

Purity of Faith (Al Ikhlas)

In The Shade Of The Qur'an by Syed Qutb

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful!

Say: **He is Allah, the one and only God
the Eternal, the Absolute
He begot none, nor was He begotten
and there is none comparable to Him**

This short surah is "equivalent to one third of the Qur'an". al Bukhari, the leading traditionist, was told about someone who had heard a man reciting, "Say: He is Allah ..." repeatedly and had gone to the Prophet the following morning and told him disapprovingly about what he had heard. The Prophet commented, "I swear by Him in Whose hand is my soul that it (the surah) is equivalent to one third of the Qur'an."

And, indeed, there is nothing surprising in that. For the unity of Allah which the Messenger was ordered to declare to the whole world is a belief to be ingrained in our beings, an explanation of human existence and a way of life in itself. From this standpoint, the surah can be said to have embraced in the clearest terms the principal and most fundamental ideas of the great truth of Islam.

The Arabic term "Ahad" used here to refer to the unity of Allah is much more precise than the much more frequently used term "Wahid" which means "one". "Ahad" has the added connotations of absolute and continuous unity and the absence of equals.

The unity of Allah is such that there is no reality and no true and permanent existence except His. Moreover, every other being acquires what ever power it possessed from the effective power of Allah which rules over this world. Nothing else whatsoever plans anything for the world nor decides, for that matter, anything in it.

This is the belief that should be entrenched in us. It is a full explanation of human existence. Once this belief has become clear and that explanation has established itself in the human mind, the heart is purified of all falsities and impurities and it is released from all ties except those of the one and unique Being who alone possesses the reality of being and who is the only effective power in this world.

The human heart is then released from bondage to anything in this world, if not from attributing existence to anything else altogether. Indeed, why should men's hearts aspire to something that has no permanent reality nor has any independent power to function in this world,
since the real being is that of the Divine Being and the truly effective power is the Divine Will?

When the human heart releases itself from believing in anything but the one Truth, the Truth of Allah, and upholds this everlasting Truth, it liberates itself from all shackles, false ideas, evil desires, fear of earthly powers and from the confusions that mislead in this life.

For when the human heart finds Allah, it benefits and loses nothing. So why should it desire anything but the pleasure of Allah? And why should it fear anything, since there is no absolutely effective power but that of Allah?

When a conception that sees nothing in the world but the reality of Allah establishes itself in the human mind and heart, it is accompanied by the vision of this genuine, permanent reality in every other being that has sprung from it. This is the stage at which the heart feels the hand of Allah in everything and beyond which it feels nothing but Allah in the whole universe. There would be no other reality to be felt.

It is also accompanied by the attribution of every event and every movement in this life and in this universe to the first and only cause, that is, Allah, that brings other causes about and influences their effectiveness. The Qur'an takes great care to establish this truth in the Muslims' concept of faith. It has always put aside apparent causes and associated events directly with the will of Allah. It says,

When you threw (a handful of dust) it was not your act, but Allah's. (8:17)

There is no triumph except that given by Allah, (8:10, 3:126)

You have no will except as Allah wills. (76:30)

By disregarding all apparent causes and connecting matters directly with the will of Allah, a feeling of relief gently penetrates the human heart so that it knows the only Saviour from whom it can ask whatever it wishes and by whom it is rescued from all it fears. It becomes unimpressed by the apparent influences, reasons and causes that bear no reality or true existence in themselves.

These are the steps of the way some mystics tried to climb, but they deviated too far from it. For Islam wants people to follow this route struggling with the realities of life with all its varied conditions and qualities, and to lead a human life in which they exercise their role of vicegerency of Allah on earth with all their resources and the obligations laid upon them.

From this concept of the unity of Allah, stems a perfect path of life based on the explanation of human existence and whatever outlooks, feelings, and traits it stimulates. Such a path is based on the worship of Allah alone, who is the only real and permanent being, and whose will is the only effective power in the world. It is the path that makes its followers turn towards Allah alone and seek refuge in Him in time of need and fear, happiness and discomfort, luxury and hardship. For what is the use of turning towards a non-existent or a powerless being?

This path has as its benefactor Allah alone. From Him we receive our beliefs, outlook, values, criteria, legislation's, institutions, systems, ethics and traditions. Such qualities must be obtained from the One and Permanent Being and the One Truth.

It is a path for performing activities, doing work and making sacrifices absolutely and only for Allah, and for wishing to be nearer the truth. This path also strengthens the links of love, brotherhood, mutual sympathy and responsiveness between all beings and Individual hearts. For when we speak of the liberation from complete submission to these feelings we by no means suggest that people should despise or hate them or escape from practising them. They arise from the creative hand of Allah and they all owe their existence to Him. They are a gift to us from the Beloved and, therefore, they deserve our love.

It is a sublime and lofty path by whose standards this earth is so small, life is so short. its enjoyments and luxuries are worthless; and the breaking away from the various hindrances and falsifications is a supreme wish and a great aim for humanity. But in Islam, however, this release does not mean seclusion and neglect, nor does it

mean contempt for or escape from life, but it simply means a continuous and sincere endeavor and an everlasting struggle to lead humanity to the submission of everything in human life to Allah alone. Consequently, as was stated earlier, it is the fulfillment of man's role as Allah's vicegerent on earth with all its obligations.

The liberation of the human soul by priesthood and extreme spiritualism is available and easy to achieve but Islam does not approve of it, because, according to it, man's vicegerency on earth and the leadership of mankind are a part of its Divine path of liberation. This is a harder way that guarantees and secures the humanity of man and achieves the victory of the Divine will within his being .

This is the real liberation, the flight of the human soul unto its Divine source and the achievement of its sublime truthfulness within the scope its wise Creator has chosen for it.

For the sake of all this, the first call to Islam was devoted to the establishment of the reality of the unity of Allah in the hearts and minds of men. For in this form it is a belief by the human soul, heart and mind, a full explanation of human existence, a way of life and not merely a spoken word or an inert belief. It is life in its entirety and religion in its totality and whatever faults follow after it are no more than the natural fruits of its establishment in the hearts and minds Of mankind.

All the deviations that afflicted the followers of earlier Divine religions, and which corrupted their beliefs, ideas and life arose, in the first place, from the deterioration of the concept of the absolute unity of God in their minds. But what distinguishes this concept in the Islamic faith, is its deep rootedness in the entire human life and the construction of the latter on its basis and its being considered as a foundation for the realistic and practical system of human life with its effects clearly appearing in legislation as well as in belief.

"He is Allah, the one and only God," means that He is "the Eternal and the Absolute," and that, "He begot none nor was He begotten," and that "there is none comparable to Him." But the Qur'an states it all in detail for more emphasis and clarification.

"The Eternal, the Absolute" means the supplicated Lord without whose permission nothing is decided. Allah is the One Lord. He is One in His Divinity and all the other beings are but His servants. To Him and Him alone are addressed all supplications. He and only He decides everything independently. No one decides with Him. And since He is the one and only God this quality is already His.

"He begot none, nor was He begotten," means that the reality of Allah is deep-rooted, permanent and everlasting. No changeable circumstances ever affect it. Its quality is absolute perfection at all times. Birth is descent and multiplication and implies a developed being after incompleteness or nothingness. It requires espousal which is based on similarity of being and structure. All this is utterly impossible in the case of Allah. So the quality of "One" includes the renouncement of a father and a son.

"There is none comparable to Him" means that no one resembles Him in anything or is equivalent to Him in any respect, either in the reality of being, or in the fact that He is the only effective power, or in any of His qualities or attribute. This is implied in the statement of his being "One" made in the first verse, but it is repeated thus to confirm and elaborate on that fact. It is a renunciation of the two-god belief which implies that Allah is the God of Good while Evil has its god who, as the belief goes -

is in opposition to Allah, spoils His good deeds and propagates evil on earth. The most well-known two-god belief was that of the Persians, who believed in a god of light and a god of darkness. This belief was known to the people in the south of the Arabian Peninsula, where the Persians once had a state and exercised sovereignty.

This surah is a fir establishment and a confirmation of the Islamic belief in the unity of Allah as was surah 109, "The Disbelievers", a denunciation of any similarity or meeting point between the unity of Allah and anthropomorphic belief. Each surah deals with the unity of Allah from a different angle. The Prophet(PBUH) used to start off his day reciting these two surahs in his morning prayer (fajr).

This, surely, was significant.

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by Syed Qutb