



Organization for Islamic Learning
Enlightenment Through Awareness

QURAN AND RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

Summary of the lecture series given by Shaykh Arif
Abdulhussain, Critical reflections and Next Steps

MUHARRAM 2018/1440

Written by: Arsheen Devjee

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The following pages contain a summary of the main points discussed in the 2018/1440 Muharram lecture series given by Shaykh Arif Abdulhussain and hosted by the Organization of Islamic Learning (OIL) in Toronto, ON. The below summaries and explanations are presented by OIL in order to give attendees a reference to check their understandings against, elucidate misperceptions and to open up further discussion on the ideas raised. This summary has been read and approved by Shaykh Arif Abdulhussain as a correct representation of his lectures.

Metaphysical Assumptions: Abdulhussain has built the below analysis from the Sadrian existential principle of substantial motion¹, which assumes that all entities are constantly in a state of motion and are completing themselves in an evolutionary fashion. Substantial motion comprises of two properties: first a negation property that everything is trying to liberate itself, and the second, an affirmative property, that everything is going through self-realization. When applied to human communities, spiritual and moral completion at an individual and collective level is no different.

1. Essence and Form:

Religion, termed as "*din*" comprises of teachings that form the basis of an outlook and a way of life. Fundamentally, the Quran states that *din* is either the *din* of Allah, or other than the *din* of Allah. Religious teachings or the teachings of *din* comprise of two components: Essence and form.

Essence is a salient (primary/main) feature of *din*, whilst the form is a contextual feature of *din*. Within the *din* of Allah, essence comprises primarily of theological teachings such as: The understanding of the origin and the purpose for human existence, the relation of human beings to God, the role of God in human life, human virtues and moral human standards. The essence is conveyed through revelations and teachings of the prophets and saints. There is an assumption in Abdulhussain's analysis that essence is intuitively known at the core of the human condition. Therefore, the essence is shared equally within humanity at large, and in particular, by the monotheistic faiths, especially the Abrahamic faiths, who in one way or another, concur upon the notion of God-centricity and spiritual morality. The Quran terms the *din* of Allah, *islam*², which means to surrender to the will of God and the teachings ordained by God, which are presumably in line with human intuition, and designed to bring about the fullest flourishing of human virtues, which constitutes human salvation. *islam* therefore has the component of the salient essence and contextual form. The followers of *islam* are termed as *muslims* within the Quran.

Verses of the Quran relating to *islam* and *muslims* are:

- 42:13 "He has made plain to you of the *din* what He enjoined upon Nuh and that which We have revealed to you and that which We enjoined upon Ibrahim and Musa and Isa..."
- 3:84 "Say: We believe in Allah and what has been revealed to us, and what was revealed to Ibrahim and Ismail and Ishaq and Yaqub and the tribes, and what was given to Musa and Isa and to the prophets from their Lord; we do not make any distinction between any of them, and to Him do we *submit (muslim)*."
- 2:133 "Nay! Were you witnesses when death visited Yaqub, when he said to his sons: What will you serve after me? They said: We will serve your god and the god of your fathers, Ibrahim and Ismail and Ishaq, one Allah only, and to Him do we *submit (muslimun)*."

¹ Substantial Motion (Harakat Jawhariyya) is a metaphysical concept that has been discussed and elaborated by Mulla Sadra in his work known as Al Asfar.

² "islam" with a lower case "i" means submission to God. Abdulhussain uses a lower case "i" to differentiate "*islam*" meaning submission to God from "Islam" with an upper case "I" that denotes the formal religion of the followers of Prophet Muhammad. Similarly, lower case "*muslim*" denotes someone who submits to God, whereas upper case "Muslim" denotes a follower of the formal religion of Islam.



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- 3:52 “But when Isa perceived unbelief on their part, he said Who will be my helpers in Allah's way? The disciples said: We are helpers (in the way) of Allah: We believe in Allah and bear witness that we are *submitting ones (muslimun).*”
- 3:85 “And whoever desires a religion other than *submission (islam)*, it shall not be accepted from him, and in the hereafter he shall be one of the losers.
- Other verses on the universality of *islam, muslim* and *din* are 3:64, 3:67, 27:44 (*aslumtu*), 29:46, 42:13

Form fashions the essence in given contexts. Thus, it gives structure to how to surrender to God and live a godly and virtuous life. The Quran terms the body of these forms as *shariah*. *Shariah*, in the broad sense, can be used synonymously with the word *din* of Allah or in a narrower sense as the formal aspect of the *din*. *Shariah*, as the formal aspect of *din*, can be viewed in two parts: regulations (*ahkam*) relating to devotions which serve as identity markers for each religion and regulations relating to human interactions. Devotional regulations (*salah, sawm, hajj*) are different in each religion and may change to accommodate different contexts: Below are verses of the Quran that evidence the changing forms:

- 5:48 “.... To each among you have we prescribed a *Shariah* and an open way (*minhaj*). If Allah had so willed, He would have made you a single people, but (His plan is) to test you in what He hath given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues....”
- 2:148 “And every one has a direction to which he should turn, therefore hasten to (do) good works; wherever you are, Allah will bring you all together; surely Allah has power over all things.”
- 22:67 “To every nation We appointed acts of devotion which they observe, therefore they should not dispute with you about the matter and call to your Lord; most surely you are on a right way.”

Abdulhussain makes a further qualification in terms of the regulations relating to the consumables and the notions of decency, and asks for strict adherence to them in a state of immutability (cannot change) for the Muslim community. The change of form is not only witnessed through successive *shariah* being revealed by God, but also through the process of abrogation within the Quran. Despite the regulations changing in form over time, the spiritual and moral essence of each regulation is retained and refined.

An example of reformulated regulations in history is the discontinuation of the punishment of stoning to death that was present in Jewish law, but is not found in the Quran³; different forms of fasting among all religions and the change in the regulation of consumables from Judaism to Islam. Today, some areas of contention, where the understanding of the essence does not agree with the prescribed forms are Quranic regulations that permit slavery (2:221), “right hand’s possession” (4:36) and two female witnesses to one male witness (2:282). These regulations were all acceptable in the 7th century Arabia of Prophet Muhammad (in fact, the above quoted verses are improving existent practices); however, today we live in a radically different context and those regulations are reprehensible.⁴

³ The Quran does not prescribe any lethal punishments. Accounts of the prophet stoning to death are weak and poorly reported.

⁴ For example, according to the Quran, two female witnesses (2:282) are equal to one male witness. The essence of this law concerns accurate testimony (“...so that is one of the two errs, the second of the two may remind the other...”). In seventh century Arabia, women were not educated and did not participate much in the public sphere as compared to men (concerning financial transactions and contracts), therefore making their testimony weigh half that of a man. Today, many barriers to female education and earning potential have been lifted, and women, in most of the world (except a few remote places), are as educated and informed as men, thereby nullifying the need for two female witnesses to equal one male witness. In order to achieve the essence of accurate testimonial, the form of the law (two female witnesses to one male witness) is no longer relevant, yet the requirement of having two informed witnesses still stands. In addition, practicing the out dated form in the changed context can be considered unjust in a world of advancing women’s education, women’s rights and contributions in the public sphere, and a curtailment of full realisation and development.



Each prophet preached the essence of the *din of islam* to his community. According to the context of the community, different regulations (forms) carrying the essence were prescribed. Human context will forever change and consequently, regulations will be reformulated to better achieve the essence that they were designed to carry. With each new prophet and scripture, the essence was recalled and new regulations that better suited the changed context were prescribed. 1400 years after the demise of Prophet Muhammad, many of the laws of human interaction in the Quran do not fit today's context.

Proof of different forms of religions based on changing contexts:

- 5:48 “.... To each among you have we prescribed a *Shariah* and an open way (*minhaj*). If Allah had so willed, He would have made you a single people, but (His plan is) to test you in what He hath given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues...”
- 2:106 “Whatever communications We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, We bring one better than it or like it. Do you not know that Allah has power over all things?”
- 22:67 “To every nation We appointed acts of devotion which they observe, therefore they should not dispute with you about the matter and call to your Lord; most surely you are on a right way.”
- Conflicting prescriptions on the laws of Hajj concerning the area of the *Mataf*. Imam Baqir said it should be between the *rukn* (*Kaaba*) and *maqam* of Ibrahim, and Imam Sadiq said it can go beyond the *maqam* (perhaps due to a growing population of *hujja*).⁵

2. Diversity is purposeful and is the hallmark of creation

Abdulhussain further argues that within the existential context, there is nothing but individuality that yields variety, diversity and relativity. Diversity is purposeful and is the hallmark of creation. In other lectures of his, Abdulhussain has argued, that diversity and communal existence is the source of social morality and many human virtues.

- 5:48 “if Allah had pleased He would have made you (all) a single people, but that He might try you in what He gave you, therefore strive with one another to hasten to virtuous deeds...”
- 30:22 “And one of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your tongues and colors; most surely there are signs in this for the learned.”
- 49:13 “O you men! surely We have created you of a male and a female, and made you tribes and families that you may know each other; surely the most honorable of you with Allah is the one among you most careful (of his duty); surely Allah is Knowing, Aware.”

3. *islam* and Judaism, Christianity and Islam

islam (with a lower case “i”) is the *din* of Allah. Whereas Judaism, in principle was the *islam* preached by Moses, and Christianity, the *islam* preached by Jesus, Islam (with an upper case “I”) is the *islam* preached by Prophet Muhammad through the revelation, his teachings and conduct.

⁵ “Reinterpretation of Islamic Laws Based on Time and Space”. <http://shaykharif.com/work/transcripts/reinterpretation>. Pg. 5
Cited: Wasa'il; bab wujub kawn qawm al tawaf bayn al Ka'ba wal maqam. 13:350.



4. Exclusivism

Exclusive claim to God's favour or guidance is condemned in the Quran in the case of Jews, Christians and Muslims. Amongst the Abrahamic faiths, no one religion has the right to claim the exclusivism of salvation and guidance.

Evidence from the Quran that exclusive claim to guidance and salvation is unacceptable:

- 2:111 "And they say: None shall enter the garden (or paradise) except he who is a Jew or a Christian. These are their vain desires. Say: Bring your proof if you are truthful."
- 2:135 "And they say: Be Jews or Christians, you will be on the right course. Say: Nay! (we follow) the religion of Ibrahim, the *Hanif*, and he was not one of the polytheists." (Religion of Ibrahim is *islam*)
- 3:24-5 "This is because they say: The fire shall not touch us but for a few days; and what they have forged deceives them in the matter of their religion..."
- 4:123-5 "(This) shall not be in accordance with your vain desires nor in accordance with the vain desires of the followers of the Book; whoever does evil, he shall be requited with it, and besides Allah he will find for himself neither a guardian nor a helper. And whoever does good deeds whether male or female and he (or she) is a believer-- these shall enter the garden, and they shall not be dealt with a jot unjustly. And who has a better *din* than he who surrenders himself (*aslama lillah*) entirely to Allah? And he is the doer of good (to others) and follows the faith of Ibrahim, the upright one, and Allah took Ibrahim as a friend."

5. Perennialism and Broader Inclusivism

islam as the *din* of Allah is expressed essentially within all three of the Abrahamic faiths, and as such includes the truths of all three within itself.

6. Centrality

The prophets and messengers are integral to the religion of *islam*, but not essential to salvation. God is omitting the centrality of the 'being' of the Prophet for salvation. The journey of life is between the person and God; the "being" of any prophet or saint is not essential to achieve salvation.

- 2:62 "Surely those who believe, and those who are Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabians, whoever believes in Allah and the Last day and does good, they shall have their reward from their Lord, and there is no fear for them, nor shall they grieve."
- 3:31 "Say: If you love Allah, then follow me, Allah will love you and forgive you your faults, and Allah is Forgiving, Merciful." – beginning with love for Allah and ending in Allah's love and forgiveness for the individual
- 33:21 "Certainly you have in the Messenger of Allah an excellent exemplar for him who hopes in Allah and the latter day and remembers Allah much." –the Prophet's example is used to become godly. It starts with the individual and ends at God.
- 2:186 "And when My servants ask you concerning Me, then surely I am very near; I answer the prayer of the supplicant when he calls on Me, so they should answer My call and believe in Me that they may walk in the right way." - The journey of life is between the individual and God. There is not room for anyone else.

Every prophet gave an example of how to be godly. They taught the same essence, and the "how to become godly" depended upon what their respective contexts demanded.

7. The Book (*Al Kitab Al Mubin*)

The Quran repeatedly mentions "The Book" (*al Kitab*). Characteristics of The Book are: Contains the details of all things (6:59, 61), is protected and only the pure can access it (56:77-80), it is with God (13:39), taught to the prophets (2:129) and is different from the scriptures (3:48).



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- 6:59 “And with Him are the keys of the unseen treasures-- none knows them but He; and He knows what is in the land and the sea, and there falls not a leaf but He knows it, nor a grain in the darkness of the earth, nor anything green nor dry but (it is all) in a clear **Book**.”
- 56:77-80 “Most surely it is an honored Quran, In a **Book** that is protected. None shall touch it save the purified ones.”
- 10:61 “And you are not (engaged) in any affair, nor do you recite concerning it any portion of the Quran, nor do you do any work but We are witnesses over you when you enter into it, and there does not lie concealed from your Lord the weight of an atom in the earth or in the heaven, nor anything less than that nor greater, but it is in a clear **Book**.”
- 13:39 “Allah makes to pass away and establishes what He pleases, and with Him is the basis of the **Book**.”
- Other verses containing descriptions the The Book are: 43:2-4, 2:129, 3:48 43:4, 39:1-2, 40:1, 41:2, 44:2, 45:1, 46:2

The Book, as mentioned throughout the Quran, displays characteristics that set it apart from the Quran and other scriptures. What is The Book? The Book is the eternal existential book with Allah that holds record of everything (6:59), past, present and future. Revealed scriptures overtime are expressions of The Book, which is eternal. The scriptures are limited expressions of The Book (they are bound to a particular time, place and language). The Book, like *islam*, is constantly being revealed in the forms of different scriptures that have been revealed over time, befitting each context. Eternity and universality of scriptures are only found *in regards to the essence they convey*. The Book is not limited to time, language or space and is with God. The Quran is a limited (limited by time, space and language) expression of the eternal Book that contains everything.

8. *Shirk* and *Kufr*:

Shirk is in principle giving independence of discretion to other than God. It is also upholding one’s own will above the will of God. Within the Quran, the category of *mushriqin* are people who claimed multiplicity of lordship and set up rivals and at times opponents to God. It is an existential state that does not allow for surrender to God, and hence unforgivable and unremedial. (4:116).

Kufr is a knowing denial of the truth, and defiance and opposition to God. The Meccan *Kuffar* and *Mushriqin* worshipped the notion of God and followed a religion through those gods that was wholly inconsistent with human virtue and moral values. To believe in a god that condones oppression, exploitation and injustice is to oppose and defy the all loving God. The Meccan *Kuffar* and *Mushriqin* would believe in a god that encouraged killing female babies, exploitation and usury. The *kuffar* and *mushriqin* would use their gods to justify these acts of oppression. As a result of their purposeful opposition to God, *kuffar* have a different receptivity; their arrogance and defiance disallows them from submitting (36:10, 2:26). The response to this type of mindset was:

- 109:6 You shall have your religion and I shall have my religion – *islam* (submission to God) vs defiance and opposition to God

Iblis is the biggest *Kafir*. He uses reason to justify his arrogance in not submitting and comes out of the religion of Allah. He then opposes Allah by threatening to go after the children of Adam and turn them away from Allah. (7:12-17)

Kufr is an inner state of being that is in all of us. Our hate, condemnation of others, arrogance, ungodly actions are all symptoms of the *kufr* in our hearts. When the inner state is compromised by *kufr*, everything it sees is compromised. 36: 10 “And it is alike to them whether you warn them or warn them not: they do not believe.”



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Shirk is an existential state where we seek the appeasement and validity of other than God due to our insecurities, fears and anxieties, however, the inner *shirk* and *kufir* are states that we are meant to grow out of as we arrive into purer monotheism.

Religions of the People of the Book, although subscribing to an incorrect notion of God, are not *mushrik* or *kafir* because they are not in opposition to Allah. They are worshipping the same Allah and are submitting to the same Allah as Muslims. They surrender to the God of Beauty and Virtues, and thus fall within the religion of Allah: *islam*, despite their incorrect notion of God.

9. Pluralism Throughout Humanity

islam is manifested through all the Abrahamic religions, and therefore salvation is attainable by all.

- 2:62 “Surely those who believe, and those who are Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabians, whoever believes in Allah and the Last day and does good, they shall have their reward from their Lord, and there is no fear for them, nor shall they grieve.”

Reprehensible *Shirk* and *Kufir* are inner states of being that can be held by all people regardless of their religious designation. This inner state is something to worry about as it is present in every community and leads to damnation.

- 92:15-16 “None shall enter it but the most wretched. Who gives the lie (to the truth) and turns (his) back.”
- 2:6-10 “Surely those who disbelieve, it being alike to them whether you warn them, or do not warn them, will not believe... There is a disease in their hearts, so Allah added to their disease and they shall have a painful chastisement because they lied.”

One Sharp Distinction in the Quran:

<p>Religion of Allah (<i>islam</i>-submitting to Allah, the essence of all monotheistic religions, friend of God)</p>
VS.
<p>Submission to Other than God (one’s own ego, arrogance which condones reprehensible actions in defiance to God, enemy of God)</p>

Kufir and *Shirk* are wretched states from within. With time, people are becoming liberated from these states and God’s religion will prevail.

- 9:33 “He it is Who sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth, that He might cause it to prevail over all religions, though the polytheists may be averse.”

Critical Reflection

1. In terms of Abdulhussain’s underlying assumption of “Substantial Motion” that everything is completing itself in an evolutionary fashion through liberation and self-realization closer to God, how does one know that the continuous motion is taking humanity closer to the Divine? Is the continuous motion headed in the right direction? Another prominent and contrasting metaphysical assumption of the nature of creation is that it is in a continuous distancing and separation from God, from the act of creation itself and culminating with the prophecies of the foreboding ‘end of times’ almost all world religions share. How can we think about and place

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the anti-god fervour of modern times? Is humanity distancing itself from the divine? Or is humanity rejecting a false god and in doing so, liberating themselves, and coming closer to the divine? Or both?

- Are the changes that are taking place in the 21st century in Canadian public “good” (closer to the essence of a godly life as per what the scriptures indicate) or “bad” (moving away from godly life)? Is it always a dichotomy, good or bad, or can it be both, and if so, how does one discriminate?
- The disintegration of the nuclear family (two parents) and gender roles (male and female) serve as prominent examples of current discourse. These two topics are prominently featured in the Quran. Parents are revered in the Quran (46:15-16, 31:14, 17:23, 14:41, 71:28) and the purposeful creation of two sexes and genders is also repeatedly mentioned (3:195, 4:124, 16:97, 33:35, 49:13, 40:40) and can be argued to be a part of the essence of the text. Are these current contextual changes in Canadian discourse bringing us closer to realising the divine way? Is it a fair assumption to accept contextual changes are *always* heading in the desired direction of bringing humanity closer to the divine?

2. To problematize Abdulhussain’s underlying assumption once more, how does one prove that society is “progressing” (getting better, better being defined as closer to God)? One of the social changes Abdulhussain cited as a notable “improvement” in the development of human morals, is the establishment of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. However, on closer examination, this “improvement”, along with many others mentioned below, are “improvements” that have an underlying ideology in the removal of the divine. In fact, much of the development of modern ideas, for example: Liberty, progress, equality, democracy, constitutional government, reliance on scientific methodology and the separation of church and state, are products of the Enlightenment. “The Enlightenment” was named as such because it called for reason to be the main means of establishing law, government and even morality. Reliance on reason would free human beings from superstition and religion and would allow them access to discovering the truth objectively, through reason.

One of the most influential legacies of the Enlightenment is the growth of secular humanism that espouses that human beings are capable of morality and self-fulfillment without the belief in God. A second legacy of Enlightenment thinking is the notion of progress, meaning that the natural consequence of sociocultural evolution is an improvement in the human condition. As a God-oriented people, we must critically reflect on the notion of modern “progress” and what “progress” has *really* been made? What is the worth of lengthening one’s life span, going to the moon and smart phones if it is accomplished through countering the *raison d’etre* of religion and even life itself: Gaining proximity to God?

Nonetheless, it may be argued that the god that was rejected by the Enlightenment was a false god, represented by institutions (the Church) that had put shackles upon the freedom of thought (scientific discoveries like the earth being round was charged as blasphemy), unfair taxation and widespread injustices, and that rejecting that false god was liberation (the first part of the *kalima* is “there is no god”); however, in hind sight, it appears the baby was thrown out with the bathwater, and God, in a formalistic sense, has disappeared from modern discourse altogether, or worse, become an undesired relic. How can one claim that these advancements (in philosophy, technology and sociologically), although materially enticing, are taking humanity closer to God, when they stand on the shoulders of ideologies that reject God? Or is the rejection of god in the Western world a rejection of a false god, and that it is only through rejecting and denying his existence that one can free one’s self from the shackles of the mind for the path to spiritual and moral completion to open?⁶

⁶ Abdulhussain furthers this argument in his Muharram 1440 (2018) lectures in London, England entitled “Discovering God Through Yourself”: <https://youtu.be/Vvww-d2QIIA?list=PLRcPfyWiWk8mhZeuhIkwUkawCQPdvYHnC>

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3. Human rights as viewed in a Western, secular paradigm, are human-centric, as opposed to God-centric. Their establishment, a result of the Enlightenment movement, places the human being as the authority in determining right and wrong; however, despite the “God-rejecting”⁷ origins to the notion of human rights (other notions from the Enlightenment are “liberty”, “freedom”, “equality”, “progress”), we are living in a world where they exist, and we appreciate their existence as they are cornerstones of our own personal life paradigms, being products of the Western, secular world ourselves. Knowing their origins, however, how do we interact with these “improvements”? I am using quotation marks around “improvements”, to question the way we view these changes in relation to the *raison d’être* of religion: To facilitate the transformation of human souls to connect with God, our ultimate destination. The notions of “human rights”, “democracy”, “freedom”, “equality” and “progress”, in the West, resulted from the Enlightenment’s abandonment of what was considered to be God’s law. Are we hopping on an incorrect train of thought when we adopt these, endorse and celebrate these concepts? Or is our understanding of God too restrictive, that we have trouble seeing the liberation from a false god as the first necessary step to finding the True God?
4. What is the “collective-intellect”? Abdulhussain repeatedly mentioned the collective intellect as what will guide the human community in reformulating the regulations of the form according to the continuously changing context. Below are a few points of reflection in regards to “collective intellect.”
 - In giving an example of what he means by “collective intellect”, Abdulhussain asked the question of what happens to the PhD graduate after graduation? His answer was that the graduate then begins to contribute to the science. Similarly, he claimed humanity has reached a level in their moral development, where they are able to take control of the reins themselves and carve out a path using the essence of the scriptures as well as the essence of the regulations concerning devotional practices and human interactions. How can one ensure that this notion of “graduating” and not needing a teacher (prophet/imam) does not lead to adopting the human-centred philosophies which reject metaphysical hierarchies, replacing God with humans at the apex of existence, thereby giving them entitlement to do whatever they want?
 - The notion of “collective intellect” derives from some sort of collectivity and cooperation amongst believers. Popular discourse is not a reliable avenue for reformulating law, and is duly cast in the shadows of fickleness in the Quran (mislead (6:119, 10:36, 6:111, 23:70-71, 26:8, 7:102, 5:103, 41:3-4, 25:44, 21:24, 10:103, 34:24). However, cooperation between intellectuals, field experts and jurists to derive laws that pertain to the current contexts seems to be a more reliable option, bringing together the expertise in Islamic law as well as specific areas of study (accounting, finances, medicine, teaching etc.).
5. Ijtihad is the process of deriving laws based on the divine sources of the Quran and Sunnah in the changing circumstances of time. For Shia Ithna Asheris, Ijtihad is not only permissible, it is necessary for the survival and relevance of Islamic Law. Does not the practice of Ijtihad by current scholars address new challenges of the continuously changing context? What is it about the way Ijtihad is practiced today that is not allowing the essence to be reflected in the laws? Is the issue of the essence not being reflected in current laws seen as a problem throughout most of the Muslim world today, or is it a specific to a particular location?
6. In Seyyid Muhammad Rizvi’s book, “Islam and Religious Pluralism”, he examines some of the above quoted verses (3:19, 3:19-20, 3:83-85, 2:135-137, 2:285) that mention “*islam*” and claims that this “*islam*” is in fact the

⁷ I refrain from using the word “god-less” because as is pointed out by Scottish philosopher, Alasdair McIntyre, that although Enlightenment scholars actively rejected theology and religiously derived morals, they failed in constructing an *independent* coherent moral framework, and instead ended up constructing secular and rational justifications of existing (religious) beliefs. MacIntyre, Alasdair (1981). *After Virtue*. London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. p. 60.

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upper case Islam meaning the formal religion of the followers of Prophet Muhammed. Rizvi quotes Aytullah Murteza Mutahhari in saying “If someone were to say that the meaning of ‘Islam’ in this verse is not our religion in particular; rather, the intent is the literal meaning of the word, or submission to God, the answer would be that undoubtedly ‘Islam’ means submission and the religion of Islam is the religion of submission, but the reality of submission has a particular form in each age. And in this age, its form is the same cherished religion that was brought by the Seal of the Prophets (Muhammad). So it follows that the word ‘Islam’ (submission) necessarily applies to it alone.”⁸ Mutahhari espouses the belief that there is one true religion in each era, and all are obligated to believe in it.”⁹

- Rizvi asks that if Christianity and Judaism were valid faiths at the time of the Prophet Muhammad, why did he try so tirelessly to invite them to the faith of Islam? He cites examples of the letters Prophet Muhammad sent out to other rulers from the People of the Book where he invites them to accept him as messenger and submit/accept Islam.

Next Steps

- The current 21st century, first world context and the seventh century Arabian context are vastly different. Do these differences in context call for a reformulation of the *Quranic* regulations of human interaction for the form and the essence for God’s word to be aligned? Which Quranic laws do not match the essence as viewed in the 21st century, first world context?
 - Who and what is the responsible body to reformulate these laws. What is meant by the “collective intellect”?
 - What are the concerns with reformulation and how do we best address these concerns?
 - Critically examine the essence of non-obligatory rituals and rites, and their intended effect on the individual’s and communal soul, and whether their current performance and practice brings about their intended effects, as well as how can these intended effects be acquired?
 - Critically examine current religious rites and rituals to assess whether they agree with the Quran.
- What does living a God-centred life mean in the 21st century in Canada and what does it mean to gain closeness to the divine in the 21st century?
- Broadly look into the breadth of Islamic practices in the remembrance of God (through art, dhikr, poetry, architecture etc.) and how such practices can be incorporated in our modern lives to bring about the reminder of God’s ubiquitous presence.
- Continuing from Critical reflection number five, examine the differences of opinion among *Marajah at-taqlid* in regards to laws that are felt to not match the essence of the Quran is needed in order to determine the scope of discourse and opinions. Along these lines, an examination of the reasons why the World Federation chooses to endorse certain scholars over others is required, and a discussion of what *is desired* of a chosen *Marajah at-Taqlid*? What does “most knowledgeable” mean? Does “most knowledgeable” take into consideration knowledge of the *maqalid’s* context and therefore their specific needs? Can “the most knowledgeable” be different for *muqalidin* in different places around the world (New York vs. Najaf?)

⁸ Seyyid Muhammad Rizvi, Introduction. Islam and Religious Pluralism. <https://www.al-islam.org/islam-and-religious-pluralism-ayatullah-murtadha-mutahhari/good-deeds-non-muslims#2-no-religion-except-al-isl%C4%81m-accepted>

⁹ Mutahhari, Murtadha. Good Deeds of Non-Muslims. “No religion except Al-Islam is accepted” pg. 2 <https://www.al-islam.org/islam-and-religious-pluralism-ayatullah-murtadha-mutahhari/good-deeds-non-muslims#2-no-religion-except-al-isl%C4%81m-accepted>



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