

Setting Goals for Spiritual Change and Achieving Them

***"Mankind was one single nation, and Allah sent Messengers with glad tidings and warnings; and with them He sent the Book in truth, to judge between people in matters wherein they differed; but the People of the Book after the clear Signs came to them, did not differ among themselves, except through selfish contumacy. Allah by His Grace guided the Believers to the Truth, concerning that wherein they differed. For Allah guides whom He will to a path that is straight".
(The Qur'an, Al Baqara 2:213).***

Once we have established the spiritual profile, we are ready to set a goal and form a strategy for attaining it. Each person will have to decide for him or herself what the proper goal is. It is perhaps not enough to decide that the goal is Islam. Islam ought to be clearly defined. I shall offer one such brief description here, but it is possible to take another from someone with better qualifications for defining Islam. I define Islam as follows: Islam is that body of belief and practice which logically follows the act of reason which takes place upon hearing the proclamation that there is no god but God. There are several implications of this definition.

First of all, it emphasizes that Islam is fundamentally a reasoned response, rather than an emotional one. Secondly, it presumes that all of Islam can be reasonably deduced from one basic proclamation: There is no god but God. Thirdly, seeing the matter from the negative view, any other approach than a logical and reasonable one is by definition not Islamic, and any source of belief or practice other than the proclamation that there is no god but God is also by definition not Islamic. In sum, the final answer for any question of why this or that belief or practice should be believed or practiced is the unicity of God. Any other reason for believing or practicing such things is non-Islamic.

These premises will exclude a good many missionary practices found among Christians and Muslims. This matter should be understood clearly, because such practices have been widely used without thinking about their foundations. Let us take two examples, a Christian one and a so-called Muslim one.

A feature of Christian missionary work is to invite people to meetings where nearly all of the activities appeal to the emotions. There is emotional, indeed, sensual music to begin with. This creates a frame of mind open to accepting matters for their emotional appeal rather than their cognitive content. Then there are sermons which appeal to emotions. In older, traditional approaches there is an emotional appeal to guilt, a feeling of having sinned. In modern approaches there is always an appeal to love, often with the additional note that God loves us even though we do not deserve it.

Finally, there is the emotional appeal that Jesus suffered a cruel death on the cross for me and you personally, because he loved us so much. This act is supposed to make everything right, and to accept this is faith. There is rarely a reasoned explanation of why such a death is supposed to be necessary or how such a death can set things right, but even when there is such an explanation, the reasons put forth are nearly always allegorical rather than logical. Muslims who become Christians are always caught by emotions.

The second example is that of a modern Muslim approach. It is to make use of science in a special way. In brief, passages from the Bible are taken to show that the Bible is inconsistent with scientific fact, while other passages from the Qur'an are taken to show that the Qur'an expresses scientific truths that were unknown at the time of its writing. The conclusion to be drawn is that the Qur'an is superior to the Bible, and therefore Islam is superior to Christianity and shows evidence of divine origin. It must therefore be accepted. What is good about this approach is that it uses reason. What is bad about it is that the reasoning is false.

First of all, Christians do the same thing to show that the Bible is true and the Qur'an is false. Secondly, the fact that scientific truths are expressed in the Qur'an, even though they were unknown at the time of writing, only implies supernatural intervention. The evangelical Christian will take this as evidence that the Qur'an was inspired by Satan (astaghfiru Allah). Thirdly, the appeal assumes that scientific truth is a criterion for judging the validity of the Qur'an. This is the area of false reasoning. First of all, scientific truth is not absolute, but is constantly under review. What is true today is shown tomorrow to be false. The result of this type of Qur'anic interpretation will inevitably be the need to revise.

This whole process has been taken over from a Western point of view, and is the very reason why Christianity got into trouble with science in the first place. By accepting the Copernican theory of the universe to be reflected in the Bible, the Church was forced to deny scientific evidence for a later revision. This caused a conflict between religion and science which has not been completely healed to the present day. Islam has generally been associated with an enlightened, scientific approach, and thus has not naturally fallen into this trap. But well-meaning people who wish to appear to young people who have been trained in universities teaching Western-developed science have engaged in this dangerous exercise.

The result may be a temporary attraction to Islam, but the results in the long run can only do to Islam what was done to the detriment of Christianity in the Middle Ages. Scientific evidence is not a criterion

for judging the validity of the Qur'an. There can be no firm basis for Islamic faith but the one already given: there is no god but God. Any other basis, even a seemingly thoroughly scientific one, is false to Islam.

It is my opinion that the basic goal must be to establish tawheed, the unicity of God, on the basis of reason. Notice that the proclamation does not state that God exists. It states that there is no other god but God. The existence of God is an unending philosophical problem. The shahadat by-passes this difficulty. It presents a binary equation, a negative and a positive, a working hypothesis. Rather than asking whether God exists, we begin by stating All and Nothingness. The logical implication is what we can call reality as an exclusive unicity. This is philosophically much easier to maintain than the existence of God.

The next step in logic is to note that an exclusive, unified reality cannot be defined in parts. First of all, parts imply limitations or borders. But the reality of our working hypothesis is limited only by Nothingness. Secondly, parts imply internal limitations, which again is inconsistent with a unicity. There are no parts.

The next implication of this exclusive unicity is sovereignty. Considering that no parts can be defined, this sovereignty must be impartial rather than partial. Therefore, it is perfectly just, rather than arbitrary. Notice how an emotional response to the concept of sovereignty will lead us to conclude arbitrariness as evidence of sovereignty itself. As we relate emotionally to the events around us, we will be drawn to classify them as pleasurable or painful, and from this draw the inference that some events are good and others bad. Beginning with the idea that God is sovereign, we will conclude that since He is sovereign over both good and bad, He is therefore arbitrary. We shall see this as a crowning evidence of sovereignty, and being blinded by our emotions, fail to realize that the argument is inconsistent with the fact that there are no parts and there is therefore no impartiality.

Having established that unicity inevitably implies justice, we are faced with the question of whether or not human beings can know justice. It would be not only illogical but an insanity to claim that human capacity can attain justice. No matter how much knowledge we have as humans, we can never come to the point that we are absolutely certain that we possess all knowledge relevant to a particular matter. A reasoned evaluation of human experience can come to only one conclusion: human beings are incapable of coming to a knowledge of what is right and wrong.

We are capable of coming to the conclusion of reality as a unicity and the implication of impartiality or justice, but we do not have the capacity, if only because of the possible limitations on knowledge, of determining what is right and what is wrong. Why then do we propose to know what is right and wrong, even though it is clear that this is a human impossibility? There are many reasons, all arising from our psychological, social, and physical conditions. We experience the need to know what is right and wrong and at the same time the incapacity of doing so.

There are various ways of reacting to this situation. Having despaired of a coherent understanding of reality, some come to the conclusion that there is no right nor wrong. The best possible society in that case is the society in which the greatest number of people can experience the greatest amount of pleasure at the least possible expense of pain to others. The individual process involves the egotistical approach to get all pleasure for oneself at the expense of all others, that is, to become a despot over the rest of oppressed humanity.

As many individuals strive toward that goal, they compress into a conformist, honey-comb society, forming an elite. To the extent necessary to preserve their position, they will alleviate the pain of those who are excluded from the elite. This is basically what we see around us. All of the liberal views of human rights, sharing of resources, and environmental concerns are fundamentally the products of this viewpoint, that there is no coherent reality and consequently no right nor wrong. It goes without saying that economic, political and social competitiveness are the result of the same outlook.

Taken from a logical perspective, the implication of justice in reality must come to the conclusion that human beings may, despite their inherent incapacity to determine right and wrong, still come to know right from wrong. The process of coming to know right from wrong in this view is what we call revelation. It is logically deduced in principle from justice and consequently from unicity. We find the process of revelation in two categories, which are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The first is revelation through verbally expressible means, which we call prophecy. The second is application of that verbal revelation by extra-verbal means in particular situations, which we call divine guidance. The final step of logic is that knowing through revelation what is right and wrong, human beings are accountable for what they do, whether right or wrong. We call this the day of judgment.

We noted in the last lecture that “the establishment of a spiritual profile is a dynamic process involving the individual in several types of influencing circumstances. Religious authorities, social and religious peers, and individual characteristics integrate in an individual’s experience to produce and reinforce a religious identity, a belief system, and a pattern of behavior.” This is also true of the changing or re-establishment of a spiritual profile.

Despite the logical sequence that we have just established, the true factors which come into play are other ones. They are not necessarily logical, and yet they generally play the most important roles in the lives of all of us. The particular challenge in both one’s own life and in relationship to others is how to relate the rational necessity of Islam with the sociological and psychological realities with which we live. How can we escape the unnoticed determinants and function in terms of that rational necessity?

This question is a practical one as much as a philosophical one. This is where rational thought and practical existence intersect. The answer implicit in this study at this point in that one should make a conscious decision to believe and practice only what can be seen to derive from tawheed, or the unicity of God. This answer lies as the end of a philosophical treatment of the matter and at the head of a practical one.

The facile response is that Islamic practice reinforces the experiential awareness of tawheed. As such it in practice and reality does replace the determining influences about us, both the positive ones and the negative ones. It reinforces right-mindedness by going over the positive influences, such as the verdicts of a mujtaheed or Islamic scholar, the opinions of Muslim peers, the pressures of Muslim family members, and the weight of a personal psychology already formed to conform to Islamic life. It counteracts negative influences, such as the contact with people of other faiths or non-faiths who express non-Islamic ideas and behave in non-Islamic ways.

This being true, it is possible to suggest that Islamic acts are in themselves rich tools for propagation. Contact with a non-Muslim may give the opportunity of introducing him or her into specifically Islamic acts. While forming a close relationship with such a person, it is possible to invite such a one to share in an Islamic meal (at which time the concept of halal can be introduced, the avoidance of alcoholic beverages, etc.), to share in the experience of fasting during Ramadhan, and eventually to share in the experience of prayer in prostration. Christian propagation often works through friendship, and this can be turned in favor of Islam. Christians are advised to penetrate Muslim societies in order to bring their faith to Muslims, but in so doing, they become susceptible to Islamic spirituality.

The same method can be turned on secularized people as well, or on those of other religious traditions. The primary vehicle of propagation at this point is the Islamic act itself rather than discussion and argumentation. In many cases the first difficulty to be overcome is fear of Islam, and the proximity of an Islamic act can raise the heart-rate and the galvanic skin response of a non-Muslim. Exposure to Islamic acts in contexts of no violence is the best form of da'wa or invitation to Islam. This can be enhanced by participating in neutral activities in such a way that with growing familiarity the fear of Islam will decline and the influence of the Islamic actions will grow.

If at all possible, it is better to get people to read literature than to engage in arguments. The problem is that most Islamic literature, for various reasons, does not appeal to a Western audience. Part of the reason for this is that Islam generally appeals to reason, whereas Westerners relate best to advertisement, especially advertisement which leaves them unaware of the fact that they are making decisions. But part of the reason is also failure to evaluate the spiritual type of one's audience and take this into account in writing.

Perhaps one of the best ways of reaching some people is through a challenge to read a translation of the Qur'an from beginning to end. It is my experience that those who oppose the Qur'an have never actually read it. They have only searched through portions of it, looking for specific things. An actual reading of the Qur'an from beginning to end is an impressive experience. This is not limited to the cultivated and educated. There are uneducated people who have embraced Islam after reading even poor and biased translations of the Qur'an.

In the way of literature, the Bible is a largely untapped source. Without denying the allegations of scholars that the Bible is corrupted in a number of ways, it can still be used effectively in support of

Islam. It supports Islam far better than it supports any of the various forms of Christianity, and Christians are forced to use it in support of their own faith. Muslims are in a far better position. The Bible is effective with people of all kinds. Nearly everyone believes that the Bible supports Christianity. Those who have left the practice of Christianity are often stimulated to a reawakened interest in the Bible when they realize that the Bible actually supports Islam instead. According to the Qur'an, one of the major uses of the Bible is in witness to the validity of the Qur'an. A Muslim must only take care not to give the impression that Islamic law is based on the Bible text, since no school of Islamic jurisprudence uses the Bible in that way.

Many people are more susceptible to brief articles than to books. It is therefore necessary to provide answers to their questions with these, despite the fact that many of them are deficient.

The more rational Islamic approach often causes difficulty in discussing issues with others. The normal situation is that a Muslim will bring forward a matter armed with a reason. The response will be an irrational denial or a sentence that turns on a completely different issue. The best way of dealing with this is to repeat the rational argument, and then leave the matter. One can always let the other have the last word. For some time the Christian will feel that he or she is getting the best of the argument in that way, and this will result in a situation in which he or she might be drawn into accepting rational thinking. For the most part Christians rely on repetition of a statement rather than rational argument. Constant repetition of a false statement wears down the hearer to the point that eventually he will accept it, even without supporting rational arguments. This is the major Christian means of communication. The same weapon can be turned on the Christian, and in a Muslim's mouth may be even more effective, since it has reason to reinforce it.

In dealing with non-Muslims, Christian or otherwise, one has to be aware of their use of illicit devices. Attempts at mental manipulation are almost universal. Christian music often contains subliminal messages which by-pass the conscious mental processes and influence decision-making. This is in addition to the highly charged emotionalism and even sensualism in their music. In recent years Christians have begun dealing in neuro-linguistic programming, which is a form of hypnosis by which people attempt to control others. This can be identified generally by the practice of imitating gestures of the person they are trying to control, by their repetition of phrases taken from the person's speech, and by their introduction into the conversation of irrational, unrelated topics and stories without a point.

It is good to begin a contact by showing an interest in the beliefs of the person in question. People are generally more interested in answering questions about their own beliefs than they are in hearing about yours. Of course it is not always possible to ask such questions, and many people, especially those largely disconnected from the traditional religions, consider their spiritual life to be a private matter. That possibility must always be taken into consideration. But showing at least an openness to such matters is often a good way to start, and it is actually necessary in order to make an evaluation of that person's spiritual type.

Most people in Europe have a Christian background, with the exception of certain parts of some large cities, where other traditions are better represented. But among all of these, only a small percentage practice traditional religions. All of them, however, are interested in some form of spirituality, although they may not call it by that name. Once that interest is identified, it provides a point of contact at which the Islamic message can penetrate.

At this point, we can make a summary of goals and means of achieving them. The goal is to change the spirituality of an individual toward Islam, which is defined as a system of belief and practice derived from a rational understanding of tawheed, or the unicity of God. The means of doing so is first of all to use reason in the form of literature and discussion to over-ride the negative social and religious influences to which the person may be susceptible. The second means of doing so is to make Islamic acts prominent and to get non-Muslims to be as closely as possible associated with them to the point first of losing their fear, and then through familiarity to find in them the source of an awareness of the unicity of God.

These two approaches correspond in type to the two forms of revelation, prophecy (or verbal revelation) and divine guidance (active application). What we are actually suggesting here as a form of da'wa or invitation to Islam is that the Muslim take on in a small sense the role of prophet and divine guide toward those to whom da'wa is being extended. The purpose of da'wa is to get the message of revelation across. God Himself chose for that prophecy and divine guidance. We can do no better than to apply the same principles.

Task Checklist of Goals

The following checklist should be filled out for each person. On the left side there is a list of basic Islamic beliefs and practices. There is room for additional ones at the bottom. Each practice should be evaluated for the beginning level of acceptance (1=rejects completely; 2=doubts; 3=does not consider important; 4=considers valid for some people; 5=believes but does not practice; 6=believes and practices). Work should be done for each point separately, giving the date when you began to present the matter and the date when each point was accepted. In the column of notes on progress, reevaluation can be made periodically using the scale of 1–6, to document change.

Belief or Practice	Beginning level of acceptance	Date presented	Notes on progress	Date accepted
Oneness of God				
Jesus (as) not Deity				
Son of God means simply Messiah				
Jesus (as) did not die for the sins of the world				
Spirit of God not a person of the Deity				
Justice of God				
Prophets				
Muhammad (as)				
Divine books				
Qur'an				
Angels				
Imamate in general				
The 12 Imams (as)				
The resurrection				
Day of Judgement				
Reward and punishment				
Prayer in prostration				
Fasting				
Alms in charity				
Khums				
Struggle in the way of God				
Fostering good				
Preventing evil				
Love of the righteous				
Avoidance of wicked people				
Ablutions				
Halal food				
Avoiding alcoholic drinks				
Circumcision				
Taking the <u>Shahadatayn</u>				
Muslim Identity				

Image:

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Prayer in prostration				
Fasting				
Alms in charity				
Khums				
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Fostering good				
Preventing evil				
Love of the righteous				
Avoidance of wicked people				
Ablutions				
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Avoiding alcoholic drinks				
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