

ULTIMATE KNOWLEDGE

PRINCIPLES OF ISLAM, SIMPLIFIED

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Ultimate Knowledge

Principles of Islam, Simplified

Preface

This is a brief account of the Islamic Principles of Belief that form the basis of one's convictions. This summary is meant to be a general reminder for fellow Muslims rather than an exhaustive account. Extracts from various books by Ayatollah Sheikh Mohammad Hussein Al-Ansari's which were taken with his permission and edited to form this brief book. .

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First Principle: Oneness of God (*Tawheed*)

The first step on the path to seek truth is curiosity about the origin of all creation, including one's self. This curiosity, when accompanied with thought and vision, will eventually lead us to God. This is a concept that is sometimes overlooked even by Muslims which leads to the question - how can one follow a path without knowing its origin?

The first step towards God is the statement "There is no God but Allah!" It starts with denouncing any notion of any God that might come to one's mind either of a physical or imaginary nature; then accepting the only true God through reason, logic and research. In other words, a God that does not share any of His characteristics with any materialistic creations and their limitations.

The first line that Prophet Mohammad (as) used in leading people towards Allah was simply:

"Oh People! Say there is no god but Allah and you shall succeed"
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This notion has been used by every messenger of Allah in his message, as the verse states:

"We have revealed to every messenger that we sent before you: that there is no god but me, so worship me" 2

Imam Ali (a.s) also states: "The beginning of religion is to know Him (Allah)". When he was once asked about the minimum level of knowledge of Allah, he replied:

"To confirm that there is no god except Him; that there is no one like Him neither similar to Him; that He is eternal,

¹ Narrated by Musnad Imam Ahmad, al-Baihaqi in al-Dalaeal, al-Tabari in his Tareekh, etc.

² Quran, Prophets Chapter, Verse 25.

*proven, existing and never absent; and that there is nothing resembling Him.”*³

The minimum requirements in knowing Allah are therefore:

1. Accepting the truth of His existence
2. That He is ‘wajib al-wojood’ i.e. His eternal independent existence is a necessity
3. Believing in His proven characteristics that are based on His unlimited knowledge and power
4. Rejecting any characteristics of need and/or incidence in Him, and
5. That injustice or any hideous or repulsive action or characteristic is not attributed to Him.

At a minimum the knowledge expressed in the above five points should form the conscious conviction of the responsible person. As a test, he or she should be able to explain these beliefs in a convincing manner irrespective of the words used.⁴

Let’s take this point further by quoting a famous, well accepted Prayer that has been narrated from the Imams:

“O Allah, introduce me to Yourself; because if You do not introduce me to Yourself then I would not know Your messenger.

O Allah, introduce me to Your Messenger, because if You do not introduce me to Your Messenger then I would not know Your Proof.

*O Allah, introduce me to Your Proof, because if You do not introduce me to Your Proof then I would be misled about my religion.”*⁵

³ Al-Kulaini, Usool al-Kafi, Tawheed Chapter, p 1.

⁴ Al-Ansari, Sheikh al-Adham, Faraed al-Usool, Vol 1, p 564-568. Al-Shahedain, al-Alfeya and al-Nafleya, p 38. Al-Karky, al-Resalah al-Jafarya, Vol1, p 80.

⁵ Al-Sadooq, Kamal al-deen wa Itmam al-Neama, p 342. Al-Kulaini, al-Kafi, 377/1.

It is obvious through this passage that the whole request revolves around knowing Allah (s.w.t). Without this step, the Prophet (a.s) cannot be really known, which is the basis of knowing Allah's Proofs and without them all would go astray from true faith.

This brings a vital question to mind and that is: How do we pray to Allah to introduce us to Himself, while our request from Him can only be made when we know Him? Otherwise, how are we praying to Him?

Two answers can be given here. Firstly, the quick answer which makes the assumption that we have only known of Him through our logic and now we seek further knowledge about Him. The second answer can be divided into two points:

1. There is a difference between knowing something and having knowledge about it. This is because knowing of that concept can be a result of an imaginary perception that should be followed by knowledge. In other words, the person has known of His existence first, and then has asked Him to grant him the understanding to know him then follow him.
2. The real dimension of this question is the consequence of that knowledge. In other words, knowing Allah alone without knowing the path to Him can be misleading and therefore this supplication is seeking the guidance from Allah for the person to recognise his path and know him through the right sources. As Imam Baqir (a.s) once told one of his companions:

“Verily only the person who knows Allah worships Him; and the person who does not know Him is misled in his worship”.

The companion asks what the meaning of knowing Allah is, the Imam replied:

“Believing in Allah, the exalted, believing in His Messenger and following Ali as the guardian and Imam as well as the

Guided Imams. Also, by denouncing, in front of Allah, their enemies. This is how Allah can be known.”⁶

⁶ Al-Kulaini, al-Kafi, 180/1.

Second Principle: Justice of God (*Adalatu Allah*)

Briefly, it is the conviction that God is fair and just in all His dealings and attributes to the extent that none of His deeds stem from unfairness or injustice. Otherwise, the whole universe would have collapsed and its foundations would have lacked stability and cohesion. This is because the universe needs coherent, stable and fixed laws to govern it in all its phases as to be able to continue its existence.

Third Principle: Prophet-hood (*Nubuwa*)

The important step that connects all knowledge is that of Prophethood, since it must first be known that a particular person is a Prophet of God to prove he is a Messenger and that message is from God. The status of Prophethood must be proven first then the legitimacy of the message. From amongst the Prophets and Messengers there were those with the status of ‘Ulu Al-Azm’ or ‘Messengers sent to all of humanity’.

A verse in the Quran revealed their names clearly:

*“We took from the prophets their covenant and from you and from Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus son of Mary.”*⁷

All of these Prophets and Messengers are faithful servants of Allah. Our belief as in the verse:

*“All believe in Allah and His angels, His Books and His Messengers and do not differentiate between any of the Messengers.”*⁸

Further the Almighty said:

*“Messengers that We have mentioned unto you before; and Messengers we have not.”*⁹

It is our belief that they numbered 124,000 Prophets and 124,000 guardians. Each Prophet had appointed a trustee as a guardian for his nation by direct order of God¹⁰.

We believe in their statements and guidance after accepting their evidence from Allah (s.w.t). We know that they were sent to guide us to

⁷ Quran, Ahzab, 7.

⁸ Quran, Baqarah, 285.

⁹ Quran, Nisa, 146.

¹⁰ Al-Sadooq, lateqadat, p 92.

the right path. They are infallible and obeying them is obeying Allah (s.w.t), as both their statements and actions reveal the message of Allah.

It is necessary to state here that knowledge comes as the first priority, even to obligatory prayers. This is because being ignorant of the status and characteristics of God and His messengers whilst having easy access to knowledge is considered a form of denouncing their guidance and distancing one's self from them. This lack of knowledge can be considered a shortcoming, which critically needs to be addressed.

So as mentioned previously, we seek assistance from Allah to enable us to know Him first and foremost. Then through Him to know His Prophet and Messengers the final of whom is Mohammad bin Abdullah (may Allah bless him and his family) who conveyed the Religion of Allah, Islam and his eternal miracle the Holy Quran.

The minimum requirements for a Muslim are to instil the following principles that were revealed unto the Prophet (Allah blesses him and his family)¹¹:

- Belief in the notion of creation and resurrection (physical resurrection)
- Carrying out acts of worship
- Acknowledging that questioning and punishment will occur after death
- Conviction that we will be interrogated on the Day of Judgement
- Understanding what the straight path is
- Having awareness of the balance of deeds
- Holding true that Heaven and Hell exist.

¹¹ Al-Ansari, Sheikh al-Adham, Faraed al-Usool, Vol 1, p 564-568.

Fourth Principle: Religious Leadership and Authority (Imama)

In the narration mentioned above by Imam Baqir (a.s) we first have to know God, the Prophet and then the Proof. It is clear from the narration that if we do not know them we will be led astray. It is interesting to note that this notion is very similar to the statement of the Prophet which has been narrated by all Muslims in which he states:

“whoever dies without knowing the Imam of his time, then he has died as an ignorant person.”¹²

So who is this Imam of the time that is mentioned in these narrations or the Proof that is mentioned by the above supplication?

This question can be answered by using very basic logic:

No Muslim claims that if anyone does not know particular individuals even the caliphs themselves, then that person is astray. Therefore, there should be someone who is meant in these statements that we need to identify and follow. If we focus deeply on the prayer narrated by Imam Baqir (as), then we notice that everything revolves around Allah (s.w.t). So the request is from Allah, the requester is the servant of Allah and knowledge (of the Imam) is requested from Allah. Furthermore, the messenger is the Messenger of Allah and the Proof is that of Allah. Hence, this prayer can be summarised carefully to mean “la ilaha illa Allah” or there is no god but Allah. It contains real knowledge about Allah, understanding the pure oneness of Allah (Tawheed) and shows practical worship of Allah. This understanding then can lead one to know the whole universe and whatever it contains as it is the basis of all concepts, as Imam Ali states: “whoever knows himself, knows Allah”. This is because there should be a need (for instance the search for human perfection) in order to spark the flame of curiosity and the motivation to pursue it. In carrying out the prayer – one should look at his/her existence and understand the notion of existence itself before

¹² Yanabea al-Mawada, Vol 3, p 372. Tabaqat al-Hanafia, p 457. Other references also mention it in various formats.

searching deeper into the universe to seek the truth and understand the aim of its existence. This step is illustrated in the Quran when Allah profoundly states:

*“I was a hidden treasure, and then I liked to be known. So I created the creation to be known.”*¹³

After knowing about God, one should know His representatives on earth. It follows that such a representative must necessarily be present at all times on earth. Prophethood being the first of such representation of God. With the passing away of the final Prophet (Mohammad) Prophethood as a form of representative of God ended but the notion of Imamate continued as the subsequent representation of God.

After the passing away of the Prophet (s.a.w) some people at the time concluded that a successor can only be chosen through two means – (i) elections or (ii) consultations “shura”. However, these people missed the essence of what it means to be the ‘successor’ of the Prophet. Allah (s.w.t) clearly states in the Quran in the verses about Adam’s creation that He told the angels: “I am placing a representative on Earth”. This shows us more than anything that this representative can only be a Prophet (Adam in this case) or his appointed successor. In other words, by knowing God we can know His representative. Also, by knowing the Prophet, we can know his successor. We also notice that the angels during the story mentioned earlier, replied: “may you be exalted; we have no knowledge, except that which you have taught us”. This is while Satan was expelled and cursed as a consequence of his rejection of God’s choice. This is the same trap that occurred at the time of ‘Saqifah’ when there was a gathering by some after the Prophet of Islam passed away to decide on his successor. By thinking that they could simply elect someone as a successor against what Allah (swt) has commanded and the Prophet (as) reaffirmed to us, these people fell into the same trap as mentioned above. In doing so these people

¹³ Al-Sebzawari, Sharh al-Asmaa al-Husna, Vol 1, p 37. Al-Majlisi, Behar, Vol 84, p 199.

demonstrated their lack of understanding the verse in the Quran which clearly states:

“when Allah and His Prophet make a decree, then they (people) do not have a choice”;

This is despite the fact that the above verse is taken to be a basic concept in Islam – not having choice a matter which has been decreed by Allah and His Prophet. Therefore, we have to know the right successor who is the Imam of the time and the one who according to the Prophet himself us not knowing will lead us astray. It is not suffice to just know of him as a person since non-believers knew the Prophet very well but staunchly stood against him to the point where they plotted to kill him, forcing the Prophet to leave his homeland. They continued to fight him until he was victorious and they became Muslims, either through fear or greed.

As a result, we have to be aware and know the Proof of Allah (s.w.t) exactly the same way that early believers knew the Messenger and followed him despite the consequences. This is especially relevant in current times where there is widespread mischief and corruption in the world leading people astray. In these times you see the everyday man seeking guidance from so called intelligent ones who themselves has gone astray. So only knowing his ancestry does not benefit us nor does knowing that he is the Imam. We should recognise him as the Proof of Allah of his creation. Hence, the supplication clearly asks Allah (s.w.t) to grant us the knowledge about his Proof and to make us immune from going astray.

There is clear evidence to show that the original and rightful reference point after the Prophet is Ahl al-Bayt as the Prophet clearly alludes to in this famous narration cited and accepted by all Muslims unanimously:

“I have left you with something that if you hold unto, you will never go astray after me: two weighty things, one larger than the other, the Book of Allah, a rope stretched from heaven to

earth, and my progeny, the people of my home – ‘Ahl al-Bayt. They will not be separated until they come back to me in the heavens.’”¹⁴

This hadith is agreed upon by Sunnis and the Shiites alike. So ponder carefully over this very significant narration. Think about the weightiness of the words especially this section – ask yourself what can be of more importance than this statement - “if you hold to, then you will not go astray after me ever”? He also left us with two weighty things coupled as one, not to be followed separately or worse – one without the other. So with both of them together (the Quran and Ahl al-Bayt), we will never go astray! Also note the clear expression: “They will not be separated until they come back to me in the heavens”. This indicates that the person, who approaches them separately and does not stick to them both together, will not find guidance. Consequently, they have been described by the Prophet as the “rescue ship” and “the safety for the people of Earth”. Whoever leaves them will drown in the arguments of error and would not be safe from loss. To restrict the interpretation of this narration to mean only love them without taking their statements and actions as a guide is escaping from the truth.

All Muslim scholars agree that the Prophet has talked about twelve successors after him but most of the Muslims unfortunately fail to name them. The common agreement is based on widely accepted hadiths that have been narrated by major references about the Prophet emphasising that his successors are twelve in number. Few will be mentioned here to illustrate this point.

1. Jabber bin Sumrah has narrated:

“My father and I were visiting the Prophet when I heard him stating: “There will be twelve successors after me. All of them are from ...” then he whispered the end part; so I asked my

¹⁴ Al-Muthafar, Aqaed Imamiya, p 71

father what did the Prophet whisper? My father said that the Prophet said: "All of them are from Bani Hashem." ¹⁵

The same narration has been repeated on other authentic hadith books but with "All of them are from Quraish" at the end. ¹⁶

2. Abdullah bin Masood has narrated:

"Prophet of Allah stated: "My successors are twelve, the same number as the elders of the Israelites"." ¹⁷

3. Anas bin Malik has narrated:

"Prophet of Allah stated: "This Religion will continue to exist until the twelfth leader from Quraish. When they all finish, then Earth will be destroyed along all its inhabitants"." ¹⁸

The answer to those who question as to why the Quran does not mention them by name directly is clear in this narration by Abu Basir:

"I asked Abu Abdullah [Imam Sadeq] (peace be upon him) about the words of God Almighty: "Obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those of you with authority" ¹⁹, he said: "It was revealed about Ali bin Abu Talib and Hassan and Hussein (peace be upon them)". I told him that people say why it did not name Ali and his household (peace be upon them) in the book of God Almighty? He said: "Tell them that prayer descended upon the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and his family) but God did not mention three or four rukas; till the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and his family) is the one who explained it to them. And Zakat was revealed to him but God did not name that for each forty dirhams, you have to pay a dirham; till the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and his family) is the one who explained it to them. And the pilgrimage was revealed but God did not say to them: do the Tawaf seven times; till the

¹⁵ Yanabea al-Mawadah, p 445.

¹⁶ Sahih al- Bukhari, vol 4, p 175. Sahih Muslim, vol 2, p 191. Etc.

¹⁷ Al-Kanji al-Shafei, Yanabea al-Mawada, p 258.

¹⁸ Al-Halabi, Taqreeb al-Maaref, vol 53, p 173. Aalam al-Wara, p 36.

¹⁹ Quran, Nisa, 59.

Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and his family) is the one who explained it to them. And "obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those of you with authority" was revealed about Ali, Hassan and Hussein. So the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and his family) said: "whomever I am his master, then Ali is his master"."²⁰

The names of the twelve successors after the Prophet have been proven through strong evidence by Shia scholars and they are:

- Ali bin Abu Talib, cousin of the Prophet and the husband of his daughter, Fatima.
- Hassan bin Ali and son of Lady Fatima
- Hussein bin Ali and son of Lady Fatima
- Ali bin Hussein Zain Alabideen
- Mohammad bin Ali al-Baqir
- Jafar bin Mohammad al-Sadiq
- Musa bin Jafar al-Kadhim
- Ali bin Musa al-Redha
- Mohammad bin Ali al-Jawad
- Ali bin Mohammad al-Hadi
- Hassan bin Ali al-Askari
- Al-Mahdi bin Hassan al-Hujjah. The proof and Imam of our time.

Now, let us focus on the Proof (Imam) of our time. It should be stated at the beginning that all Muslim scholars agree that at the end of time, the Mahdi (a.s) will rise who is the Proof from Allah. Shia scholars go further to state that he is living and present but hidden from view by people. We can identify him based on the many narrations that talk about him personally. One such narration is by a companion of Imam Hassan al-Askari, who said that:

²⁰ Al-Kulaini, al-Kafo, vol 1, p 286.

“One day, we were forty men in Hassan bin Ali’s house (the 11th Imam), when he showed us his son and said: “this is your Imam after me and my successor upon you so obey him. Do not divide up in your religions and then get destroyed. Verily, you will not see him after today” then we left his house and after few days, he (Imam Hassan) passed away.” ²¹

The Almighty said:

“Allah has promised those who have believed among you and done righteous deeds that He will surely grant them succession [to authority] upon the earth just as He granted it to those before them and that He will surely establish for them [therein] their religion which He has preferred for them and that He will surely substitute for them, after their fear, security, [for] they worship Me, not associating anything with Me.” ²²

This verse shows us clearly that there will be some people who believe in God that will succeed on Earth as it is a promise by God. The successor and Proof amongst the believers cannot be a Prophet as Prophethood came to an end with the death of our Prophet Muhammad the Prophet of mercy (may Allah bless him and his family). Therefore the person who will lead the believers at the end of the time has to be:

- (i) Appointed by God
- (ii) Reaffirmed by the Prophet
- (iii) From the Prophet’s descendants, and
- (iv) Does not contradict the character and teachings of the Prophet

This person is none other than the twelve Imam and final Proof of God, Imam Mahdi (peace be upon him).

²¹ Al-Sadooq, Kamal al-Deen, Vol 2, p 435.

²² Quran, Noor, 55.

Finally, let us end with this narration and take it as a guide for our lives so that we can always practice piety and express ourselves in the best manner, as well as deal with people in our wider society with wisdom, politeness and humbleness. It has been narrated that a companion of Imam Sadiq (peace be upon him) has mentioned to the Imam that some of his Shia (followers) have gone astray and were performing prohibited acts while saying that the religion is indeed knowledge so if you know your Imam, then do whatever you like!

Imam Sadiq replied:

“To God we belong and to Him we shall return! [This sentence is said when showing great sorrow] The unbelievers have claimed a concept that they do not understand. It was said: Seek knowledge and then do whatever you like from good deeds as it will be accepted from you, because Allah does not accept a deed of any person without proper knowledge. If a man performed all good deeds and fasted all his life, stayed up every night worshipping, spent all his wealth in charity for the sake of Allah and performed only what pleases Allah all his life but did not know his Prophet who conveyed all these obligations, he did not believe him and did not have faith in him, and he did not recognise the Imam of his time that Allah has made it obligatory upon him to obey.; then all his deeds will not benefit him even a bit from Allah’s perspective. Allah described these people and said: “We shall turn unto the work they did and make it scattered motes.”²³ ²⁴.

²³ Quran, al-Furqan, 23.

²⁴ Al-Tabrasi, Mustadrak al-Wasa'el, vol 1, p 174.

Fifth Principle: Day of Resurrection (*Yawm al-Qeyamah*)

The purpose of this life does not end with one's death; rather all will be resurrected one day to face the consequences of their actions in this world; as Allah, the Almighty states:

*“And We place the scales of justice for the Day of Resurrection, so no soul will be treated unjustly at all. And if there is [even] the weight of a mustard seed, We will bring it forth. And sufficient are We as accountant.”*²⁵

²⁵ Quran, al-Anbia, 47.

Final Words of Advice

Please remember that Islam has always emphasised the importance of considering all humans as equals while living within the wider society based on the ethical Islamic principles of respect, help and peace. The quotes below are all examples of this point:

Almighty Allah states:

*“Speak to people kindly.”*²⁶

*“And spend in the way of Allah and do not throw [yourselves] with your [own] hands into destruction. And do good; indeed, Allah loves the doers of good.”*²⁷

*“O mankind! Lo! We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another.”*²⁸

*“And not equal are the good deed and the bad. Repel [evil] by that [deed] which is better; and thereupon the one whom between you and him is enmity [will become] as though he was a devoted friend.”*²⁹

²⁶ Quran, Baqarah, 83.

²⁷ Quran, Baqarah, 195.

²⁸ Quran, Hujurat, 13.

²⁹ Quran, Fussulat, 34.

Prophet Mohammad states:

*“A Muslim is the one who the people were safe from his hand and tongue.”*³⁰

Imam Ali states:

*“Live amongst people in such a manner that if you are away, they will crave for your company and if you die, they weep over you.”*³¹

*“People are either your brothers in religion or your equal in humanity.”*³²

*“The one who takes what is not his right, and the one that oppresses others and the one who consumes what is not his, is not considered as one of our followers (Shia).”*³³

*“Grant your friend your advice; and your relatives your help; and to the rest of people your smile”*³⁴

³⁰ Ahmad, al-Musnad, vol 2, p 224, Hadith 7086.

³¹ Al-Majlisi, Behar al-Anwar, vol 42, p 247.

³² Imam Ali, Nahjul Balaghah, Letters Chapter, No. 53.

³³ Al-Qadhi al-Maghrebi, Daam al-Islam, vol 1, p 56.

³⁴ Ghurar al-Hekam, Hadith 2466.

In this book, His Eminence Ayatollah Sheikh Mohammad
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