

# Islam

## The Religion of Exaggeration

**By Jean-Georges Estiot**

# Introduction

For years I have watched with growing frustration as the media presents Islam without question, repeating exaggerations and falsehoods spread by apologists. Too many journalists fail to perform the basic investigative work needed to uncover the truth. Instead of honest reporting, they offer one-sided stories that ignore serious concerns. This book is written to challenge that complacency and to give readers a clear and honest view of Islam, not as it is often portrayed, but as it really is.

One of the most troubling developments is the use of the term "Islamophobia" to label and dismiss any criticism of Islam. This word was invented to silence questions and shut down debate. Rather than encouraging open discussion, the media have become complicit in promoting this narrative, turning into an echo chamber that suppresses all voices raising legitimate concerns. This tactic prevents meaningful dialogue and protects the religion from the scrutiny it deserves.

The danger of ignoring these realities is a slow and unnoticed spread of Islam within Western culture. Our open and democratic societies, built on freedom, equality, and transparency, are being exploited by those who wish to replace these values with a closed, restrictive, and anti-democratic system. If we continue to accept exaggerations and silencing tactics without question, we risk losing the very freedoms that define us. It is time to look honestly at Islam and understand what it truly represents, so we can respond wisely and protect our future.

This book is offered as an essential tool for anyone willing to investigate the "other side" of Islam, the side that is rarely shown in mainstream media or discussed openly. It aims to provide clear information, critical analysis, and thoughtful perspectives that challenge the common narratives. By presenting facts and exposing exaggerations, it encourages readers to think independently and make informed judgments. In a time when misinformation and silence endanger open societies, having access to honest and balanced knowledge about Islam is more important than ever.

# **Part 1**

## **The Qur'an and its contents**

# Chapter 1

## The Qur'an's perfection and uniqueness

### Eloquence and style (inimitability challenge)

One of the central claims in Islam is that the Qur'an is so beautifully written and so powerfully expressed that it could not have come from a human being. This is not just an opinion shared by believers. The Qur'an itself presents it as a challenge. In several verses, it invites doubters to produce a chapter like it if they think it is not from God. The idea is that no matter how skilled someone might be in Arabic, they could never produce anything that matches the Qur'an in beauty, structure, and message.

Muslim scholars have long repeated this claim. They say that the Qur'an's rhythm, rhyme, balance, and choice of words are beyond imitation. They also argue that the way it mixes commands, stories, warnings, and poetry is unlike anything else. Some go even further, saying that the Qur'an invented a new style of Arabic altogether, one that no poet or writer before had used. Others say the real miracle is in how it affects people. It moves them to tears, brings peace to the heart, or strikes fear in the wrongdoer. In their view, all this proves it must be divine.

But there are problems with this claim. First, what counts as unmatched beauty is not the same for everyone. Language and style are judged differently by different people. Even in the time of Muhammad, many Arabs who heard the Qur'an did not find it convincing. Some said it was just old stories. Others thought it sounded like magic or poetry. If it were truly beyond human ability, one would expect a more consistent reaction from those who spoke the same language and lived in the same culture.

Second, the Qur'an does not follow a clear structure. It often jumps from one subject to another. Legal rules appear next to parables. Battles are mixed with sermons. The same stories are told again in different places with slightly different words. For those who have grown up memorising it, these shifts may seem normal or even deep. But to outsiders, it often feels confusing. Calling this unmatched may have more to do with habit and reverence than with anything objective.

Third, the challenge to copy the Qur'an is itself impossible to meet, not because it is truly impossible, but because there is no way to prove success. The Qur'an does not explain what makes a good imitation. Is it rhyme? Grammar? Meaning?

Emotion? Even if someone did produce a beautiful chapter in the same style, believers would simply say it is not good enough. The test is set up so that only one answer is allowed. That is not a fair or useful test.

Over the years, some people have tried to take up the challenge. During Muhammad's lifetime, a man named Musaylima claimed he too received divine words. His verses were mocked and dismissed, though they followed a similar form. Later writers also tried to copy or parody the Qur'an, sometimes seriously and sometimes as a joke. Their work was always rejected, not just because of quality but because of who they were. If only believers are allowed to judge, then no imitation will ever be accepted, no matter its merit.

Other religions make similar claims. Hindus believe the Vedas are divine in sound and rhythm. Christians speak of the words of Jesus as having unmatched moral force. Bahá'ís say that their prophet's writings cannot be copied. In all these cases, followers treat their scriptures as something higher than ordinary speech. Muslims are not alone in this. What is different is how Islam turns this belief into a formal challenge, and then uses it as proof.

In the end, the Qur'an does have powerful language. It has shaped the Arabic language and left a deep mark on those who believe in it. But that does not prove it came from God. Many books, speeches, poems, and songs have moved people deeply without claiming divine origin. The claim that no one can match it is built on rules that cannot be tested and judged by neutral observers. It remains a matter of belief, not proof.

## Organisation and clarity

A common claim in Islamic teaching is that the Qur'an is perfectly organised and clear. It is said to follow a divine structure that no human could have designed, with each part connected in ways that reveal deep wisdom. Supporters argue that its structure is purposeful and that its message is explained in full. Some even say that its clarity and order are among the strongest proofs that it comes from God.

But this picture does not match how the Qur'an reads. The text often moves from one subject to another with no warning. Legal rules appear next to stories. Prayers are followed by threats. A single chapter may contain commands, reminders, and parts of unrelated stories all placed side by side. The order of the chapters is not based on theme or time. It is mostly arranged from longest to shortest. There is no clear beginning, middle, or end.

The Qur'an also repeats stories many times. Characters like Moses or Noah appear in several places, but each time with small changes and no explanation. The full story is never told in one chapter. For someone reading it without prior knowledge or outside help, it can be difficult to understand what is being said or how the parts fit together.

Many Muslims admit that the Qur'an needs interpretation. Scholars over the centuries have written long commentaries to explain how verses connect or what

they really mean. If the book were clear on its own, these explanations would not be necessary. The fact that there are many schools of thought in Islam, each reading the same verses in different ways, shows that the meaning is often not obvious.

Supporters sometimes claim that the style of the Qur'an is meant to reflect the way God speaks or that it is designed to reach different people in different ways. Others say the order is divine but mysterious. These are beliefs, not explanations. The same patterns of repetition, abrupt change, and unclear reference would not be praised in other books. They are treated as deep only because the Qur'an is believed to be divine.

In short, the claim that the Qur'an is perfectly organised and clear is based on belief, not on the text itself. Readers often find it hard to follow, and the structure only becomes meaningful after long explanation. What is called perfect clarity is often the result of tradition filling in what the text leaves unclear.

## Consistency and coherence

Another claim made about the Qur'an is that it is completely consistent and free of contradiction. It is said to contain a message that fits together without gaps, errors, or mixed signals. The Qur'an itself makes this claim in one of its verses, where it states that if the book were from anyone other than God, it would contain many contradictions. This is used as an argument for divine authorship.

In reality, the Qur'an presents ideas that are sometimes difficult to reconcile. It speaks in strong terms about peace and mercy but also includes calls for violence and punishment. It says there is no compulsion in religion but also commands harsh penalties for those who reject or leave the faith. It praises people of earlier revelations but in other places calls them corrupt, misguided, or cursed. Some verses say that every soul bears its own burden, while others suggest that guilt can be shared or passed on.

The Qur'an also contains verses that change or replace earlier ones. This is known as abrogation. Certain rules were given in the early period of Muhammad's preaching, only to be replaced later by different rules. For example, early calls for patience and non-violence gave way to calls for battle and retribution. Muslims explain this by saying that the circumstances changed and that God revealed new guidance for new situations. But this creates a problem for the claim of perfect consistency, because the older and newer verses often remain side by side in the text.

Even on deep questions like human freedom and divine control, the Qur'an offers more than one answer. Some verses say everything is written and willed by God, while others speak as if people choose their path and are held responsible for it. These ideas are not clearly resolved. Scholars have written entire books trying to explain how both can be true at the same time.

In practice, when faced with clear contradictions, believers often fall back on

interpretation. They say the meanings are deeper than they appear, or that the verses must be read in a special order, or that only experts can truly understand them. But this weakens the claim of consistency. A message that requires constant explanation to seem consistent cannot truly be called clear or free of conflict.

In summary, while the Qur'an does present repeated themes and firm ideas, it also contains contradictions in tone, content, and law. These are explained through theology, not removed. The claim of perfect coherence is only sustained through belief and selective reading.

## Claimed impossibility of human authorship

One of the most central beliefs in Islam is that the Qur'an could not have been written by a human being. Muslims are taught that its language, content, and power are beyond what any person could produce. Because of this, it is said to be a miracle and a direct message from God. This claim is repeated in sermons, books, and everyday conversation. The Qur'an itself challenges doubters to produce a chapter like it if they think it is man-made.

This idea often rests on the belief that Muhammad could not have created the Qur'an. He is described as illiterate, isolated from deep learning, and lacking any poetic ability. The argument is that a man with no formal training could not possibly have produced a work so vast, moving, and influential. Because of this, many Muslims accept the Qur'an's divine origin without question.

But there are several problems with this claim. First, the idea that Muhammad had no contact with other sources of knowledge is not supported by evidence. He lived in a region where traders, storytellers, and religious groups travelled frequently. He was familiar with Jewish and Christian stories, and many parts of the Qur'an retell these narratives, often in altered form. The Qur'an also reflects the language, moral concerns, and tribal customs of seventh-century Arabia. These are signs of human context, not signs of something outside time and place.

Second, the structure and content of the Qur'an do not go beyond what is humanly possible. The text includes many repetitions, incomplete stories, sudden shifts in subject, and phrases that require interpretation. These are the same features found in many human texts, especially those shaped by oral delivery and political needs. The fact that the Qur'an moves between different tones and styles may reflect changing situations rather than divine design.

Third, the challenge to produce something like the Qur'an does not have clear rules. What does it mean to produce something "like it"? Is it about rhyme, content, effect, or structure? No one can agree. If someone were to create a powerful and poetic text, it would still be rejected by believers simply because it is not the Qur'an. This makes the challenge impossible by definition. The standard is not based on fair comparison. It is based on belief.

Finally, other religious traditions make similar claims. Hindus say the Vedas could not have come from a human source. Christians say the words of Jesus are

unmatched. Bahá'ís say their prophet wrote with divine force. In all cases, followers feel that their sacred text is different from anything else. Muslims are not unique in this. What is unique is the use of this belief to shut down criticism or to demand faith.

In the end, the claim that the Qur'an could not have come from a human is based on circular reasoning. People believe it is divine because they are told it could not be anything else. But the text itself reflects the culture and time in which it appeared. It reads like a powerful example of human religious writing, not something outside human limits.

## Emotional and spiritual impact

Muslims often claim that the Qur'an produces an emotional or spiritual effect that proves it is from God. Many describe feeling calm, uplifted, or deeply moved when they hear or recite it. This is not treated as a personal reaction but as a sign of divine truth. It is said that no other book can touch the heart in the same way, and that this unique effect is part of the Qur'an's miracle.

These feelings are genuine. But they are not unique to Islam. People from other faiths also report strong emotions when reading their own scriptures. Christians speak of peace and joy from the Bible. Hindus describe the beauty of the Vedas. Buddhists feel clarity and calm when reading the Dhammapada. People also feel deeply affected by music, poetry, and stories that have no religious meaning. Emotional impact does not prove divine origin. It proves that words can move people.

In many cases, the reaction to the Qur'an is shaped by expectation. From a young age, Muslims are told that the Qur'an is the most beautiful and powerful thing they will ever hear. Children learn to recite it before they know what the words mean. Its sounds are tied to prayer, family, and community. By the time they are adults, the emotional response is automatic. They are not reacting to the words alone, but to everything that surrounds them.

The Qur'an also uses strong images. It speaks of paradise and fire, mercy and punishment, reward and loss. These are meant to stir the heart. But any book that speaks in vivid terms can do the same. Stories that speak of hope and fear often reach people more than abstract ideas. The Qur'an uses this method well, but it is not the only book that does.

Often, the claim is made that if someone listens to the Qur'an with an open heart, they will be moved or even converted. But this belief shapes the outcome. People expect to be touched, and so they are. The effect becomes a sign, and the sign becomes the proof. This is not evidence. It is belief confirming itself.

In short, the Qur'an can produce powerful emotions in believers. But this is not something only the Qur'an does. Many texts create the same effect in people who trust them, who grew up with them, or who turn to them in times of need. The emotional impact of the Qur'an shows that it is important to Muslims. It does not



prove that it is from God.

## Arabic as a sacred and unmatched language

Islam teaches that Arabic is not just the language of the Qur'an, but the most perfect and expressive language ever spoken. It is often described as rich, deep, and uniquely suited for divine communication. Because the Qur'an was revealed in Arabic, many Muslims believe that no other language can fully capture its meaning. Some even say that God chose Arabic because it is the only language capable of carrying His message without distortion.

This belief raises the status of Arabic far above all other languages. It is treated not only as the original language of Islam, but also as the only true medium for understanding the Qur'an. Translations are often said to be only interpretations. Some Muslims believe that the full truth of the Qur'an can never be known unless one reads it in Arabic, even if they are fluent in another language.

But this view is based more on belief than evidence. Arabic is a complex and expressive language, but so are many others. Persian, Latin, Sanskrit, Greek, and Hebrew all have long histories of poetry, philosophy, and religious writing. Arabic is not the only language with deep vocabulary, rich metaphors, or subtle meanings. The claim that it is unmatched comes from the assumption that the Qur'an is divine, and that God would only choose the best. It is the belief in the Qur'an's perfection that leads to the belief in Arabic's perfection, not the other way around.

This belief also creates a barrier for non-Arabic speakers. Islam claims to be a universal religion for all people. But at the same time, it insists that the only real way to understand the Qur'an is through a single language spoken by a minority of the world's population. This creates a strong divide between those who know Arabic and those who rely on translations and explanations. It also gives religious authority to those who can speak or read Arabic, even if they are not scholars or thinkers in other areas.

In practice, most Muslims do not understand the Arabic they recite in prayer. Many learn to read the script without knowing what it means. Others memorise verses without ever reflecting on their meaning. The claim that Arabic brings people closer to the message of God does not match the reality for most believers.

In short, the idea that Arabic is sacred and beyond comparison is part of the broader belief that the Qur'an is divine. This belief turns the language into something more than it is. Arabic is rich and important in Islamic history, but it is still a human language like any other. Treating it as holy creates obstacles rather than understanding, and it confuses linguistic pride with religious truth.

## Repetition framed as rhetorical brilliance

Many Muslims admire the Qur'an for its repeated phrases and themes, seeing them as a sign of rhetorical brilliance. Repetition is often used to create rhythm, to reinforce key ideas, and to guide the listener's attention. For example, phrases like "And Allah is Forgiving, Merciful" appear dozens of times. Supporters say that this style helps memorisation and gives the Qur'an a poetic, hypnotic quality that suits oral recitation.

However, repetition can also raise questions. If the Qur'an is truly perfect in style and content, why does it repeat the same ideas so often, sometimes almost word-for-word? In a human book, this might be seen as filler or lack of substance. In fact, some critics argue that the repetition sometimes slows the pace or interrupts the logical flow of argument. For instance, entire verses are repeated in different chapters with only minor changes, such as the stories of Moses and Pharaoh, or the Day of Judgement.

Defenders claim that repetition is part of Arabic rhetorical tradition, and that what sounds repetitive to outsiders has meaning and purpose to Arabic speakers. They may also argue that repetition reflects how humans actually learn and absorb ideas. Still, this does not explain why a divine text would need to rely so heavily on a technique that looks, to many readers, like restatement rather than revelation.

In the end, whether one sees repetition as powerful or excessive depends on what one expects from a divine message. Is it enough that the message is easy to remember and recite, or should it also avoid saying the same thing over and over? That question leads directly to deeper questions about the style, purpose, and source of the Qur'an.

## Rejection of literary criticism

Supporters of the Qur'an often reject the idea that it can be judged by the standards of literary criticism. They argue that since it is the direct word of God, it stands above human categories like narrative structure, character development, or literary unity. To them, applying such tools to the Qur'an is like judging a scientific formula as if it were a poem. The Qur'an, they say, is a unique genre, not meant to follow human rules of writing.

This view is common in Islamic teaching. Muslims are taught that the Qur'an is inimitable, that no human could ever produce anything like it. As a result, attempts to assess it using tools from literature or history are often dismissed as missing the point. Even when outsiders point out abrupt transitions, lack of context, or disjointed storytelling, believers respond that this reflects divine wisdom, not human flaw.

Critics, on the other hand, argue that the refusal to allow literary criticism is a kind of shield. They point out that all other religious texts, like the Bible or Hindu scriptures, have been studied through historical and literary methods. If the

Qur'an is part of human history, written in human language, and addressing human beings, then why should it be exempt from the same kind of analysis? Some even argue that the rejection of criticism reflects a fear that too much questioning might expose weaknesses in the text.

Others try to find a middle path. They say that one can appreciate the Qur'an's religious message while still being honest about its literary style. They note that in any other book, claims of perfection would be open to challenge, and that respect for a text should not require turning off one's critical thinking. For those outside the faith, the refusal to allow critical study can seem like an attempt to preserve belief by avoiding uncomfortable questions.

## Reverence replacing critical evaluation

In many Muslim societies, the Qur'an is treated with a level of reverence that goes far beyond respect for a religious text. It is often placed in the highest position in a room, wrapped carefully in cloth, and touched only after performing ritual washing. Recitation is done in a slow, melodic voice, and memorising the Qur'an is seen as a major achievement. This emotional and cultural attachment plays a powerful role in shaping how the text is approached.

Because of this deep reverence, the idea of critically evaluating the Qur'an is often not even considered. Questioning its verses, structure, or meaning is seen not just as academic inquiry, but as a threat to faith or even an attack on Islam itself. As a result, the Qur'an is typically approached with devotion, not with the tools of analysis used for other texts. In many cases, believers are taught from a young age that the Qur'an is perfect and beyond human criticism. Doubts are treated as personal failings rather than legitimate thoughts.

Critics argue that this mindset creates an environment where honest discussion is blocked. If no one is allowed to ask hard questions, then errors or contradictions—if they exist—can never be addressed. They point out that other major religious texts have long been studied through historical and literary analysis. If the Qur'an claims to be a guide for all humanity, then why should it be shielded from examination? For many outside the faith, this reluctance to evaluate the text is seen as a form of avoidance rather than devotion.

Some Muslims believe that real faith should not fear questions. They argue that a divine message should be able to stand up to study and reflection. However, such voices often remain quiet due to social pressure or legal restrictions. In places where blasphemy laws exist, even a respectful critique can be punished. This creates a situation where reverence becomes a barrier to understanding.

Ultimately, replacing evaluation with reverence makes it difficult to tell the difference between belief based on truth and belief based on habit. For anyone seeking clarity, the question remains whether sacred texts should be protected from doubt or opened up to it.

## Chapter 2

# Claims of scientific miracles in the Qur'an

### Retroactive reinterpretation

One of the most common strategies used to support the idea of scientific miracles in the Qur'an is to reinterpret vague or poetic verses after a scientific discovery is made. For example, after modern embryology developed, some claimed that certain Qur'anic verses about the development of the foetus perfectly matched what science had just discovered. But these verses had been read for centuries without anyone drawing such conclusions. The scientific meaning only appeared after the science itself was already known.

This process is known as retroactive reinterpretation. A verse that originally seemed general or symbolic is later given a new, specific meaning that lines up with current scientific understanding. Supporters say this shows the Qur'an contained knowledge ahead of its time. Critics argue that it simply shows how easy it is to read meaning into a text once you already know what to look for.

Another problem is that different people often give different interpretations of the same verse. What one person sees as a reference to astronomy, another sees as spiritual imagery. If the scientific meaning is truly in the text, why was it hidden for so long? And why does it only become clear after scientists explain it?

This approach can also lead to inconsistency. When a scientific claim matches a verse, it is seen as proof of divine knowledge. But when science contradicts a verse, believers are told the verse is metaphorical or not meant to be scientific. This double standard allows the Qur'an to always be right, no matter what the facts are. For many, that is not a sign of truth, but of selective reading.

### Matching verses to modern science

Some people claim that the Qur'an contains facts that match modern science. They say that this is proof that the book could only have come from God, since these facts were unknown at the time. Examples often include the development of the embryo, the shape of the Earth, or the expansion of the universe. Supporters point to verses that seem to match these discoveries and say that this shows the Qur'an is scientifically accurate.

But there is a problem. Many of these verses are vague and can be understood in different ways. They do not clearly describe scientific facts until someone reads them through the lens of modern knowledge. In other words, people already know the science and then look for verses that seem to match it. If someone read the same verses a thousand years ago, they would not think of embryology or astronomy.

Also, many of the claims are based on translations or word choices that are not agreed upon. A single Arabic word might be translated in different ways depending on what the reader wants to find. Some of the so-called scientific miracles depend on these loose translations and not on clear, solid meanings. In many cases, the same verses have been explained in totally different ways throughout Islamic history.

If the Qur'an truly wanted to leave no doubt about Allah's knowledge of science, it could have included verses that clearly describe things no one at the time could have known. It could have mentioned DNA as the code of life, or gravity as the force that keeps planets in orbit. It could have described germs, atoms, or the inner workings of the brain in a way that would be impossible to deny or misunderstand. Instead, what we find are general statements that only seem scientific after science has already explained the facts.

Critics say that if the Qur'an really described modern science, it should be clear and easy to recognise without needing outside knowledge. They also point out that some verses do not match science at all, but those are often ignored or explained away. When only the matching parts are highlighted, it becomes more like cherry-picking than serious study.

In the end, whether one sees science in the Qur'an often depends on what one is looking for. If someone wants to find proof, they will likely find it. But that does not mean the proof was really there all along.

## Claims of advanced predictions

Some people say that the Qur'an made predictions about the future that later came true. They believe this shows the book came from God, because no human could have known these things ahead of time. Examples often include the victory of the Romans after a defeat, or the spread of Islam across the world. These are seen as signs that the Qur'an contains special knowledge.

But when we look more closely, many of these so-called predictions are either vague or about things that were likely to happen anyway. For example, saying that a defeated group will win again is not unusual in history. Empires rise and fall all the time. The same goes for the spread of a religion. Once a movement gains enough followers and power, it often spreads on its own.

In other cases, the verses do not clearly say what supporters claim they say. They might be written in general terms and only sound like predictions after the event has already happened. People read them in a new way once they know what took

place. If the outcome had been different, the same verses might have been forgotten or explained another way.

Also, many important events in history are not mentioned in the Qur'an at all. There is nothing about printing, the discovery of new continents, electricity, world wars, or space travel. If the goal was to impress future generations with clear and specific knowledge, the book could have done much more. It could have named places or inventions long before they existed.

Critics say that calling these verses predictions is a stretch. They argue that if someone wants to believe in them, they will. But that belief often comes from faith, not from solid evidence. Real predictions should be clear, detailed, and made before the event in a way that anyone could check. That is not what we see here.

In the end, claims of advanced predictions in the Qur'an depend on how people choose to read the verses. To believers, they may seem like proof. To others, they seem more like guesses or general statements made to sound important.

## **Pseudoscientific language and persuasion**

Some people use scientific-sounding words to make the Qur'an seem more advanced than it really is. They say that the book talks about physics, biology, or astronomy, using modern terms to explain old verses. This can sound impressive, especially to people who are not experts in science. But often, the language used is not real science. It is what we call pseudoscience.

Pseudoscience uses big words and technical phrases without real meaning behind them. For example, someone might say that a verse in the Qur'an describes quantum theory or black holes. But when scientists look at the actual verse, it turns out to be a simple poetic line about light or darkness. The scientific meaning was not there until someone added it from the outside.

This method works by using science as a tool of persuasion. It gives people the feeling that their religion is proven by modern knowledge. It creates the impression that the Qur'an is full of secrets only now being understood. But this approach often ignores what real scientists say and how science actually works. Real science is based on evidence, testing, and clear definitions. It is not about guessing or fitting ideas into old texts.

Another problem is that this kind of language makes it hard to ask questions. If someone doubts the claims, they may be told that they just do not understand science. This creates a wall where only believers are allowed to speak, and anyone who disagrees is called ignorant. That is not how real knowledge grows.

In the end, using pseudoscientific language might make the Qur'an sound more modern, but it does not prove anything. It replaces honest discussion with tricks of speech. If a text truly contains scientific truth, it should not need to be dressed up in fancy words. It should speak clearly on its own.

## Selective reading of ambiguous language

Many verses in the Qur'an use words that can be understood in more than one way. This is called ambiguous language. Instead of being clear and direct, these verses are open to different meanings depending on who is reading them. Some people take advantage of this and choose the meaning that fits best with what they already believe. This is called selective reading.

For example, if someone wants to prove that the Qur'an talks about space or medicine, they will focus only on the verses that could be stretched to match those ideas. They ignore other possible meanings or past interpretations. They might also leave out parts of the verse that do not fit their theory. In this way, the reader is not being fair or honest with the text. They are using it to make a point, not to understand what it really says.

This problem becomes bigger when different people give different explanations of the same verse. One person says it means one thing, another says it means something else, and both claim the Qur'an is proving their view. If the verse were truly clear, everyone would understand it the same way. When meanings are flexible, it is easy to make a verse say almost anything.

Critics point out that this is not how evidence works. In science and history, facts must be clear and agreed upon. You cannot say a verse is proof of something just because you can fit it to your idea. You also have to look at how people understood the verse before modern science. If the new meaning only appeared after the discovery, it is not a prediction, it is a rewording.

In the end, selective reading of vague verses turns the Qur'an into a mirror. People see what they want to see. But truth should not depend on guessing or twisting words. If a message is meant for all people in all times, it should be clear without needing special tricks to explain it.

## Overlooking historical influences

Many people who claim that the Qur'an contains scientific miracles often ignore the world in which it was written. The Qur'an was shared in seventh-century Arabia, a place where people already had ideas about the stars, the earth, the sky, and the human body. Some of these ideas came from earlier civilisations like the Greeks, Persians, and Indians. Traders, travellers, and scholars shared stories, beliefs, and bits of knowledge across these regions.

Some of the verses that are now said to match science also match the ideas that were common at the time. For example, the idea that humans are made from a drop of fluid was already known in ancient Greek thought. People also believed in the seven layers of the sky, which shows up in earlier cultures too. So it should not be surprising to find similar things in the Qur'an. That does not mean it came from a divine source. It might just reflect what people already believed.

When these historical influences are ignored, it creates the false idea that the Qur'an came up with everything on its own. This makes normal information seem special. But if we look at the history of ideas, we see that the Qur'an was part of a long chain of human thought. It repeated some ideas, changed others, and left out many things that were unknown at the time.

Critics say that understanding the world of the past helps us read the Qur'an more clearly. It shows us what was already known, what was guessed, and what was influenced by culture. When we ignore this background, we risk turning ordinary knowledge into a miracle just because it is old. Real understanding comes from asking where ideas came from and how they fit into history, not just how they sound today.

## Popular promotion of miracle claims

In recent years, many videos, books, and websites have promoted the idea that the Qur'an contains scientific miracles. These claims are shared widely on social media, especially among young Muslims who want to feel proud of their religion. The videos often have dramatic music, big words, and impressive images of galaxies or DNA. They are designed to make people feel amazed and certain that the Qur'an must be from God.

But these popular materials often do not explain things clearly. They usually leave out important facts, ignore other explanations, and rely on weak or unclear verses. They rarely include real scientists or serious studies. Instead, they mix faith and science in a way that makes it hard to tell the difference between truth and belief.

These miracle claims can be very powerful because they give people simple answers. Instead of studying science or thinking deeply, people are told that all the answers are already in the Qur'an. This can make them stop asking questions. It also makes it hard to accept new discoveries if they seem to go against what the Qur'an says.

Some Muslims have started to speak out against these miracle claims. They say that science should not be used this way, and that faith should not depend on weak proof. They believe that mixing science and religion in a dishonest way hurts both. But their voices are often drowned out by the louder, more popular videos that promise easy certainty.

In the end, the wide promotion of miracle claims may bring short-term pride, but it can also lead to confusion. If young people later learn that the science was misused or that the claims were false, they may start to doubt everything. Real faith, and real science, both deserve more care and honesty than these miracle videos often provide.



## Dismissing critics as ignorant

When people question the claims of scientific miracles in the Qur'an, they are often told they just do not understand. Critics are called ignorant, biased, or hateful. Instead of answering the questions, some believers try to shut them down by saying only experts in Arabic or Islamic studies have the right to speak. This way, the conversation is stopped before it can even begin.

This creates a problem. It suggests that no one is allowed to question unless they already believe. It also means that even smart, educated people can be ignored just because they are not Muslim or do not speak Arabic. But science is not limited to one language or one religion. Anyone can learn how science works, ask good questions, and check facts.

By dismissing all critics, supporters of miracle claims avoid having to explain why so many of the verses are unclear or why different Muslims disagree about what they mean. They also avoid talking about why these supposed miracles were never noticed for over a thousand years. It is easier to call someone ignorant than to admit that the evidence might be weak.

Some Muslims are open to discussion and do not treat questions as insults. They believe faith should be strong enough to face honest doubts. But others use the idea of ignorance as a shield. They make it seem like the truth is already known and anyone who asks questions is just blind or stubborn.

In the end, calling critics ignorant does not prove anything. It just avoids the real issues. If the Qur'an truly contains scientific miracles, then those miracles should speak for themselves, clearly and openly. No one should need to be silenced to protect the truth.

## Inconsistent use of scientific reasoning

When people say the Qur'an contains scientific miracles, they often use science in an unfair way. They accept science when it seems to support the Qur'an, but ignore it when it does not. This is called inconsistent reasoning. It means picking and choosing only the parts of science that make your side look good.

For example, if a verse can be linked to the idea that the universe is expanding, people will say this proves the Qur'an knew modern science. But when another verse seems to go against what science says, they will say the verse is spiritual, poetic, or not meant to be taken seriously. This way, the Qur'an is always seen as right, even if the logic changes from one verse to another.

In science, this kind of behaviour is not allowed. You cannot accept only the results you like and reject the rest. Real science tests everything with the same rules. If you claim the Qur'an is scientific, then all its verses should be tested in the same way. If you only highlight the matches and ignore the mismatches, that is not honest reasoning.

Some people even say science must catch up with the Qur'an, as if science is always behind. But this ignores how science actually works. Scientific ideas change when new evidence appears. They are not based on faith or old books. If a religious claim goes against evidence, science does not change to protect feelings.

In the end, using science only when it helps your belief is not a fair way to think. If the Qur'an really agrees with science, then that agreement should be clear, consistent, and based on solid facts, not tricks or double standards. Honest thinking means following the truth wherever it leads, not just when it suits your side.

## Using miracle claims to block criticism

Sometimes, people use the idea of scientific miracles in the Qur'an to stop others from asking hard questions. Instead of talking about difficult verses or problems in the text, they say, look at the science in the Qur'an, this proves it is from God. By doing this, they try to end the discussion before it even begins.

This creates a kind of shortcut. If the Qur'an has one or two verses that seem to match modern science, then everything in it must be true. That is the message being pushed. But this skips over all the other things that deserve to be talked about, like moral rules, contradictions, or strange stories. These topics are pushed aside by repeating the same miracle claims again and again.

It also makes people feel like they are not allowed to question. If you bring up a serious point, someone might say, you are just ignoring the clear proof from science. This makes honest debate very hard. It turns the Qur'an into something that cannot be touched, not because it answers all questions, but because one or two points are used to protect the rest.

Some Muslims believe this is not the right way to defend their faith. They say that every part of the Qur'an should be open to discussion, not hidden behind miracle claims. They want people to ask questions and think deeply, not just be told to believe because of a few special verses.

In the end, using miracle claims to block criticism does not make the Qur'an stronger. It just makes it harder to have a real conversation. If the message is true, it should be strong enough to face questions without needing shortcuts or distractions.

# Chapter 3

## The idea that Islam has no contradictions

### Claim of perfect consistency

Many Muslims believe the Qur'an has no contradictions. They are taught that the book is perfectly consistent and free from errors. Some verses in the Qur'an even make this claim, such as chapter 4 verse 82, which says that if the Qur'an were from anyone other than Allah, people would find many contradictions in it. This idea is repeated often, and many people accept it without looking too closely.

But when we read the Qur'an carefully, we do find verses that say different things about the same topic. One clear example is about how humans were created. In different places, the Qur'an says that man was created from clay (6:2), from a drop of fluid (16:4), from dust (30:20), and from nothing (19:67). Supporters say these are all true in different ways, but the fact remains that the wording changes depending on the verse.

Another example is how alcohol is treated. In chapter 2 verse 219, alcohol is described as having some benefit but more harm. Then in chapter 4 verse 43, believers are told not to pray while drunk. Finally, in chapter 5 verse 90, alcohol is called an evil of Satan and must be avoided completely. These are not just extra details, they show a change in attitude over time. First it is allowed, then discouraged, then banned. This is explained by the idea of abrogation, but it clearly shows that the rule was not the same from the start.

One more example is about who gets punished on Judgment Day. In chapter 6 verse 164, it says that no soul will carry the burden of another. But in chapter 16 verse 25, it says that people who mislead others will carry their own burden and part of the burden of those they misled. These two ideas are hard to match. Either everyone carries only their own burden, or they do not.

Believers often respond to these examples by saying that each verse has a different context. But critics argue that a book claiming perfect consistency should not need this kind of patching. If the Qur'an really has no contradictions, the rules and messages should stay the same throughout. These examples suggest that the claim is not as strong as it sounds.

## Conflicting Qur'anic instructions

The Qur'an is often described as a clear guide with no mistakes, but when we look closely, we find places where the instructions seem to clash. These are not just small differences in wording. They are situations where one verse says one thing and another verse says something else. This has led many people to ask how a perfect book can give mixed messages.

One example is how Muslims should treat non-Muslims. In chapter 2 verse 256, it says there is no compulsion in religion. This sounds peaceful and respectful of choice. But in chapter 9 verse 5, it says to fight and kill the polytheists wherever you find them unless they convert. These verses seem to pull in opposite directions. One promotes freedom, the other demands force. People explain this by saying the peaceful verse came earlier and the later verse replaced it. But that means the rule changed, which shows a real conflict between instructions.

Another example is how long people must wait before remarrying. In chapter 2 verse 228, divorced women must wait three menstrual cycles before marrying again. But in chapter 65 verse 4, the waiting period for young girls who have not yet had their periods is also given as three months. This has led to serious debate about the age of marriage and the meaning of these rules. The fact that such a basic matter needs extra explanation shows that the instructions are not as clear or consistent as claimed.

We also see different rules about inheritance. In chapter 4 verse 11, it says that if someone dies and has only daughters, they receive two-thirds of the inheritance. But in chapter 4 verse 176, it says that if a man dies and has only one sister, she gets half. Some say this is not a contradiction, but when people apply these rules in real life, they find the system is complicated and hard to follow without extra guidance.

These examples show that the Qur'an does not always speak with one voice. The rules change, the instructions sometimes clash, and believers are left to choose which verse applies. Some try to fix this by creating detailed rules using later writings or legal opinions. But that raises a question. If the Qur'an is perfect and clear, why does it need so much help to be understood?

## Abrogation as a solution

When people notice that some verses in the Qur'an seem to disagree with each other, a common answer is the idea of abrogation. This means that a later verse cancels or replaces an earlier one. Supporters say this was part of Allah's plan, and that it allowed rules to change slowly as the Muslim community grew. They often point to chapter 2 verse 106, which says that Allah can remove a verse or cause it to be forgotten and bring something better or similar in its place.

Abrogation is used to explain many contradictions. For example, early verses said to be kind and patient with non-believers, like chapter 73 verse 10, which tells

Muhammad to be patient with those who deny the truth. But later verses, like chapter 9 verse 29, command Muslims to fight people who do not follow Islam. Scholars say the later verses replaced the earlier peaceful ones. This is known as the doctrine of “sword verses” overriding earlier messages of peace.

Another example is the change in direction for prayer. At first, Muslims were told to pray facing Jerusalem, as mentioned in early traditions. Later, chapter 2 verse 144 changed the direction to Mecca. This was a clear case where one rule was replaced by another.

Some changes deal with how Muslims should handle alcohol. In chapter 2 verse 219, alcohol is said to have some benefit but more harm. Then in chapter 4 verse 43, Muslims are told not to pray while drunk. Finally, in chapter 5 verse 90, alcohol is completely forbidden. Each verse seems to go further than the one before. Supporters say this step-by-step ban was done to make the change easier for people.

Critics, however, ask why a perfect book needs to change at all. If Allah knows everything, why not give the final rule from the start? Why would some verses be placed in the Qur’an just to be cancelled later? If these older verses are no longer valid, why are they still in the book? Wouldn’t that confuse people?

Some Muslims also disagree about how many verses were actually abrogated. Different scholars give different lists. Some say only a few verses were cancelled. Others say there were over a hundred. If there is no agreement on which verses still count, it becomes hard to know what the rules really are.

In the end, abrogation tries to solve the problem of conflicting verses. But it raises new questions. Can a perfect and timeless book contain laws that expire? And if it does, how can readers today be sure which parts still apply and which parts were meant to be left behind?

## Predestination versus free will

One of the biggest contradictions in the Qur’an is about whether people truly have free will or whether everything they do is already decided by Allah. In some verses, it seems clear that people have a choice and are responsible for what they do. In other verses, it sounds like Allah is the one who controls people’s actions, including whether they believe or disbelieve.

For example, chapter 18 verse 29 says, “Let him who wills believe, and let him who wills disbelieve.” This makes it sound like belief is a personal choice. Chapter 39 verse 7 also says that Allah does not like disbelief from His servants, which suggests that people choose it and Allah is not pleased when they do.

But then we find other verses that say the opposite. Chapter 10 verse 100 says, “No soul can believe except by the will of Allah.” This means people cannot believe unless Allah allows it. Even more directly, chapter 6 verse 125 says that Allah opens the heart of those He wants to guide, and makes the chest of those He wants

to mislead tight and narrow. This shows that belief and disbelief are both controlled by Allah.

Chapter 16 verse 93 says clearly, “And if Allah had willed, He could have made you one nation, but He causes to stray whom He wills and guides whom He wills.” This means that people do not guide themselves. Allah decides who goes the right way and who does not.

This leads to a serious problem. If Allah is the one who causes people to believe or disbelieve, then how can He fairly punish them for disbelief? If someone had no real choice, is it just to send them to Hell? Supporters try to explain this by saying that Allah knows what people would choose, so He acts based on that. But if He is already forcing the choice, then knowing what they would have done makes no difference.

Other defenders say there is a balance between Allah’s control and human freedom, but this is not clearly explained in the Qur’an. The verses still pull in two different directions. Some say you choose, others say Allah chooses for you. The result is confusion. If belief is a test, then the test must be fair. And a fair test means the person must be free to choose. If Allah decides the result before the test even starts, then how is that justice?

This is not just a small issue. It goes to the heart of what Islam teaches about life, judgement, and the afterlife. If people do not have real freedom, then praising believers and blaming non-believers becomes meaningless. A perfect message should not be unclear about something so important.

## Variations in repeated stories

The Qur’an repeats many stories, especially about earlier prophets like Moses, Noah, and Abraham. Supporters say these stories are told again and again to remind people of important lessons. But when you look closely, you see that the details often change from one version to another. These differences raise questions. If the Qur’an is perfect and comes from a single source, why do the same stories include different facts each time?

A clear example is the story of creation. In chapter 7 verse 11, it says Allah created man and then told the angels to bow to him. Satan refused and was punished. But in chapter 38 verses 71 to 78, the story is repeated with more detail, including Allah saying He created man from clay and shaped him before commanding the angels. In chapter 2 verse 34, the same event is told again, but with less detail and slightly different words. These are small changes, but they still make the story look inconsistent.

Another example is the story of Pharaoh and Moses. In chapter 10 verse 90, Pharaoh says he believes in the God of the Israelites as he is drowning. Then Allah responds by rejecting his belief because it came too late. But in chapter 28 verse 38, Pharaoh claims to be the only god and orders a tower to be built so he can reach the God of Moses. The parts of the story change depending on which

chapter you read. Sometimes Pharaoh speaks in one way, other times in another. The order of events is not always the same either.

There is also the story of Noah's flood. In chapter 11 verse 42, it says one of Noah's sons drowned because he chose not to come aboard the ark. But in chapter 21 verse 76, it says Noah and his family were saved. Supporters explain this by saying the son was not counted among the true family, but that is not clear from the text. If both verses are true, then the meaning of "family" seems to change just to make the story fit.

These are not just small poetic differences. They affect what the reader understands. In a normal book, when a story is told more than once with different details, we expect a reason. But in the Qur'an, the differences are often left without explanation. If the stories are supposed to teach clear lessons, why not tell them once, clearly, and with all the facts in place?

Some people say the changes are meant to suit different audiences or times. Others say they show deeper meanings. But critics argue that a perfect book should not need to adjust the same story over and over. The repeated changes raise doubt about whether the stories are truly consistent. And that goes against the claim that the Qur'an is free from contradiction.

## **Qur'an–hadith contradictions**

Muslims believe that the Qur'an is the word of God and the Hadith are the sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad. Both are used to guide daily life and Islamic law. But when we compare the two, we often find contradictions. This causes confusion because people are told to follow both, yet they do not always agree.

One clear example is about punishment for adultery. The Qur'an in chapter 24 verse 2 says that those found guilty of adultery should be given 100 lashes. It does not mention death. But in the Hadith, the punishment is stoning to death. This is not a small difference. It completely changes the outcome. Some scholars say the verse was once followed, but later stoning replaced it. Others say stoning was always the real punishment. Either way, the Qur'an and the Hadith give two different answers.

Another example is the number of daily prayers. The Qur'an does not clearly say how many times Muslims should pray each day. Some verses mention two or three prayer times, like chapter 11 verse 114 and chapter 17 verse 78. But the Hadith say there are five daily prayers. Today, Muslims follow five because of the Hadith, not because the Qur'an gives that number. If the Qur'an is supposed to be complete and clear, why does it not include this basic rule?

There is also disagreement about women and prayer. The Qur'an does not say that women cannot lead prayers or that they must stand behind men. But many Hadith say women must pray behind men and cannot lead men in prayer. These rules come from the Hadith, not the Qur'an. So people who follow only the Qur'an may see these Hadith rules as added later.

Some Muslims say the Hadith are needed to explain the Qur'an. But others say that when the two clash, the Qur'an should come first. Still, in many countries, Islamic law is based more on the Hadith than on the Qur'an. This leads to rules that are harsh or unclear, even though the Qur'an itself may say something softer or different.

In the end, the contradiction between the Qur'an and the Hadith creates a serious problem. If both are supposed to guide Muslims, then they should agree. If they do not, believers are left with a choice: follow the Qur'an, follow the Hadith, or try to mix both and accept the confusion. For a religion that claims to be perfect and complete, this raises questions that cannot be ignored.

## Reinterpreting contradictions

When people point out contradictions in the Qur'an, a common response is to say that there is no real contradiction, only a misunderstanding. This often leads to reinterpretation. In other words, the meaning of the verse is changed or stretched to make it fit with another verse. This is done to protect the belief that the Qur'an is perfect and cannot disagree with itself.

For example, the Qur'an says in chapter 6 verse 164 that no soul will carry the burden of another. This sounds clear and fair. But in chapter 16 verse 25, it says that people who mislead others will carry their own sins and also part of the sins of those they misled. These two ideas seem to clash. One says everyone is responsible for only their own actions. The other says someone can be punished for what another person did. To fix this, defenders often say that the second verse is only about extra blame, not full responsibility. But that is not what the verse clearly says.

Another example is the difference in how long it took to create the world. Chapter 7 verse 54 says Allah created the heavens and the earth in six days. But chapter 41 verses 9 to 12 adds up to eight days. Supporters of the Qur'an try to solve this by saying the days overlap or that the order is not meant to be taken in a human way. But the numbers are given in plain language. If the Qur'an wanted to say six days, why include details that add up to more?

There are also changes in how stories are told. In chapter 20 verse 120, Satan whispers to Adam and Eve, and they eat from the tree. But in chapter 2 verse 36, it says Satan made them both slip. Then in chapter 7 verse 20, Satan speaks only to Eve. These changes create confusion. To deal with this, people say the verses are all part of the same story told in different ways. But they do not explain why the details are not the same. If one version is full, why does the other leave things out or change them?

Reinterpretation can be helpful when trying to understand complex ideas. But when it is used too often, it begins to look like excuse-making. It turns clear contradictions into long explanations that only experts can follow. For a book that claims to be clear, this is a problem.



In the end, reinterpreting contradictions may keep belief alive for some people, but it does not make the contradictions go away. If verses can mean anything depending on how they are explained, then they can also mean nothing. A truly clear and perfect message should not need so much fixing.

## Silencing critique with the no-contradiction claim

One common way people avoid dealing with contradictions in the Qur'an is by saying straight away that there are none. This is often used to silence any questions. The idea is that since the Qur'an says it contains no contradictions, anyone who thinks they found one must be wrong. This stops the conversation before it can even begin.

The verse most often used is chapter 4 verse 82, which says that if the Qur'an were from anyone other than Allah, people would find many contradictions in it. Supporters repeat this verse as proof, as if quoting it settles the matter. But just saying something does not make it true. If someone finds two verses that clearly disagree, quoting a claim of perfection does not explain the problem. It just avoids talking about it.

For example, if someone asks why the punishment for adultery in the Qur'an is lashes but the Hadith says stoning, or why one verse says everyone is judged by their own actions while another says people can carry the sins of others, they are often told they do not understand, or that they are being disrespectful, or that only scholars are allowed to speak about such matters. None of these answers deal with the issue itself.

Even Muslims who raise honest questions can be told to stay quiet. In some families or communities, asking about a difficult verse is seen as being weak in faith. Some people are taught never to question the Qur'an at all, even if they are confused or unsure. This makes it very hard to talk openly or search for real answers.

Silencing criticism with the no-contradiction claim does not help people understand the Qur'an. It only stops them from speaking. If the book is truly clear and perfect, then it should be able to handle honest questions. Real truth does not need to hide from careful thinking. If a verse seems to disagree with another, the right thing is to look at both closely, not just say the problem cannot exist.

## Chapter 4

# The claim that Islamic prophecies are uniquely accurate

### Prophecies as proof of divinity

Many Muslims believe that the prophecies in the Qur'an and the sayings of Muhammad prove that Islam is from God. The idea is simple: if the Prophet predicted future events correctly, then he must have received knowledge from a higher power. These prophecies are often used as strong evidence that the Qur'an is divine and that Muhammad was a true messenger.

One of the most well-known examples is in chapter 30 verses 2 to 4, which says that the Romans have been defeated but will soon win again within a few years. Supporters say this came true when the Romans defeated the Persians after an earlier loss. They see this as a clear prediction that proves the Qur'an was right all along.

Another example often used is Muhammad's prediction that Islam would spread across the world. He is quoted in several Hadith as saying that his religion would reach the east and west, and that Muslims would conquer places like Persia and Byzantium. Supporters say this came true in the years after his death, when Muslim armies expanded into many regions.

Some also point to Muhammad's saying that barefoot Bedouins would compete in building tall buildings. They say this describes modern cities like Dubai and Doha, where desert tribes have built some of the tallest buildings in the world. To believers, this shows a level of foresight that could not come from an ordinary man.

But critics say these prophecies are not as special as they seem. Some are vague, like the one about tall buildings, which could apply to many times and places. Others were likely guesses based on what was already happening. The Romans and Persians were always at war, and predicting that the balance would shift again is not surprising. As for the spread of Islam, many religious leaders have made similar claims about the growth of their faiths.

Still, for many believers, the idea of fulfilled prophecy is comforting. It gives them a sense that everything is going according to a divine plan. But to judge whether a prophecy really proves divinity, it must be clear, specific, and made before the

event in a way that cannot be explained by luck or guesswork. Otherwise, it risks being just another story that people believe because they want it to be true.

## Standard supporting examples

When Muslims are asked to give proof that Muhammad was a true prophet, they often bring up certain well-known examples of prophecy. These are used again and again in talks, books, and online videos. Supporters believe these examples clearly show that Muhammad knew the future in a way no normal person could. But when we look closely, these examples are not as strong as they are made to seem.

One of the most common examples is the verse about the Romans in chapter 30. It says the Romans were defeated but would win again “in a few years.” Supporters say this came true when the Romans later defeated the Persians. But the Qur’an does not name any battle, place, or date. It just says something general that could easily have been guessed. Empires rise and fall all the time. Saying that the Romans will come back after a loss is not a hard thing to predict.

Another popular example comes from Hadith where Muhammad said that Muslims would conquer places like Persia and Byzantium. These conquests did happen after his death. But historians say that Muslim armies were already strong and growing, and it was likely they would fight those empires. It is not a miracle to say a rising power will defeat old enemies. Many leaders in history have made the same kind of claim.

Then there is the Hadith about barefoot Bedouins building tall buildings. This is often linked to the skyscrapers in the Gulf states today. But the Hadith gives no names, dates, or locations. People from many parts of the world have built tall buildings. To say that desert people would one day build high towers is not very special, especially since wealth from oil changed the region. This is more like a lucky guess or a vague image, not a detailed prophecy.

Supporters also bring up predictions about signs before the Day of Judgment, such as widespread lying, broken trust, and people competing to build. But these things happen in every age. They are not signs of the end of time. They are just signs of how human society works.

These standard examples are used because they seem impressive at first. But once they are looked at with care, they lose their power. They are either too vague, too likely to happen anyway, or too unclear to count as strong proof. For a prophecy to truly show divine knowledge, it should be clear, detailed, and not something that could be guessed. Most of these examples do not meet that test.

## Vague and flexible language

Many of the prophecies used to support Islam are written in vague and flexible

language. This means the words can be understood in many different ways. Because of this, people often match the prophecy to an event after it has already happened. If the words were truly clear, they would point to one specific event before it took place, not after.

A good example is the Hadith that says people will compete to build tall buildings. It does not say where or when this will happen, or who the people are. Today, many Muslims say this refers to cities like Dubai and Doha. But people have been building tall towers for thousands of years. It could just as easily describe New York, Shanghai, or any city with skyscrapers. The words are so general that they can be made to fit almost anything.

Another example is the verse in chapter 30 that says the Romans will win “in a few years.” But the Arabic phrase used is unclear. Some say it means three to nine years, others say it could be longer. There is no name of a battle or a date. So when the Romans did win years later, people said, “Look, it came true.” But if they had not won, the same verse could have been explained another way.

There are also Hadith about the end of the world that mention things like “people will stop telling the truth” or “bad people will be in power.” These things are always happening somewhere. The language is so broad that someone can always find a match. That makes the prophecy impossible to test. If anything can count as a fulfilment, then it does not prove anything.

When a prophecy uses vague words, people fill in the details themselves. They decide what the prophecy means after they already know the result. This is not real prediction. It is like throwing paint on a wall and saying it looks like a picture after it dries.

In the end, if the language is flexible enough to match many different things, it cannot be strong proof of divine knowledge. Real prophecy should be clear, detailed, and easy to check. Vague words only create the illusion of truth.

## **After-the-fact interpretation**

Another common problem with Islamic prophecy claims is that many of them are only understood after the event has already happened. This is called after-the-fact interpretation. People look at a verse or Hadith and match it to a real-world event that has already taken place. But they were not using that verse to predict the event before it happened.

For example, some people now say that the Qur'an described the Big Bang or the expansion of the universe. They point to chapter 21 verse 30, which says the heavens and the earth were once joined together and then separated. But for over a thousand years, no Muslim scholar read this verse as a description of the Big Bang. It was only after scientists came up with that theory in the 20th century that people began to connect the two. This shows that the link was made after the fact, not before.

Another case is the tall building prophecy. People say that Muhammad predicted that poor desert tribes would compete to build tall towers. Today, this is said to match what we see in cities like Dubai. But no one used this Hadith to predict what would happen in Dubai a hundred years ago. The link was made once the buildings were already there. That is not a real prediction. It is just matching an old sentence to something modern.

This method can be used with almost any text. For example, someone could read an old poem and decide it predicted the internet, mobile phones, or even a recent war. If the words are general enough, they can be bent to fit almost anything. That does not mean the writer had secret knowledge. It just means the reader is doing all the work.

Real prophecy should be clear and recognised before the event happens. If it only becomes clear after, it is not evidence of divine knowledge. It is just a clever way to make something sound special once you already know the result. This is why after-the-fact interpretation is not a reliable way to prove anything.

## Selective historical matching

Selective historical matching means picking only the events from history that seem to fit a prophecy while ignoring all the others that do not. This is a common way people try to make old texts look like they predicted the future. Instead of asking if the prophecy clearly described the event before it happened, they search through history and find something that matches well enough. If a verse or Hadith sounds close to something that happened, they call it a fulfilled prophecy.

For example, many Muslims say the Qur'an predicted that the Romans would defeat the Persians after being beaten. They point to chapter 30 verses 2 to 4 and say this came true. But they do not mention all the other battles, wars, and empires that came and went without being mentioned in the Qur'an at all. What about the fall of the Roman Empire? The rise of Britain? The world wars? The Qur'an does not say anything about these huge events, yet they shaped history far more than the Roman-Persian war.

Another example is the Hadith about barefoot desert people building tall buildings. People say this matches what happened in the Gulf countries. But they ignore the fact that many other poor places never built anything like that. They also skip over the parts of the world where tall buildings were built by people who do not match the Hadith at all. Only the matching example is used, and the rest are forgotten.

The same thing happens with predictions about the end of time. There are dozens of signs listed in different Hadith. People will point to the ones that seem to match what is happening now, like dishonesty or widespread wealth. But they ignore the signs that do not match, like the sun rising from the west or the return of talking animals. These parts are either explained away or left out entirely.

This method is not fair. It makes it look like the prophecy was correct by leaving

out everything that would show it was not. Real proof does not work that way. If a book is said to predict history, it should match many events clearly and without needing to pick and choose. Otherwise, it is just a guessing game where only the winning answers are counted.

## Failed or conflicting prophecies

Islam teaches that Muhammad was not only a messenger but also a prophet who received knowledge from God. The Qur'an calls him "the seal of the prophets," meaning the final one. Because of this, Muslims believe that whatever he predicted must be true. But when we look at the Qur'an and Hadith closely, we find some prophecies that did not come true or that seem to contradict each other.

One example comes from Sahih Muslim and Sahih Bukhari, where Muhammad is recorded saying that the Day of Judgement would come very soon. In one Hadith, he points to a young boy and says that before the boy grows old, the Last Hour will arrive. That boy grew up and died centuries ago, and the world is still here. In another Hadith, he says the time between his mission and the end of the world is like the time between two fingers being held together. But more than 1,400 years have passed.

Another example is the prediction that the Romans and Persians would fight and that the Romans would win within a few years. This is found in Surah 30, verses 2 to 4. Muslims point out that the Romans did defeat the Persians after a loss, which supports the prophecy. But the timeline given is "in a few years," which is a vague term. Depending on how it is counted, the events took longer than expected. Some scholars stretch the meaning of the Arabic word used for "few" to make the dates fit.

There are also problems with prophecies about Islam's future dominance. Some Hadith say that Islam will spread to every home and conquer places like Constantinople and Rome. Constantinople was conquered centuries later by the Ottomans, but Rome never has been, and it is unlikely to happen. These Hadith are still repeated in sermons as if they are just around the corner, but history shows otherwise.

Another issue is that some prophecies contradict each other. For example, one Hadith says that the Mahdi, a future leader, will appear before the end times. Others say that Jesus will return to break the cross and rule the world. In some versions, the Mahdi is not mentioned at all. Scholars have tried to fit these different stories together, but there is no single clear version. This causes confusion even among Muslims about what is supposed to happen.

When religious texts give predictions, people expect those predictions to be reliable. If they are vague, delayed, or never happen, it becomes hard to trust them. A true prophet should not speak words that fail. The fact that Muhammad gave prophecies that are either unclear, delayed far beyond what he described, or still not fulfilled should raise honest questions. If these predictions came from God, why do they not all come true as expected? And if they did not, what does

that say about the source?

## Parallels in other religions

Many Muslims believe that the prophecies in Islam are unique and prove that the religion comes from God. But when we look at other religions, we see that they also have prophecies that sound impressive. These are often just as detailed, just as confident, and just as meaningful to their followers. This shows that having prophecies is not special to Islam.

For example, in the Bible, Jesus says the temple in Jerusalem will be destroyed, and it was destroyed about forty years later. Christians point to this as proof that Jesus could see the future. In the Book of Revelation, there are many signs about the end of the world, including wars, plagues, and strange weather. These signs are very similar to Islamic descriptions of the Last Day.

Hindu writings also include long lists of future events. In the Puranas, a future figure named Kalki is said to appear when the world is full of evil, and he will bring about a great change. This matches the Islamic idea of the Mahdi who appears to fix the world. In Buddhist texts, there is talk of a future Buddha named Maitreya who will come when the current teachings are lost. This also sounds like a prediction of a future saviour.

Even in older religions like Zoroastrianism, there are stories about a final battle between good and evil and the coming of a saviour figure. These stories existed long before Islam and include detailed signs of what will happen in the last days.

The point is not that all these religions are true, but that they all include prophecies. If we accept Islamic prophecy as proof just because it sounds true, then we must also accept the others. But Muslims reject those other faiths. This shows that belief in prophecy is often based on what religion someone already follows, not on how clear or unique the prophecy is.

In the end, prophecies are found in many religions. People find meaning in them because they want to believe. But this does not prove that one religion is right and the others are wrong. If Islamic prophecies are to be taken seriously, they must be judged by the same standards as those in other religions. And when that happens, they no longer look as special or as certain as some claim.

## Belief shaping perception

When people already believe that Islam is true, they are more likely to see its prophecies as amazing and correct. This is called belief shaping perception. It means that what someone believes before looking at the evidence changes how they see the evidence. If a person is sure that Muhammad was a prophet, then even a vague or unclear prophecy will look like a miracle.

For example, if someone believes deeply in Islam and reads the Hadith about

barefoot Bedouins building tall buildings, they will immediately think of modern cities like Dubai. They will not ask if the words could also fit other times or places. They will not think about the fact that people have been building tall towers for hundreds of years. Their belief makes the Hadith feel special, even if it is actually very general.

Another example is the verse in the Qur'an about the Romans winning after a defeat. A believer sees this as clear proof of divine knowledge. But someone who does not already believe might say it was a lucky guess or a common pattern in history. Both people are reading the same words, but they see different things because of what they already believe.

This also happens in other religions. Christians see the words of Jesus as perfect prophecy. Hindus believe that the stories in their texts describe events that really happened or will happen. Every believer sees their own text as special. This shows that the feeling of truth often comes from belief, not from the words themselves.

Belief can make people ignore problems too. If a prophecy is wrong or unclear, a strong believer may explain it away or say it has a deeper meaning. But if the same kind of prophecy came from another religion, they would reject it. This is not fair. If we want to judge honestly, we must use the same standard for every religion.

In the end, belief shaping perception means that many people see what they expect to see. A prophecy looks amazing only if you already think it must be true. Real truth should not depend on what someone wants to believe. It should be clear on its own, no matter who is reading it.



## Chapter 5

# The claim that Islam alone respects all previous prophets

### Claim to honour all prophets

Islam often says it honours all the prophets who came before Muhammad. This includes well-known figures like Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. Muslims are taught that all these men were true messengers of God who brought the same basic message: to worship one God and live a good life. This claim sounds respectful, and many people believe it shows that Islam is more open-minded than other religions.

But when we look more closely, the picture changes. While Islam names these prophets, it also changes their stories in ways that make them less important or less trustworthy than Muhammad. For example, in the Bible, Jesus teaches love, forgives sins, and is called the Son of God. In the Qur'an, Jesus becomes a prophet who never claimed to be divine, and whose message was misunderstood. Islam says Christians changed his teachings. So instead of honouring Jesus, it corrects and lowers his role.

The same happens with Moses. In Jewish tradition, Moses is the main prophet who gave the Law and led the people out of Egypt. In Islam, Moses is respected, but only as one in a long line of prophets who delivered the same message that Muhammad completed. The Qur'an repeats the story of Moses often, but always with the idea that his mission was limited and now replaced by Islam.

Even Abraham, who is praised in all three religions, is redefined. Islam claims Abraham as a Muslim, even though the religion of Islam did not exist in his time. Chapter 3 verse 67 says Abraham was not a Jew or a Christian but a man who submitted to God, which Islam calls a Muslim. This makes Abraham feel like a supporter of Islam before Islam even began. It removes his place in Jewish tradition and gives him a new label that fits Islam's message.

In some Hadith, earlier prophets are also shown making mistakes or acting in ways that seem strange or embarrassing. Meanwhile, Muhammad is described as the best of all prophets, the final messenger, and the example for all mankind. This creates a clear ranking, where others are only honoured as long as they support Islam's version of truth. Their real teachings, as known in their own faiths, are said to be lost, changed, or wrong.

So while Islam says it respects all prophets, it often does so by rewriting their stories to make Muhammad and the Qur'an look better. This is not real respect. It is using the names of past prophets to give Islam more weight, while at the same time saying those prophets' true messages were incomplete or corrupted. What looks like honour is often just a way to take control of their legacy.

## Recasting earlier prophets as Muslims

Islam teaches that all the prophets of the past were actually Muslims. This includes not just Muhammad, but also Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Noah, and many others. The Qur'an says that they all preached the same message of Islam, even if the religion was not yet called by that name. The idea is that "Muslim" means someone who submits to the will of God, so anyone who did that in any time or place is called a Muslim.

For example, in chapter 3 verse 67, the Qur'an says that Abraham was not a Jew or a Christian, but a Muslim. This may sound respectful, but it also changes the identity of Abraham. In the Bible, he is the father of the Jewish people, not someone who followed a future religion from Arabia. Islam removes him from his original background and gives him a new label that fits its own message.

The same happens with Jesus. In Christianity, Jesus is the Son of God and the centre of faith. But in Islam, he is turned into a Muslim prophet who never claimed to be divine and only preached submission to Allah. Chapter 5 verse 116 even shows a scene where Allah asks Jesus if he told people to worship him and his mother. Jesus replies no. This is not found in Christian teachings. Instead of showing Jesus as he was understood by his own followers, Islam reshapes him into a preacher of Islam.

Moses is another example. In Jewish tradition, Moses is the law-giver and founder of Jewish identity. But in Islam, he is once again called a Muslim who preached the same message as Muhammad. The Torah is said to have been changed, and the true message of Moses is claimed to be preserved only in the Qur'an. This means the original Jewish teachings are dismissed, while Islam takes Moses as one of its own.

By doing this, Islam does not just honour past prophets. It takes them over. It uses their names but rewrites their beliefs to match Islamic ideas. Their own traditions are said to be wrong or corrupted. Their real value, according to Islam, is that they helped prepare the way for Muhammad.

This is not just a matter of different opinions. It changes the meaning of who these prophets were and what they stood for. Calling them Muslims may sound like praise, but it is really a way of saying their original followers misunderstood them. Instead of learning from their real teachings, Islam claims them as part of its own story. This is not respect. It is replacement.

## Accusations of corruption in past scriptures

Islam teaches that many prophets were sent before Muhammad, and that they brought true messages from God. This includes the Torah given to Moses, the Psalms given to David, and the Gospel given to Jesus. But Islam also claims that these earlier messages were later changed or lost. Muslims are taught that the Jewish and Christian scriptures are no longer in their original form, and that only the Qur'an has been perfectly preserved.

This idea is called the accusation of corruption, or in Arabic, "tahrif." The Qur'an itself hints at this. In chapter 2 verse 75, it says some of the people of earlier books "used to hear the word of God then distort it after they had understood it." Chapter 5 verse 13 says some of them "forgot part of what they were reminded of." These verses are often used to say that Jews and Christians cannot be trusted to keep their holy books true.

As a result, Islam claims that any differences between the Qur'an and earlier scriptures are not due to misunderstanding, but because the earlier books have been changed. For example, the Bible says Jesus was crucified, but the Qur'an says he was not. Islam solves this by saying the Bible was altered and the Qur'an is correcting the mistake. In this way, the Qur'an always comes out right, and the other books are blamed for getting things wrong.

But this view raises serious questions. If God sent earlier messages, why did He allow them to become corrupted? Why would He wait hundreds or thousands of years to fix the problem? And if earlier followers were so quick to change their books, what stops Muslims from doing the same with the Qur'an?

There is also a lack of clear evidence for this supposed corruption. The Jewish and Christian scriptures have very old copies, some going back to before Islam began. These ancient texts do not show signs of major changes. The stories, teachings, and key beliefs have stayed the same for centuries. If the Qur'an's version of events is different, it may not be because the others were changed. It may simply be that the Qur'an is telling a new version.

In the end, accusing others of corruption allows Islam to use the names of earlier prophets while rejecting their actual messages. It lets Islam say it respects Moses and Jesus, but only by rewriting what they said. This is not real respect. It is a way to claim authority while dismissing the voices of the past.

## Rejection of non-Islamic teachings

Although Islam claims to honour the prophets of Judaism and Christianity, it completely rejects the core teachings of those religions. Muslims are taught that the original messages of prophets like Moses and Jesus were true, but that Jews and Christians changed them over time. Because of this, Islam does not accept most of what those religions now teach.

A clear example is the Christian belief that Jesus is the Son of God. This is central to Christianity. But the Qur'an strongly denies this idea. In chapter 4 verse 171, it says, "Do not say 'Three'. Stop, it is better for you." This is a direct rejection of the Christian idea of the Trinity. In chapter 5 verse 72, it says that anyone who says God is Jesus has committed a terrible sin. So even though Islam says it respects Jesus, it rejects the most important belief about him in Christianity.

The same is true with Jewish beliefs. In Judaism, the Torah and the covenant between God and the children of Israel are at the heart of the faith. But the Qur'an says that the Jews broke their covenant and changed the message. In chapter 2 verse 75 and chapter 5 verse 13, it accuses them of twisting the words of God. In chapter 2 verse 120, it says that Jews and Christians will not be pleased with Muhammad unless he follows their way. This shows that Islam not only disagrees with other religions, it sees their current teachings as wrong.

Islam also rejects religious practices from these faiths. Christians believe in the cross, baptism, and the idea of salvation through Jesus. Islam accepts none of this. Jews follow Sabbath laws, kosher food rules, and see Israel as the promised land. Islam replaces all of that with its own rules and teachings. In Islamic law, Muslims are not allowed to accept religious truths from outside Islam. Even stories from the Bible are only accepted if they match what the Qur'an says.

So while Islam claims to respect earlier prophets, it refuses to accept the actual teachings that grew from them. It says the followers of Moses and Jesus are wrong unless they agree with Muhammad. This means Islam uses the names of other prophets but does not respect their religions. It replaces them instead of working alongside them. In the end, the claim to honour all prophets does not match how their messages are treated.

## Use of past prophets to support Muhammad

Islam often uses the names of earlier prophets to support the mission of Muhammad. The Qur'an says that all prophets came with the same message and that Muhammad was the final one in a long line. This helps present Islam as the final and complete version of all earlier faiths. It makes it seem like all the prophets were working toward the same goal, with Muhammad as the last and most important piece.

In chapter 61 verse 6, the Qur'an says that Jesus told his followers that a prophet named Ahmad would come after him. Muslims believe this is a reference to Muhammad. But there is no verse in the Christian Bible where Jesus says anything like this. Supporters say the original message of Jesus has been lost, but critics say this claim is just a way to make Jesus seem like he was announcing Islam in advance.

Islam also says that Moses, Abraham, and others preached the same message as Muhammad. The idea is that all of them told people to worship one God, avoid sin, and follow God's guidance. But in the Qur'an, these prophets often say things that closely match Islamic beliefs, even though those beliefs did not exist at the time.

For example, the Qur'an says in chapter 2 verse 132 that Abraham told his sons to be Muslims. This helps connect Muhammad's message back to a respected figure, but it changes the meaning of Abraham's original story.

The use of earlier prophets also appears in Islamic rituals. During prayer, Muslims mention Abraham alongside Muhammad, saying "O Allah, bless Muhammad and the family of Muhammad, as You blessed Abraham and the family of Abraham." This links Muhammad to Abraham in the minds of believers. The Hajj pilgrimage also includes actions linked to Abraham and his family, such as walking between the hills of Safa and Marwah. These connections are not found in the Jewish or Christian traditions, but Islam uses them to show that Muhammad is continuing the same path.

All of this gives Muhammad more authority. By saying that earlier prophets were really preaching Islam, the Qur'an makes Muhammad the final link in a holy chain. But it also means that the original messages of those prophets are pushed aside. Their stories are retold in a way that makes them support Islam rather than speak for themselves.

In the end, using past prophets to support Muhammad helps Islam look like a natural continuation of earlier faiths. But it only works by changing what those prophets said and meant. Instead of letting them stand on their own, their names are used to build up someone else's message. That is not real support. It is rewriting the past to fit the present.

## Suppression of other religious identities

In many parts of Islamic history, especially when Muslim rulers had power over non-Muslim groups, there were efforts to suppress other religious identities. This did not always mean banning other religions completely, but it often meant placing strong limits on them. For example, Christians and Jews living under Islamic rule were allowed to keep their religion, but they had to pay a special tax called the *jizya*. They were also not allowed to build new churches or temples in some areas, and in many places their houses of worship had to be smaller or less noticeable than mosques. In some cities, non-Muslims had to wear special clothing so people could easily tell they were not Muslim. This made them feel different or even ashamed.

Books and ideas from other religions were sometimes destroyed or banned. In some cases, speaking openly about your religion if it was not Islam could be punished. People who left Islam for another religion, or spoke badly about it, could be put to death. These rules were meant to keep Islam strong and in control, but they made it hard for other beliefs to survive or grow.

This pattern continues in some Muslim-majority countries today. In Saudi Arabia, it is illegal to publicly practise any religion other than Islam. Churches and temples are not allowed, and private Christian gatherings risk arrest. In Pakistan, people from Christian, Hindu, and Ahmadi groups have been accused of blasphemy and punished, sometimes with death. Even false accusations can lead to mobs

attacking homes and burning villages. In Iran, people who leave Islam to become Christian are often arrested, and Baha'is are banned from universities and many jobs. In Egypt, Coptic Christians have had their churches attacked and often find it hard to get permission to build new ones.

These examples show that Islam has often been linked to controlling which beliefs are allowed to be visible or shared. For people who follow other religions, this can make life unfair and sometimes dangerous.

## Respect tied to Islamic conformity

In many Islamic societies, respect is closely linked to how much a person follows Islamic rules and beliefs. People who pray regularly, dress in ways considered Islamic, and speak with Islamic phrases like “insha’Allah” or “alhamdulillah” are often treated with more honour. Those who do not follow these customs may be seen as weak in faith or even bad people. In some cases, they are insulted or excluded from public life.

For example, in Iran, women who do not wear the headscarf in public can be fined, arrested, or even beaten by the morality police. This is not just about clothing. It is about showing respect for Islam. If a woman refuses, people may say she is dishonourable or even a traitor to her culture. In Saudi Arabia, for many years, women could not drive or travel without a male guardian because it was seen as un-Islamic. Those who spoke out against these rules were often jailed.

In Pakistan, people who belong to the Ahmadi group, who call themselves Muslim, are not legally allowed to do so. Even writing Islamic greetings on a wedding invitation can bring criminal charges if you are Ahmadi. These people are treated with suspicion, and it is hard for them to find jobs or stay safe in their communities.

Even in less strict countries like Egypt or Malaysia, people are often pressured to show Islamic behaviour, even if they are not very religious. A Muslim who says they do not fast during Ramadan may be criticised or asked to keep quiet about it. If a celebrity in a Muslim country says they drink alcohol or question religious rules, they may lose their job or face threats.

This shows that in many Islamic societies, being respected often depends on showing public signs of Islamic belief. People who do not fit that image may be judged or punished, even if they are peaceful and honest.

## Comparison with other traditions

In many Christian-majority countries today, people are free to follow any religion, change their religion, or have no religion at all. For example, in Canada or the United Kingdom, someone can leave Christianity and become Muslim, Hindu, or atheist without being arrested or attacked. People are allowed to build mosques, temples, and churches. You can also question or criticise religion openly, including

Christianity, without going to jail.

In contrast, many Muslim-majority countries punish people who leave Islam. In Saudi Arabia, leaving Islam is a crime and can lead to the death penalty. In Iran, people who become Christian or atheist are often arrested or forced to hide their new beliefs. In Pakistan, people have been jailed or killed just for saying something seen as insulting to Islam. In 2023, a man named Waris Shah was beaten to death by a mob in Punjab after being accused of damaging a Qur'an. In Egypt, a person who leaves Islam cannot change their religion on their official ID, which creates problems when trying to marry, inherit property, or register children.

Freedom to speak about religion is also different. In many Western countries, books and films that question religion are allowed. In Muslim countries like Pakistan or Indonesia, people have been arrested or killed for criticising Islam or drawing pictures of Muhammad. In 2015, cartoonists in France were murdered by two brothers for drawing Muhammad. The attackers said they were defending Islam. Protests supporting the killings happened in some Muslim countries.

Other religions also have problems. In India, which is mostly Hindu, Muslims have been attacked by mobs. In Myanmar, a Buddhist-majority country, thousands of Rohingya Muslims were killed or forced to flee. But overall, in most non-Muslim countries, people are not punished by law just for leaving the majority religion or questioning it.

These examples show that Islamic countries often have strict rules that protect Islam but limit personal freedom. In comparison, many other traditions today allow people more freedom to choose or change what they believe without fear.

## Chapter 6

# The claim that Islam handles the afterlife with unmatched clarity

### Claim of detailed knowledge about the afterlife

Muslims often say that Islam gives clear and detailed knowledge about what happens after death. They claim that no other religion explains the afterlife in such depth. The Qur'an and Hadith describe many stages after death, including the grave, the Day of Judgement, and either paradise or hell.

For example, Islam teaches that after a person dies, two angels called Munkar and Nakir visit them in the grave. These angels ask questions like "Who is your Lord?" and "What is your religion?" Depending on the answers, the grave either becomes peaceful or full of suffering. This idea comes from Hadith collections like Sahih Bukhari and Sahih Muslim, which are used by Muslims as sources of religious truth.

On the Day of Judgement, everyone is brought back to life and judged by Allah. Good people are sent to paradise, which is described in great detail, with gardens, rivers of milk and honey, and fine clothes. For example, Surah 56 describes people relaxing on couches with cups in their hands, surrounded by beautiful companions. Bad people are sent to hell, which is also described with strong images. Surah 4 and Surah 22 talk about people being burned in fire, given boiling water to drink, and wearing clothes made of molten copper.

There are also details about the bridge called Sirat, which is said to be thinner than a hair and sharper than a sword. People must cross it to reach paradise. The righteous will cross it safely, while the sinful will fall into hell.

These stories are meant to be taken seriously by believers, and they are repeated often in sermons, schoolbooks, and discussions. The level of detail is much higher than in some other religions, which may speak more symbolically about the afterlife. Christianity, for example, speaks of heaven and hell, but gives fewer step-by-step images of what exactly happens after death. Hinduism speaks of rebirth, but the system is more flexible and depends on many schools of thought.

So it is true that Islam gives a very detailed picture of the afterlife, but whether these details are clear or believable is a separate question. Some of the descriptions are very physical and use ideas common in the time of Muhammad, such as punishments that involve burning, chains, or sharp objects. This raises the



question of whether these images are meant to be taken literally, or were shaped by the culture of seventh-century Arabia.

## Literal descriptions of heaven and hell

Islam gives very detailed and physical descriptions of both heaven and hell. These are not vague ideas. They are presented as real places with real sights, sounds, and sensations.

In the Qur'an, paradise is described as a beautiful garden filled with pleasures. Surah 55 speaks of shady trees, sweet fruits, and people sitting on fine cushions. Believers will wear silk robes and gold bracelets. They will drink from rivers of milk, honey, and wine that does not cause drunkenness. Surah 56 describes beautiful young companions, called houris, and servants who bring food and drink. These descriptions are repeated in Hadith and are often taught in mosques and schools as if they are facts.

Hell is described just as clearly. It is full of fire, boiling water, smoke, chains, and clubs. Surah 4 says the people in hell will have their skin burned off and replaced so the punishment can happen again. Surah 22 talks about boiling water poured on heads and people wearing clothes made of molten metal. Some Hadith go even further, saying that people in hell will be huge in size, just to suffer more, and that the fire is seventy times hotter than earthly fire.

These descriptions raise an important question. How does anyone know all this? Has someone been to heaven or hell and come back to report what it looks like? If not, then how can these images be treated as certain facts? It is fair to ask whether the descriptions reflect divine truth or simply the imagination and culture of the time. In seventh-century Arabia, paradise with shade, water, and servants would have sounded like the highest luxury, and hell filled with burning and torture would have been the worst punishment anyone could think of.

Other religions do speak about the afterlife, but usually in less physical ways. Christians believe in heaven and hell, but the Bible gives fewer exact details. Hindus and Buddhists speak of rebirth and different realms, but they do not describe rivers of wine or metal clothes in the same way. Islam stands out because it claims to know exactly what paradise and hell look like, feel like, and even smell like. But unless someone has seen these places with their own eyes, the level of certainty should be questioned.

## Emphasis on physical rewards and punishments

Islam places strong focus on physical rewards and punishments in the afterlife. The Qur'an describes paradise as a place where people will enjoy food, drink, clothing, comfort, and beauty. In Surah 76, it says that those in paradise will wear green garments of silk and be given drinks in silver and crystal cups. In Surah 55, it talks about fruit hanging low, easy to pick, and people relaxing on couches while

servants bring them whatever they want. Surah 56 describes pure companions and endless food and drink, all without pain or sickness. These are physical pleasures, not just peaceful feelings or spiritual joy.

Hell is also described using physical suffering. Surah 4 says that the skin of those in hell will be burned off and replaced so it can be burned again. Surah 22 speaks of boiling water poured on heads and burning metal clothes. Surah 14 mentions chains around the neck and fire that surrounds people from all sides. These are not symbolic warnings. They are detailed punishments that affect the body.

The Hadith make the descriptions even more graphic. They say that the people in hell will be huge so they can suffer more. One Hadith says the molar tooth of a person in hell will be as big as a mountain. Others say they will be beaten with iron hammers or dragged in chains. Paradise, by contrast, is said to have food that never runs out, drinks that cause no illness, and pleasure that never ends.

This strong focus on the body raises a fair question. Why are the rewards and punishments so physical? Why is paradise not described more as a place of wisdom or closeness to God? Why is hell not described more as deep sorrow or separation from truth? The heavy focus on physical pain and pleasure suggests that these ideas may reflect the hopes and fears of people living in a harsh, desert environment. Cool water, shade, silk, and fine food would have seemed like the highest reward. Fire, thirst, and metal would have seemed like the worst punishment.

But how can anyone know that these rewards and punishments are real? Has anyone gone there and come back with proof? Without clear evidence, these detailed pictures of the afterlife should not be accepted without question. They may say more about the time and place where they were taught than about what actually lies beyond death.

## Use of fear and reward to encourage belief

Islam uses both fear and reward to encourage belief and obedience. The Qur'an and Hadith describe the afterlife in ways that make people afraid of hell and eager for paradise. These strong emotions are used to guide behaviour and make people follow Islamic rules more closely.

The fear side is very clear. Many verses warn of painful punishments for those who disobey or do not believe. Surah 4 says that disbelievers will be burned and their skin will be replaced so the punishment can continue. Surah 22 says they will have boiling water poured on their heads and will be beaten with iron rods. These are not mild warnings. They are frightening images that are meant to scare people into belief.

At the same time, the Qur'an promises great rewards to those who obey. Surah 55 describes paradise as a place with rivers of milk and honey, fine silk clothes, and beautiful gardens. People will eat fruit, drink wine that does not harm them, and rest on soft couches. Surah 76 says they will never suffer again, and everything

they want will be given to them.

The Hadith support this message. One Hadith says that even a person with a tiny amount of faith will eventually be taken out of hell. Another says that someone who dies fighting for Islam goes straight to paradise without being judged. This second promise has had serious effects. In early Islamic history, it encouraged people to fight in battles, believing they were guaranteed paradise if they died. In modern times, extremist groups use this idea to recruit fighters. They tell young men that if they die while fighting for Islam, they will skip judgement and go directly to paradise. This promise has been used to justify suicide bombings and violent attacks, especially by groups like ISIS and Al-Qaeda.

Children are also taught these ideas from a young age. They are told that if they pray, fast, and obey their parents, they will go to paradise. If they lie, steal, or skip prayers, they may go to hell. In many families and communities, this is how belief is shaped—through fear of punishment and hope for reward.

This method works, but it also raises a serious question. Is it true belief if people are only following rules to avoid hell or to get rewards? Does fear make someone good, or just scared? Real moral choices usually come from understanding and reason, not from fear of burning or dreams of rivers and silk. When a religion relies so heavily on fear and reward, it is fair to ask whether people are being guided by truth or just controlled by emotion.

## Contradictions in afterlife imagery

The Qur'an describes the afterlife in many different ways, but some of the descriptions seem to contradict each other. These contradictions raise questions about how clear or consistent the message really is.

For example, in some verses, paradise is described as a peaceful garden where people enjoy shade, fruits, and water. Surah 55 describes calm rivers and soft couches, with everything feeling gentle and relaxing. But in other verses, the focus is on physical pleasures like wine, rich food, and beautiful companions. Surah 76 says people in paradise will drink from silver cups and wear green silk robes. Surah 56 speaks of houris, described as untouched young women with wide eyes. These images do not always match. Is paradise a place of peaceful rest, or a place of constant physical pleasure?

There are also contradictions about who gets into paradise. Some verses say that anyone who believes in God and does good deeds will enter paradise. For example, Surah 2 says that Jews, Christians, and Sabians who believe in God and the Last Day and do good will have nothing to fear. But in other verses, it says that only Muslims will be saved. Surah 3 says that anyone who seeks a religion other than Islam will be a loser in the next life. These two messages cannot both be true unless the meanings have changed over time or been reinterpreted.

There are similar problems in the descriptions of hell. Surah 4 says that hell will be a fire that burns the skin again and again. Surah 14 talks about chains, boiling

water, and complete darkness. But in some Hadith, hell is described as a place with different levels, and some people will be released from it after a while. One Hadith says that people with even a tiny amount of faith will not stay in hell forever. Another says that some people in hell will be taken out and brought to paradise because of Allah's mercy. This raises the question: is hell eternal or not? If some people get out, then how is it still eternal punishment?

Even the physical details are sometimes unclear. In one Hadith, people in hell are described as being huge, with teeth the size of mountains. But the Qur'an often speaks to people as if they will enter the afterlife in their normal human form. Which version is meant to be believed?

These contradictions suggest that the afterlife imagery in Islam is not always consistent. Some parts may have been meant for poetry or emotional effect. Others may have reflected changing ideas over time. But if the descriptions are truly from an all-knowing God, why do they leave room for such confusion? Why do the promises and warnings not always match? These are fair questions, especially for a religion that claims unmatched clarity about the life to come.

## Uncertainty over who qualifies for salvation

Islam teaches that people who believe in Allah and do good deeds will be rewarded in the afterlife. But when you look at the Qur'an and Hadith, it becomes unclear exactly who qualifies for paradise.

In Surah 2, verse 62, it says that Jews, Christians, and Sabians who believe in God and the Last Day and do good will be saved. This sounds like you do not have to be Muslim to go to paradise. But in Surah 3, verse 85, it says that anyone who follows a religion other than Islam will not be accepted and will be among the losers in the next life. These two verses say very different things. One says non-Muslims can be saved. The other says they cannot.

The Hadith also give mixed messages. One Hadith in Sahih Muslim says that anyone who sincerely says the shahada, the Muslim declaration of faith, will go to paradise. Another Hadith says that even Muslims who commit major sins may go to hell. There are Hadith that say someone who dies fighting for Islam goes straight to paradise without being judged. But other Muslims who pray and fast must still face judgement. This is confusing. Why should one group skip judgement while others do not?

There is also the idea that only Allah's mercy can save someone. In one Hadith found in Sahih Bukhari, the Prophet Muhammad says that no one enters paradise through good deeds alone, not even him, unless Allah shows mercy. If this is true, then how can anyone know if they will be saved? A person might pray, fast, give to charity, and still be unsure if they will make it.

Other cases are not clearly explained. What happens to children who die before they grow up? What about people who never heard of Islam? Some scholars say they will be tested after death. Others say they will be forgiven. But the Qur'an

does not give a clear answer. This leaves many people guessing.

These mixed messages show that there is uncertainty in Islam about who will be saved. The Qur'an says it brings clear guidance, but when it comes to salvation, the rules are not always clear or easy to follow. If people cannot know for sure who qualifies for paradise, then the claim of perfect clarity about the afterlife is hard to believe.

## **Downplaying of moral worth outside Islam**

Islam teaches that belief in Allah and following His commands are the most important things a person can do. Because of this, good actions done outside of Islam are often downplayed or seen as not enough on their own. This means that a person who is kind, honest, or generous but is not a Muslim may still be seen as a failure in the eyes of Islam.

The Qur'an repeats the idea that faith must come first. In Surah 3, verse 85, it says that anyone who follows a religion other than Islam will not be accepted and will be among the losers in the next life. In Surah 9, verse 17, it says that those who disbelieve will have all their good deeds wasted. In Surah 25, verse 23, it says that on the Day of Judgement, the good works of non-believers will be turned into dust. These verses make it clear that even a lifetime of good deeds will not count if someone does not believe in Allah.

The Hadith also reflect this view. In Sahih Muslim, there is a Hadith that says a man who did great deeds in this world will still be sent to hell because he did them for fame and not for Allah. Another Hadith in Sahih Bukhari says that even someone who gave to the poor, prayed, and taught others will be sent to hell if it was not done with the right belief and the right intention. This shows that in Islam, actions alone are not enough. They must come with the correct faith and purpose.

This has led many Muslims to believe that non-Muslims, no matter how kind or generous they are, cannot be truly good in a meaningful way. Their actions may help people in this life, but they will not help them in the next. This belief can make it hard for Muslims to value moral behaviour from people outside their faith. A doctor who saves lives, a teacher who gives free lessons, or a person who feeds the poor may still be seen as lost if they are not Muslim.

This way of thinking is different from some other religions and philosophies, which say that what matters most is how a person lives and treats others. In many parts of the world today, people believe that goodness should be judged by actions, not just beliefs. Islam's message on this issue stands out and raises important questions. If a person lives a kind and generous life, why should that be ignored just because they are not Muslim? And if belief matters more than behaviour, what does that say about the true meaning of morality?

## **Comparison with afterlife views in other religions**

Islam teaches that after death, people are judged by Allah and sent either to paradise or hell. Paradise is full of physical rewards like food, drink, fine clothes, and beautiful companions. Hell is described with fire, boiling water, chains, and constant pain. These descriptions are detailed and often very physical.

Other religions also talk about life after death, but they usually focus less on physical pleasures or punishments and more on spiritual ideas.

In Christianity, believers hope to go to heaven to be close to God. Heaven is described as a place of peace, light, and joy, but the Bible does not go into much detail about food or clothing. The main reward is being in the presence of God. Hell is seen as a place of separation from God, sometimes described with fire, but not always in physical terms. Christians also believe in forgiveness through Jesus, which means someone who has done wrong can still be saved if they truly repent.

Hinduism has a different idea. It teaches that the soul is born again and again in different bodies. This is called rebirth or reincarnation. A person's next life depends on how they behaved in this one. A good life can lead to a better rebirth. The highest goal is to escape the cycle of rebirth and reach a state called moksha, which means being free from suffering and united with the divine. Hinduism does mention heavens and hells, but they are temporary. The soul eventually moves on.

Buddhism also believes in rebirth, but it does not focus on a god who judges people. Instead, it teaches that people suffer because of their own desires and actions. The goal is to reach enlightenment and escape the cycle of rebirth. Like Hinduism, there are ideas of temporary heavens and hells, but they are not final. What matters most is freeing the mind from ignorance and learning how to stop suffering.

Judaism mostly focuses on life in this world. It does speak about an afterlife, but it gives fewer details than Islam or Christianity. Some Jewish teachings mention a place called Sheol or a future world where people are rewarded or punished, but these ideas are not central to Jewish practice. What matters more is living a good life here and now.

Compared to these religions, Islam gives the most detailed physical picture of the afterlife. It tells believers exactly what to expect if they obey or disobey. But this strong focus on physical pleasure and pain raises questions. Is the afterlife really about gardens, silk, fire, and boiling water? Or are these descriptions shaped by the time and place where Islam began? Other religions seem more focused on the soul, spiritual peace, or learning. Islam's view stands apart because it promises very specific rewards and punishments that appeal to the senses. That may give a strong message, but it also leaves room for doubt about where these images really come from.

## **Part 2**

# **Exaggerations about Muhammad and prophetic authority**

# Chapter 7

## Muhammad's moral and personal character

### Muhammad as the perfect human

Muslims are taught that Muhammad was the perfect human being. He is called *al-insan al-kamil*, which means "the complete man." Many Muslims believe that he had the best character, the best behaviour, and that his life is the ideal model for all people, in all times and places. This belief is based on verses from the Qur'an, as well as many Hadith.

One of the most often quoted verses is Surah 33, verse 21. It says that the Prophet is an excellent example for anyone who hopes to meet Allah and be saved. Another verse, Surah 68, verse 4, says Muhammad has "a great moral character." These verses are used to support the idea that Muhammad's behaviour was always right.

But when we look closely at the stories of his life, found in Islamic sources like Ibn Ishaq's *Sirat Rasul Allah* and Hadith collections like *Sahih Bukhari*, we see actions that raise serious questions. For example, Muhammad married Aisha when she was six years old and the marriage was consummated when she was nine. This information is found in *Sahih Bukhari*, which is one of the most trusted Hadith collections. Today, this would be seen as child abuse, and in most countries it would be illegal.

Muhammad also took part in raids and battles. He led attacks on caravans, including those from Mecca. One example is the raid at Nakhla, where Muslims attacked a caravan during a sacred month when fighting was supposed to be banned. Muhammad approved of the attack even though some of his followers hesitated. Later, he led battles like Badr, Uhud, and the Battle of the Trench, where people were killed on both sides.

Another serious case is what happened to the Jewish tribe of Banu Qurayza. After a conflict, the men of the tribe were judged by one of Muhammad's allies, and about 600 to 900 of them were executed. The women and children were taken as slaves. These events are described in Islamic sources such as Ibn Ishaq and *Sahih Muslim*.

There is also the issue of personal privilege. In Surah 33, Muhammad is given special rights that other Muslims do not have. For example, he is allowed to marry



more women than anyone else. He is also told that his followers should not bother him in his house or marry his widows after his death. These rules gave him a level of power and protection that no one else had.

When we look at all this, it becomes hard to accept the idea that Muhammad was a perfect human. His actions may have made sense in the context of seventh-century Arabia, but to say that they are perfect for all people in all times is something that must be questioned. A person who marries a child, orders mass executions, takes slaves, and claims special rules for himself cannot be held up as a flawless example without serious moral problems. The belief in his perfection is not based on clear facts, but on religious devotion that refuses to ask hard questions.

## Divine guidance in all actions

Muslims are taught that Muhammad was guided by Allah in everything he did. This means that his choices, actions, and even his personal habits are believed to be part of divine wisdom. The Qur'an says in Surah 53, verses 3 and 4, that Muhammad does not speak from his own desire and that what he says is a message sent down to him. Because of this, many Muslims believe that his life was free from error and that he could not make serious mistakes.

This belief has led to the idea that every action of Muhammad is good and should be copied. What he ate, how he dressed, how he slept, how he spoke, and even how he went to the toilet are all recorded and followed by many Muslims as part of the Sunnah. People are told that following these actions brings blessings because they reflect divine guidance.

But there are examples in Islamic history that raise doubts about the idea that every action Muhammad took was guided by God. In Surah 80, for example, Muhammad is corrected by Allah for ignoring a blind man who came to him while he was speaking to the leaders of Quraysh. The verse says he frowned and turned away, and Allah clearly disapproved. If he was always guided in every moment, why would he need to be corrected?

Another example is the case of the "Satanic verses," which is mentioned by early Muslim historians like al-Tabari. According to these reports, Muhammad once praised three pagan goddesses, saying their intercession was accepted. Later, he said that Satan had tricked him and that these verses were not really from Allah. Most Muslims today reject this story, but it was accepted by early scholars and shows a case where divine guidance was said to have failed, at least for a moment.

There is also the case of the prisoners after the Battle of Badr. Muhammad decided to release them for ransom, but later received a verse in Surah 8, verse 67, saying that it was not the right decision. Allah seemed to criticise his choice, saying that a prophet should not free prisoners until there has been more killing in the land. If his actions were always guided, why would he be told he made the wrong decision?

These examples show that Muhammad sometimes acted based on his own

judgement and was later corrected. That does not fit with the claim that everything he did was guided by God. It also shows that the idea of divine guidance was sometimes used to support whatever decision he made, even when those decisions gave him special rights, more wives, or more control over others.

If someone's every action is said to be from God, then it becomes nearly impossible to question anything they do. But when we look at the sources closely, it becomes clear that Muhammad made mistakes and changed his mind. Saying that everything he did was divinely guided is not based on consistent evidence. It is based on belief, not fact.

## Emphasis on mercy and compassion

Muslims are often taught that Muhammad was the most merciful and compassionate human being. The Qur'an supports this idea in Surah 21, verse 107, which says that Muhammad was sent as a "mercy to the worlds." In Hadith collections, there are many stories that show him being kind to animals, patient with people, and gentle with children. These are the examples most often repeated in sermons and books.

But when we look at the full picture of Muhammad's life, there are also many actions that do not match this image of mercy. For example, after the Battle of the Trench, Muhammad gave approval for the execution of the men from the Jewish tribe of Banu Qurayza. Between 600 and 900 men were beheaded in one day. The women and children were taken as slaves. This story is told in early Islamic sources like Ibn Ishaq and confirmed in Hadith. It is one of the most well-known examples of violence in Muhammad's life.

Another example is the treatment of critics. A woman named Asma bint Marwan was said to have written poetry mocking Muhammad. According to early sources like Ibn Ishaq, she was killed at night by a follower of Muhammad after he approved of her execution. There are also reports of other poets and critics being killed for insulting him. These stories show a leader who responded to words with deadly force.

There are also cases where Muhammad used threats of violence to control behaviour. In Sahih Bukhari, he is reported to have said, "Whoever changes his religion, kill him." This became the basis for the rule in Islamic law that apostates, those who leave Islam, should be put to death. That is a serious punishment, and it does not sound like mercy.

In his personal life, Muhammad did show moments of kindness. He adopted a slave named Zayd and treated him well. He forgave some of his enemies when he conquered Mecca. But these examples are not enough to cover over the harsher parts of his story. A truly merciful person would not order mass executions, approve assassinations, or call for death to those who leave his religion.

The idea that Muhammad was always merciful is repeated often, but it is not supported by the full record of his actions. The claim is based on selected stories,

while other parts of his life are ignored or explained away. If we are going to be honest about history, we have to look at everything, not just the parts that sound good. Mercy means more than being kind when it is easy. It means showing compassion even when it is difficult. The record shows that Muhammad did not always do that.

## Flawless conduct in warfare

Many Muslims believe that Muhammad showed perfect behaviour in war. They are taught that he only fought to defend Islam, that he treated prisoners kindly, and that he never harmed innocent people. Stories about his fairness in battle are often repeated in schools and sermons to show him as a model of justice even in war.

But when we look at Islamic sources, we find actions that do not fit this picture of flawless conduct. Muhammad took part in more than twenty battles and raids, and not all of them were defensive. One example is the raid at Nakhla, where Muslims attacked a Quraysh caravan during a sacred month when fighting was supposed to be forbidden. This act shocked even some of Muhammad's followers. At first, he said nothing, but later a verse in the Qur'an said that although the timing was bad, the actions of the Quraysh were worse, which gave support to the raid. This is told in sources like Ibn Ishaq and Tafsir al-Jalalayn.

Another example is the treatment of the Banu Qurayza, a Jewish tribe in Medina. After a battle, the men of the tribe were judged and sentenced to death. Between 600 and 900 men were executed, and their wives and children were taken as slaves. This was not just a punishment for a few leaders. It was the mass killing of an entire group of people. This event is confirmed in early sources such as Ibn Ishaq and Sahih Muslim.

Muhammad also approved of assassination in war. There are reports in early Islamic texts of him sending men to kill individuals who had written poetry against him or who were seen as enemies. One example is the killing of Ka'b ibn al-Ashraf, a poet who criticised Muhammad after the Battle of Badr. Muhammad is said to have asked his companions, "Who will rid me of Ka'b?" and a group of them killed him. This story is found in Sahih Bukhari.

Even in his final years, Muhammad led military campaigns that involved the use of power to spread Islam. The expedition to Tabuk, for example, was not a response to an attack. It was a show of force against a possible Roman threat. Tribes that surrendered were allowed to keep their religion, but they had to pay a tax and accept Muslim rule. Those who resisted were fought.

These actions may have been common in seventh-century Arabia, but calling them flawless does not match the facts. Taking part in surprise raids, approving assassinations, and killing hundreds of prisoners are not signs of perfect conduct. These events are recorded in respected Islamic sources, not from outside critics.

If someone is going to be described as having perfect behaviour in war, then their

actions should hold up to that standard. In Muhammad's case, the record is mixed. Some of his actions showed planning, control, and restraint. Others showed violence, harsh punishments, and the use of fear. The full story needs to be told, not just the parts that sound good.

## Idealised treatment of opponents

Muslims are often taught that Muhammad treated his enemies with great kindness and forgiveness. One of the most repeated stories is when he returned to Mecca with an army and forgave many of the people who had once fought against him. This is seen as a sign of his noble character. The Qur'an also says in Surah 41, verse 34, that good and evil are not the same, and that people should respond to wrong with what is better.

But this picture of kindness is not the full story. While there were moments of forgiveness, there were also many examples of harsh treatment towards opponents. These come from trusted Islamic sources.

One of the clearest examples is the killing of people who criticised or mocked Muhammad. Ka'b ibn al-Ashraf was a poet who wrote verses against Muhammad after the Battle of Badr. According to Sahih Bukhari, Muhammad asked his companions, "Who will rid me of Ka'b?" and a group of them went and killed him. Another case is Asma bint Marwan, a woman who wrote poems mocking Muhammad. Early sources like Ibn Ishaq report that she was killed at night after Muhammad approved of her death.

There were also cases where opponents were given no chance to explain or make peace. After the Battle of Hunayn, some prisoners were taken, and there are reports that Muhammad allowed the killing of certain captured men who had spoken against Islam. In the conquest of Mecca, although many were forgiven, there was a list of individuals who were to be killed even if they were found hiding near the Kaaba. Some of them were poets or people who had written against him.

Another example is the fate of the Jewish tribes in Medina. The Banu Qaynuqa and Banu Nadir were forced to leave the city. The Banu Qurayza faced the harshest punishment. After a siege, all the men were executed, and the women and children were taken as slaves. Islamic sources like Ibn Ishaq describe this event in detail. It was not a small matter. Hundreds of men were killed after surrendering.

These stories are rarely mentioned in popular lessons or sermons. Instead, people are told only about the times Muhammad forgave his enemies. But the truth is more complicated. He showed mercy in some cases and extreme punishment in others. To present only the kind side is to ignore many serious events that are recorded in the same trusted Islamic sources.

If we want to understand Muhammad's treatment of opponents, we must look at everything. Forgiveness did happen, but so did execution, exile, and assassination. The full record shows a leader who used both kindness and fear, depending on what suited the moment. Calling it ideal treatment is not honest if we leave out the

rest.

## Aisha's marriage as a moral model

Muslims are taught that Muhammad's life is the best example for all people. This includes his marriages. One of them, to Aisha, is especially well known and often discussed. In many parts of the Muslim world, this marriage is treated not only as part of history, but as a model of proper conduct.

According to Sahih Bukhari, one of the most trusted Hadith collections, Aisha said that she was six years old when she was married to Muhammad and nine when the marriage was physically completed. Muhammad at that time was over fifty years old. This report appears in multiple places and is accepted in mainstream Islamic tradition.

The problem is not only what happened, but the way it continues to be defended. Today, in almost every country in the world, marriage at such a young age is banned. Modern laws and medical understanding both agree that childhood is a time for education, growth, and safety, not marriage. Most people would agree that a child that age is not ready to become a spouse in any way.

Some Muslim scholars say that this kind of marriage was common at the time and must be judged by the standards of that period. Others say that Aisha matured early or that the Hadith reports might be misunderstood. But these explanations are not convincing, especially when the same Hadith is used by religious leaders to allow similar marriages today.

In countries like Yemen, Nigeria, and parts of Iran and Afghanistan, girls are still married off at very young ages. Supporters of this practice sometimes point to Aisha as proof that it is allowed in Islam. Because the Prophet did it, they say it must be good. In this way, what should be seen as a historical problem becomes a living example that affects real people now.

This is why the issue matters. It is not only about the past. It is about what is still taught and followed in the name of religion. A moral model should offer protection, not risk. A child should never be treated as someone ready for adult roles. If an act would be condemned for anyone else, it should not be accepted just because it is connected to a religious figure.

Treating the marriage to Aisha as a moral example has led to real harm in many places. It should no longer be seen as a standard for right behaviour. Being fair about history means being willing to say that some actions, even by prophets, were not right. That is not hatred. That is honesty.

if a powerful man claims divine approval for his personal choices, including activities that would otherwise be questioned such as pedophilia, then it becomes fair to ask whether religion was used to give cover to those desires. That does not mean every religious figure is dishonest, but it does mean that we should be willing to look closely at how personal interest and religious teaching can become

mixed together.

## Polygamy framed as virtuous

Muslims are taught that everything Muhammad did was wise, fair, and guided by Allah. This includes his practice of polygamy. In Islam, a man is allowed to have up to four wives at the same time, as long as he treats them fairly. This rule comes from Surah 4, verse 3, which says that men can marry two, three, or four women if they can be just with them. Muhammad is presented as the best example of how to do this with kindness and balance.

But Muhammad himself had more than four wives. According to Islamic sources like Sahih Bukhari and Ibn Sa'd, he had at least eleven wives at one time, along with concubines. One of the Qur'an verses, Surah 33, verse 50, gives him special permission that other Muslims do not have. It says that he is allowed to marry more women, including those who offer themselves to him, and also to keep female captives as part of his household. This verse was said to have come down after people began to question why Muhammad had more wives than anyone else.

Muslim scholars often defend this by saying that Muhammad's marriages were for political or social reasons. They say he married widows to protect them or to build alliances between tribes. While this may be partly true in some cases, it does not explain everything. Some of the women he married were not widows. Some were known for their beauty, like Zaynab bint Jahsh. She was first married to Muhammad's adopted son, but after the divorce, Muhammad received a verse from the Qur'an that allowed him to marry her. This caused strong reaction even at the time, and the verse in Surah 33, verse 37, was used to settle the matter.

It is also worth noting that Muhammad kept slave women as concubines. One of them was Maria the Copt, a gift from Egypt. She was not married to him but lived in his house and had a child with him. None of this is hidden. It is reported clearly in trusted Islamic sources. Yet it is still presented as part of his noble character.

Today, in many Muslim societies, polygamy is seen as a moral and religious act. Men who take more than one wife often say they are following the Sunnah, the example of the Prophet. This has led to problems. In many cases, women are pressured into accepting polygamous marriages even when they are unhappy. In some countries, men can take a second or third wife without telling the first. These actions are justified using Muhammad's example.

By framing polygamy as virtuous, Islam gives religious approval to something that causes deep hurt in many families. It also creates an unfair system where men have more rights than women. Women are not allowed to have more than one husband, even if they are wealthy, wise, or kind. The Prophet's life is used to support this unequal rule.

If polygamy were truly a moral good, then it should bring peace and fairness. But in many real cases, it brings jealousy, pain, and broken homes. A system that treats women as replaceable or easy to multiply cannot be called just. When

Muhammad's many marriages are presented as holy, it becomes harder for people to question them, even when they suffer because of them. A moral example should lift everyone up, not just serve the needs of one man.

## Slavery treated as unproblematic

Islam teaches that Muhammad was a model of justice and kindness, even in how he treated slaves. Stories are told about how he fed his slaves the same food he ate and never hit them. Some Hadith say that freeing slaves is a good deed, and the Qur'an does encourage manumission in certain cases. Because of this, many Muslims believe that Islam slowly worked to end slavery.

But this idea does not match the full picture found in Islamic sources. The truth is that slavery was accepted and protected under Islamic law. The Qur'an gives rules for owning slaves rather than banning the practice. In Surah 4, verse 3, and Surah 23, verse 6, Muslim men are told they can have sexual relations with their wives or with "those whom their right hands possess." This phrase refers to female slaves. These verses were used to justify slave ownership and sexual access to slave women.

Muhammad himself owned slaves. According to early sources like Ibn Sa'd and Sahih Muslim, he bought, sold, and gifted slaves. He also accepted slaves as war booty. One of the most well-known was Maria the Copt, who was sent to him as a gift from the ruler of Egypt. She was not his wife, but she lived in his home and gave birth to a son. There is no record that she was freed. Another example is Safiyyah bint Huyayy, a Jewish woman captured during the Battle of Khaybar. After her tribe was defeated and her husband killed, she was taken as a captive and later married by Muhammad. The Hadith say she was offered the choice between freedom and marriage. But it is hard to talk about real choice when someone is a prisoner.

The Qur'an never calls slavery a sin or demands its end. Instead, it sets rules for how to manage slaves. It says owners should treat them fairly and encourages freeing them as a way to gain reward from Allah. But it also accepts slavery as normal. Muslim men could inherit slaves, marry slave women without a formal contract, and use them for labour or sex. Slaves had fewer rights than free people, and there was no full ban on the trade or ownership of human beings.

Because slavery was linked to the Prophet's example and the Qur'an, it remained part of Muslim society for over a thousand years. Even today, in some parts of the world, religious scholars have defended it. In recent years, groups like ISIS openly revived slave markets, especially targeting non-Muslim women. They quoted Qur'an verses and stories about Muhammad to support what they were doing. While most Muslims today reject slavery, they still face a problem. If Muhammad did it and the Qur'an allows it, how can they say it is completely wrong?

Slavery is now understood by nearly everyone in the world to be cruel, unjust, and a violation of human dignity. But in Islam, it was accepted and regulated, not condemned. That is not a minor detail. It is a serious flaw in a system that claims to

be perfect for all time. A truly moral religion should have stood firmly against owning people. Islam did not. It accepted it as normal, and its Prophet took part in it. That is something no amount of soft stories or good intentions can erase.

## Contrast between Meccan and Medinan phases

At the start of Muhammad's mission in Mecca, his message focused on belief in one God, the Day of Judgement, and moral behaviour. He preached peace, warned against greed, and called for fairness to the poor and weak. During this time, he had no political power and faced strong opposition. Many of the verses revealed in Mecca speak about patience, forgiveness, and leaving judgement to Allah. For example, Surah 73, verse 10, says to be patient with what people say and to avoid fighting back.

All of that changed after he moved to Medina. There, Muhammad became not just a preacher, but a political leader and a military commander. The verses revealed during this period are very different in tone. They focus more on rules, punishments, battles, and how to deal with non-Muslims. Surah 9, which was revealed near the end of Muhammad's life, includes strong commands about fighting unbelievers. Verse 5 says to "kill the polytheists wherever you find them," and verse 29 says to fight Jews and Christians until they pay a special tax and feel subdued.

In Mecca, Muslims were told to leave people alone and not to fight. In Medina, they were told to fight their enemies, collect spoils of war, and expand their control. The rules of war, marriage, inheritance, and punishments were revealed after Muhammad gained power. Slavery, polygamy, and rules about dealing with conquered people all came during the Medinan period. This shift shows that Muhammad's message changed as his situation changed.

Supporters of Islam say this was part of a natural process, where the religion developed in stages. But others see it differently. They ask why a message from God would start with peace and later bring violence. If the truth is eternal and unchanging, why would the tone and content change so sharply once Muhammad gained power?

Some Muslim scholars use a method called abrogation, which means that later verses cancel out earlier ones. This idea comes from Surah 2, verse 106, which says that Allah replaces some verses with better ones. In practice, this often means that the peaceful Meccan verses are seen as less important than the harsh Medinan ones. This raises a problem. If the peaceful parts no longer apply, then Islam's claim to be a religion of peace loses meaning.

The contrast between the Meccan and Medinan phases is not a small detail. It affects how people understand Islam today. Those who want a peaceful message can quote Meccan verses. Those who want a harsh message can quote Medinan ones. Both are in the Qur'an. Both are part of Muhammad's life. That is why the difference matters. It shows that the message was not always the same and raises questions about whether it was shaped by God or by changing human needs.



## Selective and sanitised biography

The story of Muhammad that most Muslims hear is often selective and cleaned up. From a young age, they are taught that he was honest, gentle, brave, and wise. They are told that he cared for orphans, forgave his enemies, and always treated people with fairness. These stories are repeated in schools, mosques, and religious books, creating the picture of a man who was flawless in every way.

But when we read the full Islamic sources, including early biographies like Ibn Ishaq's *Sirat Rasul Allah* and Hadith collections like *Sahih Bukhari* and *Sahih Muslim*, we find many parts of Muhammad's life that are left out or downplayed. These include actions that are difficult to explain or defend.

As already discussed, Muhammad married Aisha when she was very young. This is clearly reported in *Sahih Bukhari*, yet many Muslims today are either not told this fact or are told that the Hadith is misunderstood. Muhammad also had many wives and concubines, more than the number allowed for other Muslim men. Surah 33, verse 50, gave him special permission that others did not have. This is rarely mentioned when his character is being praised.

His role in battles is also simplified. Many Muslims are taught that he only fought in self-defence. But in the early sources, we read about raids he planned, such as the one at Nakhla, which happened during a sacred month when fighting was supposed to be avoided. He approved assassinations of critics, like the poet Ka'b ibn al-Ashraf and Asma bint Marwan. These stories are found in early texts, but are often left out of modern lessons.

The mass execution of the Banu Qurayza tribe is another example. After a battle, hundreds of men from the tribe were killed, and their women and children were taken as slaves. This is reported in multiple sources including Ibn Ishaq. Yet most Muslims grow up never hearing about it.

Even when these stories are mentioned, they are often softened. For example, some scholars say the Banu Qurayza were punished fairly, or that Aisha was older than nine, or that the assassinations were necessary. These explanations are meant to protect the image of the Prophet, not to give an honest view of the historical record.

When a religious figure is treated as perfect, it becomes very hard to admit that he may have done wrong. But honesty requires looking at all the facts, not just the ones that sound good. A truly strong belief should not be afraid of the truth. If Muhammad's life is going to be used as a guide for all people in all times, then his story must be told completely, not just the parts that make people feel proud. Sanitising his biography may protect feelings, but it hides reality.

## Reverence used to block scrutiny

In Islam, Muhammad is not just respected. He is deeply revered. Muslims are

taught to say “peace be upon him” every time his name is mentioned. Many refuse to even imagine what he looked like. Drawing pictures of him is not allowed in most Islamic traditions. In some countries, doing so can lead to protests, threats, or even death. This extreme level of reverence is not just about showing love. It is also used to stop people from asking hard questions about his life.

If someone tries to criticise Muhammad or even point out something uncomfortable from Islamic sources, they are often accused of showing hatred or spreading lies. In countries like Pakistan, laws against blasphemy make it dangerous to speak openly. People have been jailed or killed just for making a comment or sharing an article. In 2011, a Pakistani governor named Salman Taseer was murdered by his own bodyguard for speaking out against these laws. The killer was celebrated by many as a hero.

Even in Muslim communities outside of Muslim-majority countries, the same pressure often exists. Teachers, journalists, and writers who raise honest questions about Muhammad’s actions face threats and rejection. Some are forced to apologise. Others stay silent out of fear. In schools and mosques, students are usually only shown the good stories, and any disagreement is quickly shut down.

This level of control makes it nearly impossible for many Muslims to explore their own religion freely. If you are taught that even asking questions is wrong, how can you ever find the truth? Reverence becomes a wall. It protects Muhammad’s image, but it also stops people from thinking deeply. It turns honest curiosity into a forbidden act.

A figure who claims to speak for God should be open to scrutiny. If Muhammad’s life is truly the best example, then it should stand up to questions. Protecting it with fear, law, or silence does not make it stronger. It only shows that something is being hidden. Reverence, when used this way, does not lead to understanding. It leads to control. And control is not the same as faith.

## **Criticism dismissed as ignorance or bias**

Whenever someone raises a difficult question about Muhammad or Islam, the first response from many Muslims is not to think about the issue but to reject it. They say the person asking the question is ignorant, hateful, or brainwashed by the media. Criticism is rarely met with honest discussion. Instead, it is dismissed as coming from people who do not understand Islam, or worse, who want to attack it.

This response is taught early. In Islamic schools and books, children are often told that anyone who questions the Prophet is either lying or lacks the knowledge to understand. Many are taught that the West is full of enemies of Islam who are jealous of its truth. Because of this, even clear and well-sourced criticism is rejected without being read or understood.

For example, if someone says that Muhammad married a child or approved the killing of critics, many Muslims will say, “You are quoting false sources,” even when those sources are Sahih Bukhari or Ibn Ishaq, which they accept as authentic in

every other context. If you quote the Qur'an directly, you may still be told you are taking it out of context, even if you are quoting a verse exactly as it is used in religious lessons. The goal of these replies is not to understand, but to shut down the conversation.

Even Muslim reformers who try to ask questions from within the religion face the same attacks. Scholars who speak out are called traitors or accused of being tools of the West. Some have been forced to leave their countries. Others have been attacked or silenced. When honest voices from within Islam are treated as enemies, it becomes clear that the problem is not the critic. The problem is the unwillingness to face the facts.

This habit of dismissal allows serious problems to go unchallenged. It lets people ignore violence, injustice, and harmful teachings by pretending they do not exist. It also creates a bubble where only praise is allowed and truth becomes whatever makes the religion look good.

A religion that claims to be from God should not be afraid of questions. Truth should be tested, not protected with insults and fear. Calling critics ignorant or biased does not answer their arguments. It only shows weakness. If the teachings of Muhammad cannot survive open debate, then people have a right to wonder whether those teachings are really from God at all.

# Chapter 8

## Prophethood as the only path to truth

### Revelation limited to prophets

Islam teaches that true knowledge about God and the afterlife comes only through revelation, and that revelation is given only to prophets. The Qur'an says in Surah 42, verse 51, that it is not for a human to speak directly with God except through revelation or from behind a veil. This means that ordinary people cannot discover divine truth on their own. They must rely completely on what a prophet says.

Muhammad is described as the final prophet. Muslims believe that the Qur'an is the last and perfect revelation, and that no new messages from God will come after him. Because of this, questioning what the Prophet said or did is seen as questioning God himself. It also means that truth is not something you can explore freely. You are expected to accept it as it was delivered through one person, in one place, at one time.

This creates a closed system. If someone has a spiritual insight, a moral idea, or a deep personal experience that goes against what the prophet taught, it is dismissed. In Islam, it cannot be accepted unless it agrees with the Qur'an and the Hadith. Even asking questions about whether revelation could happen again is considered dangerous. Many Muslim scholars say that anyone who claims to receive new messages from God is either lying or mad.

This strict rule has led to serious problems. It shuts down curiosity and discourages thinking. It also gives all authority to one voice. In history, this has allowed religious leaders to silence others by saying, "You are going against the Prophet." In countries where Islamic law is followed, this rule has been used to punish writers, thinkers, and reformers. People who speak out about new ideas are often told that they have no right to think for themselves, because truth ended with Muhammad.

Other belief systems do not always work this way. In some forms of Christianity, people believe that God can still speak to them through prayer, reflection, or conscience. In Hinduism and Buddhism, people are encouraged to meditate, ask questions, and explore different paths to understanding. In Islam, these personal paths are not trusted unless they match what the Prophet already said.

If truth is limited to one person in history, it means billions of people must submit to ideas they cannot question. This raises a serious problem. What if the Prophet was wrong about something? What if people today need answers to problems that did

not exist in the seventh century? If revelation is forever closed, then so is the door to new understanding. That does not look like a living truth. It looks like a locked box.

## Prophets as the only valid guides

In Islam, prophets are not just messengers. They are seen as the only true guides to understanding what God wants. Muslims are taught that without a prophet, people cannot find the right path. The Qur'an says in Surah 16, verse 36, that every nation was sent a messenger to tell them to worship God and avoid falsehood. This idea repeats throughout the Qur'an. It means that guidance comes from outside, not from within.

Muhammad is believed to be the final prophet, and his example is treated as the perfect guide for all people in all times. Surah 33, verse 21, says that Muhammad is an excellent model for anyone who hopes for God and the Last Day. This verse is used to show that no other guide is needed. Everything a Muslim needs to know is supposed to be found in the Qur'an and the example of Muhammad.

The problem with this idea is that it puts all spiritual authority in the hands of just one kind of person—a prophet. It also locks the door on other sources of wisdom. Philosophers, scientists, writers, or everyday people may have good ideas or deep insights, but in Islam, none of that matters unless it agrees with what the Prophet said. Even someone who lives a moral life, helps others, and seeks truth honestly is still seen as lost without the guidance of a prophet.

This belief also makes religion less about personal growth and more about obedience. The goal is not to think deeply or ask questions, but to follow what the prophet did and said. In some Muslim communities, even asking whether Muhammad's actions were right in every situation is treated as a sign of bad faith. Religious leaders say things like "Who are you to question the Prophet?" That kind of thinking turns faith into a list of rules instead of a journey of discovery.

Other traditions give more space for human reason and reflection. In Greek philosophy, for example, people were encouraged to ask what is good and true by using logic and life experience. In Buddhism, personal practice and awareness are central. Even in some forms of Christianity, people are taught that love, conscience, and understanding can guide them, not just one man's life.

Islam shuts this down by saying the only path to truth is through the words and actions of a single prophet. That gives tremendous power to religious authorities, who get to decide what the Prophet really meant. It also leaves people afraid to trust their own minds. A system that blocks all other paths and says "Only this one is true" becomes less about truth and more about control.

## Reason and conscience deemed insufficient

Islam teaches that reason and conscience are not enough to find truth on their own. According to this view, people can only know right from wrong if they follow the guidance sent by God through a prophet. The Qur'an says in Surah 33, verse 36, that it is not for a believer to have any choice once God and His Messenger have decided a matter. This means personal judgement is not just discouraged, it is rejected outright.

Muslims are told that human thinking is weak, limited, and easily led astray. Even good intentions are not trusted if they do not line up with revelation. If a person feels something is wrong, but the Prophet allowed it, then the feeling is considered mistaken. If a person cannot accept something like slavery, child marriage, or harsh punishments, they are told their conscience is being influenced by outside ideas, not by real truth.

This belief protects the system from being challenged. If someone says, "This teaching seems unfair," the answer is usually, "You do not understand," or "Your heart is not guided." There is no room for a person to say, "I have thought about this deeply and I believe it is wrong." Once you accept that your own mind and heart cannot be trusted, you are trapped. You must follow, even when it feels wrong.

This is one of the most powerful tools religion uses to protect itself. If a person starts to question, the first response is not to look at the question itself but to tell the person that they are confused or proud. The Qur'an often speaks harshly about those who follow their own desires or rely on their own thinking. In Surah 45, verse 23, it says that some people take their own desires as a god, as if using reason is a kind of worship of the self.

Other traditions see things differently. Some teach that conscience is a gift, not a trap. Many people believe that the ability to think, reflect, and feel what is right is one of the best things about being human. Laws and traditions are useful, but they must be open to review. If something causes harm, it must be rethought, even if it has been taught for centuries.

Islam says no to this. It teaches that the Prophet's guidance is perfect and complete, and that personal reason cannot compete with it. That means even if your heart tells you something is wrong, you are expected to ignore it if it clashes with what the Prophet said. This shuts down one of the main ways people move out of religion. If you are not allowed to trust your own mind and feelings, then the only path left is blind obedience. And that is not a path to truth. It is a wall that keeps people from reaching it.

## Denial of direct access to God

In Islam, people are taught that they cannot connect directly with God in the way that a prophet can. They can pray, ask for help, and seek forgiveness, but they

cannot receive messages or truth directly from God. The Qur'an says in Surah 42, verse 51, that God only speaks to humans through inspiration, from behind a veil, or by sending a messenger. This means that true guidance only comes through someone chosen by God, not through personal experience.

Muhammad is believed to be the final prophet, and Muslims are told that no more revelations will ever come. That also means no one else will ever have a direct connection like his. All religious truth is said to have already been given. Anyone who claims to hear from God today is automatically dismissed or seen as dangerous. There is no room for someone to say, "I have found a new message" or "I had a personal experience of God that leads me to a different truth."

This belief is very limiting. It tells people that their most powerful thoughts, dreams, and experiences mean nothing unless they match what was already said centuries ago. If someone feels close to God but asks new questions or reaches different conclusions, that experience is ignored or condemned. Personal discovery is treated as false unless it agrees with past revelation.

In contrast, many other religious and spiritual traditions allow people to seek a direct connection with the divine. In Christianity, some believe that God can speak through prayer, reflection, or even personal visions. In Hinduism, people meditate to reach spiritual truth and connect with what they see as the divine within. In Buddhism, truth is found through personal effort, not by following a prophet. These systems value inner growth and direct contact.

Islam blocks that path. It says the line to God goes only through the Prophet and the Qur'an. If you try to find your own way, you are told you are wrong before you even begin. That creates a system where people are not encouraged to seek God with open hearts and minds. They are told to repeat and obey, not to explore or ask deeply.

A God who only speaks through one man and never again is a God who becomes distant. A system like that turns religion into a memory, not a living search. Denying people direct access to the divine keeps them dependent and afraid to trust what they feel or discover. That is not a path to truth. It is a way to keep people quiet.

## **Finality of Muhammad's prophethood**

Islam teaches that Muhammad was the last prophet. This belief is based on Surah 33, verse 40, which says that Muhammad is the "seal of the prophets." Muslims understand this to mean that no prophet will ever come after him and that no new message from God will ever be revealed again. The door is closed, and nothing can be added or changed.

This belief is one of the most important in Islam. It means that the Qur'an is the final word. It means that Muhammad's teachings must be followed exactly. Anyone who claims to bring a new message is considered false. In some countries, even saying that you believe in a prophet after Muhammad can get you arrested or worse. The

Ahmadiyya community, for example, believes in a later prophet, and in places like Pakistan, they are banned from calling themselves Muslim.

The idea of finality is used to block change. If something in the Qur'an or Hadith seems unfair or outdated, believers are told it cannot be questioned. They are told that the message is perfect, and since no more prophets will come, no one has the authority to challenge or update it. This stops reform, even when new problems arise that did not exist in the seventh century.

It also stops people from thinking freely. If a person has a deep moral insight or a spiritual experience, they are told it means nothing unless it fits what Muhammad already taught. People are expected to follow rules without expecting any new guidance. This has led to religious leaders gaining power, because they are seen as the only ones who can explain the final message correctly.

Other traditions do not always work this way. In Christianity, some groups believe that the Holy Spirit can still guide people today. In Hinduism and Buddhism, new teachers appear in every generation. Even in some branches of Judaism, people are free to reinterpret texts in light of modern values. These systems grow with time. But in Islam, the finality of Muhammad's prophethood has made growth very hard.

Once you say that one man delivered the last truth for all people, in all places, for all time, you leave no space for improvement. You leave no room for new voices, new discoveries, or changing needs. Finality sounds strong, but in practice, it locks people into the past. And when people are not allowed to move forward, they are left repeating answers that no longer work. That is not how truth should work. Truth should grow, not be frozen in time.

## Superiority over earlier prophets

Islam teaches that all prophets were sent by God, but that Muhammad is the greatest of them all. He is called the "seal of the prophets," which means the last one, but also the most complete. Many Muslims believe that he was wiser, stronger, and more successful than anyone before him. His name is often followed by special praise, and many say he was the best of creation.

This belief is supported by Hadith found in Sahih Muslim and Sahih Bukhari. One Hadith says that if Moses were alive during Muhammad's time, he would have had to follow him. Another says that Muhammad was given things no other prophet was given, such as victory through fear and the ability to speak to all of humanity, not just one group. These ideas are repeated often in sermons and books to show that Muhammad's role was higher than anyone else's.

But this belief in superiority creates problems. It makes people compare Muhammad to earlier prophets not as equals, but as steps leading up to him. Prophets like Abraham, Moses, and Jesus are respected in Islam, but they are treated as incomplete. Their stories are changed in the Qur'an to fit Islamic teachings. For example, Jesus is not the Son of God and was not crucified. Moses is



seen as a true prophet, but the Jews are blamed for not following him properly. These changes are meant to support the idea that Muhammad corrected what others got wrong.

This view also leads to pride and rejection of other faiths. If Muhammad is the greatest and his message is perfect, then everything else must be seen as lesser. This makes it hard for Muslims to see the value in other religions. It also gives the message that nothing before Islam was good enough. Even when the Qur'an says that all prophets were sent by God, it still puts Muhammad at the top.

Some Muslims say this is just respect, not arrogance. But in practice, it often leads to the idea that no one outside Islam has real truth. It becomes a reason to ignore other teachings, even when they offer deep wisdom or kindness. It also justifies the belief that Islam has nothing to learn from others.

Other traditions do not always do this. In Christianity, for example, Jesus is central, but many Christians still read the Jewish scriptures with respect. In Hinduism, different teachers are honoured without saying that one cancels out the others. In Buddhism, many paths are accepted. Islam's belief in Muhammad's superiority shuts that door.

Once you say one man is the greatest of all time, it becomes hard to question him, compare him fairly, or listen to other voices. This kind of thinking turns religion into a competition, instead of a search for truth. And when winning becomes more important than learning, truth is often lost.

## Prophethood as source of authority

In Islam, authority comes from the words and actions of the Prophet. Once something is said to come from Muhammad, it is no longer open to debate. His sayings, called Hadith, and his actions, called Sunnah, are treated as law. They are used to explain the Qur'an and to make decisions about almost every part of life, from how to pray and eat to how to punish crimes or deal with people of other religions.

This kind of authority is deep and wide. Surah 4, verse 80 says that whoever obeys the Messenger has obeyed Allah. Surah 59, verse 7 says that whatever the Messenger gives you, you must take, and whatever he forbids, you must avoid. These verses are often quoted to show that following Muhammad is not a choice, it is a command.

Because of this, no one is allowed to disagree with him. If Muhammad said it, it becomes the truth for all time. This belief gives enormous power to the Prophet's words, even when they come from Hadith written down over a hundred years after his death. Some of these Hadith contain harsh rules, like stoning people for adultery, killing those who leave Islam, or treating women and non-Muslims unequally. But once a Hadith is accepted as authentic, it becomes a source of authority, no matter how cruel or outdated it might seem today.

This system also gives power to religious leaders, because they are the ones who decide which Hadith are authentic and how they should be used. They become gatekeepers of truth, speaking not with their own voice but in the name of the Prophet. If someone questions them, the reply is often, "You are going against the Prophet." In this way, the idea of prophethood is used to protect those in charge and silence those who raise doubts.

Other belief systems may respect religious teachers or leaders, but they often allow room for change, discussion, and personal judgement. In Islam, once something is tied to the Prophet, it is frozen. Even if the world changes, the rule does not. Even if the rule causes harm, it cannot be removed. The Prophet's voice becomes louder than any living person's voice, even centuries later.

When authority is based on one figure, and that figure cannot be questioned, the result is a system where obedience matters more than understanding. People follow not because they agree, but because they are afraid to disagree. That is not a path to truth. It is a structure built on fear and silence, defended by the sacred status of a man who can never be corrected.

## Rejection of later spiritual claims

According to Islamic belief, Muhammad was the last prophet and the final messenger from God. This means that any spiritual message, vision, or claim that comes after him is automatically rejected. Surah 33, verse 40 says that Muhammad is the seal of the prophets. Muslims understand this not only to mean that no more prophets will come, but also that no new truths or revelations can ever be accepted again.

As a result, anyone who claims to have a vision, a dream, or a message from God after Muhammad is considered false or even dangerous. Throughout Islamic history, people who claimed spiritual experiences that did not match the Qur'an or Hadith were attacked, exiled, or even killed. This includes Muslim reformers, mystics, and leaders of new religious movements. The Ahmadiyya, for example, believe that a prophet came after Muhammad. In countries like Pakistan, they are banned from calling themselves Muslim and are often persecuted just for their beliefs.

This rule shuts the door to all new spiritual insights. If someone today has a deep experience or feels guided in a way that challenges tradition, they are told it cannot be true. Even peaceful ideas are blocked if they do not line up with what was already written centuries ago. The religion becomes closed, frozen in time, and protected by fear.

Other faiths have made space for new voices. In Christianity, people have started new movements and reformed the church many times. In Hinduism and Buddhism, new teachers continue to appear. Even in Judaism, interpretation and debate are still active. These traditions grow and change over time.

In Islam, that growth is not allowed. The rejection of later spiritual claims is not just

about keeping the message pure. It is also a way to keep control. If no one after Muhammad can speak for God, then only those who explain his words hold power. And if truth cannot come from any new source, then questioning becomes almost impossible.

A living faith should allow room for discovery and change. But in Islam, once the Prophet is declared the last, the door is locked. Anyone who says otherwise is pushed out. That is not how truth grows. That is how it is kept in chains.

# **Part 3**

## **Exaggerations about Islamic law and governance**

# Chapter 9

## The justice of Islamic law

### Presentation of shari'a as flawless

Shari'a is often described by Muslims as a perfect legal system that comes directly from God. It is seen as fair, balanced, and complete. Many believe that it protects the weak, gives rights to women, and brings peace to society. In schools and mosques, Muslims are taught that shari'a is not just law but divine justice itself, better than anything humans could ever invent.

But when we look at what shari'a actually includes, we find many rules that are harsh, unequal, and out of date. These are not hidden or rare. They are found in the main schools of Islamic law and are based on the Qur'an and Hadith.

For example, in cases of theft, the punishment is cutting off the hand. This comes from Surah 5, verse 38. For adultery, the punishment is stoning to death, based on Hadith found in Sahih Bukhari and other trusted collections. For drinking alcohol, the punishment is public lashes. These are physical punishments that are still carried out in some Muslim countries today.

Shari'a also treats men and women unequally. A woman's testimony in court is worth half that of a man, based on Surah 2, verse 282. In matters of inheritance, a daughter receives only half the share of a son, from Surah 4, verse 11. A Muslim man can marry a Christian or Jewish woman, but a Muslim woman cannot marry a non-Muslim man. These rules are taught as part of God's wisdom, not as temporary customs from the seventh century.

There are also unfair rules for non-Muslims. In traditional shari'a, non-Muslims living under Muslim rule must pay a special tax called jizya and accept a lower social status. Surah 9, verse 29 says to fight the People of the Book until they pay this tax and feel subdued. In some past Islamic empires, this led to forced conversions, destruction of temples and churches, and people being treated as second-class citizens.

Even today, in places like Saudi Arabia, Iran, and parts of Nigeria, shari'a is used to punish people for what they wear, what they say, or who they love. Apostasy—leaving Islam—is punished by death in some interpretations. Blasphemy laws are used to jail or execute people who criticise religion. These are not the actions of a

system that values justice, fairness, or human rights.

Calling shari'a flawless hides the real harm it can cause. It stops people from asking hard questions or making needed changes. It also makes it easier for religious leaders to control others by claiming that every rule they enforce comes directly from God.

A truly just legal system should protect everyone equally, listen to conscience, and be open to change. Shari'a, as taught and applied in many places, does not meet that standard. Saying it is flawless does not make it true. It only makes it harder to admit what needs to change.

## Idealisation of fixed punishments

In Islamic law, certain crimes come with fixed punishments that are seen as unchangeable. These are called hudud. Many Muslims believe that these punishments are perfect because they come from God. They are described as wise, fair, and a way to stop crime and protect society. Defenders of shari'a say that hudud laws are rarely applied and that they serve more as warnings than actual punishments.

But when we look at the details, these punishments are extremely harsh. For theft, the punishment is cutting off the hand. This is based on Surah 5 verse 38. For adultery between married people, the punishment is stoning to death. This comes from Hadith in Sahih Bukhari and other collections. For those who accuse someone of adultery without proof, the punishment is eighty lashes. Drinking alcohol also leads to lashes. In some interpretations, apostasy which means leaving Islam is punished by death.

These punishments were used in early Islamic history and are still applied in some countries today. In Saudi Arabia, people have had their hands cut off for theft. In Iran, public hangings and lashings still happen. In Pakistan, blasphemy laws based on Hadith have been used to jail or even sentence people to death. In Nigeria, stoning sentences have been handed down for adultery in areas ruled by shari'a courts.

Supporters say that these punishments work as a deterrent, meaning they stop others from doing the same crime. But research from modern legal systems shows that harsh punishments do not always lower crime rates. What helps more is fair trials, good education, and strong communities. The idea that a public stoning or amputation brings justice belongs to a very different time and place.

Another problem is that these punishments are fixed. They do not take into account the person's situation. A hungry person who steals food is treated the same as a career thief. A woman who is forced into sex can still be punished if she cannot bring four witnesses. The law does not always look at context or allow for mercy. This is because the rules are said to come from God, so no one is allowed to change them.

In many parts of the world today, laws are based on fairness, evidence, and the chance to reform. Punishment is meant to protect society and help the wrongdoer become better. Islamic fixed punishments do the opposite. They focus on pain, fear, and shame. They are treated as holy even when they clearly hurt people.

To call such punishments ideal is to ignore the suffering they cause. A just system should always ask what is right, not just what is written. If a rule cannot be questioned, it cannot be improved. And if it cannot be improved, it cannot be trusted.

## **Framing of gender-based legal rules as fair**

Islamic law includes many rules that treat men and women differently. These rules are often described as fair by saying that men and women have different roles. Supporters claim that the system protects women and respects them. In practice, however, many of the rules give more rights to men and place limits on women that are hard to justify.

For example, in inheritance, a daughter receives only half of what a son receives. This rule comes from Surah 4 verse 11. In court, a woman's testimony is worth half that of a man. This is based on Surah 2 verse 282. A Muslim man is allowed to marry a non-Muslim woman from the People of the Book, but a Muslim woman cannot marry a non-Muslim man. Divorce is also easier for men. A man can say "I divorce you" and end the marriage. A woman has to go through a longer legal process and often needs the approval of a judge.

There are also rules about dress and behaviour. Women are expected to cover more of their bodies, stay away from unrelated men, and obey their husbands. In some Muslim countries, women need permission to travel, work, or study. These rules are defended by saying that women are being protected, not controlled. But many women do not see it that way. They feel trapped in laws made by men who speak in the name of God.

One of the most serious examples is how rape is handled in some Islamic legal systems. If a woman says she has been raped but cannot bring four male witnesses to prove it, she may be accused of adultery instead. This is based on Surah 24 verse 4, which says that people who accuse others of sexual wrongdoing must bring four witnesses. But in a rape, there are usually no witnesses except the rapist(s). And if there are four men present during the act, they are almost always the attackers. Expecting them to testify against themselves is absurd. In countries like Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Sudan, women have been jailed or flogged after reporting rape because they could not meet this rule. The law punishes them for being unable to prove what happened, even when they are the victim. This is not protection. This is cruelty.

Some of these rules may have made sense in a tribal society from the seventh century. But applying them today often causes harm. Inheritance rules can leave women poor. Testimony rules can block justice. Marriage rules can break families apart. Dress codes and movement restrictions can stop women from living full

lives. These are not small details. They shape daily life and limit freedom.

Other religions also had gender rules in the past. But in many places, those rules have changed. Women can now be judges, priests, leaders, and scholars. In Islam, anyone who questions the old rules is told they are going against God's will. This blocks discussion and shuts down change.

Calling these rules fair does not make them fair. Justice means treating people with equal worth. Giving women less in the name of difference is not justice. It is a way to keep power where it has always been. Real fairness listens to the people affected and allows the law to grow. Without that, the law becomes a cage.

## Justification of apostasy and blasphemy penalties

In Islam, leaving the religion or speaking against it is seen as a very serious offence. These actions are called apostasy and blasphemy. Many Muslims believe that they must be punished, even by death. This belief is not based on modern ideas of freedom, but on old religious rules found in Hadith and the writings of early scholars.

The Qur'an does not clearly say that apostates must be killed. It talks about people who leave the faith, but the punishment is left to God in the afterlife. For example, Surah 2 verse 217 says that those who turn back from faith will lose their good deeds, and Surah 3 verse 90 says their repentance will not be accepted. But it does not say they must be executed.

The death penalty for apostasy comes mainly from Hadith. In Sahih Bukhari, Muhammad is reported to have said, "Whoever changes his religion, kill him." Scholars of Islamic law took this as a rule and included it in their legal systems. Most traditional schools of shari'a still teach that an adult Muslim who leaves Islam, and does not return, should be put to death.

Blasphemy, which means saying things that insult Islam, the Qur'an, or the Prophet, is also punished harshly. In some countries, people have been jailed, attacked, or even killed just for writing a post online or saying something seen as disrespectful. In Pakistan, for example, many people have been sentenced to death for blasphemy, even when the evidence is weak or the accusations are false. Some people have been killed by mobs before reaching trial.

Supporters of these punishments say they protect Islam and stop people from attacking the religion. But the real result is fear. People are afraid to speak their mind, to ask questions, or to leave the religion if they no longer believe. This fear is not just in law. It is in families, schools, and communities. In some Muslim-majority countries, even suggesting someone has insulted Islam can lead to violence.

In other religions, people are allowed to leave their faith without fear. In Christianity, for example, someone can stop believing and still live in peace. In Hinduism and Buddhism, there is no rule that says you must believe or die. Only in Islam is leaving the religion treated like a crime worse than murder.



A religion that uses fear to keep people inside is not strong. It is afraid of losing power. If someone chooses to leave a faith, they should be free to do so. If someone speaks their mind, they should not be killed for it. Truth does not need violence to defend it. If a belief is true, it will survive honest questions. And if it is not true, then no law can save it.

## Glorification of corporal punishment

In many Islamic teachings, corporal punishment is not just allowed but praised. Corporal punishment means hurting someone physically, often in public, as a form of justice. Supporters say it is quick, fair, and based on God's law. It includes things like whipping, stoning, or cutting off a hand. These punishments are seen by many as holy because they come from the Qur'an and the Hadith.

For example, Surah 24 verse 2 says that people who commit adultery should be given one hundred lashes. Surah 5 verse 38 says that thieves should have their hands cut off. Hadith reports say that people who drink alcohol should be flogged. These rules are not written as old history. They are still part of Islamic law in many places.

In Saudi Arabia, people have been flogged for things like drinking or being alone with someone of the opposite sex. In Iran, lashings have been used for dancing at private parties. In Sudan, women have been whipped for wearing trousers. In Pakistan, people accused of blasphemy have faced public beatings, sometimes even before going to court. In these countries, corporal punishment is carried out by the state or by angry crowds who believe they are defending religion.

Supporters of these punishments say they teach respect and stop crime. But there is no strong proof that they work better than modern systems. In fact, many of these punishments hurt the poor more than the rich. A rich person can pay a bribe or get a lawyer. A poor person gets whipped. There is also no room for mercy or change. Once the punishment is fixed, it must be done, even if the person is sorry or the situation is more complex.

Some Muslims say these punishments are meant to be used only in rare cases. But in practice, they continue to be used often in certain countries. Instead of asking if a punishment is fair or helpful, the focus is on following rules written centuries ago. The pain of the person being punished is not the main concern. What matters most is obeying what is believed to be God's command.

In many parts of the world, laws have moved away from public beatings and harsh pain. Courts now aim to reform people, not just hurt them. They focus on evidence, fairness, and human dignity. Islam, in many places, still glorifies pain as a tool of justice.

A legal system that celebrates public violence teaches people to fear power, not respect justice. If people cheer when someone is whipped or stoned, something is deeply wrong. Justice should protect, not destroy. It should teach people how to live better, not leave them broken and afraid.

## Depiction of hudud as peak legal wisdom

In Islamic law, hudud are fixed punishments for certain crimes that are said to come directly from God. Because of this, many Muslims are taught that these laws represent the highest form of justice and wisdom. They are seen as perfect rules that cannot be changed. Supporters say that applying hudud keeps society safe and pure. They believe that because these rules come from God, they must be better than any human law.

Hudud punishments include cutting off the hand for theft, flogging for adultery and drinking alcohol, and stoning to death for married people who have sex outside marriage. These punishments are found in verses like Surah 5 verse 38 and Surah 24 verse 2, and in Hadith collections such as Sahih Bukhari. They are praised by some religious leaders as fair, clear, and effective. They say these punishments make people afraid to commit crimes and help keep communities in line with Islamic values.

But calling these rules the peak of legal wisdom ignores how harsh they are and how they can be used unfairly. Cutting off someone's hand for stealing a piece of bread is not justice. Public flogging or stoning destroys a person in front of others. These punishments do not leave room for forgiveness, second chances, or understanding someone's situation. If a poor man steals food to feed his children, the law does not care. The same punishment applies whether he is desperate or greedy.

There are also serious problems with how hudud are applied. They need very strong proof, like multiple witnesses to an act of sex, which is rarely possible. Because of this, some people are punished without enough evidence, or based on forced confessions. In some countries, poor people and women are more likely to suffer these punishments, while the rich find ways to escape. This shows that the system is not fair, even if it claims to be.

Today, in places like Saudi Arabia, Iran, and parts of Nigeria, hudud are still used. People have had their hands cut off. Others have been flogged in public. Some have been stoned to death. These are not things from ancient books. They are happening now, in the name of religion. Yet supporters still say that these are wise and holy laws.

Other legal systems focus on evidence, fairness, and the idea that people can change. They try to understand the reasons behind crimes and find better ways to stop them. They use prison, education, and support instead of pain and shame. Most of the world has moved away from public punishment. Islam, in some places, still defends it as perfect.

To call hudud the peak of legal wisdom is to say that cutting, whipping, and killing are the best that justice can offer. But real wisdom asks what works, what is fair, and what helps people live better lives. A legal system should protect the weak, not punish them to prove a point. Laws that cannot be questioned are not wise. They are frozen. And frozen laws cannot grow with the world.

## Portrayal of fairness toward non-Muslims

Islam is often described as a religion that treats non-Muslims fairly. Many Muslims point to early Islamic history and say that Christians and Jews, called “People of the Book,” were allowed to live under Muslim rule, keep their religion, and have some legal protection. They say this shows tolerance and fairness. But when we look more closely at how Islamic law treats non-Muslims, the picture is not so simple.

Under shari‘a, non-Muslims were given a lower status than Muslims. They had to pay a special tax called *jizya*. Muslims did not have to pay this tax. This tax is mentioned in Surah 9 verse 29. In return, non-Muslims were promised protection. But the tax was also a sign of submission. In some places, they had to pay it in person while being publicly reminded that they were inferior. Historical records show that during certain periods of Islamic rule, such as under the Abbasids and later in parts of the Ottoman Empire, non-Muslims paying the *jizya* were sometimes required to appear before officials in a public space. They were made to bow their heads or lower their eyes while handing over the payment. In some cases, reports mention that the official would slap the payer on the neck or remind them that they were under the protection of Muslims and not equals. This was not just a tax but a symbolic act of submission meant to show their lower status in the social order.

Non-Muslims were also not treated equally in court. In many cases, a Muslim's word counted more than that of a non-Muslim. Non-Muslims could not hold certain jobs or rule over Muslims. They were sometimes forced to follow special dress codes or banned from building new places of worship. In Islamic empires like those in the Middle East and North Africa, non-Muslims were often second-class citizens. They could live in peace if they obeyed the rules.

In modern times, many Muslim-majority countries still make it harder for non-Muslims to live equally. In Saudi Arabia, non-Muslims are not allowed to build churches or practise their religion openly. In Pakistan, Christians and Hindus have faced false accusations of blasphemy, which can lead to death. In Egypt, Coptic Christians often face harassment and struggle to get permission to fix or build churches. In Iran, members of the Bahá’í faith are not even recognised as a religious group and are denied many basic rights.

These problems are not just caused by culture or politics. They are supported by religious laws and teachings that treat Muslims as the top group and others as lower. Even in peaceful times, this idea continues to shape how non-Muslims are seen. They may be tolerated, but they are not treated as equals.

True fairness means treating people the same, no matter what they believe. It means giving them the same rights, the same respect, and the same chances in life. Saying Islam is fair to non-Muslims does not match the facts. A system that puts one group above all others cannot be called just. It can only be called what it is, unequal.

## Assumption of justice through divine origin

Many Muslims believe that Islamic law is always just because it comes from God. This idea is repeated in sermons, books, and religious schools. If the law is from God, they say, then it must be perfect. There is no need to question it, change it, or compare it with other legal systems. The assumption is that divine origin equals perfect justice.

This belief is supported by verses like Surah 5 verse 44, which says that those who do not judge by what God has revealed are wrongdoers. Scholars often repeat that no human law can be better than what God has revealed in the Qur'an and the Hadith. Because of this, many Muslims are taught that questioning Islamic law is the same as questioning God.

But this way of thinking creates problems. It closes the door to discussion. If people see a rule that causes harm, they are told not to ask why. For example, cutting off a hand for theft is seen as just because it is God's law, even if the thief is poor and hungry. Flogging someone for drinking alcohol is seen as fair, even if they are addicted and need help. These punishments are found in Surah 5 verse 38 and Surah 24 verse 2, and in many Hadith reports. They are carried out today in countries like Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Real-life cases show the danger of assuming that a rule is just just because it is old and religious. In Sudan, a woman was sentenced to death for converting to Christianity. In Pakistan, people have been jailed or killed for so-called blasphemy. In Afghanistan, girls were banned from school based on religious rules. In all these cases, the harm is clear, but the law is defended because it is said to come from God.

Justice should be measured by how it treats people, not by where it claims to come from. A fair law helps the weak, protects the innocent, and allows people to grow. Just because something is called divine does not make it kind or wise. If a law causes fear, pain, or silence, then we should ask what kind of justice it truly is. Divine origin should not be used as a shield to block basic questions about fairness and human dignity.

## Denial of bias in Islamic courts

Islamic courts are often described as fair and just. Supporters say that because they follow God's law, they are free from human bias. This claim is repeated in religious lessons and by scholars who say that Islamic judges are trained to be honest and to apply the law equally. The idea is that if a court follows shari'a, then it cannot be unfair.

But in practice, many Islamic courts show clear signs of bias. For example, a Muslim man's word is usually accepted over a non-Muslim's. In some cases, non-Muslims are not even allowed to testify against Muslims. This means that if a Christian or Hindu is wronged by a Muslim in court, they may not be able to get justice.

Historical Islamic law texts such as *The Reliance of the Traveller* confirm this rule, and it has been applied in countries like Saudi Arabia and Pakistan.

There is also bias between men and women. In many cases, a woman's testimony counts for less than a man's. Surah 2 verse 282 says that in financial matters, one man's witness is equal to two women. This is often used to argue that women are forgetful or emotional, and so their words are worth less. This kind of rule builds unfairness into the system from the start.

In some Islamic courts, poor people or members of certain sects also face bias. In Iran, for example, Bahá'ís are not recognised as a religious group and have no legal protection. In Pakistan, Ahmadi Muslims are considered non-Muslim by law and can be punished just for calling themselves Muslim. These laws shape how courts treat people and deny basic fairness.

When a system is based on rules that favour one group over others, it cannot be truly just. Denying the bias does not remove it. A court that treats people differently based on their religion, sex, or social group is not fair, even if it claims to follow God's law. True justice means giving every person the same chance to be heard, believed, and protected. Without that, courts do not bring peace. They bring fear.

## Contrast with secular legal systems

Supporters of Islamic law often say it is better than modern or secular legal systems. They claim that because it comes from God, it brings fairness, peace, and order. They say secular laws are made by people who can make mistakes, change the rules, or follow desires. Islamic law, they argue, is fixed and pure, and that is what makes it superior.

But when we compare the two, we see clear differences that raise important questions. In a secular legal system, everyone is meant to be treated equally, no matter their religion, gender, or background. Laws can be debated, improved, and challenged in public. If a law is found to be unfair, it can be changed. Courts have to follow rules of evidence and give both sides a chance to speak. People can also appeal decisions if they believe a judge made a mistake.

Islamic law works differently. It is based on religious texts that are considered final. This means some rules cannot be questioned, even if they harm people. For example, a woman's word may count less than a man's, or a non-Muslim may not be allowed to testify in court. These rules are hard to change because they are seen as divine. In countries like Saudi Arabia or Iran, people have been punished harshly for things like speaking out, converting to another religion, or dressing in a way not approved by religious law. These punishments come not from debate, but from old texts.

Another key difference is freedom of belief. In secular systems, people can choose their religion or no religion at all. In Islamic systems, leaving Islam can bring legal or social punishment. In some countries, it is a crime. This shows how Islamic law

often limits personal freedom in ways that secular law does not.

There are also differences in how evidence is treated. In some Islamic systems, witnesses must be Muslim men. Confessions may be accepted even if they were made under pressure. In secular courts, the goal is to prove guilt beyond doubt and to protect the rights of the accused.

Of course, no system is perfect. Secular courts can still be unfair, and corruption can exist anywhere. But the big difference is that secular systems allow people to question the rules. They can protest, vote, or take their case to higher courts. Islamic law, by claiming to be perfect, often shuts down this process. If a rule is wrong, there may be no way to fix it.

In the end, justice should not depend on where a rule comes from. It should depend on what a rule does to real people. A fair system listens, adapts, and puts people first. A system that cannot be questioned is not strong. It is stuck. And when the world changes, a stuck system will hurt those it claims to help.

## Use of selective examples to defend shari'a

Supporters of shari'a often use selective examples to make it seem fair and wise. They might point to cases where a judge helped a poor person, or where a woman won a case, or where a punishment was avoided. These stories are shared to prove that Islamic law is just and kind. But these are special cases, not the rule. They are chosen to hide the full picture.

For example, it is sometimes said that women can own property and ask for divorce under Islamic law. That is true, but it hides the fact that a man can divorce his wife just by saying so, while a woman needs to go through a long process and get permission. In many countries, this still makes it harder for women to leave an unhappy marriage.

Another example is the story that Caliph Umar stopped cutting off hands during a time of famine. This is used to show that Islamic punishments are flexible. But today, in places like Saudi Arabia, people still lose hands for stealing, even when they are poor. The exception is used to hide the fact that the rule itself is harsh and still applied.

Defenders of shari'a also say that non-Muslims were protected under Muslim rule. They give examples from history where Christians or Jews lived in peace. But they do not mention the jizya tax, the second-class status, or the lack of equal rights in court. They do not talk about the times when churches were banned or when non-Muslims were forced to obey Islamic rules.

Using only good examples is not honest. Every legal system has some fair moments, even when the system itself is unfair. A just system is not judged by rare cases. It is judged by how it works for everyone, every day. If most women face unfair divorce laws, showing one woman who won her case does not prove the law is fair. If non-Muslims are usually treated as second-class, one story of kindness

does not change that.

Selective examples are meant to make people stop asking hard questions. They create a soft image of shari'a that does not match the real experiences of many people living under it. Real justice needs more than stories. It needs rules that treat everyone with dignity and fairness, not just when a judge feels kind.

## Rejection of legal reform efforts

Rejection of legal reform efforts is common in many Muslim communities. When people suggest changing Islamic laws to better fit modern values like equality, human rights, or freedom, these ideas are often dismissed or opposed. Many argue that Islamic law is perfect and unchangeable because it comes directly from God. This belief makes reform seem impossible or even sinful.

Those who push for reform may be accused of misunderstanding Islam or trying to imitate Western ideas. They can be labelled as threats to the faith or to the community's unity. As a result, open discussion about how to adapt laws to new realities is often blocked. This resistance keeps old rules in place even when they cause harm or conflict with modern life.

Ignoring calls for reform creates problems. It makes it harder to protect the rights of women, minorities, or others affected by strict interpretations. It also leads to tensions between religious authorities and those who want change. Without the ability to update laws, Islam risks becoming disconnected from the lives of many Muslims today.

Recognising the refusal to consider legal reform helps explain why some communities struggle with social issues and human rights. It shows the need for honest debate and the courage to question traditions. Only by facing these challenges openly can Islam develop in a way that respects both its history and the needs of the present.

# Chapter 10

## Idealisation of Islamic governance

### The early caliphate as a golden age

Muslims are taught to see the early years after Muhammad's death as a golden age, when everything was just and fair. This period is often called the time of the "rightly guided caliphs". Supporters of this view say these rulers were wise, honest, and deeply faithful. They claim that Islamic values were perfectly followed, that justice was done, and that the Muslim world was united.

But this image is built more on idealism than on historical fact. The truth is far more complicated. After Muhammad's death, there was no clear rule about who should take over. The first caliph, Abu Bakr, had to deal with tribes that no longer wanted to follow Medina's rule. These tribes were called apostates, and he launched brutal wars against them. These were political problems, but they were treated as religious betrayals.

Later, during the rule of the third caliph, Uthman, there were major complaints of corruption and favouritism. He gave top positions to his own relatives, and this angered many people. The unrest grew until Uthman was killed in his own home by Muslim rebels. This murder led to a civil war between Muslims, known as the First Fitna. During this war, two of Muhammad's close companions, Aisha and Ali, ended up on opposite sides. Thousands of Muslims died.

This is not the picture of peace and unity often described in sermons and books. Instead of being a golden age, it was a time of power struggles, political violence, and deep divisions. The idea that everything was perfect in those early years is not supported by the historical record. It is a story told to inspire faith, but it does not match what actually happened.

### The caliphs as perfect rulers

Muslims grow up hearing that the first four caliphs were the best rulers in history. They are often described as perfect examples of justice, honesty, and faith. This view makes it seem like they made no mistakes, ruled fairly at all times, and only cared about serving Islam.

But history tells a more complicated story. These men were not angels. They were



powerful leaders who had to make hard choices, and not all of those choices were good. For example, Umar, the second caliph, expanded the empire through wars of conquest. He brought new lands under Muslim control, but those wars also meant death, destruction, and the forced collection of tribute from conquered people.

Uthman, the third caliph, was accused of giving too much power to his family from the Umayyad clan. Many believed he let them get rich and take top jobs unfairly. When people complained, he refused to listen. In the end, this led to a revolt and his death.

Ali, the fourth caliph, was deeply respected for his knowledge and loyalty to Muhammad. But even he struggled to hold the empire together. His time as caliph was marked by civil war. One of the worst battles, the Battle of Siffin, ended in a deadlock and more division among Muslims. Some people even broke away from him and became the Kharijites, who later tried to kill him.

These examples show that the caliphs were not perfect. They were human. They made mistakes, faced criticism, and were caught in political fights. Saying they were flawless hides the truth and turns real people into legends. It also stops honest discussions about how power worked in early Islam.

## Islamic rule as naturally just

Islamic rule is often described as being automatically fair and just, simply because it is based on divine guidance. The idea is that since laws come from God, any government using them must treat people equally and do what is right. This belief is repeated in sermons, schoolbooks, and speeches. It suggests that justice is guaranteed just by following shari'a.

But this is not what we see in real history. During Islamic rule, justice was not the same for everyone. For example, under classical Islamic law, non-Muslims paid special taxes like the *jizya*, could not hold top positions, and had fewer legal rights than Muslims. A Muslim's word in court was often worth more than that of a Christian or Jew. This is not equal justice.

Women were also treated differently under Islamic rule. Their testimony in court was often given less weight, they had fewer inheritance rights, and they needed a male guardian in many areas of life. These rules were justified by scholars as part of divine law, but they clearly show unequal treatment.

Even among Muslims, fairness was not always present. Political power often rested with certain tribes or elite families. In the Umayyad and Abbasid periods, the caliphs lived in luxury while many people struggled. Those who spoke out against injustice were often punished or silenced.

Calling Islamic rule inherently just hides these facts. Real justice depends on what leaders do and how they treat people, not just on where their laws come from. A government is not fair just because it says it follows God's rules. It has to prove it

through its actions.

## Islamic governance brings stability

Supporters of Islamic governance often say that it brings peace and stability. The claim is that when rulers follow divine law, society becomes safe, united, and well-organised. This idea is repeated in many Islamic speeches and writings. It suggests that problems only begin when Muslims stray from Islamic rule.

But history shows something very different. Islamic governments have often faced deep divisions, civil wars, and even collapse. Take the First Fitna, the civil war that broke out just 24 years after Muhammad died. Two armies of Muslims fought each other. The Battle of the Camel and the Battle of Siffin were bloody and left lasting scars. This was not a time of peace or unity.

Later, during the Abbasid period, there were many uprisings. In the ninth century, the Zanj Rebellion lasted nearly fifteen years. It was led by African slaves and poor farmers in southern Iraq who were treated terribly by the ruling class. They took over cities and defeated government armies. It took the caliphate more than a decade to crush them. If Islamic governance guaranteed stability, why were so many people willing to rebel?

Another example is al-Andalus, Muslim Spain. At first it seemed like a strong Islamic kingdom, but over time it split into smaller states called taifas. These often fought each other and even made deals with Christian kingdoms to gain an advantage. This infighting weakened Muslim rule and eventually helped Christian forces push them out.

Even in more recent history, Islamic movements that gained power, like the Taliban in Afghanistan or the Islamic Republic of Iran, have not brought lasting stability. Both countries have faced protests, internal struggles, and deep anger from parts of their own population.

These examples show that Islamic governance, like any other kind of rule, depends on human decisions, fairness, and good leadership. It is not a magic key to peace. The claim that it always brings stability is not supported by what actually happened.

## Forgetting internal conflict

Islamic history is often told as a story of unity and strength, especially in the early centuries. Preachers and teachers may talk about how Islam brought people together under one faith and one government. But this story leaves out many examples of deep internal conflict among Muslims themselves.

One of the biggest examples is the First Fitna, the civil war that broke out after the murder of Caliph Uthman. Two major Muslim leaders, Ali and Aisha, ended up fighting each other at the Battle of the Camel. Later, Ali faced another Muslim rival,

Muawiya, at the Battle of Siffin. These were not small fights. Thousands died. The community split, and the effects of this division are still seen today, especially in the split between Sunni and Shia Muslims.

The Second Fitna came not long after. It involved another power struggle, this time between the Umayyads and the supporters of Abdullah ibn al-Zubayr. Again, Muslims were killing Muslims, not over religion, but over who had the right to rule. The violence was brutal. Cities were attacked, people were executed, and sacred places were even damaged.

Even during the Abbasid period, when the caliphs claimed to be the rightful leaders of all Muslims, their rule was often challenged. There were uprisings from Shia groups, rival dynasties, and even former allies. For example, the Fatimids in North Africa set up their own caliphate in direct opposition to the Abbasids. Both sides said they were the true Islamic rulers.

Despite all this, many Islamic historians and teachers still present the past as a time of unity. They focus on victories and expansion, but skip over these painful civil wars. Forgetting these conflicts creates a false image of harmony. It also stops people from learning how power struggles, injustice, and greed affected Muslim societies just like they did in every other civilisation. Real history includes disagreement and division, not just success and glory.

## Expansion as moral leadership

Muslim conquests are often described as acts of moral leadership. The story goes that early Muslims did not invade for land or riches but to spread justice, truth, and the message of Islam. Many Islamic books and speakers say these wars were peaceful, or that people welcomed Muslim armies because they were tired of corrupt rulers.

But the actual history of Islamic expansion tells a different story. The early caliphs sent armies far beyond Arabia. Within a few decades, Muslim forces had taken over lands that belonged to the Byzantine and Persian empires. These included places like Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and Iran. These were not small skirmishes. They were full military campaigns with large battles, sieges, and forced tribute.

When Egypt was conquered under Caliph Umar, the Muslim army laid siege to Alexandria, the capital city. After surrender, Christians were allowed to keep their religion, but they had to pay special taxes and accept Muslim rule. This was not simply about moral guidance. It was about taking control.

In North Africa, Muslim armies moved west and faced strong resistance. The Berber tribes fought back, and it took many years and many battles before the area was brought under Muslim rule. Later, when Muslim forces crossed into Spain in 711, it was again a military invasion. Although it led to a rich culture in al-Andalus, it began with war, not with peaceful preaching.

Even Islamic historians admit that there were spoils of war, including land, gold,

and slaves. These were shared among the soldiers and the state. Conquered people often lost political power, had to pay new taxes, and live under foreign rule.

Calling this kind of expansion moral leadership hides the fact that it was still conquest. It may have been driven by religious beliefs, but it was also about gaining power and wealth. No empire expands just by offering wisdom. It expands through force. This is true for Islamic history too, and pretending otherwise only confuses people about what really happened.

## Denying coercion in politics

Many defenders of Islamic history say that Islam spread through persuasion, not force. They often repeat the verse that says “there is no compulsion in religion” and claim that Islamic rule was always fair to non-Muslims. The idea is that people accepted Islamic rule because it was just, not because they were pressured.

But when we look at political history, we find many examples where coercion was clearly used. After Muhammad’s death, several Arab tribes refused to keep following Medina. They stopped paying taxes and claimed they were no longer part of the Muslim community. Caliph Abu Bakr responded by launching the Ridda Wars. These were not peaceful talks. They were military campaigns to force those tribes back into the fold.

Later, when Muslim rulers expanded into non-Muslim lands, people who wanted to keep their religion had to pay special taxes like the *jizya*. They were not allowed to build new places of worship, and they had fewer rights in court. While this was not outright forced conversion, it created pressure. Many people converted to Islam over time not just for faith, but to avoid legal and financial disadvantages.

Inside the Muslim community, political control was often kept through fear. Caliphs and sultans used secret police, harsh punishments, and public executions to stop opposition. The Abbasid caliphate, for example, carried out purges of people suspected of disloyalty. The Umayyads crushed revolts with brutal force. People who disagreed with the rulers’ version of Islam were often branded as heretics and punished.

Even respected scholars were not free. The famous thinker Ibn Hanbal was jailed and beaten because he refused to say that the Qur’an was created, which was the official view at the time. This shows that rulers expected not just obedience in politics but also agreement in theology.

The claim that Islamic politics was free of coercion does not stand up to the facts. Like all empires, Muslim rulers used power to stay in control. They may have believed they were doing the right thing, but that does not mean people were always free to disagree or walk away.

## Divine law over democracy

Islamic thinkers often say that divine law is better than any man-made system. They claim that democracy is flawed because it relies on human opinion, while shari'a comes from God and is perfect. In this view, laws made by elected leaders can be wrong or unfair, but laws based on revelation are always correct. Some even argue that letting people vote on moral issues is a form of rebellion against God.

This argument is used to reject democracy in many Muslim-majority countries. In Iran, for example, the elected government must answer to religious leaders who have the final say. The Supreme Leader, a cleric, holds more power than the president or parliament. Elections happen, but they are limited. Only approved candidates can run, and major decisions must follow Islamic law.

In Afghanistan, when the Taliban returned to power, they made it clear that democracy would not shape the country. They replaced elected councils with religious scholars and banned political parties. They said Islamic law was enough and that voting would only lead people away from the truth.

But saying divine law is better than democracy raises serious problems. Who decides what God's law actually says? Scholars often disagree. For example, some say stoning is part of shari'a, while others reject it. Some say women can be judges, others say they cannot. If divine law is open to so much debate, then it is not as clear or perfect as its defenders claim.

Democracy at least gives people a voice and a way to correct mistakes. If a law is unfair, people can speak out, protest, or vote for change. Under strict religious rule, this becomes much harder. Questioning the law can be seen as questioning God, and that can bring harsh punishment.

Choosing divine law over democracy does not guarantee justice. It often leads to rule by a small group who claim to speak for God. The result is not always fairness or peace. It is often silence, fear, and no way to challenge those in power.

## Islamic finance as ethical

Islamic finance is often described as a more moral way to handle money. Supporters say it is fairer, avoids greed, and protects the poor. One of its main rules is the ban on interest, known as *riba*. The idea is that charging interest is unfair because it takes advantage of people in need. Islamic banks claim to follow ethical rules based on shari'a, where money should be earned through real work and risk-sharing, not just lending and collecting interest.

But in practice, Islamic finance is not always as different or as ethical as it claims. Many Islamic banks offer products that look almost exactly like regular bank loans, just with different names. For example, instead of lending money with interest to buy a house, the bank might say it is buying the house and selling it to

the customer at a higher price, to be paid in instalments. This avoids the word “interest,” but the final cost is often the same or even higher. The risk stays with the customer, not the bank.

Also, Islamic finance still operates in the same global system as other banks. It uses the same markets, the same profit goals, and often the same business practices. Many of the biggest Islamic financial institutions are connected to powerful governments or wealthy investors. They serve the rich far more than the poor.

There are also contradictions in how ethics are applied. Some scholars say that making money from tobacco, weapons, or gambling is not allowed. But others approve deals involving these industries if the profits are high and the rules are slightly adjusted. This shows that moral standards are not always consistent.

The idea of ethical banking is attractive. People want a system that cares about justice and fairness. But just calling something Islamic does not make it fair. Islamic finance is still part of the wider world of banking, with all its problems. It promises something better, but often delivers more of the same.

# **Part 4**

## **The myth of Islamic success**

# Chapter 11

## Growth as evidence of divine truth

### Framing growth as proof of divine favour

Muslim speakers and writers often say that the fast growth of Islam proves it is the true religion. They claim that this rise shows God is guiding more people to the right path. It is presented as a kind of miracle, a sign that Islam is winning hearts all over the world through its message.

This idea appears often in religious talks, books, and videos. Some say it is proof that Islam will dominate the future and that no other religion can keep up. But using numbers as a sign of truth is a weak argument. If that logic were used in the past, one would have to say that ancient pagan religions were once the truth, simply because they had the most followers. Truth does not depend on how many people believe in it.

Conversions to Islam do happen, but so do conversions away from Islam. In many Western countries, for every person who becomes Muslim, another leaves the faith. These losses are rarely discussed by those who claim divine approval through growth. The picture is more mixed than many admit.

By turning growth into a sign of God's favour, this claim avoids real questions about belief, doubt, and religious freedom. It turns a complex issue into a simple headline. But truth is not a popularity contest, and faith should not rely on numbers to prove its worth.

### Attribution of conversions to truth alone

Muslim preachers often say that people become Muslim because they recognise the truth of Islam. They claim that Islam is so clear, so powerful, and so convincing that anyone who studies it with an open heart will accept it. This turns every conversion into proof that Islam is the one true religion.

But people convert for many reasons, and truth is only one possible part of the story. Some convert because they fall in love with a Muslim and want to marry. In many cases, this means saying the shahada to please a future spouse or their



family. The person may know very little about the religion and may not even continue to practise it later on.

Others convert because they feel lost or hurt. This can happen in prison, after losing someone close, or during a personal crisis. In these moments, people often search for meaning, structure, or a sense of community. Islam offers a clear set of rules and a strong group identity, which can be very appealing in times of confusion or pain.

Some conversions happen with almost no thought at all. Saying the shahada is quick and simple. There are people who have said it while drunk, at weddings, or just to avoid an awkward moment. Yet once it is said, it is counted as a full conversion. In these cases, the claim that someone found the truth of Islam becomes very shaky.

People are also often shown a highly selective version of Islam before they convert. It focuses on peace, personal growth, and spiritual clarity, while skipping over topics like apostasy, gender roles, or harsh legal punishments. The Islam that is described may be very different from the Islam found in actual practice or in traditional texts. So when someone converts, they may be accepting only the version they were shown, not the full religion.

There are also those who later leave. Some find the reality does not match what they were told. Others discover they are not allowed to question, and that asking hard questions can lead to pressure, rejection, or even threats.

To say that all conversions happen because of the truth of Islam ignores all of this. People make decisions based on emotion, relationships, comfort, fear, or trust in others. Religion spreads through culture, community, and human contact. These things are not proof of truth. They are proof of how people influence each other.

## Overlooking birth rates as a key factor

A major reason for the growth of the Muslim population is high birth rates in Muslim-majority countries, but this is often ignored. Instead, people claim that Islam is spreading because people are recognising its truth. This skips over simple facts about how population growth works.

In countries like Niger, Somalia, and Afghanistan, many families have five or more children. In these places, most people are already Muslim, so every new child is automatically counted as a Muslim. There is no need for conversion. In fact, if no one converted to Islam at all, the population would still grow rapidly just through births.

Compare this to countries like Japan, Italy, or South Korea, where many couples have only one child or none. These low birth rates mean their populations are shrinking or growing very slowly. So even if no one converts to Islam, the Muslim share of the world population keeps rising, just because of the difference in birth rates.

Even within countries like France or the United Kingdom, Muslim families tend to have more children than non-Muslim families. This slowly changes the overall numbers. But it has nothing to do with more people choosing Islam because they found it convincing.

This fact is well known in serious research. For example, the Pew Research Centre has shown that the main driver of Muslim population growth is fertility, not conversion. These studies are clear and easy to find, yet they are rarely mentioned when someone claims that Islam is growing because of its truth.

Leaving out birth rates makes the story sound like a miracle, when it is really a normal result of having more children. Growth in numbers does not prove truth. It proves that demographics matter.

## **Ignoring social pressure in religious identity**

Muslim numbers are often presented as a sign of faith and truth, but the role of social pressure is rarely mentioned. In many Muslim families, people are expected to stay Muslim from birth until death. Choosing something else is not seen as a personal choice. It is seen as betrayal.

In some countries, like Pakistan, Iran, or Saudi Arabia, leaving Islam can lead to punishment by law. In others, the pressure comes from family. A person who questions Islam may be shouted at, threatened, or even cut off from their relatives. Some are forced into silence just to stay safe.

This means many people who no longer believe still say they are Muslim. They go through the motions, but their hearts are not in it. They may pray or fast only because they are being watched. They are counted as Muslims in surveys and headlines, but they are only pretending.

Even in countries with freedom of religion, the pressure is strong. A young person in a Muslim family may be afraid to speak their mind. Some ex-Muslims hide their views for years. Others never speak out at all. Converts who regret their decision may stay quiet to keep their marriage or avoid conflict.

When all of this is ignored, the picture becomes false. It looks like Islam is strong and united, when in truth, many stay because they feel trapped. Social pressure keeps people inside the religion, and that pressure is often invisible. But it is real, and it must be part of the story.

## **Downplaying apostasy and secularisation**

Muslim speakers often say that Islam is the world's fastest-growing religion. They focus on conversions and birth rates but usually avoid talking about those who leave the faith. This makes the religion look stronger than it is. It hides the fact that apostasy and secularisation are rising, especially among younger Muslims.

In Western countries, many Muslims are quietly leaving the religion. Some stop believing altogether. Others keep the label but live without practising. Studies in the United States show that a significant number of people raised as Muslims no longer identify as Muslim when they grow up. In the United Kingdom, growing numbers of young Muslims say religion is not important in their lives.

In Muslim-majority countries, apostasy is harder to track because it is dangerous. In places like Iran, Sudan, or Saudi Arabia, leaving Islam can lead to prison, exile, or even death. Because of this, many ex-Muslims stay silent. They live double lives, pretending in public and hiding their real beliefs. They are not counted in official numbers. They are erased from the story.

At the same time, secular ideas are spreading. In cities across the Muslim world, more people are living modern lives shaped by science, media, and personal freedom. Many still call themselves Muslim, but they no longer follow religious rules closely. They mix religion with culture, picking what fits and ignoring the rest. This quiet secularisation is growing, even if it is not openly discussed.

By leaving out these facts, the story of Islam's unstoppable growth becomes one-sided. It leaves out those who walk away or lose interest. It leaves out those who stay silent to protect themselves. Religion does not just gain followers. It also loses them. Ignoring this gives a false picture of strength.

## Inflated statistics in da'wa circles

In da'wa circles, meaning groups or individuals who focus on spreading Islam, big numbers are often used to impress. These speakers or preachers may appear in mosques, at events, or online. They often say that thousands of people convert to Islam every day, or that millions become Muslim each year. Some even claim that entire villages or cities have accepted Islam all at once. These statements are usually made without solid evidence, but they are repeated often and treated as fact.

Videos are shared showing a person saying the shahada in front of a crowd. The moment is presented as a great success. But no one asks what happens after. Did the person understand what they were saying? Did they continue practising? In many cases, the answer is no. Some say the shahada to please a spouse, to be polite, or because they are caught up in the moment. The shahada is short and easy to say, but that does not mean it always reflects real belief.

Da'wa speakers also use the names of famous people to suggest Islam is spreading fast. They often mention athletes, musicians, or actors said to have converted. These stories spread quickly on social media. But many turn out to be false, unclear, or based on weak sources. When corrections appear, they are rarely mentioned again.

In poorer parts of Africa or Asia, da'wa missions often report large numbers of new Muslims after brief visits. But local studies show that some people accept Islam for practical reasons, like food aid, better treatment, or social belonging. These are

not always religious choices. They are based on need or pressure.

By using inflated statistics, da'wa circles paint a picture of constant growth and success. But they ignore those who leave Islam, those who convert without meaning it, and those who remain silent about their doubts. Religion is not a contest of numbers. It is about belief, and belief cannot be measured by applause or crowd size.

## **Claim that non-Muslims secretly admire Islam**

A common claim made in Islamic preaching is that non-Muslims secretly admire Islam. Some da'wa speakers go even further and say that many non-Muslims wish they were Muslim, or that they are too proud or afraid to admit the truth. This idea is used to show that Islam is so strong and beautiful that even its critics respect it deep down.

One example often used is how some non-Muslim women choose to wear the hijab or modest clothing. This is said to prove that they see the wisdom of Islamic values, even if they do not say it out loud. But this ignores the fact that people wear all kinds of clothing for many reasons, including fashion, comfort, or personal belief. It is not proof of secret admiration.

Another common point is that famous people read the Qur'an or say something polite about Muslims. These small actions are then treated as signs of hidden belief. For example, when a Western leader visits a mosque or praises Muslim culture, some da'wa groups say this is proof that they see the truth of Islam. But politicians often speak politely about all religions. It does not mean they secretly want to convert.

There are also claims that scientists or philosophers secretly admired Islam. Albert Einstein, Isaac Newton, and even Mahatma Gandhi have been mentioned in this way. But these claims are either false, taken out of context, or based on rumours. Gandhi spoke respectfully about all religions, not just Islam. Newton was a Christian who studied the Bible in great detail. Einstein never became Muslim and never said Islam was the truth.

This idea of secret admiration makes Islam sound stronger than it is. It suggests that people only reject Islam because of pride or ignorance. But many people who are not Muslim have studied Islam carefully and made a clear choice not to follow it. They are not secretly convinced. They simply disagree.

By claiming that non-Muslims admire Islam deep down, da'wa speakers avoid honest debate. They turn disagreement into a silent victory. But real respect means accepting that others may understand Islam and still say no. That is not secret admiration. It is freedom of thought.

## Use of growth narrative to silence criticism

In many Islamic speeches and da'wa events, the growth of Islam is used as a way to shut down criticism. When someone asks hard questions about shari'a, human rights, or freedom of belief, the reply is often not a real answer. Instead, they say, "Islam is the fastest-growing religion in the world." The message is clear: if the religion is growing, then there is no need to defend it. Growth is treated as proof that everything is fine.

But this is not how truth works. A bad idea can still spread. A system can grow for many reasons, even if it has serious problems. Saying "we are growing" does not answer a question about justice, ethics, or freedom. It is a way to avoid the issue.

For example, when people raise concerns about the treatment of women under Islamic law, some Muslims do not address the problem. They say, "Despite what you say, Islam keeps growing in the West." This turns growth into a shield. It is meant to stop the conversation and make the critic look weak or uninformed.

Another example is when ex-Muslims speak out about their reasons for leaving. Instead of listening, some reply by saying, "More people are joining than leaving." But that does not change the fact that someone left for real and has reasons worth hearing. Numbers do not cancel experiences.

This way of using growth is like saying a product must be good just because it sells well. But many things become popular for reasons that have nothing to do with truth. Religion grows through birth rates, social pressure, and community strength. None of that proves that it is above criticism.

Using growth to silence questions creates a one-sided story. It avoids the hard work of facing problems and making improvements. Real strength comes from being able to answer challenges, not from repeating statistics.

# Chapter 12

## The claim of Muslim moral superiority

### Framing Muslims as the best community

Muslims are often taught that they belong to the best community ever created. This belief comes from a verse in the Qur'an that says, "You are the best nation brought out for mankind." It is repeated in sermons, schools, and books. The idea is that Muslims, by following Islam, are better than everyone else in behaviour, belief, and values.

This message gives many Muslims a strong sense of pride and identity. It can make them feel special and chosen. But it also creates a problem. If you are told from a young age that your group is the best, it becomes harder to see your own faults. It also becomes easier to look down on others.

In practice, Muslim communities face the same problems as everyone else. There are kind and honest people, but there is also corruption, injustice, and abuse. In many Muslim countries, women struggle for basic rights. Poor people are often ignored. Minorities may be treated unfairly. If Muslims are the best community, why do these problems exist on such a wide scale?

Some try to explain this by saying that Muslims are the best only when they fully follow Islam. But this creates a trick. If things go wrong, it is always because people are not Islamic enough. The idea of being the best is never questioned. It is protected by blaming individuals, not the system.

This belief can also block self-reflection. A person may think, "Because I am Muslim, I am already on the right path." But being good is not automatic. It takes effort, learning, and honesty. No group is better just by name. Actions matter more than labels.

Framing Muslims as the best community might sound uplifting, but it can lead to pride without progress. It replaces the need to do better with the belief that you already are. That is not a recipe for growth. It is a way to stay stuck.

### Moral elevation through belief alone

In many Islamic teachings, Muslims are told that belief alone makes them morally better. Just saying the shahada and believing in Allah and Muhammad is seen as

more valuable than anything a non-Muslim might do. Even if a non-Muslim lives a kind, honest, and generous life, it is often said that it means nothing without belief. At the same time, a Muslim who does wrong may still be seen as better in God's eyes because of their faith.

This belief creates a problem. It links moral value to identity instead of actions. It says that being part of the right group is what matters most, not how you treat others. This can lead to arrogance. A person might think they are good just because they are Muslim, even if they lie, cheat, or treat people badly.

There are also teachings that say a non-Muslim's good deeds will not be rewarded in the afterlife. This is sometimes taught in religious schools and Friday sermons. The message is that without Islam, nothing else counts. This creates a strong divide. It teaches Muslims that belief makes someone good, and lack of belief makes someone bad, no matter what else they do.

But in daily life, this does not make sense. Many non-Muslims care for the poor, fight for justice, protect the environment, or risk their lives to help others. At the same time, there are Muslims who cause harm or ignore the needs of others. If belief alone decides who is good, then real behaviour becomes less important.

Judging people by what they believe instead of what they do is unfair. It also goes against the idea of justice. Morality should be based on actions, not identity. Everyone should be judged by how they live, not just what religion they follow.

## Dismissal of moral value in non-believers

In many Islamic teachings, the moral value of non-believers is dismissed. No matter how kind, honest, or generous a non-Muslim may be, it is often said that their good deeds will not count in the afterlife. Some scholars teach that their actions are like dust, with no reward from God, because they do not believe in Him or follow Islam.

This idea is repeated in religious schools, sermons, and books. It creates the belief that only Muslims can truly be good. Even if a non-Muslim spends their life helping others, feeding the poor, or fighting for justice, it is often claimed that it does not matter in the end. Their actions are seen as empty because they lack belief.

At the same time, a Muslim who sins may still be promised paradise, as long as they die with belief. This means that someone who has done real harm could be forgiven, while someone who lived a good and selfless life is condemned, simply because they were not Muslim. This is not a rare view. It is found in classical writings and still taught in many parts of the world.

This belief causes harm in daily life. It teaches Muslims to see non-Muslims as morally lower, no matter what they do. It can lead to a lack of respect, a lack of empathy, and even hatred. It also creates a double standard, where the same actions are judged differently depending on the person's faith.

But real morality cannot depend on religion alone. Kindness, honesty, courage, and

love are human qualities. They can be found in every religion and in people with no religion at all. To say that good has no value unless it comes from a Muslim is to ignore the full truth of human experience. It is also to close the door on fairness.

## **Assumption of inherent ethical clarity**

Many Muslims are taught that Islam offers complete moral clarity. They are told that everything right and wrong is already explained in the Qur'an and Hadith. This creates the idea that Muslims do not need to ask deep moral questions or struggle with difficult choices, because the answers are already given by God. It is assumed that by following Islamic rules, a person will always be on the correct moral path.

This belief can lead to the idea that ethics in Islam are always clear, simple, and beyond debate. But in real life, things are not always so straightforward. Muslim scholars have disagreed for centuries on what certain verses and Hadith mean. They have different opinions on topics like punishment, gender roles, war, slavery, and justice. If the ethical guidance was truly clear, why so much disagreement?

For example, some scholars say that stoning for adultery is part of Islamic law. Others reject it. Some believe child marriage is allowed, while others say it should be banned. Views on freedom of religion, women's rights, and even what counts as justice can vary widely between different schools of Islamic thought. This shows that the moral teachings are not as clear as claimed.

There is also a risk that this belief stops people from thinking critically. A Muslim might say, "If it is in the Qur'an, it must be right," even if the rule seems harsh or unfair today. This means that instead of asking, "Is this just?" people ask, "Is this allowed?" But the two are not always the same.

Assuming that a religion has perfect moral clarity gives people false confidence. It can stop growth, prevent reform, and silence questions. Real ethics involve thinking, doubt, and learning from new experiences. No moral system is complete just because it claims to be. It has to prove itself through fairness, kindness, and how well it works in the real world.

## **Attribution of global problems to non-Islamic systems**

Many Islamic speakers blame the world's problems on non-Islamic systems. They say things like capitalism, communism, secularism, or Western democracy are the cause of poverty, war, racism, and moral decay. In this view, Islam is the solution to everything, and the rest of the world is in trouble because it refuses to follow God's law.

This idea is common in sermons, online videos, and Islamic books. It is used to show that Islam is not just a religion, but a complete way of life that offers the right



answers for every problem. Some even claim that if the world followed shari'a law, there would be peace, justice, and prosperity for all.

But blaming everything on non-Islamic systems ignores reality. Muslim-majority countries also face major problems. Many of them have high levels of corruption, weak healthcare, poor education, and human rights abuses. Some are ruled by dictators who claim to be Islamic but treat their people badly. Others have strict Islamic laws, but still suffer from poverty, violence, and unfair treatment of women and minorities.

For example, Afghanistan under the Taliban follows a strict version of Islamic law, yet it remains one of the poorest and most unstable countries in the world. Iran has Islamic rule, but still deals with protests, injustice, and economic failure. These are not signs of a perfect system.

Also, the problems blamed on the West often happen in Muslim countries too. There is greed, inequality, and crime everywhere. These are human problems, not just Western ones. Every system has flaws, and every society has to work hard to make things better.

Saying that only non-Islamic systems cause harm is a way to avoid taking responsibility. It is easier to blame others than to admit that problems exist within the Muslim world too. But real progress starts with honesty. A system must be judged by how well it works, not just by what it claims.

## **Claim that Islamic society prevents moral decay**

A common claim in Islamic preaching is that only an Islamic society can prevent moral decay. Speakers say that without Islam, societies fall into corruption, crime, and selfish behaviour. They point to problems in Western countries, such as drug use, family breakdown, or sexual freedom, and say these are the result of living without God's law. In contrast, they say that an Islamic society, built on shari'a, keeps people clean, honest, and disciplined.

But this claim does not hold up when we look at reality. Many Muslim-majority countries that follow Islamic rules still face serious moral problems. There is crime, domestic violence, child abuse, dishonesty, and corruption in both government and business. These are not rare problems. They are widespread and often hidden behind a public image of morality.

In Saudi Arabia, for example, shari'a law is enforced. Alcohol is banned, and religious police used to patrol the streets. Yet there are many reports of drug use, sexual abuse, and secret parties among the rich. In Pakistan, where religion plays a major role in public life, there are high rates of violence against women and children, forced marriages, and honour killings. These are not signs of moral health.

At the same time, some non-Muslim countries with no religious law have low crime rates, strong family support systems, and high levels of trust and honesty.

Countries like Norway, Japan, and New Zealand often rank high in measures of social wellbeing, even though they are not Islamic and have large non-religious populations.

This shows that moral decay is not caused simply by the absence of Islam, and it is not always stopped by its presence. Human behaviour depends on many things—education, justice, culture, economic fairness, and personal values. Religion can help, but it is not a magic solution. Claiming that Islamic society automatically prevents moral decline hides the truth. Every society needs to work to stay fair and kind, no matter what beliefs it holds.

## **Use of self-image to avoid self-criticism**

Muslims are often taught that their religion is perfect and that following it makes them part of the best and most moral group. This strong self-image is repeated in sermons, lessons, and daily speech. The result is a deep belief that problems in Muslim communities are never caused by Islam itself. This belief blocks self-criticism.

When someone points out issues like corruption, inequality, or abuse in Muslim societies, the usual reply is, “That’s not real Islam.” If a Muslim leader acts unfairly, the blame is put on him as a person, not on the system he follows. This protects the religion from being questioned. It also means that real problems are pushed aside or denied.

This pattern appears again when people leave Islam. Instead of asking why someone left, many say, “They were never a true believer.” The focus stays on keeping the religion perfect and the group image clean, no matter what the facts are.

Because of this, many important topics are avoided. People do not speak openly about forced marriages, domestic violence, fear of questioning, or unfair treatment of women and minorities. These issues are seen as attacks on Islam, rather than problems to be solved. The fear of making the religion look bad is stronger than the desire to fix what is wrong.

Every community has problems. Admitting them is a sign of honesty, not weakness. But when a group believes it is already the best, it stops looking for ways to improve. Using self-image to avoid criticism may protect pride, but it stops growth. A healthy community is one that can face its own flaws and try to do better.

## **Denial of internal problems in Muslim societies**

Muslim societies often face serious internal problems, just like any other part of the world. These include corruption, poverty, violence, inequality, and injustice. But instead of dealing with these issues openly, many people deny they exist or blame outside forces. The result is that real problems are ignored or hidden, and no real

progress is made.

In some countries, leaders blame the West for everything that goes wrong. They say Muslim nations are suffering because of colonialism, global politics, or anti-Islamic conspiracies. These things may have played a role in history, but they do not explain everything. When a government steals from its people, when the law favours the rich, or when women are denied basic rights, those are local problems that need local solutions.

People also avoid blame by saying, “Islam is perfect, but Muslims are not.” This makes it hard to question rules or traditions that may be causing harm. If someone speaks out against unfair treatment or abuse, they are often told not to criticise the religion. This shuts down honest discussion and protects harmful behaviour.

For example, in some countries, women cannot travel freely without a man’s permission. Instead of asking if this is fair, people say it is part of Islamic values. In others, child marriage still happens, but when it is questioned, defenders say the critics are attacking Islam. This way, harmful practices continue, hidden behind the idea of religious honour.

Denial makes problems worse. It stops people from learning, changing, or improving their lives. A strong society faces its own problems, admits when something is wrong, and works to fix it. Muslim societies are no different. The first step to real progress is telling the truth about what is going on inside.

## **Idealisation of Muslim unity across nations**

Idealisation of Muslim unity across nations is a common theme in Islamic discourse. Muslims are often encouraged to see themselves as one global community, united by faith despite differences in language, culture, and politics. This idea promotes a sense of belonging and shared purpose, which can be powerful for identity and solidarity.

However, in reality, Muslim countries and communities are often deeply divided. Political rivalries, ethnic differences, and competing interpretations of Islam lead to frequent conflicts and mistrust. For example, tensions between Sunni and Shia groups, disputes between nations like Saudi Arabia and Iran, and disagreements over religious authority show that unity is far from perfect.

This idealisation can obscure real problems. It may discourage honest discussion about divisions and challenges within the Muslim world. By focusing on an imagined unity, leaders and communities sometimes avoid addressing conflicts or reforms needed for peace and progress.

Understanding this gap between ideal and reality is important. It helps explain why calls for Muslim solidarity often fail to resolve deeper issues. Recognising the diversity and disagreements among Muslims allows for more realistic approaches to cooperation and dialogue that can benefit all.

# Chapter 13

## The portrayal of Islam as peaceful and tolerant

### Framing Islam as a religion of peace

Islam is often described as a religion of peace. This phrase is repeated by Muslim leaders, teachers, and politicians, especially when Islam is criticised or linked to violence. The claim is that Islam means peace, teaches peace, and only promotes war in self-defence. Many people believe this without looking closely at what the religion actually teaches or how it has been practised in history.

The Arabic word Islam comes from a root that relates to peace, but it also means submission. In Islamic teaching, peace is linked to submitting to God's will. Those who accept Islam are promised peace with God. Those who reject it are seen as being outside of that peace. This creates a sharp line between believers and non-believers, which shows up clearly in both scripture and law.

The Qur'an contains verses that speak of peace and forgiveness, but it also contains verses that command violence, especially against non-Muslims who oppose Islam. In chapter 9, verse 5, it says to "kill the polytheists wherever you find them" unless they repent, pray, and pay the required tax. In other verses, believers are told to fight until religion belongs only to God. These are not just historical comments. They have been used by Muslim leaders, past and present, to justify war and conquest.

Early Islamic expansion was not peaceful. After Muhammad's death, Muslim armies marched across Arabia, the Middle East, North Africa, and parts of Europe and Asia. These were not missions of dialogue. They were military campaigns. Some people were allowed to keep their religion by paying a tax, but others were forced to flee or convert. This is a fact of history, not an opinion.

Even today, many Islamic laws are not peaceful by modern standards. Apostasy can be punished by death in some countries. Criticising the Prophet can lead to prison or worse. Blasphemy laws in places like Pakistan have caused mob violence and death sentences. These actions are defended by many as part of Islamic duty.

Saying Islam is a religion of peace ignores all this. It turns a complex religion with a long and often violent history into a simple slogan. Peace exists in Islamic teaching, but so does war. The two cannot be separated. A fair view must include

both. Anything less is not honest.

## Selective quoting of peaceful verses

Many people who defend Islam as peaceful often quote verses from the Qur'an that speak about kindness, forgiveness, and patience. These verses are real, but they are often taken out of context and used to give the impression that the entire religion promotes peace above all else. This is called selective quoting, and it hides the full message of the text.

One popular verse is "There is no compulsion in religion" (Qur'an 2:256). It is often quoted to show that Islam supports religious freedom. But this verse was revealed early in Muhammad's time in Medina, when Muslims were still weak. Later verses, especially in chapter 9, speak very differently. They call on Muslims to fight against non-believers and to keep fighting until Islam is in control. In Islamic teaching, later verses are often said to cancel earlier ones. This process is called abrogation, and many peaceful verses were replaced by harsher ones.

Another verse that is often quoted says, "If anyone kills a person, it is as if he has killed all of mankind." This sounds like a strong call to protect human life. But the full verse, in chapter 5, is part of a message to the Jews. It refers to a story about Cain and Abel and says this rule was given to the Children of Israel. Right after that, the same passage speaks about executing those who "make mischief in the land," which has been used to justify harsh punishments, including death.

Many other peaceful verses also have limits. They speak about kindness, but only towards other Muslims. Or they allow peace only when Muslims are outnumbered or in a weaker position. Once the situation changes, the rules change too.

By quoting peaceful lines without their context, speakers and writers give a one-sided view. They make Islam seem like it only teaches peace, while ignoring verses that call for war, punishment, or domination. A fair reading must include all parts of the text, not just the ones that sound good. Selective quoting may calm critics, but it does not show the full picture.

## Downplaying verses that call for violence

When critics point to verses in the Qur'an that call for violence, many Muslim defenders say these verses are misunderstood, taken out of context, or only apply to the past. This makes the violent parts of the text seem unimportant or harmless. But many of these verses are clear and direct. Ignoring them or trying to soften their meaning does not make them disappear.

One example is chapter 9, verse 5, which says, "Kill the polytheists wherever you find them." Some say this only applied to a specific group at a specific time. But the verse itself does not say that. It has been used by religious leaders, soldiers, and extremists throughout history to justify attacks on non-Muslims. It is not written as a

story. It is a command. The limits often claimed today come from later scholars, not from the verse itself.

Another example is chapter 8, verse 12, where Muslims are told to strike the necks and fingertips of disbelievers. This verse is sometimes described as symbolic or tied to a single battle, but it has also been used by terrorists to justify beheadings and violent attacks. Groups like al-Qaeda and ISIS quote these verses openly and directly. They do not need to twist the meaning. The words are already strong.

Chapter 9 also includes verses that call for fighting Jews and Christians unless they accept Islamic rule and pay a tax. These verses are found in the later parts of the Qur'an, which many scholars say carry more weight. They have been used as the basis for legal rules in Islamic history, including how non-Muslims are treated under Islamic governments.

Saying "this is not real Islam" or "these verses are just history" does not answer the problem. The verses are still there. They have shaped law, behaviour, and belief for centuries. They are used today by those who kill in the name of religion. A religion that claims to be divine must be judged by all of its teachings, not just the ones that sound peaceful. If some parts are violent, they must be faced honestly, not hidden or explained away.

## Portrayal of jihad as purely defensive

Muslim leaders and teachers often say that jihad is only about defence. They explain it as a way to protect Islam, defend the weak, or fight back when attacked. Some even say that jihad mostly means an inner struggle to be a better person. This gives the impression that Islam never supports violence unless it is forced to.

But the history of Islam tells a different story. After the death of Muhammad, Muslim armies began expanding out of Arabia. They conquered lands that had not attacked them. These included parts of the Byzantine Empire, Persia, Egypt, and North Africa. The people in these areas were ruling their own countries. They were not threatening the Muslims in Medina or Mecca.

Classical Islamic law includes rules about how to wage jihad. Many of these laws are not about defence. They explain how to deal with people who refuse to accept Islam or pay a special tax. These laws offer non-Muslims three options: convert, submit and pay the tax, or be fought. This is not a defensive message. It is a plan for expanding power.

Books written by famous Muslim scholars describe jihad as a duty to spread Islam. This was not hidden. It was taught and followed for centuries. Muslim empires used these ideas to justify wars of expansion. These were not surprise attacks by enemies. They were planned military campaigns.

Today, some Muslims repeat the idea that jihad is only defensive to protect Islam's image. But groups like ISIS and al-Qaeda quote the same classical sources to support their violent actions. They do not say they are inventing something new.

They say they are following old teachings. The verses and laws they use are not rare. They are well known in Islamic history.

Saying that jihad is only about defence hides an important part of the religion's past. It leaves out conquest, power, and rules for war. If people are only told the peaceful side, they are not seeing the full truth. Honest teaching must include all parts, not just the ones that sound good.

## **Framing conquests as liberations**

Islamic conquests are often described as acts of liberation. Muslim speakers and writers say that early Muslim armies freed people from corrupt rulers, gave them justice, and brought them the truth of Islam. This story turns invasions into acts of kindness. It makes war sound like a gift.

But the facts of history show something else. After Muhammad's death, Muslim armies marched into lands that had not attacked them. They entered the Byzantine and Persian empires, then North Africa, Spain, and beyond. These were not rescue missions. They were military campaigns to take control of land, collect taxes, and expand power.

In Egypt, the Muslim army took the land from the Christian rulers. The people were allowed to keep their religion, but they had to pay a tax and accept Muslim rule. Churches were often left standing, but power shifted to the Muslim leaders. Some people converted to avoid paying the tax or to gain better treatment. This was not full freedom. It was a new form of control.

In India, later Muslim rulers claimed they were bringing justice to idol worshippers. But many temples were destroyed, and forced conversions happened. In some places, non-Muslims had to wear special clothes or follow special rules. These are not signs of liberation. They are signs of power being used to dominate.

When people are forced to change their behaviour, pay extra taxes, or live under laws they did not choose, that is not freedom. It is conquest. Calling these actions liberation hides the cost. It hides the blood, the fear, and the loss that came with them.

Framing conquest as liberation turns real history into a story of heroism. It avoids hard truths and protects pride. But the people who lived through these events knew the difference. They did not need rescuing. They were invaded.

## **Denial of forced conversions**

Muslim leaders often say that Islam has never been spread by force. They point to the verse in the Qur'an that says "there is no compulsion in religion" and claim that people were always free to accept or reject the faith. This is meant to show that conversions to Islam have always been peaceful and voluntary.

But history shows that this claim is not true. Forced conversions did happen, and they were sometimes large and brutal. In India, under some Muslim rulers, Hindus were given the choice between converting, paying a high tax, or facing death. Temples were destroyed, and many people became Muslim to protect themselves or their families.

In North Africa and parts of Europe, Jewish and Christian communities sometimes faced similar pressure. While Islamic law allowed them to keep their religion, it also placed heavy restrictions on them. They had to pay the *jizya* tax, follow strict rules, and accept second-class status. Many converted to Islam to escape these conditions. When someone changes religion to avoid punishment or suffering, it cannot be called a free choice.

Under the Almohad dynasty in Spain and North Africa, both Jews and Christians were given the choice to convert or be expelled. Many chose to leave. Others converted out of fear. This is a clear case of forced conversion, even if the person was not physically dragged to the mosque.

Some defenders of Islam say these were political acts, not religious ones. But this does not change the result. The pressure to convert came from Islamic rulers who used Islamic law to justify their actions.

Saying that Islam has never forced anyone to convert ignores these facts. It turns history into myth. A religion that claims moral superiority should be honest about its past. Forced conversions did happen, and denying them does not make them go away.

## Overstatement of protection for non-Muslims

Muslim defenders often say that Islam protected non-Muslims under its rule. They claim that Jews and Christians were treated fairly, allowed to practise their faith, and lived safely under Islamic law. This picture is repeated in speeches, schoolbooks, and public debates. It gives the impression that Islam offered full tolerance when other societies did not.

But this claim leaves out important facts. Under Islamic rule, non-Muslims were treated as second-class. They had to pay a special tax called *jizya* just for not being Muslim. They were not allowed to join the army or hold top jobs. In many places, they could not build new churches or temples, ring bells, or show public signs of their religion. They were allowed to live, but not as equals.

In some cases, the rules were even stricter. Non-Muslims had to wear special clothes, could not ride horses, and had to move aside for Muslims in the street. Their word in court was not always accepted. They were kept in a lower position to show that Islam was above them.

Protection also depended on peace. When there was war, rebellion, or political change, non-Muslim communities were often attacked or punished. In some places, the *jizya* tax was raised so high that people converted just to escape it. The



promise of safety was not always kept. It depended on the goodwill of rulers and the mood of the public.

Calling this protection leaves out the pressure and the fear. Living without full rights is not the same as living in peace. A system that treats people as less because of their faith cannot be called fair. The claim of protection hides the real experience of many who lived under Islamic rule.

## Suppression of non-Islamic religious expression

Islamic teaching allows Jews and Christians to live under Muslim rule as long as they accept Islamic authority and follow special rules. This is often described as fair treatment, but in practice it meant that open religious expression by non-Muslims was limited or even banned. Over time, many acts of worship, celebration, and public faith symbols were suppressed.

In many Muslim-ruled lands, Christians were not allowed to ring church bells, hold public processions, or build new churches without permission. In some places, even repairing old churches was banned. Crosses had to be removed or kept out of sight. Public prayer and religious symbols were often restricted to prevent them from being seen as equal to Islamic practices.

Jews faced similar rules. Synagogues were usually kept small and hidden. Public reading of the Torah or blowing of the ram's horn during Jewish festivals was sometimes banned. Celebrations had to be quiet and kept out of sight to avoid offending Muslims. These restrictions were not rare. They were part of the legal and social systems used in many Muslim countries for centuries.

In some cases, these rules led to violence. In the city of Cairo in the fourteenth century, mobs attacked Christian churches that were seen as too visible or too loud. In parts of the Ottoman Empire, local leaders forced non-Muslim communities to cancel public events or take down decorations. These actions were not just acts of personal hatred. They followed the belief that Islam must always be seen as superior.

Even today, in some Muslim-majority countries, non-Muslims cannot build new places of worship or must get high-level approval to do so. In Saudi Arabia, public practice of any religion other than Islam is not allowed. Churches cannot be built, and Christian services must be held in secret. In Iran, Baha'is face harsh limits on their religious expression and are not even recognised as a legal religion.

The idea that Islam allowed full freedom of religion does not match this history. While some tolerance existed, it came with clear limits. Non-Muslims were often allowed to live under Islamic rule, but they could not show their religion in public or practise it freely. This was not full religious freedom. It was a system that kept Islam on top and others out of sight.

# Rejection of criticism as Islamophobia

In many Western countries, criticism of Islamic beliefs, practices, or history is often labelled as Islamophobia. This label is used to shut down discussion by claiming that any negative comment about Islam is based on hate or fear. While real hate against Muslims does exist and should be taken seriously, not every criticism of Islam is hateful. Calling all criticism Islamophobia makes it impossible to have honest conversations.

This defence is used often by Muslim groups, religious leaders, and even politicians. If someone raises concerns about shari'a law, women's rights, or the history of Islamic conquests, they are sometimes accused of spreading hate. The focus shifts from what was said to the supposed motives of the speaker. This stops the discussion before it even begins.

For example, if someone says that stoning or lashings are cruel, they may be accused of not respecting Islam. If they quote violent verses from the Qur'an or question the way non-Muslims were treated in Islamic history, they may be told they are promoting Islamophobia. This makes people afraid to speak. Teachers, journalists, and even politicians have faced pressure or lost their jobs just for raising questions about Islamic doctrine or behaviour.

In the UK, a school teacher once showed a cartoon of Muhammad during a lesson on free speech. He received death threats and had to go into hiding. Some people defended him, but others said he should have known better. The word Islamophobia was used to suggest that his lesson was not educational but hateful. In France, a teacher was murdered for showing a similar cartoon. The public was shocked, but some still blamed the teacher rather than face the deeper issue of religious violence and free expression.

This pattern of using Islamophobia as a shield is not about protecting Muslims from harm. It is about protecting Islam from criticism. No religion should be above question. Christianity, Hinduism, and other faiths are regularly criticised without the same kind of backlash. Honest debate is part of a free society. When one religion is placed off-limits, it creates fear and double standards.

Using the word Islamophobia to stop criticism of ideas harms the very freedom that allows all religions to exist peacefully. It confuses hatred against people with questions about belief. Real respect means allowing open discussion. If a religion cannot face hard questions, then it is not strong. It is protected by silence.

# Chapter 14

## The portrayal of Islamic civilisation as uniquely enlightened

### Idealisation of the Islamic golden age

Islamic speakers and writers often describe the Islamic golden age as a time of great progress, peace, and learning. This period is usually said to have taken place between the eighth and thirteenth centuries, mostly under the Abbasid Caliphate. Supporters claim that Muslims at that time led the world in science, medicine, philosophy, and culture, while Europe was stuck in ignorance. The message is that Islamic civilisation was more advanced than all others and that this success came directly from following Islam.

But this perfect image leaves out many facts. It is true that some Muslim scholars made important discoveries. Al-Khwarizmi worked on algebra, Ibn Sina wrote about medicine, and Al-Razi studied disease. These were real achievements. But much of their work was based on earlier knowledge from Greece, Persia, and India. Islamic scholars built on the work of others. They preserved knowledge and passed it on, but they did not invent most of it.

Even science was limited by religion. Scholars had to be careful not to say anything that went against Islamic belief. Dissecting human bodies was often banned, which held back the study of anatomy. The Earth was usually described as the centre of the universe, and this view stayed in place long after it was questioned elsewhere. Today, human evolution is still not taught in most Muslim countries. The idea that humans came from earlier species is rejected because it goes against the creation story in the Qur'an. This shows that religious belief still shapes how science is taught.

The golden age was not a time of freedom for everyone. Non-Muslims lived under extra rules. Philosophers who asked difficult questions about religion could be punished. Al-Ma'arri, who criticised religious belief, was pushed aside. Ibn Rushd, one of the most famous thinkers of the time, had his books burned and was forced into exile. These are not signs of full freedom or open thinking.

The golden age also ended. Some blame outsiders like the Mongols or the crusaders. But the decline also came from inside. Corruption, political fighting, and religious pressure played a big part. Many rulers cared more about power than knowledge. Support for science and learning dropped. Ideas were no longer

welcomed unless they followed religious rules.

Calling this period uniquely enlightened ignores the full story. There was learning, but there were also limits. There was progress, but also pressure and fear. It was not a perfect time, and it was not shaped only by Islam. Like all civilisations, it had both light and shadow.

## Claims of Islam's central role in global progress

Muslim speakers often claim that Islam played the central role in the progress of the modern world. They say that without Islam, there would be no modern science, no medicine, no universities, and no European Renaissance. This idea is repeated in schools, sermons, and books. The message is that Islamic civilisation gave birth to everything good that came later, especially in the West.

This claim is based on a real fact: during the early centuries of Islam, Muslim scholars helped collect and preserve knowledge from other cultures. They translated Greek, Persian, and Indian texts into Arabic. This work was important, and it helped keep ideas alive at a time when some parts of Europe were not focused on learning. But preserving knowledge is not the same as inventing it. Most of the ideas that were passed on already existed before Islam.

Some discoveries did come from Muslim thinkers, especially in areas like maths, astronomy, and medicine. But progress was also happening elsewhere. In China, there were major advances in printing, navigation, and engineering. In India, mathematicians were already using zero and working with complex numbers before Islam appeared. These contributions had nothing to do with Islamic belief. They were part of a wider human story.

Also, many of the most important changes in the modern world did not come from the Islamic world. The scientific method, the printing press, industrial machines, modern democracy, and the idea of human rights all developed mainly in Europe after the Islamic golden age had ended. By that time, many Muslim regions had turned away from free inquiry. Scholars had to follow religious rules, and questioning sacred texts was not allowed.

Claiming that Islam is at the heart of all progress ignores this history. It turns one part of the human journey into the only part that matters. It also pushes the idea that Islam deserves credit for things it did not create. A fair view of history shows that many cultures made important discoveries. Islam played a role, but it was not the centre of everything. Saying otherwise is not truth. It is pride.

## Overstatement of Muslim scientific achievements

Muslim leaders and writers often speak proudly about the scientific achievements of early Islamic civilisation. They name scholars like Al-Khwarizmi, Ibn Sina, and Al-Razi, and say that Muslims led the world in science for centuries. This is used to

suggest that Islam naturally encourages scientific thinking and that Muslims are still part of this great tradition today.

But these claims often overstate the case. It is true that some Muslim scholars made important contributions, especially in maths, astronomy, and medicine. But most of their work built on ideas from earlier civilisations like Greece, Persia, and India. They translated and preserved knowledge, and sometimes improved it. This was valuable, but it is not the same as creating something entirely new.

Since the fall of the Islamic golden age, scientific output from Muslim countries has dropped sharply. In the modern world, most important discoveries in physics, chemistry, biology, and technology have come from outside the Islamic world. Research budgets are low in many Muslim countries, and education often avoids topics that might conflict with religion.

A clear example of this gap can be seen in the number of Nobel Prizes in science. As of today, only a handful of Muslims have won Nobel Prizes in scientific fields, despite there being over a billion Muslims in the world. In contrast, Jewish scientists, who make up a much smaller group, have won a large share of these awards. This is not because of race or luck. It reflects strong support for science, freedom of thought, and open education in some societies, and a lack of it in others.

Religious control over education and fear of questioning sacred ideas have held back progress in many Muslim countries. In some places, evolution is banned from textbooks. In others, teachers are not free to explore controversial topics. When science must follow religion, it cannot grow.

Claiming that Muslims still lead the world in science because of past scholars hides the truth. The early achievements were real, but they do not continue today on the same scale. Real progress needs more than memories. It needs freedom, funding, and a culture that accepts hard questions. Without these, science cannot thrive.

## **Minimising non-Muslim contributions in Islamic history**

Islamic history is often told in a way that gives most of the credit to Muslims and makes non-Muslims seem like they played only a small part. This version of history says that Muslim scholars, rulers, and thinkers created the golden age on their own, guided by Islam. It suggests that Jews, Christians, and others who lived in Muslim lands were simply protected and allowed to survive, not that they contributed much.

But this is not true. Many non-Muslims helped build Islamic civilisation. In places like Baghdad, Cordoba, and Cairo, Christian and Jewish scholars worked in libraries, translated books, and took part in science and medicine. The famous House of Wisdom in Baghdad had translators from many backgrounds. Greek texts were often translated into Arabic by Christian scholars who knew both

languages well. Without them, much of the ancient knowledge would have been lost.

In medicine, Jewish doctors were respected and often worked for Muslim rulers. In Spain, Christian and Jewish thinkers helped spread knowledge from the Muslim world into Europe. Some wrote in Arabic. Others translated texts into Latin. These actions helped bring about the European Renaissance, but they are rarely mentioned when Islamic history is told today.

Even in daily life, non-Muslims worked as architects, artists, and traders. They helped build the cities, carry out business, and shape the culture. But their names were not always recorded. Later writers focused only on Muslims and left the rest out of the story.

This kind of history creates a false picture. It makes it look like one religion created everything of value, while others did nothing. It ignores the fact that many cultures worked together. It also supports the idea that Islam alone leads to greatness, when in fact much of the success came from cooperation.

Leaving out non-Muslim contributions is not just unfair. It also hides the real strength of the past, which came from mixing ideas and working across differences. Telling the full story does not take away from Muslim achievements. It simply gives credit where it is due.

## Use of cultural tolerance as a moral shield

Islamic history is often described as proof that Muslims were more tolerant than others. Supporters point to periods when Jews and Christians lived under Muslim rule and say this shows that Islam was a model of peaceful coexistence. This claim is used to defend Islam from criticism. The argument is that because Islam allowed other religions to exist, it must be more moral than other faiths or systems.

But this kind of tolerance had clear limits. Jews and Christians were allowed to live in Muslim lands, but they had to accept second-class status. They had to pay a special tax called *jizya*, follow extra rules, and stay within their place in society. They could not publicly display their faith, build new places of worship without approval, or argue against Islam. Their survival depended on their submission.

In some times and places, this limited tolerance broke down. Non-Muslim communities were attacked, forced to move, or pressured to convert. These events are often left out of official stories. Instead, only the peaceful times are remembered and used to show that Islam was better than other civilisations.

Using this limited tolerance as a moral shield stops honest discussion. It creates the idea that any criticism of Islamic rule is unfair. It makes it hard to talk about religious discrimination, legal inequality, and historical injustice. It also ignores the fact that real tolerance means equality, not permission to exist under strict control.

Every empire had times of peace and times of cruelty. Muslim empires were no different. Saying that past tolerance proves present moral superiority turns a

narrow part of history into a full excuse. It blocks reflection and protects pride instead of truth. A fair society should not just allow others to live. It should treat them as equals. That was not the reality in most of Islamic history.

## **Framing Islamic art and architecture as proof of divinity**

Muslim speakers and writers often point to Islamic art and architecture as proof that Islam is divine. They say the beauty of mosques, calligraphy, and geometric designs could only come from a religion guided by God. This argument is used to impress people and make them feel that Islam must be true because it inspired such great works.

But beautiful buildings and artwork are not proof of truth. Every civilisation has created beauty. Ancient Greece built temples and statues. The Maya built pyramids and carved stone walls. Europe built cathedrals and painted ceilings. Hindu temples, Buddhist shrines, and Chinese palaces show the same skill and care. None of these works prove that the beliefs behind them are true. They prove that humans are creative.

Islamic art developed under empires that had money, power, and access to skilled workers. Many designs were made by craftsmen who followed orders, not by scholars or religious leaders. Some were not even Muslim. They used local styles and mixed them with Islamic rules, such as avoiding human figures. Over time, these styles became known as Islamic, but they were shaped by many cultures.

The same is true for architecture. The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem was influenced by Byzantine churches. Mosques in Spain and India used styles from the lands they were built in. The Taj Mahal, often called the finest example of Islamic architecture, was built by workers from many backgrounds and includes Persian, Indian, and Central Asian design. It is a masterpiece, but it does not prove that the religion behind it is true.

Framing Islamic art as divine avoids the harder question of what the religion teaches. It turns beauty into a shield against criticism. A religion should be judged by its values, its actions, and its effects on people's lives. Art can be moving and inspiring, but it is not evidence of divine origin. It is evidence of talent, support, and history. All religions have that. Only careful thinking can tell us which ideas are worth following.

## **Selective memory of persecution and decline**

Islamic history is often told with a focus on success, learning, and peace, while periods of persecution and decline are ignored or downplayed. This creates the impression that Islam brought only progress and was always a force for good. When negative events are mentioned, they are usually blamed on outsiders or

treated as small exceptions.

But the record shows that persecution happened within the Islamic world, often against religious minorities and sometimes against Muslims themselves. Shia and Sunni groups have fought and oppressed each other throughout history. In some cases, rulers crushed entire sects of Islam that disagreed with their version of belief. Philosophers and thinkers who questioned religious ideas were silenced, punished, or forced to flee.

Non-Muslims often lived under strict rules. While they were allowed to exist, they were taxed, limited in their freedoms, and sometimes attacked. During the rule of the Almohads in North Africa and Spain, both Jews and Christians were forced to convert, leave, or die. These events are rarely highlighted in Islamic storytelling, even though they left deep marks on the people who lived through them.

The decline of Islamic power is also blamed on outside forces like the Mongols or the West. But internal problems played a major role. Corruption, weak leadership, loss of interest in learning, and growing intolerance all contributed to the fall of many Islamic empires. Scholars who once explored science and philosophy were replaced by religious leaders who focused only on doctrine. This shift closed doors and stopped progress.

By leaving out stories of persecution and decline, the image of Islam stays clean and strong. But it is not honest. Every civilisation has moments of failure. Facing those moments is part of learning and growing. Selective memory may protect pride, but it does not protect truth. Real history includes both the rise and the fall.

## Comparison with Western civilisation to claim superiority

Muslim speakers often compare Islamic civilisation with the West to show that Islam is superior. They point to problems in Western societies such as drug use, broken families, sexual freedom, or crime, and say these are the result of living without God's law. At the same time, they highlight the past achievements of Islamic empires to argue that Muslim societies are more moral, more stable, and more just.

But these comparisons are usually one-sided. They focus only on what is bad in the West and only on what was good in the Islamic world. The poverty, corruption, violence, and lack of freedom in many Muslim countries today are rarely mentioned. Nor is the fact that millions of Muslims choose to live in Western countries, not in Muslim ones. If the Islamic model is better, why do so many leave it behind?

Western societies are not perfect, but they have made progress in many areas. They support science, protect free speech, and allow people to question beliefs without fear. They have built strong legal systems, created space for religious minorities, and worked to protect the rights of women. These things are not signs



of moral collapse. They are signs of societies trying to improve.

Islamic empires had their strengths, but they also had slavery, persecution, and strict control over thought and behaviour. Critics of religion were punished. Non-Muslims were treated unequally. Women had fewer rights. These facts are often left out when Muslims talk about how great Islamic civilisation was.

Using the West as a way to prove Islam's greatness is not an honest method. It picks the worst parts of one society and compares them to the best parts of another. It is not a fair match. A strong civilisation does not need to put others down to prove its value. It must be judged by its own results, not just its claims.

# **Part 5**

## **Exaggerations in religious practice**

# Chapter 15

## Claims about the spiritual power of Islamic rituals

### Presentation of prayer as uniquely transformative

Islamic prayer, or salat, is often described as a powerful force that changes a person's heart, improves behaviour, and brings peace to the soul. Muslim speakers say that no other religion offers such discipline or connection to God. They claim that praying five times a day keeps Muslims morally strong and spiritually pure. These claims are repeated in sermons, videos, and books to show that Islam offers something unique.

But this idea does not match what we see in real life. Many Muslims pray daily, yet still lie, cheat, mistreat others, or ignore basic ethics. Some pray regularly while also taking part in corruption, abuse, or crime. Prayer may offer comfort, but it does not automatically change a person's character. If it did, Muslim societies would have far less dishonesty and injustice than others. In reality, they struggle with the same problems as everyone else.

Other religions also use prayer, often in deep and emotional ways. Christians pray privately and in groups. Buddhists chant and meditate. Hindus use daily rituals. None of these practices are less meaningful just because they are different. People from all religions say they feel peace, strength, or healing through their prayer. Saying that Islamic prayer is uniquely transformative ignores these shared human experiences.

Islamic prayer does have a clear structure. It includes set movements, times, and words. But discipline is not the same as transformation. Someone can go through the motions without changing their heart. In many cases, prayer becomes a habit done out of duty or fear of punishment. Some even pray just to be seen as religious by others. None of this proves spiritual power.

Presenting Islamic prayer as uniquely transformative turns a private act into a form of religious advertising. It ignores the fact that real change is hard, slow, and different for every person. No ritual by itself can make someone good. That depends on honesty, effort, and the ability to reflect. Prayer may help, but it does not prove that one religion is more powerful than another.

## **Framing fasting as physically and spiritually superior**

Fasting during Ramadan is often described by Muslims as the best kind of fasting. They say it brings people closer to God, teaches patience, and improves health. It is said to clean the body, refresh the mind, and strengthen the spirit. These claims are repeated in sermons, lessons, and media. Many believe that no other religion or system has anything better to offer.

But what happens during Ramadan does not always match these claims. During the day, many people feel tired, angry, or weak. Work slows down. Schools may cancel exams. People sleep more during the day and stay up at night. At sunset, when the fast is broken, it is common for people to eat very large meals filled with fried and sugary foods. This habit repeats every night. Doctors have warned that going all day without food and then overeating can harm the body. It can cause weight gain, high blood sugar, and problems with digestion. It does not match what health experts say is good for the body.

There are also risks on the road. In Morocco, for example, traffic accidents increase just before sunset. People rush to get home in time to eat. Streets become dangerous. Some drivers lose their temper or take risks they would normally avoid. Similar problems have been reported in other Muslim countries.

While poor people often struggle through the fast, some wealthy Muslims avoid it altogether. They leave their home countries and go abroad during Ramadan, sometimes to places like France. There they eat and drink freely, without pressure. This shows that for some, fasting is more about public image than true belief.

Other religions also include fasting. Christians fast during Lent. Jews fast on Yom Kippur. These practices are often quieter and less public. Saying that Ramadan fasting is superior ignores these other forms and turns a common practice into a claim of greatness.

Fasting may have meaning for many people, but it is not proof of moral or physical superiority. The real effects depend on how it is done. When it causes harm, pressure, or dishonesty, it is no better than any other custom. Calling it the best without looking at the full picture is not honest.

## **Elevation of pilgrimage as proof of divine design**

The pilgrimage to Mecca, known as Hajj, is often described by Muslims as proof that Islam is from God. It is called a perfect system, full of deep meaning, spiritual power, and flawless organisation. Many say that only a divine plan could bring together millions of people from around the world in peace and unity. This claim is used to show that Islam is special, unlike any other religion.

But there is nothing magical about large religious gatherings. Other religions also have pilgrimages. Catholics travel to Lourdes and the Vatican. Hindus gather in

huge numbers at the Kumbh Mela in India, which sometimes has more people than the Hajj. Buddhists visit shrines in Nepal and Sri Lanka. These events also bring people together, create shared meaning, and leave strong emotional memories. None of this proves that the religion behind them is true.

The Hajj itself is not always peaceful or well organised. In past decades, there have been deadly stampedes, fires, and crowd crushes. Thousands of pilgrims have died during these events. The Saudi authorities try to manage the crowds, but every few years, new problems appear. Complaints about high prices, poor facilities, and lack of safety are common. These problems are not caused by God. They are the result of human planning and human failure.

The rituals of Hajj are also presented as full of divine wisdom. Muslims walk around the Kaaba, throw stones at pillars, and run between two hills. These acts are said to follow the steps of Abraham and his family. But to an outsider, they may seem strange or repetitive. Their meaning depends on belief. If someone is not already convinced that Islam is true, these actions do not prove anything. They are expressions of faith, not evidence.

Some rich Muslims go on Hajj many times, while poorer Muslims struggle to go even once. Others pay large sums to stay in luxury hotels near the mosque. This shows that money plays a big role in what is meant to be a spiritual journey. It also shows that the system is not free from human weakness.

Saying that the Hajj proves divine design turns a complex and very human event into something it is not. It may be powerful for believers, but it does not prove that Islam is true. Many religions have moving rituals. That does not make them all right. It shows that people are looking for meaning, not that they have found it.

## Ritual purity treated as moral superiority

In Islam, many rules focus on ritual purity. Muslims are taught to wash before prayer, avoid certain foods, and follow strict rules about what is clean or unclean. These acts are seen as part of obedience to God. But in many cases, this focus on purity is treated not just as a religious duty, but as a sign of moral superiority. The idea is that being physically clean in the Islamic way means being better, more respectful, or more deserving of God's favour.

This belief is often used to look down on others. People who do not follow Islamic purity rules, such as non-Muslims or Muslims who are not strict, are sometimes seen as dirty or less moral. In some Muslim communities, this affects daily life. Dishes used by non-Muslims may be avoided. Some people refuse to shake hands with those who do not share their religion. Others feel they must shower after contact with someone considered impure. These attitudes are not just about hygiene. They show a belief that spiritual worth is tied to outer cleanliness.

But ritual purity and real morality are not the same. A person can follow every washing rule and still lie, cheat, or harm others. At the same time, someone who eats pork or does not wash before prayer might still be kind, honest, and fair.

Treating ritual rules as proof of moral value ignores the importance of character.

Other religions also have purity rules. Hindus avoid certain foods. Orthodox Jews have detailed rules about what they eat and touch. These systems can also lead to judging others. But in Islam, the claim is often stronger, with the idea that following purity rules brings someone closer to God and makes them part of the best community.

This belief can create pride instead of humility. It turns private acts of cleanliness into public signs of being better. But real morality is not shown through soap, food, or rituals. It is shown through how a person treats others. When purity rules are used to feel superior, they stop being about faith and start being about status. That is not a sign of goodness. It is a way to divide people.

## Overstatement of the role of ritual in shaping character

Islam places great importance on rituals like prayer, fasting, and cleanliness. These acts are often described as powerful tools for shaping a person's character. Many Muslims believe that doing these rituals regularly will automatically make someone more honest, patient, kind, and disciplined. The message is clear: follow the rituals, and you will become a better person.

But real life does not support this belief. Around the world, millions of Muslims perform these rituals every day. Yet many of the same societies suffer from corruption, dishonesty, mistreatment of women, lack of fairness, and poor treatment of minorities. If rituals alone were enough to shape character, we would expect very different results.

Doing something regularly, like praying or fasting, may build habits. But it does not guarantee good values. A person can go through the motions of prayer while still being cruel, selfish, or greedy. Some people use rituals to show off their piety in public, while acting very differently in private. Others follow rituals out of fear, pressure, or habit, not because they truly want to grow.

Character is shaped by thinking, learning, and real effort to understand right from wrong. It comes from being honest with yourself and facing your mistakes. Rituals might help, but they are only tools. What matters is how they are used. A knife can cut food or hurt someone. A ritual can build discipline or become an empty performance.

Other religions also have rituals. Christians go to church, Hindus light lamps, Buddhists meditate. None of these guarantee moral behaviour. People from every faith can be kind or cruel, honest, or corrupt. What matters is not the ritual itself, but the choices people make.

Saying that Islamic rituals automatically shape good character is not only an exaggeration, it also hides the real work that personal growth requires. It lets people believe they are better just because they follow a routine. But true

character cannot be earned by repeating actions. It must be built from inside.

## **Belief in automatic spiritual benefit through practice**

Many Muslims are taught that doing religious acts like praying, fasting, or reading the Qur'an will bring rewards even if done without much thought. It is believed that saying the right words, repeating certain phrases, or reading verses in Arabic will bring blessings and help, even if the person does not understand the meaning. This creates the idea that the more you repeat the rituals, the more spiritual points you earn.

But this is not how real growth works. Just doing an action again and again does not always change a person. Someone can pray five times a day and still lie or cheat. A person can read the Qur'an every day and still treat others badly. When rituals are done without thinking or care, they become habits, not steps toward being better.

This belief also makes some people feel afraid. If they miss a prayer, they worry that something bad will happen to them. If they fast without joy or purpose, they still believe they are earning rewards. Others feel proud just because they follow the rules, even if their hearts are not involved. These ideas make religion feel like a set of magic tricks, where the words and actions matter more than the meaning.

In many Muslim societies, when something good happens, it is said to be a reward for doing rituals. When something bad happens, people are told they must not be praying enough. This way of thinking avoids the real causes of problems. It also makes it harder to face things like poverty, injustice, or illness in an honest way.

Other religions also have chants and rituals. But in all cases, what matters is not just the action, but the reason behind it. A good person is not made by repeating steps. A good person is made by reflection, effort, and the wish to improve. No ritual, no matter how perfect, can replace that.

## **Downplaying of ritual formalism and rote behaviour**

Many Muslims say that Islamic rituals are full of meaning and purpose. They describe prayer, fasting, and reading the Qur'an as deep spiritual acts that bring people closer to God. But in real life, these rituals are often done in a routine way, with little thought. This problem is rarely admitted. Instead, people are told that every action still brings reward, even if done without feeling or understanding.

In many cases, prayer becomes a set of movements repeated by habit. Children are taught to memorise the words in Arabic without understanding them. Adults rush through prayers, especially when busy or tired. Fasting can turn into a focus

on food and parties at night rather than a time for reflection. Reading the Qur'an is often done quickly to finish a chapter, not to understand the message.

These are clear signs of ritual formalism and rote behaviour. Yet few people speak about it. Religious leaders praise the rituals but do not talk much about the danger of doing them without meaning. This silence gives the impression that as long as the outer actions are done, the inner part does not matter.

But when rituals lose their meaning, they become empty. They may impress others, but they do not change a person's heart. Someone who prays out of duty but treats others badly is not showing real faith. Someone who fasts without thinking about self-control is not growing from the experience. Real change needs more than repetition. It needs honesty and purpose.

This issue exists in other religions too. Christians may go to church out of habit. Buddhists may chant without thinking. But Islam often avoids this self-criticism. The image of perfect rituals is kept in place, even when the practice does not match the message.

Downplaying this problem hides the truth. It stops people from asking hard questions about why they do what they do. It allows empty habits to continue while pretending they are full of meaning. But real belief must go beyond the surface. Rituals should help people grow. When they become automatic, they do the opposite.

## **Dismissal of non-Islamic spiritual practices as empty**

Many Muslims are taught that only Islamic practices lead to true spiritual benefit. Practices from other religions or cultures are often dismissed as false, useless, or even dangerous. Meditation, chanting, yoga, or silent prayer from non-Muslims are said to be without value because they are not part of Islam. This idea is repeated in sermons, books, and lessons. It leads many to believe that only Muslims can truly connect with God.

But people around the world find peace and strength through their own traditions. A Christian praying in silence may feel just as close to God as a Muslim reciting verses. A Buddhist sitting still in deep thought may feel calm and focused, just like a Muslim in prayer. These experiences are real. Saying they are empty just because they are not Islamic is unfair.

Even more, some Muslim teachers quietly borrow ideas from these traditions but rename them to sound Islamic. One example is how meditation has been turned into something called muraqabah, which means watchfulness. It is now taught by some Muslim groups as a way to focus on God, using silence, breath control, and stillness. These are the same steps found in Buddhist or secular meditation. The practice is almost the same, only the name has changed.

There are also programs called Islamic mindfulness. These use Qur'anic phrases while teaching people to calm their minds and pay attention to the present



moment. But the method is still based on ideas from modern psychology and Buddhism. This shows that the practices can work, even if they come from outside Islam.

Dismissing non-Islamic spirituality creates pride. It makes Muslims think they have nothing to learn from others. It also blocks honest reflection. Someone may think they are growing spiritually just because they follow Islamic rules, while refusing to see the value in how others grow.

No religion owns the path to inner peace. Real spiritual progress depends on honesty, kindness, and self-awareness. These things are not limited to one faith. They can be found in many places. To reject them just because they come with a different label is to turn away from truth.

## **Framing of Islamic dress as morally superior**

In many Muslim communities, Islamic dress is often framed as morally superior to other ways of dressing. Wearing clothing such as the hijab, niqab, or modest attire is presented not just as a religious duty but as a sign of higher moral character and greater devotion. This idea suggests that those who follow the dress code are more virtuous, disciplined, and respectful than those who do not.

This framing can create pressure on women and men to conform strictly to these dress standards. Those who choose not to wear Islamic clothing may be judged as lacking faith, being immoral, or giving in to improper influences. In some societies, failure to dress “modestly” according to Islamic rules can lead to social exclusion or even legal penalties.

However, attitudes toward dress vary widely among Muslims worldwide. In many places, local culture influences clothing choices, and strict dress codes are not always enforced or expected. The idea that Islamic dress is inherently better is often tied to specific cultural or political contexts rather than universal religious requirements.

Framing dress as a measure of morality can limit personal freedom and create divisions within communities. It shifts attention away from deeper ethical principles and focuses instead on outward appearance. This approach can discourage individual choice and may unfairly stigmatise those who dress differently.

# Chapter 16

## Exaggerations in conversion and moral change

### Idealisation of the convert's transformation

Muslim communities often present the story of a convert as something amazing and almost magical. The idea is that as soon as someone says the shahada, they are washed clean of all past mistakes and become a better person. Their life is shown as suddenly full of peace, purpose, and moral clarity. These stories are shared in videos, books, and public talks, usually focusing on how lost the person was before Islam and how perfect they became after.

But real life is rarely like that. People do not change overnight. Many converts still struggle with the same problems they had before. They may feel lonely, confused, or judged by the very community that welcomed them at first. Some feel pressure to show that Islam has fixed them completely, even if they are still dealing with doubt or hardship. When they speak openly about these struggles, they may be told they are not faithful enough.

This idealised image also creates false hope. New Muslims may expect that prayer will solve all their problems or that they will suddenly feel close to God. When this does not happen, they may blame themselves. Some feel guilty, others drift away quietly. But these stories are rarely told. Only the happy ones are repeated, giving the impression that Islam always brings instant success.

At the same time, the image of the convert is often used to make Islam look powerful. If someone from a non-Muslim background accepts Islam, it is treated as proof that the religion must be true. The more dramatic the change, the more it is used as a kind of advertising. But not every convert becomes a model of goodness, and not every story has a happy ending.

This view also hides the fact that many converts leave Islam later. They may leave quietly because of fear, shame, or pressure. Others speak out and face anger or rejection. But these voices are often ignored or silenced because they do not fit the perfect story.

In truth, conversion is a personal journey. It can help some people grow, but it does not magically solve everything. Presenting it as a total transformation hides the hard parts and puts unfair pressure on new Muslims. Real change takes time,

honesty, and support. It is not something that happens with a single sentence.

## Claims that Islam uniquely reforms character

Many Muslims say that Islam is the only religion that truly reforms a person's character. They believe that by following Islamic rules, a person will automatically become honest, kind, patient, and morally upright. This idea is repeated often, especially when talking about people who convert to Islam. It is said that Islam takes people who are lost or sinful and turns them into better human beings.

But this claim is not supported by reality. There are many Muslims who lie, cheat, steal, abuse power, or treat others unfairly. There are Muslim-majority countries with high levels of corruption, injustice, and violence. If Islam automatically changed people's character, these problems would not exist on such a large scale.

Other religions also teach good values. Christianity talks about love, forgiveness, and honesty. Buddhism teaches peace, self-control, and compassion. Many Hindus, Jews, Sikhs, and non-religious people live honest lives. They help others, speak the truth, and show kindness without ever becoming Muslim. Good character is not limited to one religion.

The idea that Islam alone can fix someone's behaviour also leads to pride. It suggests that Muslims are better by nature, and that non-Muslims are somehow broken. This stops people from seeing their own flaws. It also creates pressure to pretend. Some Muslims may act pious in public while hiding serious problems in private, just to keep the image.

Changing a person's character takes more than rules. It needs honesty, reflection, and effort. A person can follow all the rules of prayer and fasting, yet still treat others badly. At the same time, someone who has never prayed may be kind, generous, and just.

Claiming that Islam alone reforms people ignores the truth about human nature. People grow through life experience, personal struggle, and the values they choose to live by. Religion can help, but it is not magic. No religion has a perfect record. People are people, and good character can be found everywhere.

## Framing conversion as the discovery of obvious truth

Islam is often presented as so clear and powerful that anyone who honestly studies it will naturally accept it. Conversion stories are shared to support this view, with people saying they "finally saw the truth" or "could no longer deny the obvious". These stories are repeated in books, videos, and public talks, where conversion is framed not as a personal choice but as a discovery of something undeniable. The message is simple: if you look at Islam with an open heart, you will accept it, because it is the truth.

This framing ignores the fact that belief is not the same for everyone. People convert for many reasons. Some are drawn to the structure and discipline, others to the sense of community. Some marry Muslims and adopt the religion to fit in. Others come from hard situations and see Islam as a new start. That does not mean they discovered a universal truth. It means they found something meaningful for them. People also convert to Christianity, Hinduism, or Buddhism and speak about it in the same way. They too say they have found the truth.

The idea that Islam is obviously true can also lead to harsh judgement. If someone studies Islam but does not accept it, they are seen as dishonest, arrogant, or spiritually blind. If a convert leaves Islam later, it is treated as betrayal. But belief is complex. What makes sense to one person may not work for another. People change. Life circumstances change. Calling Islam an obvious truth oversimplifies what it means to choose a religion.

This way of thinking also discourages honest questions. If the truth is obvious, then doubt becomes shameful. Converts may feel pressure to hide confusion or pretend they understand everything. Some leave quietly, afraid to speak up. Others stay but struggle in silence.

Religion is not a puzzle with one correct answer. It is a search for meaning, shaped by history, culture, and personal experience. What is true for one is not always true for all. Claiming that conversion proves obvious truth turns belief into a rule, not a journey. It removes the freedom to explore, to question, and even to change your mind.

## Use of testimonials as evidence of truth

Personal stories are often used in Islam to prove that the religion is true. Videos, books, and talks are filled with people explaining how they found Islam and how their lives improved after converting. These testimonials are shared as if they are strong proof that Islam must be the one correct religion. The message is clear: if so many people say Islam changed their lives, then it must be true.

But personal stories are not the same as evidence. People convert to many different religions and also speak about how it changed their lives. Christians, Buddhists, and Hindus all have similar stories. Some talk about feeling peace, finding purpose, or being saved from a life of confusion. The fact that someone feels better after joining a religion does not prove that the religion is true. It only shows that they had a powerful personal experience.

These testimonials are also chosen carefully. The happy and positive ones are shared widely. Stories of people who left Islam, or who faced problems after converting, are usually ignored. This creates a false picture where only good things happen after someone accepts Islam. In reality, some converts struggle with isolation, pressure, or doubt. Some leave the religion later but feel unable to speak openly.

Using testimonials as proof of truth also puts pressure on new converts to present

their story in a certain way. They are expected to talk about how lost they were before Islam and how perfect life became afterward. This can lead to exaggeration or silence about ongoing struggles. People may feel they have to keep up an image instead of being honest about their journey.

Belief is not proven by stories. It must be tested by facts, ideas, and actions. A person's feelings can be real, but feelings alone do not prove something is true for everyone. Using testimonials in this way turns religion into a sales pitch. It replaces thoughtful discussion with emotional examples and hides the full picture. A religion should be judged by its teachings and its impact, not by how many people say it changed their lives.

## Dismissal of deconversion or regret

Stories of people who leave Islam or feel regret after converting are rarely shared. When they are brought up, they are often dismissed or explained away. Some Muslims say the person was never sincere, was confused, or was only looking for attention. Others say that they were led astray by bad friends or by the influence of Western society. This refusal to take deconversion seriously allows people to ignore the real problems that some converts face.

Not everyone who becomes Muslim has a good experience. Some feel judged by the community, struggle to understand Arabic prayers, or feel pressure to act more religious than they really are. Others face family problems, loneliness, or confusion when Islamic teachings do not match what they were told. Some try hard to make it work but eventually leave. Instead of listening to these voices, many Muslims treat them as failures or traitors.

This makes it harder for people to speak honestly. A convert who has doubts or feels regret may stay silent out of fear. They may pretend to be happy just to avoid being blamed or shamed. In some communities, leaving Islam is seen as a crime, and in some countries, it is even punished by law. This shows that leaving the religion is not always a free choice, even for those who want to.

Ignoring these stories gives a false picture. It makes it seem like everyone who becomes Muslim stays Muslim and lives a perfect life. But the truth is that religious journeys are complex. Some people join a faith and later realise it does not suit them. Others are drawn in by an emotional experience but later step back when they face problems.

All choices, including religious ones, deserve honest reflection. Just as conversion is often praised and celebrated, deconversion should be taken seriously. It is not always caused by weakness or sin. Sometimes it is the result of careful thought and hard experience. By listening to those who leave, communities could learn and grow, instead of hiding from uncomfortable truths.

## Portrayal of ex-Muslims as corrupt or misguided

People who leave Islam are often shown as having something wrong with them. They are not usually allowed to just say they changed their beliefs. Instead, their choice is explained away by blaming their character, their morals, or their personal problems. This is common in speeches, sermons, and Islamic writings where ex-Muslims are accused of being selfish, arrogant, or having fallen into sinful behaviour. They are sometimes described as having been led astray by fame, money, or Western influence. The idea is that they did not leave because they had good reasons, but because they were weak or confused.

A well-known example is when Muslim preachers talk about people who become atheists or Christians after leaving Islam. These people are sometimes said to have been fooled by lies or trapped by desires. Zakir Naik, a popular Islamic speaker, has said that people who leave Islam are often doing it for show or because they never really understood Islam properly. This ignores the fact that many ex-Muslims studied their religion deeply before deciding to leave. Their reasons are often about belief, not bad behaviour.

In some countries, ex-Muslims are treated as criminals or mentally ill. In Iran, leaving Islam is seen as a serious offence, and people who do it can be arrested or even killed. In families and communities, people who leave Islam are sometimes shunned or punished. They may lose their jobs, their safety, or their family. These harsh reactions are then used to explain that the person who left must have been confused or troubled, because no sane person would give up the "truth" of Islam.

This kind of portrayal makes it harder for ex-Muslims to speak openly. It also sends a warning to others not to ask too many questions. By labelling ex-Muslims as corrupt or misguided, the community avoids dealing with their actual reasons and avoids having to answer serious doubts about the religion.

## Framing Islam as a solution to modern ills

Islam is often presented as the answer to the problems of the modern world. This includes everything from poverty and crime to loneliness and family breakdown. Muslim speakers and writers sometimes say that Western society is full of greed, selfishness, and chaos, and that Islam has the perfect answers to fix it. They may point to high divorce rates, drug abuse, or the rise of depression and say these are the results of living without God or without rules. Islam is then offered as a system that brings peace, order, and meaning.

For example, some claim that the Islamic way of life prevents problems like alcohol addiction because drinking is forbidden. Others say that Islamic rules about marriage protect families from divorce or that praying five times a day gives people discipline and purpose. In this view, Islam is not just a religion but a complete lifestyle that can heal broken societies. Problems like greed in business, corruption in politics, and lack of respect for elders are all blamed on modern, secular values, while Islam is said to encourage honesty, kindness, and community.

spirit.

However, this way of thinking often leaves out the fact that Muslim-majority countries also face many of the same problems. There is poverty, injustice, corruption, and social unrest in many parts of the Muslim world. Just saying that Islam is the solution does not explain why these problems still exist in places where Islam already shapes the laws and culture. Also, different interpretations of Islam can lead to very different rules, so it is not always clear what version of Islam is being offered as the solution.

This kind of framing also avoids deeper discussions. Instead of looking at the causes of modern problems, it jumps straight to the answer: follow Islam. This can be comforting to believers, but it oversimplifies the real world and makes it harder to look at other possible ideas or solutions. It also tends to ignore or dismiss the contributions of non-Muslim societies to things like science, medicine, education, and human rights.

## Minimising the role of social and psychological factors

When people convert to Islam or stay committed to it, Muslim explanations often focus only on the strength or truth of the religion itself. Social and psychological factors are either ignored or treated as unimportant. The idea is that someone becomes Muslim simply because Islam is true or beautiful, and that any other explanation would be an insult. But in reality, people's beliefs are shaped by many things, including their upbringing, their personal struggles, their relationships, and their search for identity or meaning.

For example, someone who feels lost or lonely may find comfort in a religion that offers community and structure. Someone going through hardship may be drawn to Islam's clear rules and promises of reward. A person in a new country might turn to religion to feel part of a group. But when Muslims talk about conversions, they usually don't mention these kinds of reasons. Instead, they focus on stories where someone reads the Qur'an and is instantly convinced by its message. This gives the impression that truth alone explains belief, when in fact emotions, needs, and social pressures play a large role too.

Even when people leave Islam, Muslim explanations often do the opposite. They say the person left because of personal problems or outside influence, not because of careful thought. In both cases, the goal is to protect the idea that belief in Islam comes only from the mind and heart recognising the truth. This avoids facing the fact that belief and unbelief are both shaped by life experience, emotional needs, and social environments.

By minimising these factors, the Muslim narrative avoids hard questions. It also makes people who doubt or leave feel like their struggles are not valid. A more honest view would admit that faith is not just about facts or logic. It is also about who we are, what we feel, and what kind of life we are trying to build. Ignoring this

makes the story simpler but less human.



# **Part 6**

## **Exaggerations in miracle claims**

# Chapter 17

## Exaggeration of Muhammad's miracles

### Claims of miracles beyond the Qur'an

Although the Qur'an itself contains very few clear miracles linked to Muhammad, later Islamic sources and traditions began to describe many supernatural events that were not part of the original message. These include stories of trees speaking to him, animals greeting him, water flowing from his fingers, the moon splitting in two, and food multiplying to feed crowds. None of these are found in the Qur'an in a clear or direct form. Most of them appear in later Hadith collections, often many years after Muhammad's death.

These stories grew in number and detail over time. As Islam spread, many Muslims wanted to show that Muhammad was not just a messenger, but also a miracle-working prophet like Moses or Jesus. Since the Qur'an says that Muhammad was given the Qur'an itself as his main sign, some early Muslims even admitted that he had no other miracles. But later followers found this unsatisfying. So more miracles were added through oral stories and written reports. Some of them clearly resemble Christian or Jewish miracle tales, with only the names and setting changed.

An example is the claim that the moon split in two when Muhammad pointed at it. This story appears in some Hadith and is often repeated today, even though it has no support from outside Islamic sources. There is no record from people in other parts of the world who would have seen such a major event. The story is often told without any evidence, as something that must be believed if one accepts Muhammad as a prophet.

This pattern reflects a need to match the standards set by earlier prophets. Since Moses parted the sea and Jesus healed the sick, Muhammad was expected to have done similar wonders. The problem is that many of these claims are not only unsupported but seem to have been created to boost his image over time. The miracles become more detailed and more dramatic in later centuries, showing that memory and legend may have replaced history.

In modern times, these stories are still taught to Muslim children and repeated in sermons. They are used to increase faith, not to invite investigation. Questioning them is often discouraged, even when the sources are weak or contradictory. This

makes it hard for Muslims to separate what may be historical from what has been exaggerated or invented to make Muhammad seem more powerful and special.

## The splitting of the moon as historical fact

Muslims are often taught that the moon once split in two as a miracle performed by Muhammad. The idea comes from a verse in the Qur'an that says the moon has split, but the verse does not give any detail. It does not say when, how, or even if it already happened. Later stories, found in Hadith collections, say that Muhammad pointed at the moon and it broke into two pieces before coming back together. Some say this was to prove he was a prophet.

But there is no record of this event outside Islamic texts. The moon is visible to many people across the world at the same time. If it had split in two, someone else should have seen it. No writings from other parts of the world mention it. No one in India, China, Europe, or Africa wrote about the moon breaking apart in the sky. Even Arab poets and traders who were not Muslim said nothing. The only reports come from Muslim sources written many years later.

To explain this, some say it was only visible in Arabia. But the moon is not like a candle in one room. It lights up half the Earth. If it had really split in two, many people would have seen it. Others say it was a miracle that left no trace. But if there is no sign, no record, and no outside witness, how can it be used as proof?

Even so, the story is told in many Muslim schools and homes as if it were history. Children grow up believing it really happened. They are not told that even some early Muslims thought the verse was about the future, not the past. The story is not questioned, and people who do question it are often told they are weak in faith.

This shows how a miracle claim can be repeated so often that it feels real, even if there is no solid reason to believe it. Instead of being tested, it is protected. That makes belief easier but makes truth harder to find.

## Stories of water flowing from hands and food multiplying

Many Muslims believe that Muhammad performed miracles similar to those of earlier prophets. Among the most common stories are those where water flowed from his fingers or where small amounts of food fed large crowds. These stories are found in later Hadith collections and are not mentioned in the Qur'an. They are often told to show Muhammad's power and to compare him with prophets like Moses and Jesus.

One story says that Muhammad's companions had no water, so he placed his hand in a bowl and water flowed from between his fingers until everyone had enough. Another story says that once, a little bit of food fed hundreds of people after Muhammad prayed over it. These events are treated as signs of his closeness to

God and proof that he was a true prophet.

But there are problems with these stories. First, they are not supported by anything outside Islamic tradition. They come from reports written long after Muhammad's death. Second, the same kinds of stories appear in Christian and Jewish writings from earlier times. For example, Jesus is said to have fed thousands with a few loaves of bread. Stories about food multiplying and water appearing are very old and are often used to show that someone is holy. These patterns raise the question of whether such stories were added later to give Muhammad a similar status.

There is also no record of people outside Muhammad's close followers ever seeing these events. The reports usually say that only his companions were there, and they are the only ones who passed the stories on. This makes it hard to check if the events really happened. In daily life, we do not accept such big claims unless there is strong proof, especially when they break the laws of nature.

Even so, these stories are told to Muslim children as facts. They are repeated in books and sermons to increase faith, not to invite questions. People who doubt them may be told they are insulting the prophet or lacking belief. But if the goal is truth, then it is fair to ask whether these stories were created to inspire followers rather than record history.

## Animal and object obedience as signs of prophethood

In many Islamic stories, animals and even objects are said to have recognised Muhammad as a prophet. These stories are used to show that he had a special link with all of creation, not just with people. For example, it is said that a camel complained to him about being overworked, that a tree trunk cried when he stopped leaning on it during sermons, and that stones gave him greetings of peace before he received his first message. Some stories even claim that lizards or wolves spoke to confirm his status.

These stories are not found in the Qur'an. They appear in Hadith collections and later biographies written long after Muhammad's death. The idea that nature itself obeyed or recognised a prophet is not unique to Islam. Similar stories exist in other religions. In Christian texts, animals obey saints. In Jewish writings, objects sometimes act in strange ways to support a holy person. These types of tales were common ways to build up the image of someone as chosen by God.

But stories like these are hard to prove. They usually rely on reports passed down through believers only. No one outside Muhammad's group wrote anything about animals or objects behaving in strange ways. There are no signs that these events caused public surprise at the time. If a tree had really cried in front of a crowd or a rock had spoken, it would have left a strong memory among non-Muslims too. But we find no mention of this in any outside record.

These tales serve a purpose. They help to create a picture of a prophet who was not only wise but also in harmony with the world around him. They make people feel that Muhammad's message was so true that even nature could sense it. But taken as history, they fall apart. They offer no evidence and often copy older miracle patterns found in other faiths. Repeating these stories can build faith, but it does not make them real.

## Elevation of weak hadith to prove miraculous events

Many of the miracle stories told about Muhammad are based on weak hadith. A weak hadith is one where the chain of people who passed down the story is unreliable or broken, or where the story itself contains problems. In Islamic tradition, scholars developed rules to judge the strength of hadith, and many of the reports about miracles do not meet the highest standards. Still, these weak hadith are often used in books, sermons, and lectures as if they are solid proof.

For example, the story of Muhammad's night journey on a flying creature called Buraq is supported in part by strong hadith, but many of the details—such as the way the creature looked, or how fast it travelled—come from weaker sources. The same is true for the crying tree, the water flowing from his hands, and the moon splitting. In some cases, the main version of the story is only found in weak hadith, but it is still told as if it were proven fact.

This is especially common when the story supports a miracle. The rules about hadith strength are often pushed aside when the story makes Muhammad seem more special. The idea is that since the miracle fits with his role as a prophet, it must be true. But this creates a problem. It means that the usual rules about what can and cannot be trusted are ignored when the story serves a religious purpose. That weakens the whole system of judging hadith.

Some scholars have pointed this out. They say that using weak hadith for major beliefs is dangerous, because it opens the door to false claims. But others say that as long as the story makes people love the prophet more, it is fine to use. This shows that the goal is not always truth. Sometimes the goal is emotion, loyalty, or unity.

By treating weak hadith as reliable when it suits the message, believers risk spreading legends instead of facts. A system that demands strong proof in one area but ignores it in another cannot be trusted. If miracles are real, they should rest on the strongest evidence. If they do not, it is fair to doubt them.

## Use of miracles to deny ordinary humanity

In many Islamic stories, Muhammad is described not just as a prophet but as someone beyond ordinary human experience. Miracle stories are used to push

this idea. Instead of showing him as a man who struggled, failed, or doubted like others, he is shown as someone whose life was filled with supernatural signs. Water flows from his fingers, food multiplies in his hands, animals speak to him, and trees cry when he leaves them. These stories do not just support his message. They make him seem unlike any other person.

By filling his life with miracles, his human side becomes harder to see. Struggles or mistakes that would make him relatable are either hidden or explained away. His anger becomes wisdom. His silence becomes patience. His victories are due to divine help, and his defeats are part of a bigger test. Even his emotions are sometimes described as perfect. This removes the ordinary human qualities that help people understand a leader as one of them.

The Qur'an itself presents Muhammad as a human messenger. It says he eats food, walks in the markets, and does not know the unseen. But later traditions often go further. They describe his sweat as sweet-smelling, his shadow as never falling, or his body as never decaying. These claims do not come from the Qur'an. They come from later sources meant to raise his status in the eyes of followers.

This shift is important because it changes how people relate to him. A prophet who feels pain and doubt like others can be a guide. A figure surrounded by miracles becomes someone to admire but not to follow in daily life. It also makes it harder to question his actions, because those actions are seen as perfect by nature. The more miraculous his image becomes, the less space there is for critical thought.

In the end, miracle stories may inspire devotion, but they also make Muhammad less human. They raise him so high that honest questions become disrespect. They turn a historical figure into a symbol of perfection, and in doing so, close the door to open discussion.

## **Dismissal of historical scrutiny as bad faith**

When people raise historical questions about Muhammad's life or the early days of Islam, they are often accused of acting in bad faith. Instead of answering the questions directly, some Muslims respond by saying that the person asking is biased, hateful, or trying to attack Islam. This happens even when the questions are based on Islamic sources or come from a careful study of history.

For example, if someone asks why stories about Muhammad's miracles appear long after his death, or why outside records do not mention events like the moon splitting, they may be told that they are twisting facts or insulting the prophet. If someone points out that Hadith collections were written generations later, they may be called enemies of Islam. The focus shifts from the issue to the person raising it.

This creates an environment where honest study is treated as disrespect. It makes it hard to separate belief from fact. Someone who wants to understand history may feel afraid to speak, because questioning is seen as doubting, and doubting is treated like betrayal.

It is normal for all religions to protect their stories, but when historical study is blocked or dismissed, it becomes difficult to find truth. The goal should not be to attack or defend, but to understand what really happened. If a story is true, it can survive honest questions. If it cannot, then it should be looked at again.

Calling historical study an attack does not answer the questions. It only avoids them. This may protect belief in the short term, but it does not help people who are searching for honest answers. Faith should not need fear to survive.

## Chapter 18

# Belief in divine signs and supernatural intervention

### Framing everyday events as divine signs

In many Muslim communities, ordinary events are often described as signs from God. If something good happens, it is said to be a reward from Allah. If something bad happens, it is said to be a warning, a test, or a punishment. This way of thinking gives a religious meaning to almost everything that takes place in daily life. It also turns chance events into proof that Islam is true.

For example, if someone avoids a car accident by just a few seconds, it might be called a miracle. If rain falls after a prayer for rain, it is seen as a sign that the prayer worked. If someone converts to Islam after meeting a Muslim or reading one verse of the Qur'an, it is treated as proof that Allah guided them directly. Even natural disasters are sometimes said to be aimed at people who do not follow Islam, while good weather or success in school or business is seen as a reward for faith.

The problem with this way of thinking is that it ignores other explanations. Good and bad things happen to people of all religions, or of no religion at all. If a Muslim avoids an accident, a Christian might too. If a prayer is followed by rain, it does not mean the prayer caused it. Weather changes all the time. Picking only the events that support a belief while ignoring the ones that don't is not honest thinking. It is called confirmation bias—seeing only what fits what you already believe.

Also, if everything is a sign from God, then nothing really is. If both illness and health, winning and losing, safety and danger are all signs, then the word "sign" loses its meaning. It becomes impossible to tell what a sign is actually saying. The real reason many people see signs is not because the signs are clear, but because they are already convinced. They are looking for patterns and meaning, and they will always find something that seems to match.

Framing normal events as divine messages can feel comforting, but it does not lead to truth. It stops people from asking deeper questions about how the world works. It can also cause guilt, fear, or pride, depending on how people interpret what happens to them. A more honest view is to accept that life is full of random events, human choices, and natural causes. Not everything needs to be a message from the sky.



## Use of personal experiences as proof of divine favour

Many Muslims use personal experiences to claim that God is real and watching over them. These stories can include moments when they felt at peace while praying, dreams they believe had special meaning, or times when something they hoped for came true. They may say that they were struggling, prayed, and then suddenly found a solution. These moments are taken as signs of Allah's favour and care.

These stories are powerful because they feel deeply real to the person telling them. But feeling something strongly does not make it proof. People from all religions have similar stories. A Christian might say Jesus helped them through pain. A Hindu might say a prayer to Krishna changed their life. Even non-religious people sometimes feel they were helped by the universe or fate. The same kinds of events happen to people with very different beliefs.

Also, people often forget the times when their prayers were not answered or when things went badly. They remember the good results and link them to faith, while ignoring the bad ones. This creates a false pattern. If something good happens after prayer, it is called proof. If nothing happens, the believer is told to wait or to believe that it is part of a bigger plan. This way, the belief is never tested. It always finds a way to seem true.

Using personal experiences as proof of divine favour also creates pressure. Someone who suffers may wonder if they have been rejected by God. Someone who doubts may be told that their life is hard because they lack faith. This way of thinking turns religion into a scoreboard, where good luck means approval and bad luck means failure. But life is not that simple. People suffer for many reasons, and success often depends on chance, effort, or help from others—not just prayer.

Personal stories can be moving, but they are not evidence. They show how someone feels, not what is true for everyone. They should not be used to prove that one religion is right. They can be shared and respected, but they are not a reason to believe something without question.

## Belief in jinn as a real-world explanation for misfortune

In many Muslim communities, when something bad happens that cannot easily be explained, people often say it is because of jinn. Jinn are said to be invisible beings that can live in houses, enter people's bodies, or cause bad luck. If someone gets sick, behaves strangely, or loses their job, it might be blamed on jinn. This idea is taken seriously in many parts of the world. Families sometimes take people to religious healers instead of doctors, believing that a jinn has taken control.

One example is when someone starts talking to themselves or becomes violent.

Instead of thinking about mental health, people may say the person is possessed. This can stop them from getting proper help. Some are taken to a healer who reads Qur'anic verses over them or even tries to beat the jinn out. In 2012, a girl in Morocco died during such a session after being hit many times. Her family believed she had a jinn inside her. These kinds of cases are not rare. Human rights groups have reported similar events in countries like Pakistan, Nigeria, and even in Muslim communities in Europe.

Believing in jinn gives people a way to explain bad things when no one knows what is really wrong. But it also causes fear. Children are often warned not to go out alone or to speak too much about doubts, in case a jinn hears and attacks them. If someone leaves Islam or starts asking difficult questions, and then suffers a setback, others might say that a jinn is punishing them. This makes people afraid to speak freely.

There is no real proof that jinn exist. Scientists have never found anything like them. The things blamed on jinn, like voices in the head or sudden changes in behaviour, are often signs of illness, stress, or trauma. Treating them with prayer instead of care can make the problem worse.

Using jinn to explain misfortune may feel like it makes sense, but it usually blocks the truth. It stops people from getting real help and makes fear a bigger part of everyday life. A better way is to ask clear questions, look for real causes, and take care of people instead of blaming invisible creatures.

## Islamic healing and protection through verses

Many Muslims believe that verses from the Qur'an can heal sickness, protect against harm, and drive out jinn. This practice is called ruqyah. It usually involves reading or listening to certain parts of the Qur'an, sometimes while blowing air over water or touching the sick person. Some families also hang up verses in their homes or carry them written on paper as a kind of protection charm.

Verses that are often used include Ayat al-Kursi from Surah Al-Baqarah, the last two verses of that same chapter, and the last three chapters of the Qur'an. These are believed to protect from evil, cure illness, and block the effects of black magic. If someone is feeling pain, is afraid, or thinks they are being followed by a jinn, they might ask a religious healer to perform ruqyah. Some people do it at home on their own. Others go to a specialist who charges money for the service.

This kind of healing is very popular in many Muslim countries and even among Muslim communities in the West. People often say it helped them feel calm or made their problem go away. But the success of ruqyah is hard to measure. Sometimes people recover because they would have anyway. Sometimes they feel better because they believe strongly that the verses will help. This is called the placebo effect. It is a real thing, but it does not prove that the verses have magic powers.

There are also dangers. In some cases, people are told not to go to a doctor

because the Qur'an is enough. This has led to serious harm. There are reports of people with epilepsy, depression, or other medical problems being treated only with ruqyah. Some have died because they were not given proper care. In other cases, the person being treated is blamed for the problem. They are told they must have weak faith, bad thoughts, or secret sins. This can make them feel ashamed and afraid instead of helping them heal.

Using verses for comfort is not a problem by itself. Many people find peace in their religion. But when these practices are used in place of real medical care, they can cause more harm than good. Healing should be based on facts, not fear. Real help means knowing the difference between spiritual comfort and physical treatment.

## Acceptance of dreams as spiritual communication

In Islam, dreams are often seen as a way that Allah communicates with people. Some Muslims believe that certain dreams carry deep messages or warnings. They may say that a dream showed them the truth of Islam, or gave them a sign to make an important decision. Stories of people seeing Muhammad in a dream are especially common, and these dreams are said to be proof that the person is on the right path. Others claim to see paradise, hell, or even angels. These dreams are treated with great respect and sometimes shared in public talks or books to encourage belief.

But the science of dreams tells a very different story. Dreams are not messages from outside. They come from the brain. During sleep, the brain is still active. It mixes up memories, emotions, thoughts, and bits of information from the day. It does this mostly during a stage of sleep called REM, when the brain is busy but the body is still. Dreams feel real because the part of the brain that checks for logic and truth is less active during this stage. That is why even strange or impossible things in dreams feel normal while we are asleep.

Most dreams are shaped by what we already know, fear, or hope for. If someone has been thinking a lot about religion, they are more likely to dream about religious things. If they are under stress, they may have dreams that feel urgent or emotional. There is no evidence that dreams come from outside the body. They are personal experiences created by the brain.

In religious settings, dreams are often used as proof. If someone doubts Islam, and then has a dream that seems to push them back, it is said that God has spoken to them. If a person converts after such a dream, the story is told as a miracle. But people in other religions have the same kinds of dreams. Christians dream of Jesus. Hindus dream of their gods. Even atheists sometimes dream of dead relatives or strange beings. Dreams reflect the mind, not the truth of a belief system.

Relying on dreams as a form of spiritual guidance may feel meaningful, but it is not reliable. It can lead to false ideas or important choices based on imagination rather than fact. Dreams are not proof of anything outside the brain. They are

stories the mind tells itself in sleep, often shaped by emotions, memory, and suggestion. Treating them as messages from heaven may seem harmless, but it can replace careful thinking with superstition.

## Use of magic and evil eye to explain suffering

In many Muslim communities, when something bad happens and no clear reason can be found, it is often blamed on magic or the evil eye. If someone falls ill, loses their job, cannot get married, or suffers from unexplained problems, people may say that someone has used black magic against them. The evil eye is believed to come from jealousy. A person might look at you with envy and, without even meaning to, cause you harm. These ideas are deeply rooted in culture and are often treated as serious threats.

To protect against the evil eye, some people wear charms, hang up special objects in their homes, or recite certain verses from the Qur'an. Families sometimes avoid showing pictures of their children or sharing good news, in case someone becomes jealous. In more serious cases, people visit religious healers who offer cures through prayer, water, or written verses. These visits can cost a lot of money. In some places, people are told to burn objects, wash in special water, or bury something in the ground to undo the magic.

The belief in magic and the evil eye gives people a way to explain things that feel unfair or painful. If life is going badly, it can feel better to say that someone caused it, rather than accept that bad luck, stress, or illness just happen. But this way of thinking can be harmful. It can break up families if someone is wrongly blamed for casting a spell. It can stop people from seeking real help. A person with mental illness might be treated for magic instead of getting proper care. A child with learning problems might be taken to a healer instead of a teacher.

There is no scientific proof for the evil eye or black magic. What often gets blamed on these things can usually be explained by health problems, stress, poverty, or chance. People suffer in all parts of the world, in all religions, and many of the same problems exist in places where belief in magic is strong. These beliefs may give comfort or hope, but they also spread fear and suspicion. They make people worry that their friends or neighbours might secretly wish them harm.

Explaining suffering through magic and the evil eye blocks understanding. It turns life's struggles into battles with invisible forces. This makes it harder to deal with problems in a clear, helpful way. People should be supported with real care, not fear of curses or unseen danger.

## Dismissal of natural explanations as reductionist

In many Muslim circles, when someone offers a natural explanation for something that others believe is spiritual or divine, they may be accused of reducing everything to science or logic. The word "reductionist" is often used to criticise

people who explain dreams through brain activity, sickness through medicine, or strange behaviour through psychology. The idea is that by giving a natural explanation, the person is ignoring deeper meaning or spiritual truth.

For example, if someone says that a person hearing voices might have a mental illness, rather than being possessed by a jinn, they might be told they are rejecting what Islam teaches. If someone says that a successful event happened by chance, not because Allah planned it, they may be called cold-hearted or arrogant. This makes it hard to have open conversations. People are pushed to choose between faith and science, as if both cannot work together.

The problem with calling natural explanations “reductionist” is that it shuts down thinking. Instead of asking what the best explanation is, people are told not to question. This can cause real harm. If someone refuses to treat a medical problem because they think it is spiritual, their condition might get worse. If a natural event like an earthquake is called a punishment from God, it may stop people from building safer homes or preparing better for disasters.

Natural explanations are not an attack on religion. They are a way to understand how the world works. Science looks for patterns, tests ideas, and changes when better evidence appears. It does not claim to know everything, but it works by reason, not belief. Calling this “reductionist” ignores the fact that natural causes explain many things far better than guesses or old stories.

Believing in miracles, jinn, or signs is a personal choice. But when people dismiss real explanations just to protect belief, they risk turning away from truth. Faith should not be afraid of questions. It should grow stronger by facing them. Dismissing honest thinking as reductionist does not protect religion. It only makes it harder to know what is real.

## Blurring the line between folklore and doctrine

In many Muslim communities, people mix up religious teachings with old stories and local customs. This makes it hard to know what Islam actually teaches. Some ideas come from the Qur'an and early Muslim sources. Others come from culture, myths, or village beliefs. But over time, both are treated the same. People grow up hearing these things at home, in mosques, or from elders, and few stop to ask where they really come from.

For example, some believe that cutting nails at night brings bad luck, or that whistling indoors invites jinn. Others are told that if you say a certain phrase exactly 33 times, something good will happen. These are not found in the Qur'an. They are part of local culture. But many people treat them as serious rules.

In some places, Muslims visit graves of saints to ask for help. They believe the dead can give blessings or cure illness. This is common in countries like Pakistan, Morocco, and Egypt. But other Muslims say this is wrong and has nothing to do with Islam. The fact that both sides think they are following the religion shows how hard it is to tell the difference between doctrine and folklore.

This confusion is dangerous. It allows made-up ideas to seem holy just because they are old or repeated often. It makes it harder for people to ask questions. If you doubt a story about a miracle, you might be accused of doubting Islam. If you refuse to follow a superstition, you might be warned of punishment.

When folklore is treated like religion, people follow a mix of truth and fiction without knowing which is which. This weakens belief instead of making it stronger. Real faith should be based on clear sources, not on stories that change from village to village. If there is no line between doctrine and folklore, anyone can add to the religion, and no one can say what is true.

## Use of dreams as divine endorsement

In many Muslim communities, dreams are not just seen as personal experiences. They are used as proof that someone is guided by God or that Islam is the true path. If a person dreams of Muhammad, it is often said to mean that the person is loved by God. If a new convert dreams of a bright light, a peaceful feeling, or a voice saying the shahada, it is taken as a sign that Allah chose them. These dreams are treated as more than private moments. They are shared in books, talks, and videos to show that Islam is confirmed by the unseen world.

Some people even claim that they saw future events in a dream, or that they were warned by angels. Others say they saw non-Muslims in fire or Muslims in paradise. These kinds of dreams are used to say who is right, who is wrong, and who will be saved. When told in public, they can be very powerful. They are often accepted without question, especially if the speaker is respected or famous.

But dreams are made by the brain during sleep. They mix memories, emotions, hopes, and fears. If someone spends their days thinking about Islam, they are more likely to dream about it. If they are afraid, guilty, or confused, their brain may turn these feelings into pictures or voices. That is normal. People in all religions have dreams like this. Christians dream of Jesus. Hindus dream of their gods. Even atheists sometimes dream of religious scenes if they were raised with religion. These dreams feel real, but they come from inside the person, not from outside.

Using dreams as proof creates problems. It makes belief a private experience that cannot be checked. Anyone can say they had a dream, and no one can prove them wrong. It also gives power to people who claim to receive dreams about who should be obeyed or what should happen next. Some leaders use dreams to say they were chosen by God or to stop others from asking questions.

Dreams can be strong and emotional, but they are not evidence. They should not be used to prove that a belief is true or that a person is blessed. That turns sleep into a tool for control. What matters is not what someone sees when their eyes are closed, but what can be known when they are open.

# **Part 7**

**Exaggerations that  
suppress dissent and  
claim universality**

# Chapter 19

## Islam as the final and universal religion

### Claim that Islam completes all previous revelations

Many Muslims believe that Islam is the final and complete version of all previous messages sent by God. They are taught that Judaism and Christianity were true in their original forms, but were later changed or lost. Islam is said to correct these changes and return people to the original message of pure monotheism. The Qur'an is described as the last and perfect revelation, and Muhammad is called the final prophet. This belief is often stated as a fact, not as a religious view.

The problem is that this claim assumes that the Islamic version of earlier religions is more accurate than the original ones. Muslims believe that Abraham, Moses, and Jesus were prophets of Islam, but Jews and Christians do not see it that way. They have their own writings, histories, and traditions that do not match what Islam teaches about them. For example, Christians believe that Jesus is the son of God and that he died and rose again. Islam denies both of these points. Saying that Islam "completes" Christianity really means that it rewrites it.

Muslims are also taught that earlier scriptures were changed, while the Qur'an has been perfectly preserved. But this idea is not based on shared records. The earliest copies of the Bible and Jewish texts were written long before Islam. The Qur'an came much later and gives a different version of key events. Claiming that Islam completes earlier religions is not a neutral statement. It tells Jews and Christians that their beliefs are broken and that only Islam has the truth.

This belief can also block real understanding between people of different faiths. When one side says, "Your religion was once true but is now false, and only ours is correct," it is hard to have equal and honest dialogue. It also lets Muslims take stories and figures from other religions and give them new meanings, while refusing to accept how those figures are understood in their own faiths.

The claim that Islam completes earlier revelations is based on belief, not history. It rests on the idea that the Qur'an corrects mistakes in the past, but this is only convincing to those who already accept Islam. Others see it as rewriting their sacred stories. Calling this a completion does not make it true. It only hides the fact that Islam changes the meaning of what came before.



## **Framing Islam as suitable for all cultures and eras**

Islam is often described as a religion that fits all people, in all places, at all times. This claim appears in sermons, books, and public talks. It is said that the teachings of Islam are so complete and balanced that they remain valid no matter how much the world changes. From seventh-century Arabia to modern Europe or Asia, Islam is presented as the ideal system for guiding personal behaviour, family life, law, and society.

But many parts of Islamic teaching reflect the time and place where they were first recorded. The Qur'an and Hadith were shaped in a tribal society with clear gender roles, rules about slavery, honour, and family control. These values were common across ancient cultures. However, some of them stand in conflict with modern ideas about freedom, equal rights, or individual choice. For example, Islamic law allows polygamy for men but not for women, gives male relatives a larger share of inheritance, and expects women to obey their husbands. These rules made sense in their original setting but are difficult to apply fairly in today's world.

When Islam spreads into new regions, it often absorbs local customs. In West Africa, Islamic practices are shaped by older traditions. In Indonesia, the religion looks different from how it is practised in the Gulf. In Europe or North America, Muslims adjust clothing, language, and even legal thinking to match their surroundings. This shows that religion is not untouched by culture. The claim that Islam stays the same everywhere is not true in real life.

When certain teachings seem out of place—like punishments for theft, or rules about non-Muslims—some argue these laws were only meant for the past. Others say they still apply today. This creates a problem. If the rules must change, then they are not timeless. But if they must never change, then they cannot fit every time or culture. The claim of perfect fit is often used to avoid hard questions.

A religion that works for all people must allow for growth and discussion. It cannot depend on the idea that one set of rules, created in a specific time, should always be followed the same way. Islam has evolved in different places, and that shows it can change. But claiming that it needs no change at all does not match history or daily experience.

## **Arabic elevated as the only true language of revelation**

Islam teaches that the Qur'an was revealed in Arabic and that this language was chosen by God. Arabic is often described not just as the language of the first Muslims, but as the only proper language for reading, memorising, and understanding the Qur'an. Translations are seen as helpful, but not equal to the original. In many schools and mosques, children are taught to recite the Arabic text even if they do not understand what they are saying. Prayers must be done in

Arabic, no matter what language a person speaks.

This raises the Arabic language above all others and treats it as sacred. The idea is that Arabic is not just a human language, but one that was made perfect for God's message. Because of this belief, the Qur'an is often described as untranslatable. Some scholars say that its meaning can only be fully known in Arabic. Others say that even small changes in wording lose the miracle of the original.

But this creates problems for people who are not native Arabic speakers. The majority of Muslims in the world do not speak Arabic as their first language. Many never learn to understand it well. Yet they are told that they must use Arabic to pray and that the Qur'an cannot be truly understood in any other language. This creates a divide between those who know Arabic and those who do not. It also makes access to the religion harder for many people. A message that is said to be for all of humanity is locked in one language.

No other major religion treats one language in quite this way. Christians read the Bible in hundreds of languages. Jews pray in Hebrew but also study texts in many other tongues. In Islam, Arabic holds a special place that goes beyond history or culture. It becomes a part of belief itself.

This belief also blocks change. If Arabic is perfect, then changing how the Qur'an is read or explained in modern words is seen as a loss. If only Arabic is holy, then every other language becomes second-best. This turns a human language into a spiritual barrier. A religion that says it is for everyone should not make understanding depend on learning one ancient tongue. A truly universal message should speak clearly in every voice.

## Denial of local or cultural origins of the religion

Islam is often described as a religion that comes directly from God and does not belong to any culture. Followers are told that it is not Arab, not tribal, and not tied to any one way of life. This idea is used to say that Islamic laws and customs can apply to everyone, everywhere, without change.

But when we look at the Qur'an and early Islamic practices, we see that they clearly reflect life in seventh-century Arabia. The Qur'an speaks about date palms, camels, desert travel, and tribal rules. It includes laws about inheritance that favour male relatives, rules about slavery, and instructions for war that match the customs of Arab tribes. Even the way people dressed, settled disputes, and organised their families follows Arab ways of life from that time.

Muslims today are expected to pray in Arabic, face Mecca, and make a pilgrimage to an Arab city. These are not neutral places. They are part of a specific region with its own history and values. In many parts of the world, local customs were replaced or pushed aside to make room for Arab-style behaviour. In Nigeria, for example, traditional clothing and food were changed in some Muslim communities to copy what was seen as more Islamic, even though those changes had nothing to do with belief. In Indonesia, some local Islamic practices were later

criticised as being too soft or not Arab enough.

By denying that Islam began in a specific culture, people are blocked from asking honest questions. They are told that every rule is from heaven, even when that rule clearly comes from a certain time and place. But no religion appears out of nowhere. It always grows within a real society. Islam grew out of Arab life, just as Christianity grew out of Jewish life, and Hinduism grew out of Indian life.

This does not mean that Islam cannot have meaning for people outside Arabia. But saying that it is above culture is not true. It hides the fact that many Islamic rules were shaped by human needs and habits in the desert. When this is not admitted, followers are told to copy an ancient lifestyle instead of asking what still makes sense today. A religion that claims to be for all people should not pretend it has no roots. It should be open about where it came from and allow people to grow from there.

## **Framing rejection of Islam as wilful blindness**

Rejection of Islam is often explained as a sign of pride, stubbornness, or spiritual blindness. People who do not accept Islam are described as having closed hearts or turned away from the truth on purpose. This idea appears in sermons, books, and school lessons. It tells believers that those who reject Islam do so not because they have good reasons, but because they refuse to see what is clear. This way of thinking creates a world where Islam is always right, and anyone who disagrees must be dishonest or lost.

The Qur'an uses words like deaf, dumb, and blind to talk about those who reject the message. These are not treated as physical problems but as signs of people who refuse to listen or understand. This view has shaped how many Muslims think about non-Muslims. Instead of seeing them as people with different views or life experiences, they are seen as people who know the truth deep down but still choose to ignore it.

This idea blocks real discussion. If someone says they have studied Islam and still do not believe, they may be told that they are arrogant or that their heart has been sealed. If a person raises doubts or asks hard questions, they may be accused of being dishonest or just trying to attack Islam. Their reasons are not taken seriously. This makes it hard for Muslims to understand why others reject their beliefs, and it creates mistrust between groups.

People reject Islam for many reasons. Some do not find the evidence convincing. Some do not agree with the moral rules. Some are troubled by the history or teachings. Others simply believe something else. None of this means they are blind or evil. It means they see the world in a different way.

Framing rejection as wilful blindness also makes Muslims less likely to reflect on their own faith. If every critic is seen as corrupt or stubborn, there is no need to ask whether the belief itself needs to change or grow. The blame is always placed on the outsider.

A fair religion must accept that people may disagree for honest reasons. Not everyone who rejects Islam does so out of pride or hate. Some are simply unconvinced. Calling them blind is not an answer. It is a way to avoid giving one.

## **Assertion that Islam will inevitably prevail**

Islam is often described not just as a religion but as a force that will one day cover the whole world. Followers are told that Islam will inevitably prevail over all other ways of life, either through people accepting it willingly or through the rise of Islamic rule. This belief is taught in sermons, books, and religious classes. Verses from the Qur'an are quoted to support the claim that Islam will overcome all other religions, and many Muslims grow up expecting that one day, the whole world will follow Islam.

This belief creates a picture of history as a straight line leading to one goal. It says that Islam is not just true but unstoppable. Any delay or setback is treated as a test or a temporary pause. Losses are explained away, and victories are seen as proof that the final result is certain. In some communities, this creates a kind of excitement, where every political change or world event is seen as a sign that Islam is about to rise again.

But the world does not work this way. Religions do not grow in straight lines. They rise and fall, change shape, split into branches, or lose followers. Islam, like other religions, has gained and lost ground over time. It spread quickly in its early years, but later faced resistance, decline, and change. Today, there are more Muslims in the world than ever before, but there are also many who leave Islam, question it, or practice it in very different ways. Some countries are becoming more religious, others less.

Saying that Islam will prevail no matter what also creates problems. It can lead to ignoring reality, blocking criticism, or avoiding honest discussion. If the final victory is already promised, then there is no need to ask hard questions. Those who resist are treated as enemies, and those who doubt are seen as weak.

This belief can also lead to pressure on others. If someone is told that Islam will win in the end, they may feel they have no choice but to join now or be on the wrong side of history. But true belief cannot be forced. It must come from understanding and choice.

Claiming that one religion will rule the world does not make it happen. History is full of beliefs that said the same thing and failed. A strong religion should focus on truth, not on control. If Islam is true, it does not need to conquer the world to prove it. If it is not, then no promise of victory will make it so.

## **Marginalisation of non-Arab expressions of Islam**

In many parts of the Muslim world, Islam is closely linked to Arab culture. Arabic is

the language of the Qur'an, Islamic law, and daily prayer. This gives Arab ways of speaking, dressing, and thinking a special place in the religion. Muslims from other cultures often feel pressure to copy Arab customs in order to be seen as more religious or more authentic. This happens even when those customs have nothing to do with belief.

For example, converts to Islam in Africa, Asia, or Europe may be told to change their name to an Arabic one. In some communities, women are expected to wear clothes that match Arab styles, even if they live in cold or very different climates. A person who leads prayer or gives religious talks may be judged by how well they pronounce Arabic words. Local music, language, food, and customs are sometimes seen as less Islamic just because they are not Arab.

This treatment pushes aside the rich variety of ways Islam has been practised around the world. In West Africa, Muslims used to write in local scripts and dress in their own styles, but these have been replaced in many areas by Arab models. In South Asia, Islamic poetry, art, and customs developed in their own way, yet today some of these are dismissed as wrong or not pure. Even in Indonesia, the country with the largest Muslim population, local Islamic traditions have been criticised for not following Arab norms closely enough.

The problem is not with Arabs themselves, but with the idea that their way of doing things is always the best. When Arab expressions of Islam are treated as the standard, other cultures are pushed to the side. This turns a global religion into something that feels foreign to many of its own followers.

Islam grew and spread across many lands. It took on different colours, foods, languages, and music. That is a sign of life, not of weakness. But when only one version is lifted above the rest, something is lost. A religion that claims to speak to all people should make space for their voices. If only Arab ways are honoured, then millions of Muslims are made to feel like guests in their own faith.

## Rejection of pluralism in final judgment narratives

Islamic teachings about the Day of Judgment often present a very clear outcome. People who believed in Islam and followed its rules will go to paradise. Those who did not believe, no matter how kind or sincere they were, will go to hell. This idea is repeated in the Qur'an, Hadith, and religious education. It leaves little room for the idea that people from other religions, or people who had doubts, could be saved.

This creates a sharp divide between insiders and outsiders. A Muslim who prays and fasts may be promised paradise, even if they made mistakes. A non-Muslim who lived an honest life, helped others, and showed kindness may still be described as someone who will face eternal punishment. The message is clear: belief in Islam is the one key that matters most, even more than actions or personal effort.

This rejection of pluralism can be troubling for people who live in mixed societies. It suggests that friends, neighbours, or even family members who are not Muslim

are doomed in the afterlife, simply because they did not accept the religion. Some Muslims try to soften this by saying that God is merciful and may forgive who He wants. But even then, the main idea stays the same. Islam is the only safe path.

Stories of final judgment in Islamic books often describe groups of people lined up, divided by belief. Non-Muslims are shown in a bad light, even if they were never violent or hateful. Converts are praised as those who found the truth, while those who did not convert are seen as having turned away from guidance. These stories do not allow for the possibility that someone might have searched honestly, found no reason to believe, and still lived a good life.

This view discourages open thinking. If only one path leads to safety, then asking questions becomes dangerous. It also creates fear and guilt in people who doubt or explore other ideas. They may be told they are risking hell just by wondering.

A more honest approach would accept that good people exist in all religions and none. If final judgment is real, it should be based on truth, effort, and character, not on labels or birthplace. Saying that only Muslims will be saved blocks understanding and builds walls where there could be bridges. A fair system would judge people by their choices, not by what religion they were taught to follow.

## Chapter 20

# Suppression of doubt and internal criticism

## Framing doubt as a moral failing

In Islam, doubt is often described as a sign of weak faith or a problem in the heart. A person who starts to question is told they are being influenced by the devil, that they lack trust in God, or that they are showing pride. This turns doubt into something shameful. Instead of being seen as a normal part of thinking, it is treated as a personal failure.

A young Muslim who asks why certain rules exist or why some parts of the Qur'an are hard to understand may be warned to stop. They might be told that strong believers never doubt, and that real Muslims accept everything without question. This creates fear. People feel they must hide their questions or risk being seen as sinful. A student, for example, may pretend to agree in class while feeling confused inside. A parent may warn their child not to think too much in case they fall into disbelief.

But doubt is not a moral failing. It is something that happens in every area of life. People doubt things when they are unclear, when they see problems, or when they try to understand deeply. In science, doubt is a step toward truth. In religion, it is often blocked. This makes it harder for people to grow. They are told to repeat answers, not to ask better ones.

When doubt is treated as a sin, people feel guilt. They begin to believe there is something wrong with them just for wondering. Some stay silent for years. Others leave their faith in secret, afraid to say why.

Calling doubt a problem of the heart does not help. It does not give answers. It only tells people to stop thinking. But real belief should be open to questions. If something is true, it will survive being tested. If people are punished for doubting, it means the truth is being protected by fear. That is not faith. That is control.

## Denial of legitimate disagreement within Islam

Disagreement within Islam is often treated as a problem rather than a natural part of belief. When someone holds a different view on a verse, a rule, or a practice, they may be told they are wrong, misguided, or even outside the religion. Instead

of being accepted as part of a wider discussion, disagreement is often shut down. This creates a world where only one answer is allowed, and anyone who questions it is seen as a threat.

In many Muslim settings, a young person who asks why a rule exists may be told not to argue. If someone disagrees with how prayer is done or how women should dress, they may be accused of following desires or rejecting God's law. Even well-known differences between Islamic schools of thought are sometimes hidden or ignored. People are told that Islam is clear and united, even though its history shows many different views on nearly every topic.

This denial of disagreement blocks learning. It tells people not to look too closely at the past or explore other opinions. But Islam has always had debate. Early scholars argued about how to understand verses, what laws should apply, and how to judge between cases. Even the most respected names in Islamic history disagreed with each other. These arguments were not seen as a sign of weakness. They were part of trying to understand.

When people are told there is only one correct view, they may never hear other sides. A student in a religious school might grow up thinking there is only one way to pray or one way to dress. They might be shocked later to learn that other Muslims do it differently. This kind of control makes people less able to think for themselves.

A healthy religion should allow room for disagreement. Not every question has only one answer. When a belief system refuses to accept that, it becomes more about control than truth. Hiding differences does not remove them. It only hides the fact that belief is more complex than people are told. Letting people see and explore real disagreements helps them grow in understanding and choose their beliefs with care, not with fear.

## Labelling reformers as deviants or enemies

In many Muslim communities, people who suggest changes to Islamic rules or beliefs are quickly labelled as dangerous. They may be called deviants, enemies of the faith, or accused of trying to destroy Islam from within. This happens even when the reformer is a practising Muslim who wants to improve the religion or make it more just. Once someone is given one of these labels, others are warned not to listen to them. Their books may be banned, their talks blocked, and their ideas treated as a threat.

This reaction has a long history. Scholars who questioned common views or offered new ways to read the Qur'an were often attacked. Some were punished or driven out of their communities. In recent times, people who speak about gender equality, freedom of belief, or modern science in relation to Islam face strong backlash. They may be accused of copying Western ideas or working for non-Muslim powers. These kinds of attacks try to turn public opinion against them, without answering their arguments.



This way of thinking keeps the religion fixed in place. Any call for change is treated as betrayal. Instead of asking whether the reformer has a point, people are taught to fear them. A woman who says that Islamic law should treat men and women equally may be called a rebel. A teacher who says that harsh punishments no longer make sense may be called corrupt. The label comes first, and the conversation stops.

But reform is not always an attack. In every religion, people have raised questions and tried to make their faith better. They have asked whether old rules still make sense in a changing world. They have looked at the sources with fresh eyes. In Islam, this has also happened many times. Not all reformers are right, but shutting them down with names and threats only hides the real issues.

Calling someone a deviant does not prove they are wrong. It only avoids the hard work of debate. If Islam is strong, it should be able to face new questions. If it is just, it should welcome voices that call for fairness. Labelling reformers as enemies blocks truth and creates fear. It protects power, not faith.

## **Discouragement of independent thought among laypeople**

Ordinary Muslims are often told not to think too much about religion on their own. They are expected to follow scholars, memorise answers, and avoid asking deep questions. This is sometimes explained by saying that Islamic knowledge is too complex for the average person. Only trained experts are said to be able to understand the Qur'an and Hadith correctly. Because of this, laypeople are told that their job is to obey and not to question.

In many communities, if someone without formal training shares a different view or asks about difficult topics, they may be told to stay silent. A student who questions a rule may be warned that they are stepping outside the limits. A parent may tell a child not to question what the imam says. Even asking why a verse says one thing while life shows another can be treated as dangerous. People are often told to avoid thinking too much in case they fall into error or disbelief.

This discouragement creates a kind of mental block. Instead of helping people understand their faith, it teaches them to rely on others for answers. This keeps power in the hands of a small group. It also leads to fear. Many people learn to hide their doubts and follow rules they do not understand just to avoid trouble.

But belief should not be based on silence or fear. A religion that claims to be true must welcome honest thinking from everyone, not just a few experts. People should be able to read their own scriptures, ask their own questions, and reach their own conclusions. History shows that many important thinkers in Islam started as ordinary people who asked hard questions.

Telling people they are not allowed to think for themselves turns religion into a system of control. It also pushes people away. When they feel they cannot ask or

think, they may give up entirely. A strong belief should help people grow, not make them feel small. Independent thought is not a threat to faith. It is how real understanding begins.

## Use of fear to prevent apostasy or criticism

Fear is often used to stop Muslims from leaving the religion or speaking critically about it. From a young age, many are told that leaving Islam leads to hell forever. They are taught that questioning the Qur'an or the prophet is not just wrong but dangerous. In some countries, leaving Islam can mean losing your family, your job, or even your life. In others, it may not be illegal, but it still brings shame, rejection, and isolation.

In school or at home, a child who asks why Islam is true may be warned not to speak like that. A teenager who says they no longer believe may be told they are cursed or influenced by evil. Even among friends, someone who shares doubts may be pushed away or treated with suspicion. The fear is not only about punishment after death. It is also about losing the people you love and the life you know.

This fear stops many from asking questions. It teaches silence instead of thinking. A person who doubts may pretend to believe just to stay safe. Some live double lives, hiding their true thoughts from everyone around them. In extreme cases, people are forced to attend religious classes, get married, or even see religious healers to bring them back to faith. This is not persuasion. It is control.

Using fear to protect belief means that belief is no longer free. It becomes something people accept out of pressure, not out of conviction. A religion that depends on fear to survive is not confident in its truth. If Islam is true, it should be able to stand without threats. People should be free to stay or to leave. They should be able to speak without fear of being harmed or cast out.

Real faith does not grow through fear. It grows through trust, honesty, and choice. Punishing doubt or disbelief does not protect religion. It only hides the fact that people are scared to speak. And when fear rules, truth becomes harder to find.

## Religious policing in education and media

In many Muslim countries and communities, schools and media are closely watched to make sure they follow Islamic rules. This is often called religious guidance, but in practice it acts as a form of control. Students are taught what to think, not how to think. Books, films, songs, and websites are checked to make sure they do not question Islam or show anything seen as un-Islamic. If they do, they may be banned or censored. People who create or share such content can lose their jobs, be fined, or even be arrested.

In schools, the curriculum often includes daily religious lessons. Children are

taught to memorise verses from the Qur'an and follow the rules of Islam. Questioning the material is not encouraged. A student who asks why Islam is true, or how it compares to other religions, may be told to stop thinking that way. Teachers themselves may be afraid to speak freely. If they raise doubts or talk about ideas that are not approved, they risk being punished or reported.

In the media, television channels and newspapers often follow strict rules. Religious authorities may review content before it is shown. Topics like freedom of belief, gender equality, or critical views of religious history are avoided. If a writer or actor speaks openly about problems in the religion, they may be called disrespectful or accused of spreading false ideas. In some cases, they may be banned from working again.

This kind of control creates an environment where only one voice is allowed. It blocks honest conversation and keeps people from hearing new ideas. It also teaches fear. A child growing up in this system may learn early that asking questions leads to trouble. An adult may choose to stay quiet, even when they see things that do not make sense.

Religious policing in education and media does not protect faith. It protects power. A belief that is true should not need to silence other views. It should be able to face questions and offer answers. When people are only allowed to hear one side, they are not being guided. They are being kept in the dark. Real understanding comes from open thought, not from rules that block it.

## **Framing critical questions as attacks on faith**

When people ask difficult or critical questions about Islam, their questions are often seen not as honest seeking but as attacks on the religion itself. Instead of welcoming questions, some leaders and communities treat them as threats. A person who wonders why certain rules exist or why some stories seem strange may be accused of disrespecting God or insulting the prophet. This makes asking questions feel dangerous.

This reaction discourages open discussion. A student who raises a hard question in class might be told to stop or punished. A person who shares doubts online may be called an enemy of Islam or told they want to harm the community. Even family members may pressure someone not to speak out, warning that they are causing trouble or leading others away from the faith.

When questions are seen as attacks, people learn to hide their doubts. They may pretend to believe, even if they struggle inside. This creates fear and silence instead of growth. Faith becomes about protecting feelings rather than seeking truth.

But asking questions is natural and important. It helps people understand better and build stronger belief. If Islam is true, it should welcome honest inquiry, not fear it. Treating questions as attacks only blocks knowledge and makes faith weaker.

Real faith grows by facing hard questions with honest answers. It is not threatened by doubt. Calling questions attacks is a way to avoid dealing with problems, not a way to find truth. People deserve to ask and learn without being seen as enemies.

## **Exaggerated confidence in scholarly consensus**

Islamic teachings are often presented as settled and agreed upon by all scholars. People are told that there is a clear, united understanding of what Islam says and how it should be followed. This idea of scholarly consensus is used to stop debate and silence different opinions. When someone suggests a different view, they may be told that scholars have already decided and that their question is unnecessary or wrong.

In reality, scholars have often disagreed on many issues. From the earliest days of Islam, there have been different schools of thought, varied interpretations, and ongoing debate. On topics like law, prayer, and social rules, no single opinion has always been accepted by everyone. Even today, scholars continue to discuss and argue about many matters.

Claiming total agreement hides this diversity. It creates a false picture that Islam is simple and fixed. This stops people from exploring new ideas or adapting beliefs to changing times. It also gives too much power to a few voices while ignoring others.

When people are told that all scholars agree, they may feel pressure to accept what they hear without question. This can block learning and honest discussion. It also makes it harder to admit mistakes or consider reform.

A healthy religion allows room for different views and ongoing study. It respects the work of scholars but does not claim that all questions are solved. Pretending there is complete consensus is a way to protect authority, not to seek truth. Real understanding grows when different opinions are heard and tested, not when they are hidden.

## **Use of repetition and fear to maintain belief**

Belief in Islam is often kept strong through repeating the same ideas many times. People hear the same stories, prayers, and rules again and again from a young age. This repetition makes the beliefs feel very certain and natural. It also helps people remember what they are supposed to believe without needing to think deeply about it.

Along with repetition, fear is used to keep people following the religion. From early on, Muslims are told about the punishments of hell for those who leave Islam or break its rules. They hear about the rewards of paradise for those who obey. This makes belief a matter of avoiding fear and hoping for reward. People may follow the religion because they are afraid of what might happen if they do not.

Together, repetition and fear create a strong habit. Questioning or doubting becomes difficult because the mind is used to hearing only one side. If someone starts to wonder or disagree, they may feel scared or guilty. They may worry about losing family, friends, or their place in the community.

This approach works to keep belief stable, but it also stops people from thinking freely. It replaces curiosity with caution. A faith built on fear is not the same as a faith built on understanding. People may follow out of habit or fear, not because they truly believe.

True belief should come from knowing and choosing, not from being told the same thing over and over or being afraid of punishment. When fear controls belief, it can make people hide their doubts or live double lives. Repetition and fear protect the religion from questions but also keep people from finding real peace.

# Chapter 21

## A Critical Overview of Islam's Major Exaggerations

### Introduction

Islam is often shown as a perfect and complete faith for all people and all times. People are told it gives clear rules for how to live and that it does not change. But when we look closely, many stories and claims about Islam are exaggerated or shaped to keep people from asking questions. This chapter brings together the main issues found earlier to give a clearer picture of Islam's true nature and its effects on followers and society.

### Exaggerated Miracles and Supernatural Claims

Many stories in Islamic tradition describe miracles attributed to the prophet Muhammad. These include events like the moon splitting in two when he pointed at it, trees speaking to him or crying when he left, water flowing from his fingers to provide for companions, and food multiplying to feed large groups of people. These tales are commonly told in sermons, religious schools, and community gatherings as evidence of Muhammad's special status and divine support.

However, most of these stories come from sources written long after Muhammad's lifetime. Many originate in collections of hadith that scholars classify as weak or unreliable due to questionable chains of transmission or inconsistencies. The Qur'an itself mentions only a few miracles and does not include many of the well-known stories that later became part of Islamic folklore. The absence of these accounts in the earliest texts suggests that many miracle stories were developed later to enhance Muhammad's image.

When examining historical records from the time, no independent contemporary sources outside Muslim tradition mention extraordinary events like the moon splitting. Given that such an event would have been highly visible, it is notable that no non-Muslim writers from Arabia, Byzantium, Persia, or elsewhere report it. This lack of external evidence raises questions about the literal truth of these miracle stories.

Despite this, the stories remain widely accepted by many Muslims today and are

often taught to children as factual. Questioning them may be discouraged and seen as disrespectful or indicative of weak faith. This approach encourages belief based on tradition and authority rather than critical examination or evidence. It can make it difficult for believers who encounter conflicting information or who seek a more historical understanding of Muhammad and early Islam.

Understanding the role these miracle stories play is important. They provide followers with a sense of wonder and connection to the divine, but at the same time they blur the line between history and legend. This can lead to challenges when trying to separate faith from fact, especially in modern contexts where evidence and historical accuracy are valued.

## **Framing Doubt and Questioning as Moral Failings**

In many Islamic contexts, doubt about religious teachings or practices is often viewed not as a natural part of learning but as a moral or spiritual problem. Individuals who question aspects of Islam may be described as lacking faith, being influenced by negative forces, or showing arrogance. This framing discourages open inquiry and creates pressure to conform without question.

Such attitudes can make people hesitant to express doubts or ask questions, especially when they are young or lack formal religious education. For example, a student who wonders why a certain rule exists or why a story in the Qur'an seems difficult to understand might be told that true believers do not question or that their doubts come from pride or evil influences. This environment often leads individuals to hide their uncertainties to avoid judgement or exclusion.

In many communities, knowledge about Islam is seen as complex and accessible only to trained scholars. Laypeople are advised to accept established interpretations and avoid independent reasoning. This reduces opportunities for personal understanding and can prevent believers from engaging with their faith in a meaningful way.

Doubt and questioning are natural responses to uncertainty and are essential for growth in many fields of knowledge, such as science, philosophy, and history. However, in some religious settings, questioning is discouraged or punished, which can cause confusion, guilt, and isolation among those experiencing uncertainty.

Suppressing doubt limits the possibility of honest reflection and may contribute to a superficial or fragile belief that does not address deeper concerns. Encouraging thoughtful questioning and providing respectful answers could lead to a more informed and resilient understanding of faith.

## **Claims of Universality and Timelessness vs. Cultural Origins**

Islam is often described as a religion that applies to all people, in all times and

places. It is presented as offering rules and guidance that never change, providing answers to every situation regardless of culture or era. However, a closer examination reveals that many Islamic teachings and practices are deeply rooted in the specific culture and history of seventh-century Arabia.

The Qur'an was revealed in Arabic and includes references to desert life, camels, tribal customs, and social norms that reflect the environment and society of the Arabian Peninsula at that time. For example, laws about inheritance favour male relatives over female, and men are permitted to have multiple wives. Such rules made sense within the tribal society of the period but can be difficult to reconcile with modern ideas about equality and human rights.

Arabic holds a special status within Islam as the language of the Qur'an and prayer. This emphasis on Arabic reinforces the connection to Arab culture and often means that Muslims in non-Arab countries must learn Arabic to fully participate in religious practices. Local customs and languages in many Muslim-majority regions are sometimes discouraged or viewed as less authentic, leading to the suppression of diverse cultural expressions within Islam.

Denying that Islam has specific cultural origins can make it harder to adapt its teachings to different societies and changing times. Acknowledging that Islam grew out of a particular historical and cultural context does not diminish its significance. Instead, it highlights the importance of interpretation and adaptation when applying its principles today.

Understanding Islam's cultural roots can help believers navigate the challenges of practicing their faith in diverse modern contexts. It encourages openness to reinterpreting practices that were shaped by historical circumstances while preserving core spiritual values.

## **Fear and Social Control in Maintaining Belief**

Fear is often used as a tool to maintain religious belief and discourage criticism within many Muslim communities. Teachings about punishment in the afterlife for those who leave Islam or break its rules create a strong incentive to conform. People are told that apostasy leads to eternal punishment, and that questioning the faith endangers one's soul.

In some countries, leaving Islam is not only socially unacceptable but also illegal. Apostasy can lead to legal penalties, imprisonment, or worse. Even where it is not illegal, those who express doubts or reject Islam may face social rejection, family estrangement, or threats. The fear of these consequences can discourage honest questioning and encourage outward conformity.

Religious education and media in many Muslim-majority areas often reinforce orthodox views and censor dissenting opinions. Books, films, and discussions that challenge mainstream interpretations may be banned or heavily restricted. Those who raise doubts or advocate reform may be labelled enemies or heretics, isolating them further.



This environment of fear limits open discussion and critical thinking. Many believers comply outwardly while privately struggling with doubts or disagreements. Such pressure can affect mental well-being and cause people to hide their true thoughts or live double lives.

When belief is maintained primarily through fear of punishment or social exclusion, it may lack genuine conviction. Faith built on coercion or silence is fragile and may not withstand personal challenges or changing circumstances. Environments that allow safe questioning and dialogue are more likely to foster lasting and thoughtful belief.

## **Framing Non-Believers and Reformers**

In many Muslim contexts, those who do not believe in Islam or who call for changes within it are often described in negative terms. Non-believers may be seen as stubborn, blind, or deliberately rejecting the truth. Reformers who question established interpretations or advocate for new understandings may be labelled as enemies, deviants, or threats to the community.

This approach leaves little room for honest disagreement or discussion. Instead of engaging with the reasons behind doubt or calls for reform, such individuals are often dismissed or condemned. This discourages open debate and can isolate people who seek to explore different perspectives.

Throughout Islamic history, there have been diverse opinions and debates among scholars and followers. Differences in interpretation, law, and practice have always existed. However, in many communities today, there is pressure to present a unified and unchanging version of Islam, which suppresses alternative views.

The refusal to accept disagreement limits Islam's ability to respond to new challenges or adapt to changing societies. It also makes it difficult for individuals to reconcile their personal beliefs with official teachings, leading to inner conflict or disengagement.

Creating space for respectful disagreement and reform could help the religion remain relevant and meaningful for a wide range of people. Acknowledging diversity within Islam does not weaken it but reflects the complexity of its history and followers.

## **The Impact of Exaggerations and Controls**

The patterns of exaggeration, control, and suppression within Islam affect both individuals and communities in significant ways. Many believers carry the weight of fear, shame, and silence. They may struggle privately with doubts they feel unable to express. The pressure to conform and avoid questioning can lead to feelings of isolation or confusion.

Those who choose to leave Islam or openly question its teachings often face

serious social consequences. They may be rejected by family and friends, face discrimination, or even be threatened. This creates a climate where many hide their true beliefs or live double lives to avoid conflict.

On a broader level, communities lose opportunities for open dialogue and mutual understanding. The discouragement of critical thinking and disagreement means that many social and theological challenges go unaddressed. Young people, in particular, can find it difficult to balance their faith with modern knowledge and values, sometimes resulting in alienation or loss of belief.

The rich cultural diversity within Muslim societies is often overshadowed by strict adherence to uniform interpretations. This can diminish local traditions and reduce the variety of ways Islam is practiced around the world.

Understanding these impacts helps reveal how exaggerations and controls limit personal freedom and intellectual growth. It also shows why many individuals and groups call for more openness, tolerance, and reform within Islam.

## Conclusion

Islam often says it is perfect and true for all people and all times. But many stories told to make people believe, like miracles and signs, are exaggerated or made up. Some are not just mistakes but clear lies. These stories help bring in new followers and keep old ones in control.

Doubting or asking questions is seen as wrong or sinful. Thinking for yourself is discouraged. People who want change are called enemies. Fear is used to keep people quiet and obedient. This is not about free choice or truth. It is about control over what people think and do.

The real face of Islam is a system that cares more about power and control than honesty. It asks people to believe without proof, to fear questions, and to obey without arguing. This causes fear, shame, and silence. It stops people from learning and talking honestly.

If Islam wants to be more than a way to control people, it must face the truth openly. It must let people doubt, think, and change. Until then, many see it as a religion held together by lies and fear, not truth.

This book has shown these facts clearly. Seeing them is the first step to understanding Islam honestly. Only then can belief respect freedom and value truth over control.

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