



Chapter Five

Islam





Islam

Vedic religion, Christianity, and Islam combined, comprise a significant number of followers in the world. Of these three, the Vedic Dharma is the oldest, followed by Christianity and then the Islamic tradition. The word ‘Islam’ is derived from the Arabic word root *s-l-m*, meaning ‘to submission or surrender’, and specifically, to surrender to the will of God. Thus, in the Islamic tradition, the one who has surrendered to God (Allah) is called a Muslim, meaning ‘one who has surrendered.’ The prophet Muhammad, the messenger of God in this tradition, taught the importance of discipline and obedience. Humility is a principal virtue of Islam.

The Arab World at the Time of the Birth of Muhammad

Prophet Muhammad was born in the sixth century C.E. (approximately 1440 years ago). At that time, the Arab world was in great turmoil. There was social and religious upheaval, and the community was divided into many factions. The nomadic tribes and aboriginal peoples of the Arab region had diverse objects of worship, including the heavens, ghosts, spirits and stones, as well as other inanimate idols. There were many



Jewish communities in the Arab world, and the Jewish traditions were widely practiced in these communities. With so many options for worship, the people were not united under the canopy of any single religious belief system. Moral values were declining and social anarchy was at a zenith. Worship, sacrifice and prayers were performed either out of ignorance, habit, or to justify and gratify the individual ego. Prayer and sacrifice were often aimed at extorting or humiliating other individuals or groups. Social vices such as the use of intoxicants, adultery, communal discord, and bribery were prevalent.

This unfavorable environment, characterized by the absence of a central ethical code and the lack of any systematized or coherent religious belief, was pervasive throughout the Middle Eastern region at that time. But there were also many peace-loving people, and they yearned for religious and social reform. The combination of these factors created fertile ground for change and reformation. It was at this time and under these social and religious conditions, that the Prophet Muhammad was born.

The Life of Muhammad

It is believed that the Prophet Muhammad was born around the year 570 C.E. into a Quraish family, in the city of Mecca, in



what is today known as Saudi Arabia. His mother's name was Aminah and his father was Abdallah. His father, Abdallah died several weeks before Muhammad's birth, leaving Muhammad fatherless. Muhammad's mother, Aminah also passed away when he was only five years old. He was raised by his paternal uncle, Abu Talib.

Even as a young child, Muhammad already was different from his peers. He was calm and serene by nature. He avoided social and religious celebrations that encouraged disgraceful behaviors. Speaking the truth came naturally to Muhammad, he never imbibed intoxicants, and he always returned what was not his. He avoided the popular festivals, which he viewed as idolatrous, loud, and filled with idle talk. His good nature was well known, and he was content to earn his livelihood by the sweat of his brow. Under the guardianship of Abu Talib, he grew into adolescence and took up the job of tending camels . Later in life he married a wealthy widow.

From his early years, Muhammad enjoyed solitude. He frequently visited a hill, named Heera, in the wilderness near Mecca. He would stay in a cave there, subsisting on a few items which he would bring with him. In this cave he would spend days in worship and prayer to God (Allah). Descriptions of



Muhammad's experiences at Heera have been documented by various Muslim writers.

For example, Molana Rum relates Muhammad's description of his meditative experiences:

My ears reverberate with the sound of God. But God's sound hides from fleshly ears.

And Molana Sheikh Muhammad Akaram Sabari has written that Muhammad remained immersed in vibrant unceasing inner sound while living in this cave (*Iktbas-Ul-Anwar*, 106). Sabari also claims that the founder of the Qadari Sufi Community, Hajrat Kadar Jilani, meditated in this same cave for extended periods of time.

From these examples, it is clear that the Prophet Muhammad practiced the Yoga of Sound in the same way as various saints of different traditions. In Sufism (mystical Islam) the Yoga of Sound is known as *Sultanulajakar*, and in the Vedic tradition it is known as *Nadanusandhana* or *Surat Shabad Yoga*. This practice of the divine sound is considered to be the highest practice of the saints. It is believed that the experience of sound meditation was also attained by Muhammad Dara Shikoh, the eldest son of the Mughal Emperor of India, Shah Jahan Khan. He has written:

The entire world is filled with the divine light and sound of God. The blind still ask where God is.



Cleanse your ears that are filled with the wax of arrogance and skepticism, and then you will hear the sound in every direction coming from the heavens above. It is a mystery why we wait to hear the divine trumpet resounding on the Day of Judgment when the sweet sound of the divine trumpet resounds unceasingly. (Risala-E-Haq-Numa, 16)

Dara Shikoh also states that before Muhammad became a prophet, as well as after, he practiced the meditation of divine inner sound or Word.

Prophet Muhammad and the Divine Vision of the Angel Gabriel

By the grace of God, and through the power of spiritual discipline, the angel Gabriel appeared before Muhammad during a spiritual retreat in the cave of Heera. Muhammad was forty years of age. At the time of this divine vision of the angel Gabriel, the verses that would become the Holy *Koran*, were also revealed to Muhammad. After these events he became known as a prophet. He had full faith that Allah was the only God, and was the only true master. He told other people about the divine message he had received, and that Allah had made him a messenger for the benefit of humanity. Sometimes he was faced with distressing reactions from those who did not believe him. Such people were engrossed in traditional beliefs and found such



talk useless, and in fact, even threatening to their established beliefs. In this way he made many opponents. There were also some who were envious of his large following and recognition. So it happened that these sought to do him harm out of their jealousy.

For many years Muhammad taught the divine message in secret, tolerating many abuses. After this period Muhammad received Divine instruction to teach this message in the open. His enemies reacted adversely, continued to inflict abuses, and even threatened to take his life. Due to this increasing threat and danger, at the age of 53 Muhammad was forced to leave Mecca to take refuge in Medina. The people of Medina welcomed him wholeheartedly. It can be said that the Islamic faith actually began to spread from Medina. This year of Muhammad's migration to Medina came to be called the *Hijri* or Hijrah by the followers of Islam. The word *Hijri* literally means 'to abandon a place.' The Islamic calendar reckons the year of the *Hijri* as the first year. At the age of 63, Muhammad left this material world.

His last words were:

Every person should work toward their own liberation.



The Principles and Practices of Islam

According to Islamic doctrine, every individual [the follower of Islam] must have faith in Almighty Allah and his prophets. It is believed that a day of judgment will come when Allah will hold each human being accountable for his actions. On that day people will be judged according to their good or evil deeds.

The Five Pillars of Islam

There are five obligatory practices that are foundational to the Islamic faith. These are known as the five pillars:

1. *Kalimai Taiyab* or *Shahada*: This is the proclamation and confession that Allah is the one and only true God, and that Muhammad *Sahab* is the prophet of God. It is expected to be a public testimony of commitment made by each Muslim. This is also called *Kalima*, and it corresponds with the Vedic term *dharma mantra*.

2. *Namaj* (also referred to as *Salat* or Ritual Prayer): Five times each day there is obligatory prayer. This is preceded by ritual purification of the body by washing with water. The followers of Islam must go to a mosque every Friday to perform the afternoon prayers.

3. *Roza* or *Sawm*: This is the daily fast during the holy month of Ramajan (Ramadan). It is believed that the Divine



message, in the form of the *Koran*, was revealed to Muhammad during this month.

4. *Zakat* or *Zakaah*: Muslims should give one fortieth of their income to the poor and needy as charity. They must see this charitable act as their offering to God.

5. *Hajj*: Each Muslim is expected to travel to Mecca on pilgrimage at least once in their lifetime. Money spent to go on this pilgrimage should have been earned honestly and with pure work.

In addition to these five pillars of Islam there are other doctrines which deal with specific activities of living. Some examples of doctrines which a devout Muslim must abide by are as following:

- Muslims must not worship idols. For this reason, photos or representations of the physical form of the prophet Muhammad are not available.
- They must not eat the flesh of swine which is considered an unclean animal.
- They should not make loans that bear interest.

Muslims must also follow various rules concerning marriage and divorce. These rules are specified in *Sharia*, the body of Islamic law. In addition, Muhammad did not approve of the practice of



slavery, and he stated that it is benevolent for Muslims to free slaves. The central message of Islam is equality of all human beings.

Fundamental Beliefs of Islam

1. *Kalimaitaib: La ilaha ill-Allah, Muhammad-ur-rasool-ullah.*
“There is no God other than Allah. Muhammad is the true messenger of Allah.”
2. *Kalimai Sahadat: ashhadu a la ilaha ill-Allahu wahdahu la sharika lahu wa ashhadu anna Muham- madan 'abduhu wa rasooluh.* “I bear witness that there is no other God than Allah and I confess that Muhammad is his His messenger.”
3. *Kalimai Tamjeed: Subhana-Allahi walhamdu lillahi wa la ilaha ill-Allahu wallahu Akbar, wa la haula wa la quwwata ilia billahil 'aliyyil-'Azeem.* “Allah is pure Being. All praise and all good words pertain to Allah. There is no other God than Allah. Allah is the most great and there is no other deity greater than Him. All strength, abundance and radiance are in Allah.”
4. *Kalimai Tauhid: La ilaha ill-Allahu wahdahu la sharika lahu, lahul mulku wa lahul hamdu, Yuhyi wa Yumeetu, biyadihil-*



khairu, wa huwa 'ala kulli shai-in Qadeer. “There is none worthy of worship, but Allah; He is One and has no partner. All praises are for Him. He is the life giver and the cause of death. All well being is from Him and He has power over all things.”

5. *Kalimai Istigafar: Astaghfirullah Rabi min kulli dhanbin adhnabtahu amadan aw khataan, sirran aw alani-yatan wa atubu illaih minadh-dhanbilladhi, la a'lamu, innaka anta allamul ghayub, wa sattar ul'uyoubi, wa ghaffarudh-dhunubi, wa la hawla wa la quwwatta illa billahil alliyil 'adheem.* “I seek forgiveness for all my sins, those which I have committed knowingly as well as unknowingly. Whether they were committed in the open or in secret I ask for forgiveness for all these sins. Allah, You are the knower of the other world and our fate. You are the concealer of our sins and mistakes and the forgiver of our sins and weaknesses. There is no power or strength except from Allah, the Most High.”

6. *Kalimai Raddi-Kufr: Allahumma inni a'oozu bika min an ushrika bika shai'an wa ana a'lamu wa astaghfiruka lima la a'lamu innaka anta 'Allam ul-ghuyoobi tubtu 'anhu wa tabarr'atu 'an kulli deenin siwa deen il-Islami wa aslamtu wa aqoolu la ilaha ill-Allahu Muhammad-ur-rasool-ullah.* “O Allah! Verily I seek refuge in Thee from associating any partner with Thee



knowingly. I beseech Your forgiveness for the sins which I am not aware of. Verily, Thou art the Best Knower of all secrets. I repent for all my sins, and for any abuse, shameful discourse, back-biting, and I accept the blame for any disobedience against any of the teachings of Islam. I have taken refuge in You, and I hereby declare: There is none worthy of worship but Allah, and Muhammad is the Apostle of Allah.”

Pilgrimage to the *Ka’ba* (Hajj)

Many devout Muslims go to the *Ka’ba* for pilgrimage. This is a small sanctuary inside of a great mosque located in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. It is believed by Muslims that Abraham had this sanctuary built for the worship of Allah. In this building there is a sacred black stone. According to legend, this stone was given to Abraham by the angel Gabriel. All Muslims, no matter where they live, pray facing the holy *Ka’ba*.

The Day of Judgment

The followers of Islam do not subscribe to the theory of reincarnation. Rather, Muslims believe in a catastrophic end on the Day of Judgment. In this system, it is believed that on Judgment Day all souls will take up their physical bodies again,



and each will be judged by Allah according to their good and evil deeds. All souls will present themselves to Allah. Justice will then be administered. Each soul will be sent to heaven or hell according to its respective deeds: Those whose good deeds are in preponderance will go to heaven, while those whose evil deeds are in preponderance will go to hell. Those who go to heaven will find all comforts and joys, but those who go to hell will find torture and misery.

The *Koran*

The *Koran* (*Qur'an* in Arabic) is the sacred text of the Islamic faith. The word *Qur'an* literally means 'recitation.' Muslims believe that the actual words of the *Koran* are the words of the light of knowledge which were received by Muhammad from Angel Gabriel. It is believed that the *Koran* was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad from the time when he was 40 years old until he was of age 63, at which time the revelation was complete. The words of the *Koran* were revealed by the angel Gabriel and Muhammad transcribed them word by word.

The *Koran* contains 30 sections and 114 chapters. The chapters are called *suras*. In each chapter there are many *rukua* (pauses) within which there are many sayings of wisdom. The language



of these verses is Arabic. The *Koran* comprehensively elaborates the details of leading a moral life, as well as observing prescribed social norms. With regard to political life, the *Koran* teaches that political tenets should be predicated on the religious principles of Islam.

***Kafir* (Non-believer)**

The idea of a nonbeliever is an integral aspect of the Islamic system. However, in modern times this term has been interpreted in a most controversial tenor.

A scholar of Islam, Ahmed Bsahir, has written the following in his commentary on the *Koran*:

Kafir means 'one who denies.' According to Islam the one who denies the unity and power of God is a non-believer. Non-believers are of two kinds: Those who do not accept Islam or the unity of God. They worship other gods. The second type of non-believers pursues active opposition to the faith of Islam. Those of the second variety wage wars and commit atrocities against the Islamic faith. The atrocities perpetrated against Muhammad and his followers caused them to retreat to Mecca. With respect to the second type of non believer, the Koran recommends that wherever they are found they should be killed. Keep on killing them until there is only the rule of God (Islamic faith). Concerning the first type of non-believer, toleration is recommended by the Koran. For example, the guardian and uncle of Prophet Muhammad, named Abutalib, never converted to the Islamic tradition;



however, he was always respected by Muhammad and other Muslims. When Muhammad went to Medina the worshippers of many different gods and faiths continuously assisted and supported Muhammad.

The Community: Major Sects of Islam

After the death of Muhammad, there developed a great controversy over the question of his successor. Apparently, he had made no provision indicating the next leader of the Muslim community. As a result, the followers divided into two groups. One group thought that the rightful successor of Muhammad should be a relative. This group proclaimed Muhammad's son-in-law, Ali, to be the rightful successor. The followers of Ali are known as Shi'ite. Shi'a literally means the group of Ali. According to that tradition, Muhammad gave instructions to Ali which are not present in the *Koran*.

The second group of followers opposed the idea of the line of succession. They asserted that Abu Bakr, the Prophet's close and faithful friend, should be the successor. This group had greater public support. The follower of this group came to be known as *Sunnis*. The word *Sunni* comes from the word *sunna* which means 'the tradition of the Prophet of Islam,' 'the tried and true path.' This path is believed to be 'the one that Prophet Muhammad himself journeyed.'



Although both sects agree on the core fundamental principles of Islam they, in addition to the original conflict about succession, also had several other differences from one another with regard to their interpretations and traditions. One of the most important distinctions involves the legitimate authority within the community. The *Sunnis* always give preference to the community of the Islamic faithful in making day to day decisions. However, the *Shi'ites* consider the voice of the *Immam* (a religious leader with infallible authority) as the determining authority. On a practical level, these sects have differences in rules and times for *namaz*, call to prayer. For example, *Shi'ites* sometimes combine prayers, worshipping three times instead of five.

The Sufis

In the 11th century there arose a mystical branch of Islam, which has come to be known as Sufism. Sufis seek close, direct, and personal experience of the divine. They emphasize that realization of God can be attained in this life through faith, devotion, and meditation. Although many strands of Sufism have emerged, the core issue for Sufis is the experience of the practitioner who seeks to unite with the infinite God. A seeker



through sincere devotion and the inner light of the soul strives to be one with the Divine.

The Teachings of Islam

Islam involves a series of disciplines which are practiced daily. These practices are considered necessary to become a true human being. The prominent teachings of Islam are as follows:

1. This world is a prison house for the people of faith. However, for non-believers, this world is a heaven.
2. God is pleased with those who do not desire the world and do not desire human possessions, God will be pleased.
3. Feed the hungry and tend the sick. And if someone has been unjustly imprisoned then liberate that person. Help those who are suffering whether they are Muslim or not.
4. The worst enemies of Allah are those who accept Islam as their religion but, who are, in fact, corrupt, and needlessly shed the blood of others.
5. Allah is merciful to those who show mercy to the people of Allah. Show kindness to all people, whether they are good or evil. To show mercy to the wicked is to protect them from evil. Heavenly beings will then show mercy to you.



6. When you speak, only speak truth. If you give your word, then fulfill that promise. Fulfill your responsibilities. Do not commit adultery. Be pure and block evil thoughts from your mind. Stop your hand from harming others or from taking what is not yours.
7. The Faith instructs against acts of harm of any kind. True believers do not let others kill.
8. He is a believer who does not commit adultery, does not steal, does not take intoxicants—alcohol, drugs, etc.—and does not take that which is not his. Beware of these vices.
9. This life is preparation for the next life, like a crop which should be tended with great care for harvesting. Do good deeds so that you can harvest the good in the next life. Hard work is the royal decree of Allah. Only through hard work can the commands of Allah be obeyed.
10. A man who even has a speck of ego in his heart can not enter heaven.
11. If you face some adverse situation, it is a result of your own actions.
12. The person who spends his life in an effort to attain knowledge of God, will never die.
13. One who knows himself also knows God.



Islam and Spirituality

In the Holy *Koran* practical advice for day to day living is interwoven with subtle spiritual knowledge. Just as there are people who study the Hindu epic tale *Ramayana* without grasping its subtle teachings, there are also some readers of the *Koran* who fail to grasp the subtle teachings embedded in this Holy Book. The *Koran* contains many descriptions of the nature of God and many references to inner meditation:

1. This world is like a play or drama. In reality the next world is the best for those who desire to escape harm.
2. In the beginning all people were on one path.
3. Do not follow your selfish desires, for they will lead you astray from the path of God.
4. God is truth.
5. Those who deviate from Truth become the fuel for hell.
6. God creates the world and we create our world, and He will mark the return. Ultimately, we all must go to God (go back to the source).
7. East and West belong to God. Whichever direction you face is the direction of Allah. Allah is all pervasive and all knowing.
8. One who holds the garment of Allah [takes refuge in Him] with strength will always find the right path.



9. Those who trust God have Allah as their helper. God will take them out of darkness and bring them to light.
10. In the realm of Allah, that which will go upward is the Holy Sound. The good deeds take us upward.

The Essence of the Teachings of Islam

The Mystery of *Aliph*

It is said in the *Koran*, that ‘in the beginning all people followed one path.’ Today, however, people have strayed onto many paths and are consequently suffering in many ways. If we could just properly read the first letter of Arabic, *aliph*, then we could attain knowledge and peace. There was a great fakir (holy man) in Punjab by the name of Bulle Shah. He said that by studying *aliph* one can attain liberation. We study many books, and receive degrees, and even read *aliph* many times in a day, but we do not understand the kind of *aliph* fakir Bulle Shah is speaking about. What kind of *aliph* could bring liberation from the suffering of this world?

Hajarat Anwar Ali Rohataki, a scholar and devout Muslim, has written a book called *Kanune Ishak*. In it he says that the *aliph* which bestows liberation is not simply a letter of the alphabet of Urdu, Persian, or Arabic languages. Neither can it be written on



the chalk board. This *aliph* is without form and is the all pervasive Divine. This knowledge is a matter of experience which cannot be written. A parallel idea is found in Christianity, where God is described as the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. In mystical Judaism this same idea is known in the correspondence between the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, the *aleph*, and Ultimate Reality.

When Guru Nanak (founder of Sikh Dharma) was a child he went to a *Mullah* (Muslim clergy) to study. The Clergy gave him letters from the Arabic alphabet—*aliph*, *be*, etc.—to memorize. Guru Nanak duly repeated each letter of Arabic. He asked the Clergy to tell him the meaning of *aliph*. The teacher replied that the meaning is one. Then he asked for the meaning of *be*, the second letter of the alphabet. The teacher replied, two. Guru Nanak said, “Please let me understand the *one* (One Divine Reality), before I take up the study of two.”

What kind of understanding of *aliph* was Guru Nanak referring to that enabled him to become a great sage? Muhammad himself, although not a scholar, received the verses of the Holy *Koran*. How was he able to receive and repeat the Divine Revelation? It is said that for those whose heart is pure and full



of devotion, the voice of God—Allah’s revelation—emanates in their inner being.¹

The day that we see the direct knowledge of God is the day we see all as the same. At that time you will not see the black or white or tall or small or Hindu or Muslim or Buddhist or Jain. In the animate and inanimate you will see One God.² Allah is all pervasive.

It is written in the *Koran*:

The east and west—all directions—are of Allah. Whichever direction you face, Allah faces the same direction. Allah is all pervasive and all knowing.

Now we shall consider the first letter of the Hindi alphabet, A. In Hindi we study consonants and vowels. Vowel comes first then comes then the consonant. In the same way, Allah comes first and then the Creation. In addition, within each consonant, a vowel is hidden or embedded. It is not possible to take a vowel out and separate it from a consonant in the Hindi script, in the same way, the world is permeated by God and no one can separate God from this world. This same relationship underlies the Islamic way of thinking about Allah.



The Inner Sacred Place

How are we to understand this Allah? The *Koran* says Allah is compassionate and merciful. All the saints say that we must seek the One. To know Allah it is not necessary to wander anywhere. To find Him, simply look within.

A fakir has said:

Man is oblivious to the fact of God's all pervasive and mysterious nature. The Prophet Muhammad is visible, but God is not visible with these eyes.

If you want to find Allah (*Khuda*) you must turn within. He will not be found outside and therefore, you must make your heart pure and keep your heart clean in order to invite the Divine guest within.

Another fakir has said:

Purify the heart to invite the presence of God. Leave aside thoughts of others if you want to seat God within. One heart with many worldly desires leaves no room for God. Then, there is no place for the Divine to sit in such a heart. It is heartbreaking that you go to the fake (manmade) temples and mosques, but God is only found in the inner mosque—in the pure heart.

Sa'd al-din Mahmud Shabistari (1250-1320), one of the most celebrated authors of Persian Sufism, also writes:

Go sweep out the chamber of your heart. Make it ready to be the dwelling place of the Beloved. When



you depart out, He will enter it. In you, void of yourself, will He display His beauties.³

We go to temples, mosques, churches and we build these fine structures. They become places of worship and are places to sit quietly and remember God. However, God does not live in the temple, church or mosque. The Divine temple of God is the body and He resides in the inner chamber of the heart. The Body is the mosque and within we will find Allah.

True Prayer

Once we have understood the true place of worship, we can discuss the true nature of prayer. We say prayers, but, what is a prayer in reality?

A Muslim poet says:

True prayer is bringing joy to sick and suffering beings. True prayer is giving refuge to one who has no refuge. We have learned from touching the mentor's holy feet (learning under their tutelage), that if you desire to find God, you must know yourself (your own true nature).



The Divine Unity of the Soul and Allah

Until we know ourselves, we will not be able to find God. The moment we know our self is the moment that we will find God. At that time, God will not be lost from us. That moment of self realization is the same moment that we will have God realization.

A great Sufi, Sa'd al-din Mahmud Shabistari, eloquently states:

What are "I" and "You"?

Just lattices in the niches of a lamp through which the One Light radiates.

I and You are the veils between heaven and earth; Lift this veil and you will see how all sects and religions are one.

Lift this veil and you will ask "I" and "You" do not exist. What is a mosque? What is a synagogue? What is a fire temple?⁴

We should carefully consider that it is impossible to see God with the physical eyes.

Sant Kabir Sahab says:

You cannot see God with the physical eyes. You must see God with the eyes of the soul. And, He who has seen his soul has seen God.

If one is able to recognize a drop of water, then he will be able to recognize the water of a small pot, the water of a big vessel, the water in a well, river water, and the water of a vast ocean.



He/she will then be able to see the same water in whatever form it appears. In the same way, the one who has recognized the true nature of his soul will see an elephant, a horse, a bull, a camel, a human, and even animate and inanimate creation, all as the one God. There will be no question of different castes or religions.

How to Experience the Divine Within

The question now emerges, how can we recognize this soul and God within? In order to do this, we must use specific techniques. First, one must experience the Divine light (the glory of Allah), and then one can listen to the inner Divine Sound (the Divine voice).

The *Koran* addresses this:

Oh, God of the Day of Resurrection! Kindly show me the straight path. Show me the blessed path, but not the path which will anger my Lord and cause his harsh eye to be upon me.

There are three important elements to note in this quotation. First, the path is straight. Second, it is a blessed path. And third is to ask protection from Allah's evil and harsh eye. The belief is that those people who do not act according to the *Koran* have lost the path. Gods' vengeance will be upon them. People who do evil deeds and who have strayed from the true path deserve



God's vengeance. Those who walk on the true (spiritual) path will have the kind gaze of Allah upon them.

Now we should consider carefully what is meant by 'the straight path'. In the *Koran* it is written:

Those who have faith in Allah, then Allah is their protector and helper. Allah takes them from darkness to light.

The *Koran* further elaborates on the experiences of the Divine Light when it says that Moses saw the stars, the moon and the light of the sun. These references from the *Koran* indicate movement from darkness to light. They can be compared to references in the Vedic literature. In the celebrated prayer we ask God for guidance:

Please lead me from untruth to truth, from darkness to light, and from death to immortality.

A well known Indian scholar and great teacher, Vinoba Bhave, said:

To some of our prayers God listens and to others he does not.

What kind of prayer then does God listen to? And what type of prayer does He not listen to?

Vinoba Bhave gives an example and explains:

Imagine, a train is going from Ranchi to Patna and you are sitting in that train praying to God to take you



to Patna safely, God will listen to your prayers, and will help you arrive at the Patna railway station. However, if you are praying to God to take you to Patna while sitting in a train traveling from Ranchi to Calcutta, God will not listen to that prayer, and you will reach Calcutta, not Patna. The lesson: Wherever you wish to go, first sit in the appropriate vehicle which is going to your desired destination, and then pray to reach that destination safely. In the same way, Allah is compassionate, and the one who walks on the right path—the path which leads from darkness to light—will have his prayers answered.

What is this path from darkness to light? The *Koran* gives this prayer:

Show me the straight path.

This straight path is not in the world. It is not easily found in the darkness. However, in light the path is easily discerned. What, then, is the technique for going from darkness to light? The *Koran* answers this as well: Keep your face and body firm, keep your vision fixed straight ahead in front of your nose and fix your vision on that place.

Compare this to the verses in the *Bhagavad-Gita*:

Keep your body, head and neck in a straight and erect position. Sit without moving and without looking in any direction; stare straight in front of your nose. (Bhagavad-Gita 6/13)



In the New Testament of the *Bible* it is written:

The light of the body is the eye. Therefore, if the eye is single the whole body will be full of light. However, if the eye sees evil then the whole body will be full of darkness. (Luke 11:34)

Now we should glance within and take our bearings. When we close our eyes what we see is darkness. How then do we move from darkness to light? What is the means and technique to do so? How is this path found? Muslims believe that Prophet Muhammad came to this world to show this path. He said we should walk on the straight path. This is the inner path, and it is subtle.

Sant Kabir Sahab says:

The path of devotion is very subtle. There is no desire, neither is there desire for no desire. One must always remain immersed in God.

This path of devotion is subtle, and the gross physical body is unable to tread on such a subtle path. Only the inner spirit, the soul, can go there. It is impossible to see God with the gross physical eyes. If we desire to experience God by using the gross senses of sight and touch, this will prove impossible. What then is this world? What is that God? The world is permeated with God and God permeates the world. With these eyes we are able to see a flower, but we can not see the fragrance that permeates it. We cannot experience that fragrance using the sense organs of



vision our eyes. However, we can experience it with the sense of smell, using our nose. In the same way, we can not experience God through the gross senses, but only through the soul.

Sant Kabir Sahab says:

Whoever has seen his soul (ruh) has seen God. Our true form is the essence of the Divine.

Only the soul can have a direct experience of the Divine. Where then is this true and straight path on which to reach the Divine?

One fakir answers:

This path is found in the sushumna (subtle spiritual nerve current). By traversing the sushumna one attains the Divine.

He further says:

If you want to drink the Divine nectar and to see the light of God, then you must walk the path taught by the great masters.

If you want to get a glimpse of the divine light—the celestial form of the Divine—walk straight. The aspirant may then ask: “What kind of path is this, and have others traveled this path?” The fakir assures us that this path has been well traveled, and many sages and mystics—Mansur, Sarmad, Shamz, Bu Ali, and others—have traversed its road. This is the path of pure devotion and love of the Divine, and it is not a difficult path.



Sant Tulsi Sahab says:

The path given to you is the highest goal. Tend it with great care. This secret path is not achieved merely by talking about it. This path is the inner mystery, and one should carefully tread its course.

Now today we do not have the living Prophet Muhammad with us. Who then was Prophet Muhammad, one may ask. Prophet Muhammad was the light of God, and he was the messenger, the prophet of God. He was also a fakir and great sage. Where then would we find the light of God according to the teachings of Islam?

Sant Kabir Sahab says:

My prophet (the Divine light) lives in my eyes. When I focus between my eye brows I see the light of the Divine. I live in this inner space of my heart, therein resounds the celestial music of the stringed instrument. My Beloved is always with me and takes me to the Palace of the Divine Sound.

Amir Khusro, a Muslim poet, writes:

With the blessing of my teacher Khwaja I went to the Ganga River. There I saw the great Guru Swami Ramanand. He blessed me with his grace, and my heart became pure. The radiance of God manifested in my purified heart.

How can we see this inner light? The answer: Only when you have the grace of a pure spiritual teacher. Khwaja Sahib, a Muslim fakir, says that just as Muhammad went from Mecca to



Medina, in the same way we have to leave the nine gates of the body and enter in to the tenth gate. This is the door to the divine realms (*ajna chakra*). It is reached through the practice of piercing the *ajna chakra* (the third eye, between the two eyebrows).

Now we live as slaves in the nine gated body. The gates are the two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, the mouth, and two organs of excretion. We are living in this nine gated body.

Sant Radha Swami, who lived in Agra, wrote:

This body is permeated with darkness. We are under an illusion and we are deluded. Now we should search within for light and leave this nine gated body.

To repeat, as long as we live in the nine gated body we live in darkness. We must leave the nine gates and go through the tenth gate. How do we go from darkness to light, and what is the means for accomplishing this? This is only possible if an accomplished guru teaches us the path of escape from the darkness. Otherwise, we will remain in darkness.

Sant Tulsi Sahab says:

Approach an accomplished teacher with reverence and patience. He/She will tell you this mysterious path to tread the path within.



The teachers of the worldly sciences can teach those worldly subjects, but when we come to the science of spirituality, only the accomplished spiritual teacher can give these teachings of the spiritual path. All the wisdom in the sacred texts points to the importance of a teacher. This mysterious path is described in the holy books, but it cannot be found simply by the study of sacred texts. It is found by the grace and guidance of an accomplished teacher.

Saint Maharishi Mehi says:

Without the grace of an accomplished teacher, we cannot find the path. This has not happened in the past, nor will it happen in the future. It is essential to have this grace of a teacher.

Guru Nanak Dev Ji says:

O Feeble Disciples! Take refuge in Guru. Go, get the key to this (spiritual) gate from an accomplished teacher if you want to open this tenth gate, the gateway to the spiritual realms. None other has the key to open this gate.

As you open this gate you will be immersed in the Divine light of God. When you leave the nine gated body and go through the tenth gate, then you will go from darkness to light and from untruth to truth. When you are able to see this divine light then you will begin to hear the divine inner sounds. This inner sound



can not be heard with the physical ears, but only with the inner spiritual ears.

Just as we call out to a dog and he listens to us and comes to us, so also God calls out to us in the form of celestial sounds, and we also are drawn to God. We will listen to the Divine call and behold the glory of God. There is no doubt. After seeing the pure form of God, we will become pure, just as God is pure. Through this journey and experience all our suffering will end.

We should strive just as the Prophet Muhammad did, and meditate and traverse the spiritual journey within. In this way, our human body and our human birth is worth living.

A Sufi fakir, Yunus Emre has written:

We entered the house of realization, we witnessed the body. The whirling skies, the many-layered earth, the seventy-thousand veils, we found in the body. The night and the day, the planets, the words inscribed on the Holy Tablets, the hill that Moses climbed, the Temple, and Israel's trumpet, we observed in the body. Torah, Psalms, Gospel, Koran--what these books have to say, we found in the body. Everybody says these words of Yunus are true. Truth is wherever you want it. We found it all within the body.⁵



¹ Mystic Attar says: Strive to discover the mystery before life is taken from you. If while living you fail to find yourself, to know yourself, how will you be able to understand the secret of your existence when you die?

² Baba Kuhi of Shiriz, a Persian dervish poet who died in 1050 A.D., also composed these words:

*In the market, in the cloister--only God I saw.
In the valley and on the mountain--only God I saw.
Him I have seen beside me oft in tribulation,
In favour and in fortune--only God I saw.
In prayer and fasting, in praise and contemplation,
In the religion of the Prophet--only God I saw.
Neither soul nor body, accident nor substance
Qualities nor causes--only God I saw.
I opened mine eyes and by the light of His face around me,
In all the eye discovered--only God I saw.
Like a candle I was melting in His fire,
Amidst the flames out flashing--only God I saw.
Myself with mine own eyes I saw most clearly,
But when I looked with God's eyes--only God I saw.
I passed away into nothingness, I vanished,
And lo, I was the All-living--only God I saw.*

Baba Kuhi, in *The Mystics of Islam*, translated by Reynold A. Nicholson

³ Mahmud Shabistari - *Rose Garden of Mystery*

⁴ Mahmud Shabistari, *Perfume of the Desert*, translation by Andrew Harvey and Eryk Hanut.

⁵ Yunus Emre, translated by Kabir Helminski and Refik Algan, *The Drop That Became Sea*. http://wahiduddin.net/sufi/sufi_poetry.htm#Rabia%20al-Adawiyya%20al-Qaysiyya, accessed on October, 1/2005.

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