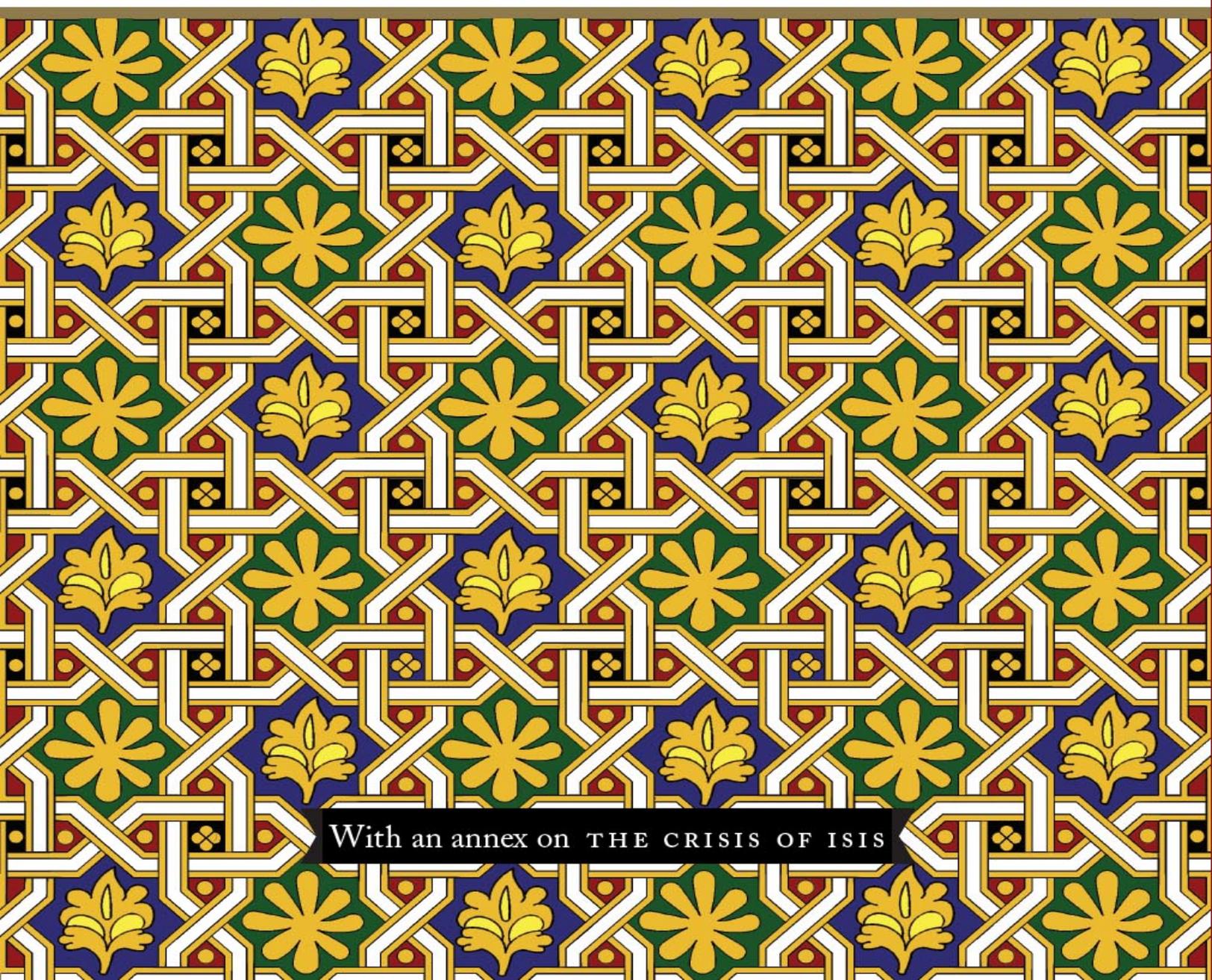


*A Thinking Person's*  
**GUIDE to ISLAM**

The Essence of Islam in 12 Verses from the Qur'an

H. R. H. PRINCE GHAZI BIN MUHAMMAD

Foreword by H.M. King Abdullah II ibn al-Hussein



With an annex on THE CRISIS OF ISIS

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# Chapter 1

## WHAT IS RELIGION?

*Truly this is in the former scrolls, (Al-A'la, 87:18)*



Humanity has never been able to exist without religion. It is true that some people ignore religion all their lives. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—for the first time in history perhaps—certain countries became atheist and others became secular. It is also true that some people wish there were no religion. Today perhaps five per cent of the world is atheist and perhaps another 10 per cent is avowedly irreligious. It is even true that religion—or rather the misuse of religion—has caused a lot of suffering. But it is also true that regimes based on atheistic ideologies like Communism and perhaps Nazism have caused even more suffering when they have been in power, and they have often made ‘religions’ of their own atheistic philosophies. And it is clear that the vast majority of humanity loves religion and has always done so. At any rate, today (1437 AH/2016 CE) about 85 per cent of the world’s population of 7.4 billion people belong to a religion.

Currently, the largest religions in the world are—as they have been for the last thousand years—Christianity and Islam. Christians make up about one third of the world. Muslims make up about one quarter of the world. Together they make up 55 per cent of the world’s population. So religion has never gone away, despite the coming of modern science and technology during the last 200 years. And today religion seems to be as powerful as ever in shaping history.

Religion must be a part of human nature. There is obviously an innate and profound human need for it—or at least for faith as such—and it obviously fulfils deep human needs. As Emily Brontë (1818–1848) wrote (in ‘No Coward Soul is Mine’):

No coward soul is mine,

No trembler in the world’s storm-troubled sphere!

I see Heaven’s glories shine,

And Faith shines equal, arming me from Fear.

At any rate, religion is a fact of life, and a fact of history. And since it is not going away any time in the foreseeable future, it is essential for everyone in the world to know what it really is. In what follows, we will examine Islam’s view of religion, and thus of itself, based upon the Qur’an and the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ (the *hadith*). Islam is the world’s last major religion, and so the whole world—Muslim and non-Muslim alike—needs to have a concise and accurate explanation of it.

### WHAT DOES THE WORD ‘RELIGION’ MEAN?

The Arabic word for ‘religion’ is ‘*din*’. Its original meaning is ‘humility’, ‘restriction’ and ‘obedience’, and it is related to the word for ‘debt’ (‘*dayn*’). The idea is that we must be humble and constrain ourselves, for we are under God’s control. Moreover, we owe a debt to God (for having created us), so religion (*din*) is the natural relationship we have with God.

The English word for ‘religion’ is now a word whose meaning people argue about. Originally, however, it came from the Latin ‘*re-ligio*’ meaning to ‘re-tie’ or ‘re-bind’—and hence ‘bond’—(between man and heaven). This implies a bond that ties us, or re-ties us, to God.

In short, by definition, a true religion is what ‘attaches’ human beings to God (and hence to salvation and paradise) according to

their inherent relationship with God.

In the Qur'an, God mentions that there is a timeless message in the monotheistic religions. God says:

*Truly this is in the former scrolls, / the scrolls of Abraham and Moses. (Al-A'la, 87:18–19)*

The 'scrolls of Moses' ﷻ are the Torah—the first five books of the Old Testament, which itself is the first part of the Bible. The 'scrolls of Abraham' ﷻ are lost to us now, or perhaps they were absorbed into the Torah. At any rate, we know that they contained essentially the same message.

What was that message? God describes it in the verses leading up to the ones quoted above. God says:

*Successful indeed is he who purifies himself, / and mentions the Name of his Lord and prays. / Nay, but you prefer the life of this world, / whereas the Hereafter is better and more lasting. / Truly this is in the former scrolls, / the scrolls of Abraham and Moses. (Al-A'la, 87:14–19)*

So the essential message of monotheistic religion consists of: (1) belief in One God; (2) belief in the afterlife (and hence in judgement); (3) prayer and remembrance of God; and (4) purification of the soul from the ego and evil (and hence virtue). One might say that it consists of a doctrine, a method and the practice of virtue.



## WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO KNOW ALL THIS?

It is important to know this because it shows that the purpose of religion is fundamentally to *help* people, morally and spiritually. It is meant to help people in this life and the next. It is meant to be a force for *good*. It is also important to know this because it shows

that religion is a 'complete programme' for human life: it has a vision of reality, a plan of action, and embraces all of life. This programme is extremely powerful. Where there is great power, there is also great danger. In other words, religion is supposed to be a great force for good, but for that same reason it can be very dangerous if it is abused. So nothing is more important for human beings than a proper understanding of religion.



## Chapter 2

### WHAT IS ISLAM?

*Truly I am God—there is no god except Me. So worship Me and establish prayer to make remembrance of Me. (Ta Ha, 20:14)*



The word 'Islam' has come to have a number of different meanings, and people get confused between them. First, there is the literal meaning of the word '*islam*' in Arabic. Second, there is the religion of Islam, as it is in principle, according to the Qur'an and the *hadith*. It is what Muslims believe, and should do. It is, as it were, what God and the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ have said and done. Third, there are the civilisation and cultures created over the course of history by the religion of Islam. It is what Muslims have said and done, and are doing—rightly or wrongly. It is important to distinguish between the second and third senses of the word. Otherwise, the religion of Islam gets blamed for things it actually condemns, and the few hijack the reputation of the many.

### THE MEANING OF THE WORD 'ISLAM'

The meaning of the word '*islam*' in Arabic is: 'to turn oneself over to; to resign oneself; to listen and submit oneself'. This meaning is indicated perfectly in God's words about Abraham ﷺ:

*When his Lord said to him, 'Submit', he said, 'I have submitted to the Lord of the Worlds'. (Al-Baqarah, 2:131)*

The root of the word *islam* is the triliteral Arabic root *s-l-m*. *S-l-m* basically means two things: (1) ‘to be free of blemish’ and hence ‘security, safety, well-being’; and (2) ‘peace’ (*‘salam’*). So these two root meanings of *s-l-m* are ‘built in’ to the very concept of the religion of Islam.

1. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ alluded to the first meaning (of ‘safety’) in his definition of what a (true) Muslim is: ‘The Muslim is a person from whose tongue and hand *all people* are safe (*salima*).’ (*Nasa’i; Ibn Majah; Musnad Ahmad Ibn Hanbal*)

2. The second meaning (of ‘peace’) is shown by the characteristic greeting of Islam, ‘*Al-Salam ‘alaykum*’ (‘Peace be upon you’). God says in the Qur’an: . . . *But when you enter houses, salute [with a greeting of Peace] (‘sallimu’) one another with a greeting from God of blessing and purity. . . (Al-Nur, 24:61)*. Actually, in the Qur’an this is the greeting not only of believers (*Al-Nisa’*, 4:94 et al.); but also of pre-Islamic prophets (*Maryam*, 19:15 et al.); of angels (*Al-Nahl*, 16:32); and of God Himself (*Yasin*, 36:58). It is a greeting that conveys Divine Mercy, for God says in the Qur’an:

*And when those who believe in Our revelations come to you, say: ‘Peace be unto you!’ Your Lord has prescribed for Himself mercy, that whoever of you does evil through ignorance and repents of it afterwards and does right, [for him] lo! He is Forgiving, Merciful. (Al-An‘am, 6:54)*

‘*Al-Salam*’ (‘The Peace’) is also one of the Names of God in the Qur’an (*Al-Hashr*, 59:23), and paradise is called ‘*dar al-salam*’ (‘the abode of peace’) in the Qur’an (*Yunus*, 10:25 et al.). The implication here is that ‘*Muslim*’ is someone who has submitted to God and has found (inner) peace (*salam*).

It will be noted that the word ‘*islam*’ is different from the word ‘*istislam*’ which means ‘giving up; abandoning; capitulating, succumbing’. The linguistic implication of the word ‘*islam*’ is only that the ‘*Muslim*’ (the person who lives ‘*islam*’) voluntarily gives up his or her will—or rather, ego—to God, and so (a) becomes safe and secure (and others are secure from him or her); and (b) finds (inner)

peace. He (or she) *does not* capitulate or lose himself (or herself). On the contrary, he (or she) gains his (or her) (true) self.

## ISLAM AS A CIVILISATION

Turning to the history and civilisation of Islam, as is well known, the religion of Islam started in around 610 in Mecca, a town in the western part of Arabia. A noble Arab, descended from Ishmael  the son of Abraham , aged around 40, began to receive revelations from God whilst in solitary retreat. He tried to convey the content of the revelations, but the majority of his people, who practised idolatry, rejected him (initially at least). After 13 years of persecution in Mecca, he  escaped north to the town of Yathrib (later renamed 'Medina'), where he  was welcome. This event was known as the *Hijra*, and it marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar. There he set up a new community with the people of Medina and with those Meccans and others who believed his message. The Meccans and their allies pursued him even in Medina and waged war on him there. Ten years later he died. By that time, however, most of Arabia had entered his religion. The revelations he received are known as the *Qur'an*. The man was Muhammad bin 'Abdullah . No single person has had a greater influence on the history of the world than he.

The religion brought by the Prophet Muhammad  was called *Islam*. It was a final restatement of the same monotheistic religions brought by the great prophets of the past. It moulded one of the greatest civilisations in history. Within 100 years it spanned much of the Middle East, Asia and Africa, as well as parts of Europe. For the last 1300 years these areas have more or less remained Muslim, and Muslims today make up about a quarter of the world's population. Islam is the second largest religion in history, and today the fastest growing. It is also the most widely practiced in the world—Muslims being generally more religious than the mass of adherents to other religions.

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