

# Righteousness: A Quranic Perspective

By: Gatut Adisoma

In studying the Quran, one often finds important lessons "hidden" between seemingly unrelated subjects. For example, the Quran discusses idolaters who invented dietary prohibitions and attributed them to God in Sura 6:138-144. In the subsequent verses, God not only answers and nullifies the people's argument by detailing what the real dietary prohibitions are, but He goes on to the essence of the matter as only the Creator can. Verses 145 and 146 of the Sura specify in no uncertain terms the four dietary prohibitions. However, God does not stop there; in verses 151 to 153 He goes on to point out what the real prohibitions and commandments are. These can be summarized as follows: not to set up idols beside God, to honor the parents, to give Zakat, not to kill the children (abortion) or any person (except in the course of justice), not to commit gross sins/adultery, not to touch the orphans' money except for their own good, to give full weight and measure in trade, to be just when bearing witness, to fulfill the covenant, not to accept any information unless verified, and not to be arrogant (see also 17:22-39).

Similarly, one can find an important concept illuminated in many different subjects within the book. This exemplifies another aspect of the Quran's beauty. In 2:62 and 5:69, we learn that the three minimum requirements for anybody's salvation and eternal happiness are: belief in God, belief in the Hereafter, and leading a righteous life. One cannot attain God's grace without being righteous. How do we know how to lead a righteous life? Within the Quran, righteousness is mentioned in light of the discussions about the direction in prayer (qiblah), the different rites and laws of Abrahamic congregations, the hajj pilgrimage, and even in the discussion about dress code, among others. These provide the sincere seeker a better perspective and a fuller understanding of the meaning.

The changing and restoring of the qiblah ***"The fools among the people would say, "Why did they change the direction of their qiblah?" Say, =To God belongs the east and the west; He directs whomever He wills in the right direction." (2:142)***

This verse opens the discussion on the changing of the qiblah during prophet Muhammad's time as a test for the people, and actually hints at the answer. The verses that follow explain why the prayer direction was changed and then restored back to the Sacred Masjid in Mecca. However, 2:148 sums up the heart of the matter, the true qiblah:

***Each of you chooses the direction to follow; you shall race towards righteousness...  
One religion, different rites and laws***

***The only religion approved by God is Submission... (3:19)***

***Anyone who accepts other than Submission as his religion, it will not be accepted from him... (3:85)***

Islam (Submission) is not a name; it is a description: "Total submission to God - worshipping God, and devoting the worship absolutely to Him alone." Anyone who meets this criterion is a submitter. Thus, one can be a submitter Jew, a submitter Christian, a submitter Muslim, or even a submitter anonymous. What is required from them, according to the Quran, is righteousness.

***For each congregation, we have decreed a set of obligations that they must uphold... (22:67)***

***...For each of you, we have decreed laws and methodologies. Had God willed, He could have made you one congregation. But He thus puts you to the test through His revelations to you. Therefore, you shall race towards righteousness... (5:48)***

Provisions for the Hajj pilgrimage Hajj pilgrimage, as detailed in the Quran, is the only commandment that is conditional upon one's ability. As with all religious duties in Submission, hajj was decreed through Abraham (22:26-27), but only for those who can afford it (3:97). Pilgrims from all over the world converge in Mecca, and with it comes the chance to buy and sell goods as a way to help finance the journey. Indeed, seeking God's provision through commerce during hajj is allowed in 2:198. But the following verse makes it clear what the best provision is.

***Hajj pilgrimage shall be observed during specific months... As you prepare your provisions for the journey, remember that the best provision is righteousness... (2:197)***

The next verses explain one of the rituals in hajj pilgrimage:

***The animal offerings were Included in God's rituals for your own good... Neither their meat, nor their blood reaches God. What reaches him is your righteousness. (22:36-37)***

Finally, on the subject of hajj, here is a question to the Arabs:

***Have you considered the watering of the pilgrims and caring for the Sacred Masjid a substitute for believing in God and the Last Day, and striving in the cause of God? They are not equal in the sight of God. God does not guide the wicked. (9:19)***

### **Dress code**

This must be one of the hottest topics of discussion in idolatrous "Islamic" countries in the Middle East and throughout the world. In many of these countries, women are literally "buried alive" under piles upon piles of garments that cover everything, from face to toe. Known as the "Muslim" dress code, it is actually based more on tradition and prejudice than religion. It is an idolatrous practice because people claim (falsely) that it comes from God when in fact it was invented by their religious scholars- just as the case with dietary prohibitions mentioned previously. Nowhere in the Quran does God command the women to cover their head or their face. The clear commandment in the Quran

is for women to cover their chests (24:31). More importantly, the motivating idea, directed to both men and women, is given just prior to this commandment:

***Tell the believing men that they shall subdue their eyes, and to maintain their chastity... And tell the believing women to subdue their eyes, and maintain their chastity... (24:30-31)***

Obviously, maintaining one's chastity is easier if the bosoms-not the faces-are covered. In addition, God also commands the believing women to lengthen their garments (33:59), and to maintain modesty in general (24:60). However, the essence of discussion about "the best garment," as in the prohibitions, goes beyond the mundane dress code:

***O children of Adam, we have provided you with garments to cover your bodies, as well as for luxury. But the best garment is the garment of righteousness... (7:26)***

As we learn from the Quran, Satan does not have any power over God's servants, those who worship God alone (38:83). The garment of righteousness protects God's servants from Satan's influence. Breaking God's commandment results in removal of one's garment of righteousness, and the person falls prey to Satan's ever eager hands. This is explained in the verse immediately after the above verse:

***O children of Adam do not let the devil entice you as he did when he evicted your parents from Paradise. He removed their garments to expose their bodies. He and his tribe see you, while you do not see them. We appoint the devils as companions for those who do not believe. (7:27)***

With all the above perspectives on righteousness, it would be nice to know its clear description. AS it turns out, righteousness is a whole set of moral standard, as the Most Gracious has defined it for us in the following verse:

***Righteousness is not turning your faces towards the east or the west. Righteous are those who believe in God, the Last Day, the angels, the scripture, and the prophets; and they give the money, despite loving it, to the relatives, the orphans, the needy, the traveling alien, the beggars, and to free the slaves; and they observe the contact prayers (salat), and give the obligatory charity (Zakat); and they keep their word whenever they make a promise; and they steadfastly persevere in the face of adversity, hardship, and persecution. These are the truthful; these are the righteous. (2:177)***