adoration, that He is the only Being possessing all powers, that all are in need of His favour, and that all are obliged to solicit His help.”¹³¹ The effects of having this testimony are that man’s vision is enlarged and his outlook becomes boundless; he has a higher degree of self-respect and self-esteem; he becomes more modest and humble, virtuous and upright; he can never be truly despondent but rather is increased in his determination, patient perseverance and trust in God; he is able to develop an attitude of peace and contentment with whatever his circumstances are in life; and finally, he will gain a desire to obey and observe God’s Law.¹³²

By making this declaration of belief, it is in effect making a proclamation that “the one who believes and utters it cancels from his heart loyalty, devotion, obedience, submission to and worship of anything other than God, the Praised and Exalted -not merely of man-made idols of wood or stone, but also of any conceptions, ideologies, ways of life, desires, loves, preoccupations and authority-figures which claim his supreme devotion, loyalty, obedience and worship.”¹³³ At the same time, the declaration further encompasses belief in the guidance that the Prophet Muhammad brought to mankind and with it, a statement of intention to faithfully follow that guidance.¹³⁴

For Muslims, the kalima is not a one-time statement of belief, but also a daily renewal of their commitment to keep their intents and actions in accord with the teachings of Islam. They often repeat the kalima as an act of remembrance and focus during all that they are doing in their busy lives. The kalima is called from the mosque’s minarets five times daily as part of the call to prayer. It is one of the first things a parent will whisper into the ears of their newborn infant and one of the last things they will hear on their death-beds. It is a continual reminder that their lives are to be always in submission to God and that they are to be obedient to the prophets’ words on a daily and even hourly basis.

LDS scriptures also declare the separate Unity of God the Eternal Father as that of one distinct being only and that we should be in constant worship of Him. Our heart, might, mind and strength should be focused on Him at all times and we should spend our lives in continual submission to His will by obeying His commandments. We know “...that there is a God in

¹³⁰ Maududi, Sayyid Abul A’la. *Towards Understanding Islam*, International Islamic Publishing House, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 1996, p.66

¹³¹ Ibid, p. 67

¹³² Ibid, pp. 74-78

¹³³ Haneef, p.42

¹³⁴ Ibid, p.43

heaven, who is infinite and eternal, from everlasting to everlasting, the same unchangeable God, the framer of heaven and earth, and all things which are in them; And that he created man, male and female, after his own image and in his own likeness, created he them; And gave unto them commandments that they should love and serve him, the only living and true God, and that he should be the only being whom they should worship.” (D&C 20:17-19) “Wherefore I give unto them a commandment, saying thus: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy might, mind and strength; and in the name of Jesus Christ thou shalt serve him.” (D&C 59:5)

Bearing active testimony of these things is very much a part of LDS lifestyle as well. In our monthly church testimony meetings, we are able to express our convictions of the reality of God, that He lives and that obedience to Him is the focus of our lives. We also testify that Jesus Christ lives and that Joseph Smith was a prophet. We proclaim our knowledge that the Book of Mormon is the revealed Word of God and that we have living prophets to guide and direct our church today. Bearing testimony is also not a one-time declaration of belief for us, but rather an opportunity to increase our faith and improve our desires to live righteously by expressing these feelings to others.

By sharing our testimonies with one another, be it as a Mormon or Muslim, we can strengthen our own commitments to follow and worship God and to abide by His words as written in the scriptures and as spoken by His prophets. We can declare our intentions to let our hearts be centered upon the things of eternal consequence and that we will continue in our efforts to submit our lives in worship and obedience to Him.

The Pillar of Prayer (*salat*)

Prayer is considered the foundation of Islam. It allows Muslims to remember God formally five times daily through recitation of passages from the Quran and is a continual means of worshipping Him. The benefits of prayer are to strengthen belief in God’s existence, to act as a motivational force in the practice of submission to Him, to foster virtuous growth and higher morals through purifying the heart, to help suppress any unrighteous desires while helping to increase the awareness of conscience, and to provide comfort to the soul.¹³⁵ Prayer is not “merely a sequence of physical movements or an empty recital of the Holy Book. It is a matchless and unprecedented method of intellectual meditation and spiritual devotion, of moral elevation and physical exercise, all combined. ..where every muscle of the body joins the soul and the mind in the worship and glory of God.”¹³⁶

Muslims hear the call to prayer from the mosque at sunrise, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset and evening prayer times. They prepare by performing a ritual washing, or ablution, called *wadu*, that cleans the parts of the body that are normally exposed to dust or dirt, such as face, hands and feet with water. After the ablution, they will use a prayer rug or find a clean spot to pray and face the direction of wherever Mecca is from their location. While reciting phrases and passages of the Quran, they will then perform a series of bows and prostrations (forehead touching the ground while kneeling). The order of movements that constitute one cycle of prayer is exactly

¹³⁵ Ati, pp.57, 58

¹³⁶ Ibid, p.58

repeated from two to four times depending on the time of day. Generally, it takes from fifteen minutes to a half an hour to do the complete process.

Prayers may be performed anywhere, not just in the mosque. Consequently, you will see Muslims praying in a variety of locations out in public as it is considered much more obedient to pray when the prayer time comes rather than to delay until you can get to a mosque. While driving on the highway, it is common to see cars pulled along the roadside while people perform their prayers. Frequently, my students pray at the back of the classroom during a short break. In town, smaller businesses and offices briefly close when the call to prayer is heard so that their staff can pray. Additionally, on Fridays, there is a congregational prayer at noontime where the family can come to the mosque to pray, although the men and women are separated into different areas. Generally, however, women will stay at home with the small children and perform their Friday noon prayers there.

Besides the formal prayers, Muslims also have a type of prayer that is for personal supplication called *dua*. This is similar to how Mormons say our prayers in that a person can use their own words and talk to God directly either vocally or silently rather than use a passage from the Quran. There are no bows or prostrations involved and *dua* can be performed anywhere at any time. I have seen passengers near me on an airplane or colleagues at work seated behind their desks engaged in *dua* without any embarrassment or thought whatsoever about who might be looking at them.

They are able to openly express their desires to pray and to concentrate on their worship and obedience to God regardless of other people's opinions or the nearby distractions of the busy world around them. It is not a matter of "Rameumptom"¹³⁷ pride that they are so forthright in public. Rather, it is evidence of a true intent and deep commitment to practice their faith no matter where or with who they may be. This is indeed one area in which we could learn from them to increase our ability to be more open in front of others about our beliefs and how we practice them no matter what the circumstance.

Muslims truly live according to the words of the Book of Mormon prophet Amulek when he preaches: "Therefore may God grant unto you, my brethren, that ye may begin to exercise your faith unto repentance, that ye begin to call upon his holy name, that he would have mercy upon you; Yea, cry unto him for mercy for he is mighty to save. Yea, humble yourselves, and continue in prayer unto him. Cry unto him when ye are in your fields, yea, over your flocks. Cry unto him when ye are in your houses, yea, over all your household, both morning, mid-day, and evening... But this is not all; ye must pour out your souls in your closets, and your secret places, and in your wilderness. Yea, and when you do not cry unto the Lord, let your hearts be full, drawn out in prayer unto him continually for your welfare, and also for the welfare of those who are around you." (BM Alma 34: 17-21,26,27)

As Mormons, we can join with them in our testimony of the integral part that prayer plays in living the gospel in our lives. We all believe in what the prophet Alma declared to his

¹³⁷ As recounted in the Book of Mormon, the Rameumptom was a prayer platform that the wicked Zoramite people built in their synagogues so that they would be able to pray to God in public for all to hear. See BM Alma 31 for details.

son Helaman: “Yea, and cry unto God for all thy support; yea, let all thy doings be into the Lord, and whithersoever thou goest, let it be in the Lord; yea, let all thy thoughts be directed unto the Lord; yea, let the affections of thy heart be placed upon the Lord forever. Counsel with the Lord in all thy doings, and he will direct thee for good; yea, when thou liest down at night lie down unto the Lord, that he may watch over you in your sleep; and when thou risest in the morning let thy heart be full of thanks unto God; and if ye do these things, ye shall be lifted up at the last day.” (BM Alma 37: 36,37)

The Pillar of Fasting (*sawm*)

The law of the fast is a vital component of belief in practice for all Muslims. It is a requirement for all who are active in their faith and is looked upon as a time to focus on the purification of the soul and developing spiritual discipline. Fasting promotes the love of God, strengthens character, cultivates a vigilant and sound conscience, generates patience and endurance, increases faith and encourages sympathetic appreciation of the needs of the poor.¹³⁸ Fasting frees man of his slavery to his hungers and desires while allowing him to join in a spiritual act that increases his sense of community and brotherhood. This will result in an increase of love for his fellow man as well since “it teaches man the principal (sic) of sincere love; because when he observes fasting, he does it out of deep love. And the man who loves God truly is a man who really knows what love is.”¹³⁹

The obligatory fast for all Muslims is the lunar calendar month of Ramadthan. Fasting is done during the daylight hours between dawn and sunset every day of the month. This involves total abstinence from all food and drink, tobacco and sexual intercourse while also refraining from lying, speaking ill of others, arguing or wrong behavior of any sort.¹⁴⁰ It is a time for rectifying past wrongs, reconciling troubled relationships, and seeking forgiveness from God for sins committed during the year. There is a Hadith from the prophet Muhammad that states: “whoever fasts in the month of Ramadthan out of sincere faith and hoping for a reward from Allah, then all his previous sins will be forgiven.”¹⁴¹

All Muslims who are past the age of puberty participate in the fast excepting those who have special physical conditions that would affect their health adversely, such as pregnant mothers, those on necessary medications or who are ill, and the aged and feeble. There are also circumstantial exceptions such as traveling long distances or women who are menstruating. Any days missed due to these temporary situations should be made up after the month is over.

Additionally, Ramadthan provides a chance for increased worship and devotional activities. After the evening prayer, there is an additional special prayer called *taraweeh* in which the entire Quran is recited during the course of the month. The last ten days of Ramadthan, many Muslims will stay in the mosque all night reading the Quran and praying. Daily activities such as

¹³⁸ Al-Sheikh, Yaseen Ibrahim, *A Handbook of Sawm: Islamic Fast*, Al-Maktab Al-Islami, Beirut, Lebanon, 1998, pp.12,13,24,25)

¹³⁹ Ati, p.87

¹⁴⁰ Haneef, p.135

¹⁴¹ Hadith in *The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Muhammad Muhsin Khan, Islamic University, Al-Medina Al-Munawwara, Saudi Arabia, no date, vol. 3, p.70

work and school will still go on as normal, however most Islamic countries have shortened daylight working hours during the month for those who are fasting.

The breaking of the fast at sunset is a time for joining together with family and friends. Many special foods are served only during Ramadthan making it a month to look forward to by all who observe the fast. For devout Muslims, it is a holy month, similar to our month preceding Christmas, where the focus of life turns inward and a conscious effort is made to be more spiritual and treat others with a higher degree of kindness. Both individually and communally, it is a time to be closer to God and to increase in attention to spiritual matters.

While living in the Middle East for a decade, I have had an opportunity to experience many Ramadthans in many different countries. It is somewhat similar to attending an LDS church sacrament meeting in any place in the world in that no matter where you go, Ramadthan is observed in the same way. Without exception, the people who I have lived among truly enjoy the fast and the opportunity to be more spiritual in their lives. For my part, I have welcomed the chance to fast along with my friends and to in turn use it as a month to focus on things of the spirit in my own life.

All Mormons share a similar attitude toward fasting as our Muslim brothers and sisters. Fasting is a year-long commitment and we fast the first Sunday of every month for the space of 24 hours or generally two meals, during which time no food or drink is taken. The reasons for fasting are similar to those given above for Muslims. “The fast day is a special day for us to humble ourselves before the Lord in fasting and prayer. It is a day to pray for forgiveness from our sins and for the power to overcome our faults and to forgive others....Fasting helps us gain strength of character. When we fast properly, we will learn to control our appetites and passions. We are a little stronger by having proved to ourselves that we have self-control. If we teach our children to fast, they will develop the spiritual strength to overcome greater temptations later in their lives.”¹⁴²

We can also fast on any other day we choose during the year for specific reasons, such as in behalf of those who are sick that they might be healed, or those who are experiencing difficulties and serious trials in their lives. When we fast and pray for others, it expresses our love for them as well as a desire to have God’s blessings in all our lives.

Whether we fast for thirty days between sunrise and sunset, or every first Sunday of the month for 24 hours, fasting is a divine principle that extends the same benefits for all who participate in it. As we obey this law with pure intent of heart, we will be filled with joy and be able to increase in our thanksgiving to God for His hand in our lives.¹⁴³

The Pillar of Alms (*zakat*)

¹⁴² LDS Church official manual *Gospel Principles*, 2011, chapter 25, pp. 144-148. See <https://www.lds.org/manual/gospel-principles/chapter-25-fasting?lang=eng>

¹⁴³ D&C 59:12-21

Another of the foundations of worship in Islam is that of paying *zakat*, or the equivalent to LDS tithing and offerings. *Zakat* is paid at the rate of 2.5% yearly on any cash or capital that is not used for one's immediate needs. For example, clothing, a car, furniture or the house in which you live is not included in *zakat*, whereas a savings account, additional real estate, investments, livestock or crops, or any source of additional profit or increase would be subject to the tax every year. The proceeds of all collected monies are given to those in need, such as orphans, widows, the aged or unemployed.¹⁴⁴ It basically constitutes what could be considered a Muslim social security fund similar to the LDS Church welfare system that would provide for the needs of anyone in the community who would be in destitute circumstances otherwise.

Along with Mormons, Muslims believe that their possessions are given as a stewardship from God and that "the true Owner of everything is not man, but God, Who bestows wealth on people out of His beneficence as He sees fit. Hence those to whom He has given more have an obligation to spend from His bounty for their brothers and sisters who need help."¹⁴⁵ In addition, *zakat* monies can be used for construction of mosques, religious schools and hospitals and for the salaries of those engaged in full-time religious service.

The word *zakat* literally means purity in English. This refers to the benefits of obeying this law which are a purification of the heart from greed, selfishness, possessiveness, and in an increase of charity, or pure love, toward those in need. *Zakat* is "not just a form of charity or almsgiving or tax or tithe. Nor is it simply an expression of kindness. . . . The meaning of the Qur'anic word *zakat* not only includes charity, alms, tithe, kindness, official tax, voluntary contributions, etc., it also combines with all these God-mindedness and spiritual as well as moral motives."¹⁴⁶

The Quran enjoins, "Believers, give in alms of the wealth you have lawfully earned and of that which We have brought out of the earth for you; not worthless things which you yourselves would only reluctantly accept. . . . To be charitable in public is good, but to give alms to the poor in private is better and will atone for some of your sins. . . . Whatever alms you give shall rebound to your own advantage, provided that you give them for the love of Allah. And whatever alms you give shall be paid back to you in full: you shall not be wronged." (Surah 2: 267-273)

Similarly, Mormons pay a 10% tithe on their increase. They give the equivalent cost of the two meals they fast every month as well. These monies are used to benefit the poor, build meetinghouses, print church materials, and help in humanitarian efforts, missionary work and fund church educational programs.¹⁴⁷

Not only does tithing benefit those in our society, it also proves our obedience to God's commandments and a willingness to sacrifice for others. "The blessings we have been promised

¹⁴⁴ Haneef, pp.49,50

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, p.48

¹⁴⁶ Ati, p.93

¹⁴⁷ *Gospel Principles*, chapter 32, pp.184-88

are both material and spiritual. If we give willingly, Heavenly Father will help us provide for our daily needs of food, clothes, and shelter.”¹⁴⁸

Additionally, the blessings promised in Malachi are for all who observe the commandment of giving offerings. God will open the windows of heaven and pour out a blessing so great that there will not be room for us to receive it. In addition, the devourer will be rebuked for our sakes, our lands will be protected and we will be called “delightful” by all nations if we will observe this law.¹⁴⁹ Whether we pay 2.5% of our excess or 10% of our income, both Muslims and Mormons have a strong testimony of the necessity of obeying this commandment of God.

The Pillar of Pilgrimage (*Hajj*)

Every Muslim is required to perform the pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia at least once in their life if they are physically capable of doing so. “Make the pilgrimage and visit the Sacred House for His sake.” (Surah 2:196) “Exhort all men to make the pilgrimage. They will come to you on foot and on the backs of swift camels from every distant quarter; they will come to avail themselves of many a benefit... Then let the pilgrims spruce themselves, make their vows, and circle the ancient house. Such is Allah’s commandment.” (Surah 22: 27-30) Those that are either too ill or infirm for the journey or too poor to undertake it are exempt from the responsibility, however, another person may go as a proxy to perform the ritual in that person’s stead. This includes performing hajj in behalf of the dead who were not able to do so in this life.¹⁵⁰

The site for the pilgrimage is the sacred house, or the *ka’aba*. This is a small rectangular stone structure that is inside the large mosque in the center of Mecca. The *ka’aba* is believed to have been built by Abraham and his son Ishmael as the first sanctuary on earth dedicated to the worship of the One God.¹⁵¹ The Quran states, “We made the House a resort and a sanctuary for mankind, saying: ‘Make the place where Abraham stood a house of worship.’ We enjoined Abraham and Ishmael to cleanse Our House for those who walk round it, who meditate in it, and who kneel and prostrate themselves.” (Surah 2: 125)

When Muslims perform the pilgrimage, they go during the first ten days of the Islamic month *Dhul-Hijjah*. Their intent is to partake in rites that center on complete submission and devotion to God. They enter into a state of consecration by divesting themselves of anything physically obvious that would differentiate them from their fellow brothers or sisters. They all dress in the humble basic white robes of the pilgrim with the robe draped over the left shoulder. They then perform various prayers and walk in a circle around the *Ka’aba* seven times while “pouring out their hearts in supplication to Him... Here, under the blazing sun of Mecca, making his circuits around God’s Holy House as he repeats the solemn, moving supplications of the pilgrim, he comes face to face with his own nothingness, his creatureliness, his utter dependence on his Creator in the face of God’s ineffable glory and sanctity, grasping, in that brief yet intense

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, pp. 187-88

¹⁴⁹ KJV Malachi 3:10,11

¹⁵⁰ See Hadith in Khan *Bukhari*, vol 2, p. 344

¹⁵¹ Haneef, p.53

encounter with the sublimity of God, that all the movements and efforts which men make on this earth are as nothing. They and he will pass away, and then he will come alone before the One who gave him his life to receive His judgment and the recompense for all he did.”¹⁵²

Other rites (including animal sacrifice) are performed during the next few days in remembrance of Hagar and Ishmaels’ journeyings in the desert. The pilgrims travel to various sites near Mecca to partake in the sacred rituals that have been practiced for hundreds of years in the same manner. They are “completely absorbed in supplication to God Most High, glorifying Him, affirming their utter helplessness and dependence on Him, and yearning for His forgiveness and His pleasure, enduring all the fatigues and difficulties of travel and the pilgrimage itself, with its severe climate and hard conditions, for the sake of that intense, profound experience of pouring out their souls before their Lord.”¹⁵³

By performing hajj, a pilgrim can receive forgiveness from his or her sins. There is a Hadith that says whosoever performs hajj for God’s pleasure and does not commit any acts of sin while doing it shall “return after Hajj free from all sins as if he were born anew.”¹⁵⁴

Likewise, it is incumbent upon all members of the LDS Church to seek to be worthy to enter the House of God, called a temple,¹⁵⁵ at least once in our lifetimes to perform the necessary ordinances there. We only attend the temple to perform these sacred ordinances and similar to the restrictions surrounding non-Muslims going to Mecca, only worthy LDS church members may enter the temple upon recommendation from their ecclesiastical leader (similar to a Muslim receiving the endorsement from their local Imam to perform hajj.)

In the temple, Mormons dress in a similar non-distinguishing fashion in robes of white and perform various rites that allow us to enter into a state of consecration before God. We also are able to perform the ordinances by proxy for any who have died without being able to go for themselves. In our temples, families are joined together by the authority of God for eternity. We are able to perform baptisms in proxy of those who have died so that they might be able to be forgiven of their sins and make higher covenants with God. We receive in return endowments and blessings from God as we make promises to devote our lives more fully to Him.

Going to the temple is the same exultant and intensely profound experience for Mormons as performing hajj is for our Muslim brothers and sisters. We re-dedicate ourselves to God’s service and increase in our level of submission to Him through the performance of these rites. We all come back to our lives with a new sense of commitment to be more righteous than ever and more diligent in being obedient to His laws.

Struggle Against Evil (*jihad*)

¹⁵² Ibid, pp.54, 55

¹⁵³ Ibid, pp, 56, 57

¹⁵⁴ Hadith in Khan *Bukhari*, Vol 2, pp. 347, 348)

¹⁵⁵ A temple is not the same as a church. Mormons do not hold weekly worship services there. There are currently only 144 temples in operation world-wide and many people must leave their country to travel to another to attend one. See <https://www.lds.org/church/temples?lang=eng>

The concept of holy war, or *jihad*, is one of the oft-misrepresented beliefs in Islam. While the Quran speaks of fighting in the cause of God and being willing to die in His defense, jihad does not imply that an aggressive posture should be taken to establish Islam by force on the unbelievers. “Islam has recognized war as a lawful and justifiable course for self-defense and restoration of justice, freedom and peace... Muslims are commanded by God not to begin hostilities, or initiate any act of aggression, or violate the rights of others... There is no such thing as religious war to force Islam on non-Muslims, because if Islam does not emerge from deep convictions, from within, it is not acceptable to God, nor can help its professor.”¹⁵⁶

The literal meaning of the word jihad is to strive. The primary reference is to the striving within the soul to overcome all the natural tendencies of this world. “The first and most essential jihad which the Muslim must carry on is within himself in a never-ceasing effort at self-improvement and self-purification. This is known as *jihad bil nafs* (striving within the self), which the Prophet, peace be upon him, called the ‘greatest jihad.’ This unremitting struggle is to begin within the Muslim’s soul from the time he or she attains a consciousness of right and wrong, and it does not end until the end of life itself.”¹⁵⁷

Additionally, there is a duty incumbent upon all Muslims to strive within their societies and communities to promote virtuous principles and help governing authorities to create laws that are in keeping with God’s commandments. They are to fight against all forms of social ills such as tyranny, injustice and oppression, not only for themselves, but in behalf of all who live there. This is not done by just standing passively by while watching these acts being committed on others. Muslims have a responsibility to stop the oppressor by whatever means possible- by speaking out, writing against it, and if all else fails, using the hand to fight as a last resort.

A Hadith from the Prophet Muhammad states that you must “help your brother, whether he is the oppressor or the oppressed.” When asked how to help the oppressor, he answered, “‘Restrain him from it.’ Thus the Muslim is not only required to give assistance to one who is the victim of tyranny, injustice and wrong-doing, whether (he) is a Muslim or non-Muslim, a single individual or a whole people, but also to try to stop the one who is committing it and to strive with all his energies to bring about the rule of righteousness, freedom and justice for all people.”¹⁵⁸

Likewise, LDS modern day prophets have instructed members of the Church to take an active part in our communities to uphold moral laws and conduct. We are to fight our own jihad to insure that our countries and governments operate under righteous principles. We are encouraged to be vocal in our stance against any morally perverse attitudes that attack our family values and beliefs in today’s world. Although we may not have councils such as they do in Saudi Arabia for the “Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice”, we still take part in community watch groups that actively confront and monitor such controversial topics as legalization of drugs, abortion laws, freedom of speech issues and gay/ lesbian rights. We have

¹⁵⁶ Ati, pp.140,141

¹⁵⁷ Haneef, p.119

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, p.119

covenanted to act as witnesses “at all times and in all things, and in all places that ye may be” in the defense of God’s truths throughout our lives.¹⁵⁹

We also actively strive to overcome the world within ourselves, to put off “the natural man (that) is an enemy to God and has been from the fall of Adam and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit...and becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father.¹⁶⁰ By submitting to God and fighting against the forces of Satan, we too are participating in jihad.

The pillars of Islam are a firm foundation of righteous principles of action by which Muslims live their daily lives. Each of them is also found in the LDS scriptures and upheld by our prophets’ teachings. Whether we bear testimony of Joseph Smith or Muhammad, pay 2.5 or 10% in offerings, pray morning and night or five times a day, fast a consecutive month or the first Sunday of the month, attend hajj or a temple, the principles remain true and constant as given by God to us all.

¹⁵⁹ BM Mosiah 18:9

¹⁶⁰ BM Mosiah 3:19

Chapter Six

What Think Ye of Christ?

Throughout the account of the Savior's three-year ministry as recorded in the New Testament, we read of the many attempts by the Pharisees and Sadducees to discredit him and his teachings. These groups of learned religious men would pit their lawyers and spokesmen against Jesus in public forums where they would seek to trap him in rhetorical play by twisting his words around. However, their efforts were in vain as Christ would speak in parables and pose questions in return that they could not possibly answer with their limited knowledge.

The book of Matthew contains the account of the last time the Savior was accosted by these groups in chapter 22. They alternately asked him questions in order to "entangle him in his talk", (KJV Matthew 22:15) but Christ answered them in such a way that they "marvelled" and "were astonished at his doctrine." (KJV Matthew 22: 22,33) Finally, when he had had enough, the Savior queried them back. "What think ye of Christ? Whose son is he?" When they answered that he was the Son of David, he responded, "How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies they footstool? If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?" (KJV Matthew 22: 42-45) This reply was so profound that no one was! able to answer him back "neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions." (KJV Matthew 22:45)

Even though the question was never asked again in Christ's time, the issue and subsequent debates have occupied over two millennia of religious controversy since then. Every major religion answers this question within the framework of their beliefs and many people judge the truth of each other's faith as a whole by their stance on this one point. Just among the denominations today that claim to be Christian, there are widely differing doctrines on exactly who Christ was, how he was born, his mission, his death, and his current status.

Additionally, written records have been altered, truths lost and doctrines changed over the millennia since Christ was born. Consequently, religious groups have held councils through the years to decide what is and isn't true doctrine or scripture. Perhaps the most famous is the council of Nicea in 325 CE where the books of the Bible and the nature of the Christ were in dispute. Subsequent doctrines came out of that meeting which have led to the variance of Christian beliefs today.

For Latter-day Saints, there is no dispute or question regarding this issue since Joseph Smith restored many of these plain and precious truths to us through direct revelation from God. We are able to answer what we think of Christ with conviction and testimony. We know of his birth, death, role, and that he still lives. We have no doubts that he will come again to this earth and that every knee shall bow and tongue confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah of humankind.

This knowledge, as revealed through modern day prophets, puts us at odds sometimes with our fellow Christians. We find ourselves often in the position of fighting misconceptions that we worship Joseph Smith or that we are not even Christian despite the fact that our church is named after Jesus Christ. Our belief in the distinctness of personage between God the Father and Christ separates us from the majority of Christian groups today who hold to the Nicene doctrine of the t Trinity. We declare that God, Christ and the Holy Ghost are three separate beings who work together in a Godhead that is one in purpose, not one joined together in a single corporeal body or essence. We do not believe that Christ was God the Father incarnate while living his earthly life. We do not glorify, worship or pray to him instead of God the Father nor do we pray to the Virgin Mary or other saintly people.

The fact that we do not use the normal Christian icons of the cross or crucified Christ figure in our churches is another point that promotes our individuality. We also believe that the Bible is the word of God only as far as it is translated correctly. We know it contains faults, is missing text and in many instances uses mistranslations. This confession on our part widens the gap between us and other main-stream Christian faiths. With the addition of our other three books of scripture, it is no wonder that the majority of Christendom today views us as something entirely outside their concept of a Christian faith. Conversely, from our side, Elder Parley P. Pratt's comments from 1855 as quoted earlier are still relevant now in that we would most likely view modern Christianity's Trinitarian doctrines to be a form of heathenism as compared with those of Islam that closely parallel our own.

So what exactly do Muslims think of Christ? One of the foremost misconceptions about Islam is that they do not believe in Christ at all. This is to them like saying to Mormons that we are not Christians. It is utterly false and really very upsetting to a faithful Muslim. Just because they do not have knowledge of his role as the Savior does not mean that they do not revere and accept his teachings as a prophet nor his mission in restoring the truth to his dispensation. The Islamic beliefs about Christ "do not intend in any way to belittle his role or underestimate his character or diminish his great person. On the contrary, these Islamic beliefs depict Jesus in a most respectable manner and place him as high in status as God himself has placed him. In fact, the Muslim is more respectful of Jesus than many Christians... Acceptance of Jesus by Muslims is a fundamental article of faith in Islam."¹⁶¹

The Quran refers to Christ as a holy or pure son born to the Virgin Mary and a mercy from God.¹⁶² It is interesting to note that he is called Jesus the Messiah in several places in the Quran including the instance of the annunciation of the angel to Mary regarding his birth. "Allah bids you rejoice in a Word from Him. His name is the Messiah, Jesus the son of Mary." (Surah 3:45) The Arabic root of the word Messiah includes among other definitions to erase, wipe or rub away. In his role as the Savior though the atonement, Christ fulfills all the meanings of this title but nothing more is mentioned in the Quran alluding to his role as redeemer.

The important point to remember here is that Muhammad's mission was to rid the Arabian peoples of their idolatrous beliefs, their plurality of Gods and their misconceptions concerning the true character of Allah. The Christian churches during his time were already

¹⁶¹ Ati, p.152

¹⁶² Surah 19:19, 21

teaching the Trinitarian doctrine in full force, and with the addition of pagan idolatry among non-Christians, there was little if any pure religion left on earth in 600 CE. This was indeed an age of ignorance in regards to religious truths as well as other aspects of civilization. When Muhammad revealed the Quran, the main theme was the Unity of God- not partnered or shared by any idols, sons, daughters, or additions of any kind.

There are numerous passages in the Quran that refute idolatry and an equal number that address the erroneous Christian view of the Trinity essence. The deification of Jesus, declaring that he was God the Father in the flesh and should be worshipped, was as heinous a sin as to believe that God had created daughters who were idols, also worthy of worship.¹⁶³ In one poignant passage, God declares that they would assign daughters to Him, yet they would bury their own when they were born. “They give daughters to Allah (Glory be to Him!), but they themselves would have what they desire. When the birth of a girl is announced to one of them, his face grows dark and he is filled with inward gloom. Because of the bad news he hides himself from men: should he keep her with disgrace or bury her under the dust? How ill they judge!” (Surah 16: 57-59)

The single important truth of *tawheed* (the Unity of God) that Muhammad revealed did not leave room for God to have any deified sons or daughters that would draw worship and belief away from Him. Additionally, the Christian denominations were promoting the birth of Christ to be something other than the miraculous creation by God. They were using the words “only begotten” to imply the strict definition of an earthly physical union as the means by which conception took place. That coupled with their view of Christ as God the Father incarnate resulted in many Quranic revelations given in the strongest language possible to set the record straight. Regarding the act of Christ’s conception, God declares, “Allah forbid that He Himself should beget a son! When he decrees a thing He need only say: ‘Be,’ and it is.” (Surah 19:35)

And further: “Those who say: ‘The Lord of Mercy has begotten a son preach a monstrous falsehood, at which the very heavens might crack, the earth break asunder, and the mountains crumble to dust. That they should ascribe a son to the Merciful, when it does not become Him to beget one!” (Surah 19:88-92) Of the actual process of the creation of Christ, another surah states, “And in Mary, Imran’s daughter, who preserved her chastity and into whose womb We breathed of Our spirit; who put her trust in the words of her Lord and His scriptures and was truly devout.” (Surah 66:12)

Jesus Christ came to this earth to live a completely mortal life experience as an example for us to follow. He did not perform his miracles¹⁶⁴ by using some special divine power in the role of a god himself, but accomplished them through his faith and to give the glory and honor to the Father only. The Quran has an interesting passage where God will question Christ about what he taught and did in this life. “Then Allah will say: ‘Jesus, son of Mary, did you ever say to mankind: “Worship me and my mother as gods beside Allah?”’ ‘Glory to You,’ he will answer, ‘how could I say that to which I have no right? If I had ever said so, You would have surely

¹⁶³ Allah’s daughters were the Arabian idols Al-Lat and Al-Uzzah specifically- see Surah 53:19

¹⁶⁴ For complete texts of miracles mentioned in the Quran but not found in our scriptures, see end of chapter.

known it...I spoke to them nothing except what You bade me. I said: “Serve Allah, my Lord and your Lord.”” (Surah 5: 116, 117)

In regards to the issue of Christ as a deity that is part of a Trinity essence, the Quran repeats time and time again that Jesus is not the Son of God¹⁶⁵ (meaning his creation through earthly physically begotten means and then partnered on the same level as God the Father or sharing an essence with Him.) If God so chose, He could have destroyed Christ, Mary and all the inhabitants of earth.¹⁶⁶ God is totally self-sufficient without the need of a Son or partner with whom to share His power or glory. All that the heavens and earth contain are His alone.¹⁶⁷ If there were more than one God in heaven, each God would govern his own creation and vie each other for position.¹⁶⁸ Christ was only mortal, an apostle (prophet), and a servant of God, which position he did not disdain.¹⁶⁹ The disbelievers are those who say Allah is one of three. But He is only one God.¹⁷⁰ The Jews say that Ezra is the Son of God and the Christians say the Messiah is the Son of God. They worship them along with their rabbis and monks as gods besides Allah although they were ordered to serve one God only. There is no God but Him. He is exalted beyond those whom they would deify beside him.¹⁷¹

Islam leaves no room for doubt about the supreme Oneness of God to whom all glory belongs. To the People of the Book (Christians), the Quran gives a challenge: “Say: ‘People of the Book, let us come to an agreement: that we will worship none but Allah, that we will associate none with him, and that none of us shall set up mortals as gods besides him.’” (Surah 3:64) Christ as a deified God the Father incarnate and part of a Trinity godhead’s singular essence were the very doctrines that Joseph Smith also refuted in his time. Through his first vision¹⁷² of the Father and the Son, the first thing Joseph learned about the character of God was that He was a separate and distinct being from that of the Savior. While God the Father, Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost constitute a working Godhead, they are one only in purpose, not in essence.

LDS doctrine teaches that Jesus Christ is our elder brother (the firstborn spirit of our Heavenly Father) who came to this earth in the bodily nature and form of a mortal man. “...I was in the world and made flesh my tabernacle, and dwelt with the sons of men.” (D&C 93:4) While we affirm His divine roles as a member of the Godhead in the pre-existence and the Savior of this earth, all things that were delegated to him both in heaven and on earth were done at the command of and for the glory of the Father, not for himself. Christ fulfills the commands of the Father and carries out His will. He is not to be worshipped as a God equal in position of hierarchy to the Father. He is subordinate to God the Father in power, supremacy and authority.

¹⁶⁵ For references regarding the Islamic definition/ connotation of Son of God see end of chapter.

¹⁶⁶ Surah 5:17

¹⁶⁷ Surah 10:68

¹⁶⁸ Surah 23:91

¹⁶⁹ Surah 4:171,172

¹⁷⁰ Surah 5:73

¹⁷¹ Surah 9:30,31

¹⁷² When Joseph Smith was a young man, he received a vision in which the Father and the Son appeared to him. For his account of this vision, see PGP Joseph Smith-History <https://www.lds.org/scriptures/pgp/js-h?lang=eng>

All glory belongs to the Father only. While we also strongly affirm that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Only Begotten of the Father, the concept of “begotten son” to us is not strictly that of a physical act of conception. Rather, it refers to the literal relationship that Christ has with the Father that was necessary to his mission to act as the Savior for the world.

We are in agreement with those of most faiths regarding the fact that Mary was a virgin and that Christ had no mortal physical father. In this sense, we say that God “begot” him through His direct involvement in His creation and because of this, he is the Son of God (differing from all of us who were conceived by solely mortal physical means). But we do not know how the actual act was performed. In the book of Moses in the Pearl of Great Price, God refers to Christ as His Only Begotten and the Savior, but within the same verse states very emphatically that there is no God beside Him. He speaks to Moses telling him that he is in similitude to Christ, “and mine Only Begotten is and shall be the Savior, for he is full of grace and truth; but there is no God beside me, and all things are present with me, for I know them all.” (PGP Moses 1:6)

The title of “son of God” or “God the son” also refers to Christ’s participating role as a member of the Godhead in the pre-existence. As we learn through the scriptures, Christ took an active role in the creation of the earth by carrying out the instructions of the Father. In the book of Moses, God states: “Behold I reveal unto you concerning this heaven, and this earth; write the words which I speak. I am the Beginning and the End, the Almighty God: by mine only begotten I created these things; yea, in the beginning I created the heaven, and the earth upon which thou standest.” (PGP Moses 2:1) All glory and credit for the creation are still with the Father, but He clearly states that He used the Savior to accomplish the act.

The divine role that Christ performed as the Savior is the major differing factor in our beliefs with those of Islam. For us, Jesus was more than just a prophet and teacher of truth. He was also the Redeemer of humankind wherein he used his divinely inherited powers to take upon himself the sins of the world to bring about the laws of mercy and fulfill the laws of justice according to the commands of the Father. This was another of his pre-existent assignments as part of the Godhead. He was foreordained to fulfill the role of Savior in the Father’s great plan of salvation for His children.

When he appeared to the Nephites in 34 CE shortly after his crucifixion and resurrection in Jerusalem, Christ told them, “Behold, I have come into the world to bring redemption unto the world, to save the world from sin. Therefore, whoso repenteth and cometh unto me as a little child, him I will receive, for of such is the kingdom of God. Behold, for such I have laid down my life, and have taken it up again; therefore repent, and come unto me all ye ends of the earth, and be saved.” (BM 3 Nephi 9:21,22) We do not know exactly how Christ performed the atonement, but we believe his divine parentage from God allowed him to have the power of His Godhood at the proper time to accomplish this act. This is why he could not have been born from a normal physical union as were the rest of us.

Although he lived his life as a mortal, he had the divine ability to fulfill this task when the necessary time came. “The fact of Jesus’ being the literal Son of God in the flesh is crucial to the Atonement, which could not have been accomplished by an ordinary man... To complete the Atonement by physical death and resurrection, it was necessary that Jesus be able to lay down

his physical body and also be able to take it up again. He could do this only because he had life in himself, which he inherited from God his Father.¹⁷³ Christ inherited the ability to die from his mortal mother and the power to resurrect himself from his immortal Father. Dying was for him a voluntary, deliberate act for mankind, made possible only because he was the Only Begotten of the Father (D&C 20:18-26).”¹⁷⁴

We do know that the act of the Atonement began in the Garden of Gethsemane and that the process was extremely painful. In a very beautiful passage of scripture, Christ tells us of the event himself. “I, having accomplished and finished the will of him whose I am, even the Father, concerning me...For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent; But if they would not repent, they must suffer even as I, Which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit- and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink- nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men.” (D&C 19: 2, 16-19)

Even in fulfilling this role as the Savior, Christ did not glorify anyone but the Father and in fact, spoke of his submission to God in all things. “And behold, I am the light and life of the world; and I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me, and have glorified the Father in taking upon myself the sins of the world, in the which I have suffered the will of the Father in all things from the beginning.” (BM 3 Nephi 11:11) God had chosen Christ to be the Redeemer in the beginning before the world was created and gave him “power to make intercession for the children of men.” (BM Mosiah 15:8) Additionally, Jesus’ role of intercessor was intimated or foretold by most of the prophets who preceded him.

The Quran actually contains several references to intercession (though none in direct reference to Christ), stating that none will have this power unless God grants it.¹⁷⁵ On the Day of Judgment, when the trumpet shall sound, “none shall have power to intercede for them except him that has received the sanction of the Merciful and whose word is acceptable to Him.” (Surah 20: 100, 102, 109) Then it will not matter which idols were worshipped, for none will be able to answer. “The gods to whom they pray besides Him have not the power to intercede for them. None can intercede for them save him who knows the truth and testifies to it.” (Surah 43:86) A very interesting note in the King Fahed commentary on this verse states, “While idols and false gods have no power of intercession, persons like Jesus, who is falsely worshipped by his misguided followers, but who himself preached the Gospel of Unity with full understanding will have the power of intercession.”¹⁷⁶

Muslims believe that forgiveness of sins is obtained through repentance and the will of God. One of God’s 99 names is the “Forgiving One” and He is able to apply mercy to the repentant: “Say: Servants of Allah, you that have sinned against your souls, do not despair of Allah’s mercy, for He forgives all sins. He is the Forgiving One, the Merciful. Turn in repentance to your Lord and surrender yourselves to Him before His scourge overtakes you; for

¹⁷³ KJV John 5:26; 10:17-18

¹⁷⁴ Ludlow, Daniel H. *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, Mac Millan Company, 1992, Vol 2, p.729

¹⁷⁵ Surah 10:3

¹⁷⁶ *Quran*, King Fahed Translation, p.1516, note 4683

then there will be none to help you.” (Surah 39: 53,54) The Quran also mentions that there are those who surround the throne of God to plead for forgiveness for the faithful. They implore God to let those who repent enter into paradise with their families and descendants. But ultimately it is only God who forgives and accepts repentance.¹⁷⁷ Additionally, there are passages that mention the performance of righteous deeds as a way to help gain forgiveness: “As for those that have faith and do good works, We shall cleanse them of their sins and reward them according to their noblest deeds... Good deeds make amends for sins.” (Surah 29:7, 11:114)

For the Muslim, repentance and forgiveness are straightforward. If you will truly acknowledge your sins before God, change your ways and ask for forgiveness, He will be Merciful and grant it to you. There is no need for an intermediary or Savior to perform an atonement since God is very capable of forgiving man if He so chooses. How God actually accomplishes this is neither relevant nor in need of explanation. It is enough to say that He has the power to do so. Since Christ’s role as Savior was not revealed to Muhammad, there would be no need to provide any other revelations regarding the process of repentance and forgiveness. This is totally consistent with other Old Testament peoples who did not receive this knowledge nor the higher laws and responsibilities that would ensue.

Additionally, the Quran has very little to say about the last days of Christ’s life or his death. There is one passage that refers to the crucifixion as not happening the way the Jews believed: “They declared: ‘We have put to death the Messiah, Jesus the Son of Mary, the apostle of Allah.’ They did not kill him, nor crucify him, but thought they did.”¹⁷⁸ Those that disagreed about him were in doubt concerning his death, for what they knew about it was sheer conjecture; they were not sure that they had slain him. Allah lifted him up to His presence.” (Surah 4:157,158) Most Quranic commentary states that Christ was never crucified at all and some even purport that another person was crucified in his stead. However, when reading the verse in context from the standpoint of the Jews’ belief that they killed him, the main point here is that Christ did not die the permanent death the Jews thought they had inflicted upon him. He was indeed raised to God. Again, the resurrection or any reference to it is not in the Quran for it would have to allude directly to Christ’s overcoming death as a part of his role as Savior.

The King Fahed Commentary states: The end of the life of Jesus on earth is as much involved in mystery as his birth... It is not profitable to discuss the many doubts and conjectures among the early Christian sects and among Muslim theologians... The Quranic teaching is that Christ was not crucified nor killed by the Jews, notwithstanding certain apparent circumstances which produced that illusion in the minds of some of his enemies; that disputations, doubts, and conjectures on such matters are vain; and that he was taken up to Allah.”¹⁷⁹

There is one verse in the Quran that is of interest, though, that states that Christ did indeed die as part of God’s plan: “Allah is the supreme Plotter. He said: ‘Jesus, I am about to cause you to die and lift you up to Me. I shall take you away from the unbelievers and exalt your followers above them till the Day of Resurrection.’” (Surah 3:55) However, the commentary for

¹⁷⁷ Surah 40:3, 7-9

¹⁷⁸ Other Quran translations state “as it seemed to them or appeared to them or a likeness of that was shown to them”.

¹⁷⁹ *Quran*, King Fahed Translation, pp.267,268, note 663

this verse only refers back to the quoted verse above in reference to the Jews not really killing him as they thought. Also, other translations of the Quran do not use the word “die” in this passage, but “take or gather” and in the Ibn Katheer commentary, he points out an alternate meaning of “put to sleep”. Christ, himself, also is quoted as making reference to his own death when he miraculously spoke from the cradle as an infant (see end for full text): “I was blessed on the day I was born, and blessed I shall be on the day of my death; and may peace be upon me on the day when I shall be raised to life.” (Surah 19:33) Muslims believe that this reference to death has yet to take place in the future.

Regardless of the differing views on his death, the fact that God took Christ up to Himself is undisputed. Muslims also firmly believe that Jesus will yet appear again on the earth prior to the Day of Judgement.¹⁸⁰ In the Hadith it states that he will destroy the anti-Christ, establish Islam and remain on earth for forty years before he dies.¹⁸¹ Any disputations

¹⁸⁰ Surah 43:61

¹⁸¹ Hadith as reported in *Sunan Abu Dawud*, vol 3, p. 1203, no. 4310

Miracles of Christ not found in the Bible:

1- Speaking from the cradle:

“Carrying the child, she came to her people, who said to her: ‘your father was never a whore-monger, nor was your mother a harlot.’ She made a sign to them, pointing to the child. But they replied: ‘How can we speak with a babe in the cradle?’ Whereupon he spoke and said: ‘I am the servant of Allah. He has given me the gospel and ordained me a prophet. His blessing is upon me wherever I go, and He has commanded me to be steadfast in prayer and to give alms to the poor as long as I shall live. He has exhorted me to honour my mother and has purged me of vanity and wickedness. I was blessed on the day I was born, and blessed I shall be on the day of my death; and may peace be upon me on the day when I shall be raised to life.’ Such was Jesus, the son of Mary. (Surah 19: 27-34)

2- Miracle of the clay bird:

“Allah will say: ‘Jesus, son of Mary, remember the favour I have bestowed on you and on your mother: how I strengthened you with the Holy Spirit, so you preached to men in your cradle and in the prime of manhood; how I instructed you in the Scriptures and in wisdom, in the Torah and the Gospel; how by My leave you fashioned from clay the likeness of a bird and breathed into it so that, by My leave, it became a living bird; how, by My leave, you healed the blind man and the leper, and by My leave restored the dead to life; how I protected you from the Israelites when you brought them veritable signs: when the unbelievers among them said: “This is nothing but plain magic”... (Surah 5: 110)

For Islamic definition of Son of God, see:

concerning his life and role will then be settled and made clear for all to understand. If we are truly pure in heart and seek only to follow God, it will be easy to accept whatever Christ will teach us when he is among us once again in the future.

This belief of Jesus' imminent return is something to which both Mormons and Muslims can look forward. At that time Christ will reign upon the earth as the head of one religion and one people who will finally live together in peace: "...and the earth shall be like as it was in the days before it was divided. And the Lord, even the Savior, shall stand in the midst of his people, and shall reign over all flesh...and the government shall be upon his shoulder and his name shall be called ...The Prince of Peace." (D&C 133: 24,25; BM 3 Nephi 19:6)

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Chapter Seven

A Peculiar Lifestyle

After three years of living in an isolated mountain village in Yemen, I felt like I was finally becoming part of that community. One day as I was sitting in one of the small shops talking to the shopkeeper who was a good friend, a stranger stopped by on his way to a neighboring village. Seeing me sitting there in the shop and noting I was obviously not Yemeni, he asked the shopkeeper who I was and why I was there. In Yemeni culture, it is out of respect for a woman that a stranger would not address her directly, but talk to another man present if he had a question concerning her. My friend informed him that I was “one of them nevertheless” meaning that I was living among them and considered a member of their family & community. The man then inquired if I were a Muslim. My friend immediately answered, “no, but she has the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith as a prophet, doesn’t drink coffee or tea, believes in Allah and will get to heaven faster in her faith than you ever will as a Muslim.” He then proceeded to give the man a fifteen minute lecture on my beliefs and how I had lived my life among them for the past few years. Needless to say, I was shocked at how much my friend knew since we had had very few direct discussions about my beliefs, nor had he ever asked me any specific questions over the whole three years that would have given him the information he was now telling this stranger.

As I returned home later that afternoon, I mused over how he could have known about my beliefs so thoroughly without us ever having discussed it. Then I remembered my first few months in the village. I had been invited to people’s houses to meet them and share a meal with them. They would inevitably offer me coffee or tea after we ate and I would politely refuse, saying that it was against my religious beliefs as mentioned in the health law we uphold. I then thought of how, within a short time thereafter when I went visiting, everyone started offering me the fruit drink Vimto or some cold water instead. Even people in whose houses I was visiting for the first time knew by then that I didn’t drink coffee or tea.

I also thought of the many Friday mornings when people would come by to visit and I would answer the door with my scriptures in hand. Friday is the Sabbath in the Middle East and I would be in the midst of my own church study time when they called. I gladly let them interrupt me with only a brief explanation of what I was doing. Shortly thereafter, no one came in the mornings on Fridays but waited until later in the day to visit me. Again, everyone in the village seemed to know that Debra was busy with “church” on Friday mornings without me having to really say anything specific to them about it.

Our LDS lifestyle makes us a peculiar people in today’s world to say the least. Once we let people know that we will not join in something because of our religious beliefs, they will then watch us more intently to see what other areas of our life and behavior our beliefs have influenced. Our lifestyle truly reflects not only our faith and values but also the intensity to which we follow them. We are marked in society as different because of our abstinence from alcohol, tobacco, coffee, tea, drugs, strong language, immodest clothes, sex before marriage,

inappropriate music, films or other improper activities. As our thirteenth Article of Faith states, “We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to all men... If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things.”¹⁸²

In each of the six Islamic countries where I have lived, the majority of people I have encountered are extremely surprised to find that an American would have such a conservative lifestyle. From what they have seen on TV, in the movies or from other foreigners they have met, they find it quite unbelievable that any American would actually choose to live with such restrictions. They have never heard of Mormons and the usual response I get from them is that sure I may believe these things, but like everyone else, I don’t actually live them all the time. As they come to know me and see that it is really true, they delight in presenting me to their friends as something of a novelty.

I once had a rather humorous introduction by a Syrian friend to one of his work colleagues. He proudly pointed at me and said, “This is Debra. She doesn’t drink alcohol, coffee or tea, doesn’t smoke or have sex outside of marriage and she’s American. Can you believe that? Have you ever heard of an American who lives like that?” Although we all laughed, it led to a useful conversation between the three of us for the next hour on what untrue stereotypes people have about other cultures and nationalities overall and what kinds of values are important to have in this life regardless of specific religious beliefs. These are the kinds of discussions that help bridge the gap between cultural and religious barriers. We can learn to respect a great deal about another person’s beliefs when we take the time to talk about the common values we share. This is why we are commanded not to hide our examples as lights under bushels but set them conspicuously visible as cities on top of hills for all to see.¹⁸³

I also remember a Sudanese doctor who was at the lone clinic in our area in Yemen. Again, I was the first American or even Westerner he had lived around and also the first Mormon. Likewise, he knew that this was my first experience living among Muslims in the Middle East, so he felt that it was his duty to share Islam with me in hopes for my sake that I would accept the true faith of God. In the first few months of my living there, we spent quite a few hours discussing mutual beliefs as well as differing points of view. I was interested to know what Islam taught and what the people believed whom I was living among. At the end of every discussion, he would kindly invite me to change my faith and become Muslim.

After about two months of being extremely patient while yet politely declining his customary closing requests, I finally blurted out, “Did it ever occur to you that perhaps I might feel that my religion is just as true from God and have just as much faith in it as you feel about yours? I can respect your beliefs but I will not change mine simply because you ask me to. I could just as well ask you to convert to Mormonism for the same reasons. I believe with all my heart that I am already walking in the right way to return back to God and if you will get to know me better and watch how I live my life, you will see that this is true.” While we still had occasional religious discussions after that, he never did broach the subject again of me changing

¹⁸² *Articles of Faith*, no. 13

¹⁸³ KJV Matthew 5:14-16

my faith. We worked in the village together for the next two years and as time passed we became good friends.

It was with some humor that I answered the door one day to find a Sudanese friend of his who had come by from another village to propose marriage to me. He had had a long discussion with the doctor about me and my beliefs and had concluded that I was living a virtuous enough life for him to marry me since he was a devout Muslim.¹⁸⁴ I politely thanked him for his interest but told him that I had a few more requirements in a spouse than someone who was devout, though that was certainly an important consideration. Even our village Sheikh sent a friend of his by at one point who also proposed marriage to me as a second wife. While these experiences were humorous from an American cultural viewpoint, I was appreciative of the respectful honor that these men were affording me from their religious standpoint. From my time among them, they could see that I was abiding by righteous principles and that my reputation was spotless enough to be recommended for marriage to other honorable men in their circles.

When I did find my husband some years later, it was through a similar introduction from a Muslim friend in Kuwait who recommended me to one of his friends because he had known me long enough to see how I lived my life and what I truly believed. The concept of honor and reputation is extremely important in the Middle East and nothing can substitute for the good words spoken of you by others. This is why so much of the Islamic lifestyle upholds that which is virtuous and of good report in daily life. This is also why the social codes of conduct are taken from the Sharia (Islamic law based on the Quran) and the Hadith (sayings and actions of the Prophet Mohammed). When people are serious about following their religion as a way of life rather than just a set of beliefs, it builds a strong sense of cultural and societal value as well.

Many people feel that Middle Eastern countries impose far too many constraints on their citizens in how much they prohibit. Westerners are apt to look at the censoring of movies, books, and internet, the custom of veiling for women, the lack of bars and discos, and the severe penalties for crime as far too restrictive and even oppressive overall. As a member of our Church however, I have found it much more comfortable to practice my faith in an Islamic country that enforces these codes than when I go back to American suburbia where such constraints are not allowed.

I appreciate the fact that in these countries, I can generally go outside my house alone at any time of the day or night without the fear of being molested in any way. I appreciate turning on the TV to see a program or going to movies that have been previously censored for offensive scenes and language. I appreciate driving during the late night without fear of being hit by a drunk driver going home from some bar. I appreciate the lack of drug, disco or acid rock music cultures that prevail elsewhere. I appreciate using the internet without having pornographic material pop up unsolicited in my browser space. And I appreciate seeing the people around me modestly dressed and acting with polite speech and actions in their dealings with each other. While not every person in the Middle East is a living example of what their religion teaches (as is true of every faith), I have still observed that general public behavior is much more courteous and respectful in these countries than what I experience at home. This again is due to the codes

¹⁸⁴ In Islam, it is permitted for Muslims to marry Christian women as long as they are believing and chaste. See Surah 6:5

handed down from the Hadith literature based on the life of the Prophet Muhammad that was recorded nearly 1400 years ago. It was pertinent in their time and still is applicable in ours.

As regarding moral values and public behavior toward one another, the Prophet Muhammad said, “By Allah he does not believe! By Allah he does not believe! By Allah he does not believe!” It was said, ‘Who is that O Allah’s Apostle?’ He said, ‘That person whose neighbor does not feel safe from his evil.’¹⁸⁵ Beyond the absence of evil acts, one should also avoid saying negative things about anyone else. Another Hadith states, “He who believes in Allah and the Last Day should talk what is good or keep quiet.”¹⁸⁶ So important is the ability to hold one’s tongue that the Prophet equated it with keeping one’s chastity intact. “Allah’s apostle said, “Whoever can guarantee (the chastity of) what is between his two jaw bones and what is between his two legs (i.e. his tongue and his private parts), I guarantee Paradise for him.”¹⁸⁷

Controlling one’s anger is also a very important social skill that is taught in the Hadith. “Allah’s apostle said, ‘The strong is not the one who overcomes the people by his strength, but the strong is the one who controls himself while in anger.’¹⁸⁸ One interesting custom in Yemen that follows this Hadith is the procedure for settling verbal disputes. One of the few highly valued possessions of the Yemenis are their *jambiyas* (the silver ornamental daggers the men wear tucked into their belts that in many cases are family heirlooms.) In order to ensure that all language will be appropriate during any heated disputes, both parties are required to give their *jambiyas* to a third party who is known to be a virtuous person.

If at any time during discussion, one party accuses or slanders the other party through anger or any form of verbal words deemed inappropriate, they lose their *jambiya* to the other man. I have witnessed many such discussions and conflicts that were settled amicably and respectfully due to this custom being carried out. Additionally, in all of my three years in the village, I never heard one person speak badly of another nor witnessed any angry fights carried out in public. If there were angry words at the beginning, usually someone would step up to the person and lead them away to cool down with some kind of light humor.

All the people were honestly trying to live as peaceful a life as is humanly possible. They were trying to make themselves “a community that follow the righteous people who were before us, and (so that) the people after us may follow us.”¹⁸⁹ “The best talk (speech) is Allah’s Book (Qur’an), and the best way is the way of Muhammad.”¹⁹⁰ To live a life of charity one for another is what the Prophet’s life exemplified and what the resulting Hadith promotes. When Muhammad was asked about giving alms, he taught that it was compulsory for Muslims to make an offering. The people asked, what if a man has nothing to give? The Prophet answered that he should work with his hands to benefit himself and give to others. And if he cannot physically work? Then he should help the oppressed unhappy person by word or deed. If he cannot do this, then he should at least encourage that which is good and reasonable. And finally, if that is

¹⁸⁵ Hadith in Khan, *Bukhari*, vol 8, p. 28

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, p.320

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, p.320

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, p.87

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, vol 9, p.282

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, p.238

impossible, he should refrain from doing evil for that will be considered an act of charity from him just as great.¹⁹¹

A person who cannot control his behavior and abide by this code of conduct does not do any good by obeying the other basic requirements of Islam. The Prophet said, “Whoever does not give up false statements (i.e. telling lies), and evil deeds, and speaking bad words to others, Allah is not in need of his leaving his food and drink.” (as in fasting during Ramadthan).¹⁹² Additionally, if a person lives according to the pillars of Islam solely out of duty with no real intent, it will avail him nothing. Doing righteous deeds for the sake of being seen in public is also fruitless. “He who lets the people hear of his good deeds intentionally, to win their praise, Allah will let the people know his real intention (on the Day of Resurrection), and he who does good things in public to show off and win the praise of people, Allah will disclose his real intention (and humiliate him).”¹⁹³ This also applies to deeds of generosity and kindness to one another.

One of the great cultural values that have resulted from the Hadith and that the Middle East is famous for is that of hospitality and the treatment of guests in Muslim lands. It is a religious obligation to offer protection to a *dhimmi* (non-Muslim, and more specifically a Christian) living in an Islamic state. The Prophet said, “Whoever hurts a dhimmi hurts me, and who hurts me annoys Allah.”¹⁹⁴ Further, the famous Islamic jurist Ibn Hazm stated that if an enemy comes with forces to take a dhimmi away from the Islamic state where he is living, it is an obligation upon every Muslim to fight that enemy and even give their lives before breaking the covenant of protection that is guaranteed by Allah to the non-Muslim.¹⁹⁵

Hospitality is a sacred virtue to a Muslim and guests are entitled to rights in the Hadith. Among them are to be entertained generously with high quality of food for a day and night or with ordinary food for three days. The host should not eat until the guest eats and there should never be anger or impatience displayed before them.¹⁹⁶ Over the years I have been very impressed with the generosity and hospitality offered to me on countless occasions in Islamic countries. Whether it is a simple meal such as an *iftar* dinner (breaking the fast during Ramadthan), a special occasion such as a wedding, or just staying with friends, my hosts have always prided themselves on how much they could offer with their only thought being their pleasure to serve me. This also extends to situations out in public whenever I have been in need of any kind of assistance. Strangers always have gone out of their way in both time and finances to help me if needed as a part of what they consider to be their least duty to a guest. This societal attitude of generosity and genuine helpfulness is extended to anyone out in public, whether stranger or friend, who is in obvious need.

I compare this attitude with an experience I encountered as I came back to the States on a vacation visit some years ago. I arrived at the airport and was waiting for my luggage at the

¹⁹¹ Ibid., vol 8, p.31

¹⁹² Ibid, p.53

¹⁹³ Ibid, p.334

¹⁹⁴ Al-Qaradawi, Yusuf. *The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam*, American Trust Publications, Indianapolis, Indiana, 1960, p. 338

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, p.339

¹⁹⁶ Hadith in Khan *Bukhari*, op. cit., vol 8, pp. 30, 102, 103

baggage carrousel. Next to me was an elderly lady who was easily 75 years old. Standing on either side of us were well-dressed younger men who were also impatiently waiting for their luggage. When the bags came around, the woman recognized her bag and made a vain attempt to reach it. As it went by her, she accidentally hit the arm of the man to her right. Rather than help her, he gave her a look of disgust and stepped back out of her way. Happily another gentleman on the other side of him saw her distress after the fact and chased her bag down. I had a hard time restraining myself from lecturing the other man who was so disdainful of offering any help to this elderly woman. That situation was a poor commentary on just how far some of our social values have declined in the past few decades. I have noticed over the years an overall increase in selfishness and lack of concern about others within my home culture. Again, while I would certainly not lump all American people into an uncaring mass, I do feel that we could improve somewhat in our sense of societal responsibility by studying the examples and values as taught by the Hadith that are still very much a part of Islamic modern lifestyle.

Another religious value taught in the Hadith is that of family importance and respect for older family members, the mother being of prime importance. The Prophet Muhammad was asked “‘O Allah’s Apostle! Who is more entitled to be treated with the best companionship by me? The Prophet said, ‘Your mother.’ The man said, ‘Who is next?’ The prophet said, ‘Your mother.’ The man further said, ‘Who is next?’ The Prophet said, ‘Your mother.’ The man asked for the fourth time, ‘Who is next?’ The Prophet said, ‘Your Father.’”¹⁹⁷ Mothers hold an all-time high position of respect in the Islamic household. They are honored and listened to by their children and continue to live with them under the same roof until the time they pass away. My friends in various countries have been aghast to find out about the existence of retirement homes in the States and have a hard time understanding how we could be so cold, uncaring and non-respectful as to place our aged parents into one.

We feel that one of the strong points of our LDS faith is how we view our families, our commitments to love and serve each other and to remain close. In 1995, the First Presidency issued a statement known as “The Family: A Proclamation to the World”.¹⁹⁸ In it, the Church affirms that marriage and family life are ordained of God and children are entitled to be raised in an environment founded on the “principles of faith, prayer, repentance, forgiveness, respect, love, compassion, work, and wholesome recreational activities.”¹⁹⁹

While we believe in having our families sealed together with us for eternity in our temples, we should ask ourselves to what extent we are truly maintaining that kind of eternal closeness to them in our daily lives. In most Middle Eastern extended families, the bonds of family kinship are extremely strong. This not only applies to emotional links, but pertains to areas of physical support and maintenance as well. Part of it is due to the remnant of a cultural tribal tradition that binds them so tightly together, but for the most part, it is the attitudes of respect and honor engendered by Islam as a duty to fulfill in family life. All members of the family share their financial and physical resources between each other, even after marriage. There is never a question of who will support the aged when they become infirm. Nor are there many facilities for orphans, mental health patients or the poor. Families deal with these problems

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, p.2

¹⁹⁸ See <https://www.lds.org/topics/family-proclamation>

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, *The Family: A Proclamation to the World*, 1995, First Presidency Statement

themselves to the best of their abilities without turning their members permanently over to a public facility. It just would not be considered socially or culturally acceptable let alone religiously upheld.

As mentioned, honor and respect for individuals or family names are at a premium in Islamic countries. Any member who is disgraced for any reason disgraces the family as well, so it is imperative to remain of good reputation and sound report. This attitude is in part what is responsible for women not being so forthright in public places. Again, a view that many Westerners see as oppressive due to religious fundamentalism. How a woman acts in public has a direct impact on her family. The more modest and discreet a woman is, the more virtuous her actions and speech, the more honor and respect is attributed to her and her family.

Nowadays, while all women will wear modest clothing in public, it is usually a cultural and family decision as to whether or not she will wear the *abaya* (black cloak with or without head covering attached) or cover her face with her veil. The Quranic teaching is that women should “cover their adornments (except such as are normally displayed); to draw their veils over their bosoms and not to reveal their finery except to their husbands.” (Surah 24:31) Adornments have been interpreted to mean the hair always and sometimes face and hands. Regarding the full veiling of the face however, there is no direct teaching in the Quran that requires this. And in fact, during prayer and hajj, a woman’s face must be uncovered.

Another noted Muslim jurist, Al-Qurtabi states, “It seems probable that, since the face and hands are customarily uncovered, and it is, moreover, required that they be uncovered during acts of worship such as *salat* and *hajj*, the exemption (referred to in the verses of Surah al-Nur) pertains to them. This conclusion is supported by what Abu Daoud has transmitted on the authority of Aishah (Hadith). She said that Asma, the daughter of Abu Bakr, once came to the Prophet (peace be upon him) wearing transparent clothes. The Prophet (peace be upon him) turned his face away from her and told her, ‘Asma, when a woman begins to menstruate, nothing should be seen of her except this and this,’ and he pointed to his face and hands.”²⁰⁰

The choice therefore of whether to veil or not depends in a large part on the cultural norm and family expectation rather than Islamic law. Consequently, within the same country, you will see many women on both ends of the extreme. While living in Saudi Arabia, I was required to wear the *abaya* even as a foreigner. I also carried a scarf with me in public to wear in case I was requested by any *mutawa* (Islamic religious police which are particular to conservative Islamic countries only) to cover my head. Most of the time I did not have to, but there were occasions on which I was forced to comply.

The compulsory wearing of *abaya* and scarf by all women (even foreigners) is not upheld by the Quran but rather a requirement approved by various political entities in ultra conservative Islamic governments. While countries like Saudi Arabia and Iran have modern laws on the books regarding female public attire, it even varies inside those countries from city to city as to its enforcement. Foreign women living in Jeddah in Saudi did not have to veil their heads at all and rarely wore an *abaya* in public. Where I worked in a hospital in the heart of Riyadh, even some of my Saudi female co-workers did not wear a scarf. The majority of them chose not to come to

²⁰⁰ Al-Qaradawi, p. 157

work wearing face veils although there were a few who came fully covered, even to the point of wearing gloves. I had some long conversations with some of these women who were my friends and they were quick to vehemently assure me that it was by their own choice that they covered completely, not through force or constraint from their families or the government. Again, they referred to the respect and honor that their family was due by their actions and how it pleased them to be able to provide it through something as minimal as the clothes they wore in public.

At the University where I worked in the United Arab Emirates, although it was an all-female campus, the majority of the students wore an abaya to class and covered their heads. If they veiled their faces, they generally took it off during class time, but put it back on to move around the campus as there were some workmen and other male professors there. It was neither oppressive nor a hardship on these women who chose to wear it. To them, it was simply a lifestyle choice that showed they were proud of their heritage, devout and honored their family name.

Along with the code of conservative dress, there are expectations of conservative behavior between the sexes in public as well. It is considered in bad taste for men and women to show any outward signs of affection in public, even when married. It is much more common to see physical affection shown between friends of the same sex who greet one another by kissing on both cheeks and often hold hands while walking together. This is not in any way to be misconstrued as gay conduct, but again, a culturally accepted norm for public behavior in the Middle East.

Most businesses such as restaurants, banks, post offices and other commonly used facilities have separate entrances, areas or lines for men and women. If there is no special place designated for women, they are free to walk to the front of any line of men in order to be served. Generally, women are treated with higher respect and are dealt more courtesy than men in public. For me as a woman, I have always especially enjoyed the privileges that have come with my gender while living in these countries. It feels good to be granted greater deferential treatment than I would normally receive at home where everyone is considered the same in regards to public manners and behavior.

While segregation of the sexes in public is not due to a Quranic injunction, the main reason for this hesitancy to mix in a casual setting is to avoid any temptations in regards to sexual transgressions. There is a Hadith that states, "Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day must never be in privacy with a woman...for otherwise Satan will be the third person (with them)." ²⁰¹ Al-Qurtabi comments on this saying that "the avoidance of such situations is better for one's purity of heart, strength of soul, and perfection of chastity." ²⁰² It is also to curtail any possibility of gossip that would ensue that could directly affect a woman's or family's honor. So, it is simply best to not even have the opportunity to be alone rather than to risk any negative ramifications that may follow.

In my workplace in Riyadh, this particular Hadith was posted inside the elevators in the buildings. Consequently, if the elevator doors opened on any floor and women were inside, a

²⁰¹ Ibid, p.150

²⁰² Ibid, p.150

man would let the doors close and wait patiently for the lift to come back again empty before he would use it. I personally found it rather amusing to contemplate just what kind of mischief two strangers could get into between floors in an elevator, but the point itself of the Hadith is well taken.

Of course, the heinous sins of adultery and fornication are *haram* (prohibited) in Islam. The punishment for adultery is death by stoning, but in order to be accused, there must be four reliable witnesses who can testify to seeing the act. Also, masturbation and homosexuality are considered *haram* as referenced in both the Quran and Hadith.²⁰³ Speaking of controlling passions and curbing desire, the Prophet said, “Young men, those of you who can support a wife should marry, for it keeps you from looking at women and preserves your chastity; but those who cannot should fast, for it is a means of cooling sexual passion.”²⁰⁴

Bridling one’s physical appetites does not only apply to passion, but to the other literal bodily hungers of eating and drinking as well. Islam also has a health code similar to the LDS “Word of Wisdom”²⁰⁵ (health law) that prohibits the intake of alcohol or any other intoxicants, pork or carrion flesh (dead animals).²⁰⁶ Old Testament parallels here are justified when looking at the requirements in Islam for slaughtering animals and what is considered clean and unclean meat. Regarding drug use, most Islamic countries have severe penalties for the import or possession of illegal substances up to and including the death penalty. Consequently, all the things that go with the drug culture are not very prevalent in these countries.

Whether talking of the self-control of an individual or governmental control of a society-at-large, the goal of Islam is to teach submission to God in body, mind and heart. The world is a place full of enticements and temptations that will lead us in the opposite direction if we make no effort to control our actions or minds. The Prophet Muhammad likened the wealth of the world to green and sweet fruit, that when partaken of too freely by an animal, will kill it. This Hadith concludes by saying, “if a person earns it (the wealth of the world) in a legal way and spends it properly, then it is an excellent helper, and whoever earns it in an illegal way, he will be like the one who eats but is never satisfied.”²⁰⁷

In order to use the opportunities of this world properly and not let them lead us in the wrong direction or distract us from our view of eternity, we should keep in remembrance the broader view of how this life fits in with the next. “The world is going backwards and the Hereafter is coming forwards, and each of the two has its own children; so you should be the children of the Hereafter, and do not be the children of this world, for today there is action (good or bad deeds) but no accounts, and tomorrow there will be accounts, but no deeds to be done.”²⁰⁸

²⁰³ Surah 26:165,166; 23:5-7

²⁰⁴ Ibid, p.171

²⁰⁵ The Word of Wisdom is given in D&C 93. Mormons are forbidden alcohol, coffee, tea, tobacco, and intoxicants.

²⁰⁶ Surah 2:173; 5:90

²⁰⁷ Hadith in Khan *Bukhari*, vol. 8, p. 291

²⁰⁸ Ibid, p.285

It is hard to always keep the true reality in focus when we deal with the trivial things of our daily lives. That is why it is so vital that we surround ourselves with things that will remind us of what is really important. When I lived in the United Arab Emirates, I frequently drove the two hours from Al Ain to Abu Dhabi on Fridays to attend church. I liked the fact that the highway was posted with signs about every two miles that offered reminders of God. The short Arabic phrases gave the traveler the sense that no matter where you go, your beliefs accompany you and you are still surrounded by faith and God's presence if you will remember Him. It exemplifies the Book of Mormon plea for us to have our hearts continually drawn out to God in prayer at all times. This way we can be in the world but not of it.

This eternally focused attitude is what makes all of the righteous so peculiar to others around us who are immersed in what they view to be the dim reality of their existence. We must, as Muhammad taught, "Be in this world as if you were a stranger."²⁰⁹ We do this both as Muslims and Mormons through living our beliefs, not just thinking about them. By our commitment to live God's laws openly within our lifestyle choices, we are proving daily that we are striving to "do the greatest good unto thy fellow beings, and wilt promote the glory of him who is your Lord." (D&C 81:4)

²⁰⁹ Ibid, p.285

Chapter Eight

Peace on Earth

Most people remember where they were on 9-11-2001 when they heard the news. I had traveled to Ras Al Khaimah, a city in the Emirates some 225 kilometers away from my home in Al Ain on that Tuesday in order to teach a distance learning class. I was in a hotel restaurant ordering dinner when the waitress asked if I had heard the terrible news. She said an American plane had hit the trade tower and it was being covered by CNN on the satellite television channel. I thought she meant the World Trade Tower in Dubai and was imagining a huge international incident taking place right there in the Emirates while being televised around the world. It wasn't until later when I saw the familiar skyline of Manhattan on the television screen that I realized it was something of even more import. I will always remember watching that moment, from half way around the world, when the towers fell and all our lives changed.

The tragedy of 9-11 has left a lasting impact on all of us that the future has yet to unfold in totality. Within the month that followed the incident, people were quickly polarized into the camps of sorrow and revenge. While many were grieving for the loved ones, friends and acquaintances who were directly affected by the attacks, most of America was itching for an immediate and absolute response through retaliation. We were the innocent victims, the sufferers, and we had justice on our side.

Some people chose to strike out at any who gave the appearance of belonging to the race or being affiliated with the general religious beliefs of the terrorists, whether proven or not. Hate crimes against other innocent Americans broke out all over the US as Muslims, Arabs, and even other non-related religious and ethnic groups were targeted for abusive crimes in an effort by some to release their desires for vengeance closer to home.

Mosques were vandalized and threats on life became common among these groups of people who themselves were suffering along with everyone else in the wake of the tragedy. Their grief became mixed with fear for their own safety and many chose not to go outside their homes or to mingle with other people due to the real possibility of attack on their families or communities. World governmental and church leaders tried to speak out in support of these innocent victims of prejudice, but this did not stop the ignorant and unjust from actuating further crimes of abuse and spiteful retaliation based solely on ethnic background or religious affiliation.

The First Presidency of the LDS Church issued the following statement on 21 September, 2001: "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints has enjoyed a long and mutually respectful relationship with many of the leaders and followers of Islam. We recognize that those responsible for the reprehensible actions of September 11 in no way represent the views of millions of Muslims throughout the world. We are grieved to hear of instances where innocent members of this and other faiths have been singled out for acts of retribution. We condemn such

acts as wrong and immoral. The church urges its members and people everywhere to extend kindness and love to all sons and daughters of God.”²¹⁰

Unfortunately, the attitude of racial and religious retribution continued for several months as the media reported many new instances. The very sad thing that these new antagonists did not realize was that their behavior and thinking was exactly the same as the terrorists who caused the original tragedy. By retaliating on innocent citizens who had nothing to do with the attack, they were becoming terrorists themselves in an unrighteous cycle of vengeance- the cycle which has no beginning and no end as each act is viewed as justifiable retaliation for a perceived wrong from before. Stark justice without the redeeming qualities of mercy, forgiveness, humility or charity, dispenses a need for further responses of the same eye for an eye mentality. Compounded by generational hatred passed from parents to children, the resulting circle spirals ever forward through time causing only further grief, sorrow, death and feelings of revenge. We see this evident in many countries in our world today where there is strife and war, particularly those of the Middle East.

This is not what our Heavenly Father desires for His children while on their earthly sojourn. He did not allow for the creation of diversity of religions and races so that His children would use these differences as justification to kill each other. Almost every religion or creed on this earth teaches that we all should be at peace with one another. Treating our neighbor as ourselves is a fundamental requirement for anyone with a moral conscience. It necessitates a certain degree of open-mindedness, tolerance and understanding. We are not asked to accept everyone else’s opinions and beliefs as our own as we all have the gift of agency to choose what we will think. However, we are required to allow others the same choice without threat of force or compulsion.

LDS Scriptures teach this doctrine under the auspices of agency, or freedom of choice. It is a recurring theme that almost every prophet in the Book of Mormon addresses. For example, Alma admonished his son Corianton that, “...whosoever will come may come and partake of the waters of life freely; and whosoever will not come the same is not compelled to come; but in the last day it shall be restored unto him according to his deeds.” (BM Alma 42:27) Jacob, the brother of Nephi also spoke about this to his brethren. “...and remember that ye are free to act for yourselves- to choose the way of everlasting death or the way of eternal life.” (BM 2 Nephi 10:23) Some generations later, Samuel the Lamanite instructed, “And now remember, remember, my brethren, that whosoever perisheth, perisheth unto himself; and whosoever doeth iniquity, doeth it unto himself; for behold, ye are free; ye are permitted to act for yourselves...” (BM Helaman 14:30)

Freedom to choose and practice individual religion is a gift bestowed by God to all of His children. In the Doctrine and Covenants, section 134, it states “that religion is instituted of God; and that all men are amenable to Him, and to Him only, for the exercise of it...” (D&C 134:4) It is a common and unfortunate misconception that Islam teaches the use of force, violence or aggressive acts to gain converts or annihilate non-Muslims who do not conform to their ideology. This fallacy is primarily due to what Islamic extremists have openly promoted as part

²¹⁰ See <http://www.ldschurchnewsarchive.com/articles/40610/LDS-leaders-reach-out---to-Muslims.html>

of their political agenda, but mainstream Islam does not condone force or intolerance when dealing with opposing religious points of view.

To the contrary, the Quran contains many injunctions for maintaining an attitude of acceptance and non-confrontation when associating with people of other faiths. The Quran states that had God chosen, He could have made just one religion for all of us, but he did not.²¹¹ The same chapter explains that through unrighteousness, men divided religions and teachings, but it does not state that people should give up their beliefs and be forced to join Islam. Rather it tells the Muslim to not be contentious in conversations with those of other faiths. "...but say: I believe in all the scriptures that Allah has revealed. I am commanded to exercise justice among you. Allah is our Lord and your Lord. We have our own works and you have yours; let there be no argument between us. Allah will bring us together, for to Him we shall return." (Surah 42:15) Notice that exercising justice here is linked with acceptance and no disputation of differing beliefs.

Additionally, the Quran states that "there shall be no compulsion in religion." (Surah 2:256) All men have their agency to choose their beliefs. "Had your Lord pleased, all the people of the earth would have believed in Him. Would you then force faith upon men?" (Surah 10:99) "You shall not use force with them. Admonish with this Quran whoever fears My warning." (Surah 50:45) "He that seeks guidance shall be guided to his own advantage, but he that errs shall err at his own peril. No soul shall bear another's burden." (Surah 17:15)

A further revelation is directed toward dealing specifically with Christians, or People of the Book, as referred to throughout the Quran. "And dispute ye not with the People of the Book, except it be in the best way, unless it be with those of them who do wrong but say, 'We believe in the Revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you; Our God and your God is One; and it is to Him we submit.'"²¹² The commentary on this passage of scripture from the King Fahed Quran translation states, "That is, the religion of all true and sincere men of Faith is, or should be, one; and that is the ideal of Islam."²¹³

Another passage in the Quran speaks about the other religions at that time and the disputes between them all. "Believers, Jews, Christians, and Sabaeans - whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day and does what is righteous shall be rewarded by their Lord; they have nothing to fear or to regret... The Jews say the Christians are misguided, and the Christians say it is the Jews who are misguided. Yet they both read the scriptures. And the pagans say the same of both. Allah will judge their disputes on the Day of Resurrection." (Surah 2:62, 113)

Contention about differing religious beliefs or practices has always been a point of reproof in the scriptures. Any time the gospel has been commanded to be preached, it is always with the enjoinder to do so with meekness and persuasion, long suffering and patience,

²¹¹ Surah 42:8

²¹² *Quran*, King Fahed Translation, Surah 29:46

²¹³ *Ibid*, p.1165

brotherly kindness, charity and humility.²¹⁴ Contention in any form is of the adversary and will not bring about any result except enmity and alienation.

In visiting the Nephites as recorded in the Book of Mormon, the Savior told them, "...and there shall be no disputations among you, as there have hitherto been; neither shall there be disputations among you concerning the points of my doctrine, as there have hitherto been. For verily, verily I say unto you, he that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil who is the father of contention, and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another. Behold, this is not my doctrine, to stir up the hearts of men with anger, one against another; but this is my doctrine, that such things should be done away." (BM 3 Nephi 11: 28-30)

Christ will judge between any discrepancy of belief and according to the works of men at the Day of Judgement. LDS scriptures teach that it is our responsibility is to be tolerant and forgiving of any with whom we have had disagreements or feel have wronged us while in this life. The Lord has said that He will forgive whom He will forgive, but it is required of us to forgive all men. We must say in our hearts to let God ultimately judge between us.²¹⁵ Additionally, Mormons are commanded to increase our understanding of other cultures, to learn of other nations and countries, histories and languages and the learning that is found in all good books.²¹⁶ Muslims are also given this charge to emulate the good works found in all sects and to appreciate the righteous goals which each has. "Those to whom the scriptures were given know this to be the truth from their Lord. Allah is watching over all their actions. But even if you gave them every proof they would not accept your *qiblah* (direction of prayer), nor would you accept theirs; nor would any of their sects accept the *qiblah* of the other... Each one has a goal towards which he turns. But wherever you be emulate one another in good works. Allah will bring you all before Him." (Surah 2: 144,145, 148)

The good works of every faith will be accorded as righteousness before God, whether a Muslim, Mormon or any sect. "Your religion is but one religion, and I am Your only Lord. Therefore serve Me. Men have divided themselves into schisms, but to Us they shall all return. He that does good works in the fulness of his faith, his endeavors shall not be lost: We record them all." (Surah 21:92-94)

Regarding the good works done by the righteous of any faith, there are also passages in the Quran that teach that some Christians are upright in the practice of their beliefs. "Yet they are not all alike. There are among the People of the Book some upright men who all night long recite the revelations of Allah and worship Him; who believe in Allah and the Last Day; who enjoin justice and forbid evil and vie with each other in good works. These are righteous men: whatever good they do, its reward shall not be denied them. Allah knows the righteous...Some there are among the People of the Book who truly believe in Allah, and in what has been revealed to you and to them. They humble themselves before Him and do not sell His revelations for a trifling price. These shall be rewarded by their Lord. Swift is Allah's reckoning." (Surah 3: 113-115, 199)

²¹⁴ D&C 4:5, 121:41

²¹⁵ D&C 64:10, 11

²¹⁶ D&C 88:78-80, 93:53, 90:15

Islam also accepts the teaching contained in the original gospel and the Torah as true revelations from God. If the Christians will follow those teachings, they will be worthy of paradise. “If the People of the Book accept the true faith and keep from evil, We will pardon them from their sins and admit them to the gardens of delight. If they observe the Torah and the Gospel, and what is revealed to them from Allah, they shall be given abundance from above and from beneath. There is from among them a party on the right course.” (Surah 5: 65,66, King Fahed Translation 5:66)

All of our Heavenly Father’s children who are righteous in this life will be able to abide in at least a terrestrial glory.²¹⁷ Mormons believe that when Christ returns to the earth to reign during the millennium, there will be many honest and good people from many faiths living on the earth together and He will unite us all as the head of our government and religion. The earth will finally be a place of peace for all cultures, religions and races. It will be a true paradise for those who have been faithful in their testimonies of truth, regardless of the prophet, time, language, or place through which that truth was revealed.

Regarding the final paradise where all the righteous will dwell together, the Quran describes it as a place where this voice of peace will be present.²¹⁸ Additionally, the gospel of Peace among all men is mentioned in the Quran in several places. It is linked to charity and kindness and even a solution to fighting ones enemies rather than resorting to war. “There is no virtue in much of their counsels: only in his who enjoins charity, kindness and peace among men. He that does this to please Allah shall be richly rewarded.” (Surah 4:114) “If they incline to peace, make peace with them, and put your trust in Allah. He hears and knows all.” (Surah 8:61)

Both the words “Muslim” and “Islam” share the same root in Arabic that translates literally to mean peace. Even the greeting of Muslims to each other and to others whom they meet is one of peace. The words most commonly used, *salaam aleykum*, translate into English as peace upon you.

Unfortunately, our world is not a paradise of peace yet. Too many of us are power hungry and exercise unrighteous dominion upon each other.²¹⁹ Some use their religion as a rationale for acts of aggression based on instances detailed in the scriptures concerning defense of the faith. As with all scriptures given through various prophets to different peoples, God’s laws and words can be twisted and interpreted by individuals seeking justification for all kinds of unrighteous acts. But it is another great misconception about Islam to think that all Muslims believe in violent acts on innocent people as a part of defending their faith.

Regarding the principle of defense and fighting for the cause of truth, many times in the Bible and Book of Mormon, God has commanded specific groups of armies and prophets to wipe out the unrighteous through wars, executions and even assassinations.²²⁰ The waging of Holy War is not new or confined just to Islam. Even in Joseph Smith’s time, the saints were taught to defend the faith at the price of their lives. If they died in the cause, they were promised an eternal

²¹⁷ D&C 76

²¹⁸ Surah 19: 60-63

²¹⁹ D&C 121

²²⁰ KJV 1 Kings 18:40, BM 1 Nephi 4:10-18

reward for their sacrifices. “And whoso layeth down his life in my cause, for my name’s sake, shall find it again, even life eternal. Therefore, be not afraid of your enemies, for I have decreed in my heart, saith the Lord, that I will prove you in all things, whether you will abide my covenant, even unto death, that you may be found worthy.” (D&C 98: 13,14)²²¹ Those who die for God do so with a sweet death. “And it shall come to pass that those that die in me shall not taste of death, for it shall be sweet unto them.” (D&C 42: 46) That is not to say that any who die for a perceived religious cause will be blessed, but only those whom God has specifically commanded through His prophets. But it is easy to see how passages like these, when taken out of context, can act as the basis for misguided interpretations that lead to aggressive acts and suicide martyrdoms from the standpoint of all the overzealous extremists of any faith.

The Quran contains numerous revelations on fighting for the cause of God, defending righteousness and that he who loses his life in such an exploit will be entitled to Paradise for his sacrifice. Many of these references are directed toward specific battles that were happening at the time of the revelations to Muhammad and his followers. Like the early saints of our church who faced persecution and expulsion, the early Muslims were fighting for their lives in defense of their beliefs and needed the words of comfort from God to aid them in their battles. But even if taken outside the historical context, the principles of righteous defense and self-sacrifice are clearly distinguishable from aggressive unwanton acts of terrorism on innocent people.

Those who do die through battle while fighting for the cause of Allah will be admitted into Paradise. “...As for those who are slain in the cause of Allah, He will not allow their works to perish. He will vouchsafe them guidance and ennoble their state; He will admit them to the Paradise He has made known to them.” (Surah 47:4-6) This passage comes immediately following a description of how to kill one’s enemy on the battlefield. The revelation refers to this kind of killing as a test for both sides as God could punish the unrighteous if He chose. “Had Allah willed, He could Himself have punished them; but He has ordained it thus that He might test you, the one by the other.” (Surah 47:4)

Of course, Islam teaches the basic commandment of thou shalt not kill.²²² The taking of life is never taught as an acceptable solution for religious differences and even if the person believes that their actions are right, it will not excuse them in the final judgement. “Say: ‘Shall we tell you who will lose most through their labours? Those whose endeavours in this world are misguided and who yet think that what they do is right... On the Day of Resurrection We shall not honour them. Hell is their reward...’” (Surah 18:103-106, compare BM 2 Nephi 15: 20-23)

The Quran states that all three major religions have similar revelations given about fighting for the cause of God. “Allah has purchased of the faithful their lives and worldly goods and in return has promised them the Garden. They will fight for His cause, slay and be slain. Such is the true pledge which He has made them in the Torah, the Gospel and the Quran.” (Surah 9: 111) This cause is defined further in other revelations as defense only- not aggression. “Fight for the sake of Allah those that fight against you, but do not attack them first. Allah does not love the aggressors.” (Surah 2: 190) This passage goes on to explain in very strict detail how and

²²¹ See also D&C 103:27,28

²²² Surah 4:29,30

where life may be taken while allowing for forgiveness and repentance by the enemy at any time.²²³

In the LDS Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord also gives very specific laws regarding how and when to fight and includes a forgiveness clause as well. “And again, this is the law that I gave unto my ancients, that they should not go out unto battle against any nation, kindred, tongue or people, save I, the Lord, commanded them. And if any nation, kindred, tongue, or people should proclaim war against them, they should first lift a standard of peace unto that people, nation, or tongue; And if that people did not accept the offering of peace, neither the second nor the third time, they should bring these testimonies before the Lord. Then, I, the Lord, would give unto them a commandment, and justify them in going out unto battle against that nation, tongue, or people. And I, the Lord, would fight their battles, and their children’s battles and their children’s children’s, until they had avenged themselves on all their enemies, to the third and fourth generation. Behold, this is an ensample unto all people, saith the Lord your God, for justification before me. And again, verily I say unto you, if after thine enemy has come upon thee the first time, he repent and come unto thee praying thy forgiveness, thou shalt forgive him, and shalt hold it no more as a testimony against thy enemy.” (D&C 98:33-39)

Concerning the use of offense versus defense in fighting for a just cause, the Book of Mormon has many examples that contain very specific counsel. As Helaman recorded about the wars of the Nephites in his time in 73 B.C., “Now the Nephites were taught to defend themselves against their enemies, even to the shedding of blood if it were necessary; yea, and they were also taught never to give an offense, yea, and never to raise the sword except it were to preserve their lives.” (BM Alma 48:14).

In dealing with their own terrorists of the times, the Gadianton robbers, who worked in secret doing all manner of vile acts, the Nephites were again commanded not to take the offense in destroying them, but to take a defensive posture. They were told if they took the initiative to seek the robbers out and fight them, they would be delivered into the robbers’ hands instead. Rather, they were commanded to wait until attacked so that God could deliver the robbers into their hands.²²⁴ Of course, the best solution for ultimately managing the robbers came through converting them rather than destroying them. “And it came to pass that the Lamanites did hunt the band of robbers of Gadianton; and they did preach the word of God among the more wicked part of them, insomuch that this band of robbers was utterly destroyed from among the Lamanites.” (BM Helaman 6: 37)

Perhaps one of the reasons that Heavenly Father allows such forces to combine against the righteous is to see exactly how His people will handle themselves. Fighting the wicked in battle is a straightforward means of rooting out evil. Preaching the gospel to them would be a much greater test of endurance, tolerance and charity. The laws of justice, retaliation, vengeance, forgiveness, mercy and reconciliation are continually used throughout the scriptures as various means in handling conflicts between opposing forces.

²²³ Surah 2: 191-193

²²⁴ Surah 2: 191-193

What seems to be important is the attitude that is taken while fighting for the just cause. Vengeance is never acceptable as a means of executing justice, however, there is a law of retaliation as mentioned in the Old Testament that is part of the lower Law of Moses. This closely follows the same law as given in the Book of Mormon and in the Quran. “And if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, stripe for stripe.” (KJV Exodus 21: 23-25) “And he that killeth any man shall surely be put to death...And if a man cause a blemish in his neighbor; as he hath done, so shall it be done to him.” (KJV Leviticus 24: 17, 19)

The Book of Mormon states that the murderer shall give up his own life²²⁵ while the Quran speaks of retaliation as a means of safeguarding life. If the punishment for taking a life is to give your own, it will act as a deterrent for the act in the first place. “Believers, retaliation is decreed for you in bloodshed: a free man for a free man, a slave for a slave, and a female for a female. ...Men of understanding! In retaliation you have a safe-guard for your lives; perchance you will guard yourselves against evil.” (Surah 2: 178, 179)

The law of retaliation is not to be carried out solely to satisfy any lingering feelings of revenge. Vengeance is the sole prerogative of God and is carried out by Him through His judgment. “Behold what the scripture says- man shall not smite, neither shall he judge; for judgment is mine, saith the Lord, and vengeance is mine also, and I will repay.” (BM Mormon 8: 20) If men seek revenge in order to satisfy their feelings of hatred, it might result in the sword of justice cutting off their own heads as well. The Quran talks about the consequence of carrying vengeance too far. “You shall not kill any man whom Allah has forbidden you to kill, except for a just cause. If a man is slain unjustly, his heir is entitled to satisfaction. But let him not carry his vengeance too far, for his victim will in turn be assisted and avenged.” (Surah 17:33)

Of course, Christ modified these lower laws of just retaliation when he added to them the higher laws of mercy. “Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn unto him the other also.” (KJV Matt 5: 38,39) The attitude of Christian mercy teaches forgiveness when justice would demand repayment in kind otherwise.

It is another prevalent misconception that Islam teaches only the strict lower laws without mercy. While many Middle Eastern countries today base their forms of capital punishment and limb mutilation on the Quranic doctrines of strict retaliation, there are also passages that teach a higher law of forgiveness and forbearance. “In the Torah We decreed for them a life for a life, an eye for an eye, a nose for a nose, an ear for an ear, a tooth for a tooth, and a wound for a wound. But if a man charitably forbears from retaliation, his remission shall atone for him.” (Surah 5:45) “Let evil be rewarded with like evil. But he that forgives and seeks reconciliation shall be rewarded by Allah... To endure with fortitude and to forgive is a duty incumbent on all.” (Surah 42: 40, 43)

There is even the doctrine of loving your enemy and doing good to them that hate you while returning good for evil against you. “Good and evil deeds are not alike. Requite evil with good, and he who is your enemy will become your dearest friend. But none will attain this save

²²⁵ BM 2 Ne 9: 35, BM Alma 34:12

those who endure with fortitude and are greatly favoured by Allah.” (Surah 41:34, 35) This follows closely on the heels of the scripture in Romans which advises to “Recompense to no man evil for evil... If it be possible, as much as lieth with you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.” (KJV Rom 12: 17-21)

The teachings of Islam, along with those of every major religion, promote the Gospel of Peace. We all worship the same God of heaven, the Father of us all. And He has given us His words to guide us back to Him, whether we believe in the Bible, Book of Mormon, Torah or Quran, Jesus as the Son of God, or Muhammad or Joseph Smith as a prophet. If we will live according to the higher laws of forgiveness, mercy, love and tolerance, we will be able to bridge these cultural and doctrinal differences and live in peace with one another in our chaotic world.

We must seek to understand and be compassionate with each other. We must be willing to be open-minded toward differing ethnic, theological and cultural backgrounds that may be very foreign to our own. We should look for the positive aspects of each other’s beliefs that help support our own faith rather than seek to deride or destroy another’s value system. We must put aside stale misconceptions based on the exceptions of the few and instead open our hearts and minds to the righteous truths shared by the many.

We must “sue for peace, not only to the people who have smitten you, but also to all people; And lift up the ensign of peace, and make a proclamation of peace unto the ends of the earth.” (D&C 105: 38,39) “O Mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (Not that ye may despise each other). Indeed, the most noble among you is the most God-fearing” (King Fahed Translation, Surah 49: 13)

As Elder Russell M. Nelson stated, “Because of the long history of hostility upon the earth, many feel that peace is beyond hope. I disagree. Peace is possible. We can learn to love our fellow human beings throughout the world. Whether they be Jewish, Islamic, or fellow Christians, whether Hindu Buddhist, or other, we can live together with mutual admiration and respect, without forsaking our religious convictions. Things we have in common are greater than our differences. Peace is a prime priority that pleads for our pursuit.”²²⁶

May we all be united as brothers and sisters under the one God who created us all and seek to walk in His paths.

²²⁶ Nelson, Russell, M. “Blessed are the Peacemakers”, *Ensign*, November 2002, See <http://www.lds.org/conference/talk/display/0,5232,23-1-315-13,00.html>