

TOUGH QUESTIONS AND HONEST ANSWERS ABOUT THE WORLD'S
FASTEST-GROWING AND MOST-CONTROVERSIAL FAITH.

TOP 15 TOUGH QUESTIONS ON ISLAM

AHMED LOTFY RASHED

MY TEACHER WAS AHMED RASHED. WE SPEND WITH HIM A LOT OF TIME TO GO
THROUGH THE QURAN. AFTER THAT I START TO UNDERSTAND MUSLIMS MUCH BETTER.

-FORMER ISLAM-101 STUDENT

AHMED LOTFY RASHED

Top 15 Tough Questions on Islam



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Contents

<i>Preface</i>	v
<i>Introduction</i>	vi
I QUESTIONS ABOUT PROPHET MUHAMMAD	
1 Your Prophet Allowed Deceit	3
2 Muhammad and A'isha	5
3 The Prophet's Wives	8
II QUESTIONS ABOUT ISLAMIC BELIEFS	
4 Islam's Ultimate Goal	13
5 Islam - Static or Dynamic?	17
6 Salvation, Tolerance, and Guidance	21
III QUESTIONS ABOUT ISLAMIC HISTORY	
7 Religion of Peace?	31
8 Apostasy in Islam	33
9 Islam and Slavery	37
IV QUESTIONS ABOUT ISLAM AND MODERNITY	
10 Islam and Homosexuality	43
11 Why is Sharia and Islamic Law So Harsh?	46
12 Islamic Inheritance Law	49

V QUESTIONS ABOUT WOMEN'S ISSUES

13	Polygamy in Islam	53
14	Husbands and Wives	57
15	Women's Testimony	59

VI BONUS

16	QUESTIONS TO THE AUTHOR	63
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	<i>Final Thoughts</i>	66
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Preface

This book documents my experiences as a volunteer with WhyIslam.org. Ever since 2009, I have helped facilitate dialogue with many different people, answering questions about Islam and addressing misconceptions about my faith. While many of the conversations were simple question-answer sessions, quite a few were deep and engaging dialogues. I felt that it would be a great loss if these interactions remained out of the public sphere, so I wrote this book to share those conversations with people who might otherwise not have the ability or opportunity to talk with a Muslim about the beliefs of our faith.

Over the course of these dialogues, I compiled an extensive list of resources, documents, and other information that has benefited my conversation partners. I have written this book in part to share reliable, authentic, quality resources for those seeking information, and those who would like to know which sources are reliable and reputable in a simple way.

This booklet is a collection of the deepest and most-controversial questions I've encountered over the years.

My hope is that this book can be a small step towards better understanding and harmony.

Introduction

In the Name of God, the Most Gracious, the Ever-Merciful

What is Islam all about?

Islam is not a new religion. Rather, it is the same truth that God revealed through all His prophets to every people. For over a fifth of the world's population, Islam is both a religion and a complete way of life. Muslims are taught to be truthful, to be just, to help the needy, to honor their parents, and to maintain good relations with neighbors and relatives.

The Qur'an tells Muslims to say: *"We believe in God and what was revealed to us, and what was revealed to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the Tribes, and what was given to Moses and Jesus and to the Prophets from their Lord. We do not separate between them, and to Him we submit."* (3:84)

This is how Islam sees itself in relation to all other religions. The Message revealed to Muhammad is considered God's religion for humanity in its final form. Muslims view Muhammad as the final successor to Jesus, Moses, Abraham, and all the previous prophets. Muslims view the Qur'an as the final Testament from God to humanity. Just as God sent revelation to Moses and Jesus (peace be upon them), Muslims believe God sent revelation to Muhammad (peace be upon him) to confirm, correct, and complete all previous Scriptures.

The Qur'an says that God sent prophets to every community in history. These prophets were men of high moral character chosen by God to teach their people about their duty to God and to their fellow man. The Qur'an teaches that this duty was always "submission and devotion to God" and to

treat all God's creation with equality and compassion.

"Islam" is simply the Arabic word for this duty of "submission and devotion" to God.

"Muslim" is the Arabic word for "one who submits" to God and obeys Him.

Prophet Muhammad, like all the prophets before him, called people to believe in and worship One God, to believe in His Angels, to believe in His Prophets, to believe in His Revelations, to believe in the Day of Judgment, and to believe in Divine Decree and Destiny.

Prophet Muhammad, like all the prophets before him, called people to bear witness that there is no god but God and that he was God's Messenger, to pray regularly, to give charity regularly, and to fast as a form of self-purification. Prophet Muhammad, like Prophet Abraham before him, called people to make the pilgrimage to the Holy Sanctuary in Mecca, where the first house of worship dedicated to God Almighty was built.

What was the Prophet's message?

The Prophet Muhammad is defined in the Qur'an as *a Giver of glad tidings and a Warner*. What he preached can be summarized by these passages from the Qur'an:

Take not with God any other god; or you will end in disgrace and utter loss. Your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him, and that you be kind to your parents. Whether one or both of them attain old age in your life, say not to them a word of contempt, nor repel them, but address them in terms of honor. And out of kindness, lower to them the wing of humility, and say: "My Lord! Have mercy on them as they cared for me in childhood."

Your Lord knows best what is in your hearts: If you do deeds of righteousness, verily He is Most Forgiving to the oft-repentant. And give to the relatives their due rights, and to those in want, and to the wayfarer: But do not squander your wealth. Verily the wasters are brothers of the devils; and the Devil is ever ungrateful to his Lord.

And even if you turn away from them for your Lord's expected Mercy, speak to them a word of kindness. Do not hold your hand back to your neck, nor over-stretch it, for you would become blameworthy and destitute. Verily your Lord increases His

bounty to whomever He pleases, and He decreases it. Truly He is ever Aware and Watchful of His servants.

Kill not your children for fear of poverty: We shall provide for them and for you. Verily the killing of them is a great sin. And do not come near adultery: for it is shameful indecency, and an evil way.

And do not take life - which God has made sacred - except for justice. And if anyone is slain wrongfully, we have given his heir authority; but let him not transgress in retribution, for he has been helped. And do not come near to the orphan's wealth except to improve it, until he attains the age of full strength; and keep your promises, for every promise will be questioned. Give full measure when you measure, and weigh with a straight balance: that is fair and better in the end.

And do not follow what you do not know; for surely the hearing, the sight, and the heart shall all be questioned. Nor walk the earth with insolence: for you cannot split the earth asunder, nor reach the mountains in height. The evil of all such things is ever hateful with your Lord. This is wisdom, which your Lord has revealed to you. Take not with God any other god, lest you be thrown into Hell, blameworthy and rejected.(17: 22-39)

I

QUESTIONS ABOUT PROPHET
MUHAMMAD

Your Prophet Allowed Deceit

Q. How can I trust anything you say?? Your so-called “prophet” taught you guys the concept of Taqiyya. That you “believers” may deceive non-believers in any way, at any time, if it serves Islam. All this mainstream talk about coexistence is just pure lies if it helps the greater spread of Islam.

The Prophet (pbuh) taught, *“He who truly believes in God and the Last Day should speak True, Righteous speech or keep silent.”*

Taqiyya is a false narrative invented to keep the public in fear of Islam and Muslims. The motivation for propagating this false narrative are obvious: if you can convince people that a group is inherently dishonest, then people will believe that group is inherently dangerous. And if that group is believed to be inherently dangerous, then people will naturally demonize them and accept bigoted laws against them.

This fear-mongering tactic is not new. It was used against the Jews in Nazi Germany, and it was used against Japanese-Americans during WWII. The majority of people have never met a Muslim, so it is easy for the majority of people to accept this propaganda.

Now let us tackle the actual concept of Taqiyya. Historically, this term was used by classical Muslim jurists to allow a person who faces religious persecution to withhold the identity of their faith in order to avoid bodily

harm or death. The concept was particularly embraced by Shiites, who took steps to hide their religious beliefs from the majority Sunnis. Indeed, part of the reason for Sunni distrust of Shiites is because Sunnis regard Taqiyya as part of Shiite practice.

Khaled Abou El Fadl, professor of law at the University of California at Los Angeles, is a leading authority on Islam. He said, *"Yes, it is permissible to hide the fact you are Muslim [if a person is under threat] as long as it does not involve hurting another person. But there is NO concept that would encourage a Muslim to lie to pursue a goal. THAT IS A COMPLETE INVENTION. Any Muslim is raised on the idea that lying is a sin."*

Another expert on Islamic law, Noah Feldman of Harvard Law School, said, *"Taqiyya is dissimulation when one is being oppressed or tortured or having one's views banned, a bit like Jesuit dispensation to lie under oath when your life is in danger."*

Omid Safi, director of the Duke University Islamic Studies Center, said *"the Taqiyya conversation is today part and parcel of the Islamophobic attack against American Muslims, in which no matter what a Muslim says, he or she can't be trusted."*

In addition, consider that even Prophet Muhammad's bitterest enemies, such as Abu Jahl, Abu Sufyan, and Umaiyya all acknowledged that Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) never lied. In fact, when Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) first announced his prophethood to the Meccans, he asked them if they would believe his testimony. They all responded, *"Of course; we have never known you to tell a lie."* Prophet Muhammad's attachment to truth was so strict that he even instructed his followers to joke **only if** there was no lie in the joke.

In conclusion, Taqiyya is a term from classical Islamic law books that has been hijacked by anti-Muslim demagogues to silence the moderate majority of Muslims. That is what these conversations are for: to refute false narratives with facts, and to set the record straight - nothing more; nothing less.

Muhammad and A'isha

Q. I have often heard and read that Muhammad had sexual intercourse with a 9 year old girl when he was in his 50's. Can you please verify if this is true or not? I have previously asked other practicing Muslims this question and most try to change the subject or become defensive. Any honest response or clarification would be most appreciated.

Prophet Mohammad's youngest and only virgin wife was Aisha, the daughter of his life-long friend and companion. Her age at the time of marriage is NOT certain because there are conflicting reports (each of equal authenticity) as to how old Aisha was when she married Prophet Muhammad. The only thing that is certain is that their marriage was contracted about 2 years before the Muslims migrated to Medina and consummated about 1 year after.

According to the most prevalent Hadith reports, Aisha was born 8 years before the Migration, so she was six or seven years old when she was married to Muhammad and nine when the marriage was consummated.

However, other traditional sources disagree. Ibn Khallikan and Ibn Sa'd al-Baghdadi and Tabari all report that each of Abu Bakr's four children were born before the Prophet's first revelation (610 CE). This means Aisha was at least 12 in 622 CE when the Muslims migrated to Medina. This implies that Aisha was 13 or 14 when the marriage was consummated.

In another traditional source, Aisha **herself** reported that, *"I was a young*

girl (*jariya*)” when the 54th chapter of the Qur’an was revealed. It is known from other sources that the 54th Surah of the Qur’an was revealed **five years** before the Migration. Therefore, according to this report, Aisha had not only been born before the revelation of the referred chapter, but was actually a young girl at the time of this Surah’s revelation. The Arabic word “*jariya*” refers to a girl between 6 to 10 years old, so she would have been between age 12 to 16 when her marriage was consummated.

In another traditional source, Aisha is reported to have died in the 58th year after Migration when she was 70 years old. This implies she was 12 or 13 when the Muslims migrated to Medina and therefore she was 13-14 when her marriage was consummated.

Finally, other traditional sources report that Aisha’s elder sister, Asma, was ten years older than Aisha. It is reported in **Taqreeb al-Tehzeeb** as well as in Ibn Kathir’s **Al-Bidayah wal-Nihayah** that Asma died in the 73rd year after Migration when she was 100 years old. Now, obviously if Asma was 100 years old in the 73rd year after Migration, she should have been 27 or 28 years old at the time of Migration. If Asma was 27 or 28 years old at the time of hijrah, Aisha should have been 17 or 18 years old at that time. Thus, if Aisha got married in year about 1 year after Migration, she must have been between 18 to 19 years old when her marriage was consummated.

In conclusion, there are conflicting reports as to how old Aisha was when she married Prophet Muhammad. The sources point to age 9 or 13-14 or 16-19. Also, remember that birthdays and death days were not precisely recorded in this time period. Therefore, a person’s reported age was nothing more than a best-estimate, not a historical certainty.

Regardless of her disputed age, the marriage **could not** have been consummated until **AFTER** she reached puberty. In many cultures, women are or were married years before a marriage is consummated. The custom of early betrothal and marriage continued until the late 19th and early 20th century in much of the world, including Europe and North America, where there are still many states that allow for underage marriage.

What all the records agree upon is that Muhammad and Aisha had a loving and egalitarian relationship, which set the standard for reciprocity, tenderness

and respect enjoined by the Qur'an. Insights into their relationship, such as the fact they liked to drink out of the same cup or race one another, are indicative of a deep connection which belies any misrepresentation.

Therefore, even if she was in fact nine years old, this marriage is justified for the following reasons:

(a) She reached the full age of puberty. This is the standard around the world for tribal societies. To this day, the Bedouin tribes of Arabia, the tribes of Papua New Guinea, and the Yanomamo tribe of the Amazon Basin all have their girls marry as soon as they complete their first menstrual cycle. Tribal societies do not have "adolescence" as more developed societies do. They have "coming of age" which is between 9-12 for girls and 11-13 for boys. When boys and girls "come of age" they are considered adults and are allowed to participate in adult activities like sex and marriage.

Since Islam is for all people and all times, Islam does not impose an arbitrary minimum age for marriage. Instead it states that so long as the bride and groom are both physically mature (post puberty) and their families agree to the union, then that marriage is valid. Islam leaves the minimum marriage age to the custom of the society. Therefore, it is perfectly OK for a developed society to set that age according to their custom (16 or 18 usually) just as it is OK for a tribal society to set that age according to their custom (9 or 10 usually).

(b) The marriage happened 1,400 years ago, not today. It is wrong to project modern sensibilities on a time and place so far removed from our own. That is the fallacy of *presentism*, a cultural bias against past societies based on current norms. At that time, their marriage was not considered strange or blameworthy. . . the proof of this is that the enemies of the Prophet at that time did not criticize this marriage. They attacked Muhammad on many different issues, but they never criticized his marriage to Aisha.

(c) Aisha indicated how happy and honored she felt to be married to prophet Mohammad. If she was unhappy or miserable because of this marriage, she would not have narrated so many positive, instructive stories and sayings about him. She definitely would not have mentioned the love and tenderness that existed between them.

The Prophet's Wives

Q. Why did your Prophet have so many wives?!? He had even more than your Qur'an allowed!

By Dr. Jamal Badawi:

The Prophet exemplified the ideal of one wife. He was married to his wife Khadijah for 25 years and he only remarried after she died. His plural marriages later in his life were due to his unique mission to be an example for the Muslim community: Taking care of widows, reconciling families through marriage, freeing slaves, and educating his wives in the teachings of Islam.

Consider this. . . He married only one wife during his youthful, vigorous years, so it is far-fetched that the number of wives was due to personal designs or physical wants. Anyone who doubts the moral integrity of Muhammad on account of his marriages has to explain the following: Why did he start his first marriage at the age of 25 after having had no association with any female? Why did he choose a twice-widowed older lady who was 15 years senior to him? Why did he stay married only to her; not taking any additional wives until after her death?

Therefore. . . The matter is not so simple as to be interpreted in terms of manly love and desire for women. It calls for honest reflection. Had the Prophet (pbuh) been lustful, he would have opted to marry when he was in his prime youth, a period when desire for sex is at its peak. However, he married

several wives only after he had grown into old age, when desire for women is less.

So why DID the Prophet marry additional wives?

The first reason was to protect and support a widow. By marrying Sawda, he set the example of marrying elderly widows. By marrying Umm Salamah, he set the example of marrying widows with children. By marrying Maymunah, he set the example of marrying widows who initiated proposal.

The second reason was to cement bonds with close followers and other clans. By marrying Aisha, he cemented his relationship with Abu Bakr, his First Successor. By marrying Hafsa, he cemented his relationship with Umar, his Second Successor. By marrying Juwairiah, he gained the support of her clan and their allied tribes. By marrying Safiyah, he neutralized a great section of the hostile Jews of Arabia. By accepting Umm Habibah, he softened the heart of her father Abu Sufyan, and paved the way for his conversion to Islam.

The third reason was to abolish corrupt traditions. Before Islam, the Arabs forbade divorcees to remarry and treated adopted sons as real sons. By marrying Zaynab, the divorcee of his adopted son, Zaid, the Prophet showed that adoption does not make the adopted child a real son of the adopting father. He also showed that marriage is lawful for divorcees.

Incidentally, this very Zaynab was Muhammad's cousin, and had been offered to him for marriage before she was taken by Zaid. He refused her then, but after she was divorced he accepted her for the two legislative purposes: the lawful marriage of divorcees and the real status of adopted children. The story of this Zaynab has been associated in some minds with ridiculous fabrications as regards the moral integrity of Muhammad. These vicious fabrications are not even worth considering here (see Qur'an, 33:36,37,40)

In Conclusion, the Prophet's (pbuh) additional marriages were for these reasons: to protect and support a widow, to cement bonds with other clans, and to abolish corrupt traditions.

II

QUESTIONS ABOUT ISLAMIC BELIEFS

Islam's Ultimate Goal

*Q. I hear over and over that one of the goals of Islam is world domination, so at some point, it is to be the only religion left on Earth. The ends justify the means, so if it takes Jihad, so be it. This seems extremist to me and not mainstream. Is this goal true and how it is to be realized? I also see a term, *Dhimmitude*, that means all non-Muslims will have to surrender to true believers in order to be allowed to live. Is that an accurate definition??*

World domination is **NOT** the 'goal' of Islam. The mission of Prophet Muhammad was not political, social, or economic reform, although such reforms were a logical consequence of his mission. His mission was not the unity of a nation and the establishment of an empire, although the nation did unite and vast areas came under one government. His mission was not the spread of a civilization or culture, although many civilizations and cultures developed. His mission was only **to deliver the Message of God to all the peoples of the world and to invite them to submit to God alone, while being the foremost among those who submitted.**

Having said that, the Prophet *did* predict that eventually Islam would reach the farthest regions of the earth. However, this is just a prediction of how far Islam would spread. It is not a command to eliminate other religions. The Muslim sees himself as an ambassador of God, reaching out to all people and inviting them to worship God and work righteousness on Earth. Those who

accept are welcomed as new brothers and sisters. Those who reject are free to continue living with their old faith. A person who denies God still has all the rights to **life, wealth, family, honor, and intellect** that a Muslim has. These are fundamental human rights in Islamic law, regardless of whether a human being believes or disbelieves.

As for Jihad, this is the most misunderstood concept in our faith. The word Jihad comes from the root word ‘jahada,’ which means ‘struggle.’ At the individual level, jihad primarily refers to the inner struggle of being a person of virtue and submission to God in all aspects of life. It does not mean “holy war.” Jihad on the battlefield, in the Islamic perspective, is the last resort, and is subject to stringent conditions (no harming non-combatants, no demolishing buildings, no cutting down crops, no killing of prisoners).

The Qur’an says: *To those against whom war is made, permission is given to fight because they are wronged, and verily God is their strongest helper. Those who have been driven from their homes unjustly, for no cause except that they say, “Our Lord is God.” If God did not check one set of people with another, many monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques—in which the Name of God is remembered often— would have been leveled.* -Qur’an (22:39-40)

Moreover, the Qur’an says: *And why should ye not fight in the cause of God and of the oppressed Men, women, and children whose cry is, “Our Lord! Rescue us from this town whose people are oppressors; and raise for us from Thee one who will protect; and raise for us from Thee one who will help!* -Qur’an (4:75)

Thus the conditions of physical Jihad are clearly defined in the Qur’an. Regardless of how legitimate a cause may be, Islam does **not** condone the killing of innocent people. Terrorizing the civilian population, whether by individuals or states, can **never** be termed as jihad and can **never** be reconciled with the authentic teachings of Islam. The ends **NEVER** justify the means in Islam.

The Quran says: *God does not forbid you, regarding those who have not fought you for your faith, nor expelled you from your homes, that you should be kindly to them, and act justly towards them; surely God loves the just.*

God only forbids you as to those who have fought you in religion's cause, and expelled you from your habitations, and have supported in your expulsion, that you should take them for friends. And whosoever takes them for friends, those are the evildoers. Quran (60:8-9)

So God REQUIRES that Muslims treat non-Muslims who do not attack Muslims or drive them from their homes with goodness and equality.

Regarding your last question, *Dhimmitude* is an Islamophobic term that was invented to scare people away from even learning about Islam. As mentioned before, a person who rejects Islam still has all the rights to life, wealth, family, honor, and intellect like a Muslim.

The actual Arabic word is *Dhimmi*, which means “protected.” Islam teaches that all able-bodied men are religiously required to defend their community’s homes, lives, and faith by serving in the armed forces of the nation. However, since Islam does NOT force anyone to be Muslim, non-Muslims living in an Islamic land pay a compensation tax called *jizya* in lieu of military service. Why are they called “protected” citizens? They benefit from the army protecting them without joining the army itself.

The rate of *jizya* is less than the religiously mandated tax on Muslims to support the poor. If any able-bodied non-Muslim man wishes to join the Muslim armed forces, then he can do so and no *jizya* is due from him. There have been several non-Muslim communities (mainly Christian Arab tribes), who chose to serve in the army instead of paying the *jizya* tax. In conclusion, men are expected to defend their nation by serving in the armed forces. If a non-Muslim man does not want to contribute to the defense of the state with his efforts, he is required to contribute to the defense of the state with his money. Women, children, handicapped, and elderly persons do not pay this tax because they are not required to serve in the military.

Check out these sites if you want to see what unbiased non-Muslims say about Islam and Muslims:

<http://www.islamicity.com/Mosque/aboutislam.htm>

As for the allegation that Muslims do not condemn terror attacks, check out this link:

http://theamericanmuslim.org/tam.php/features/articles/muslim_

[voices_against_extremism_and_terrorism_part_i_fatwas/0012209](http://www.voices_against_extremism_and_terrorism_part_i_fatwas/0012209)

And this link:

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ali-eteraz/the-myth-of-muslim-condem_b_67904.html

An average of 20,000 American citizens accept Islam each year. Over 50% of these converts are women. If Islam really is the way the fear-mongers claim it is, why would these law-abiding, US born-and-raised people accept Islam? Why else except that they found a truth beyond the lies and slander that is filling the media space. They found that rather than oppressing women, Islam is a Woman's Magna Carta (Yvonne Ridley, 2002). Rather than a religion of hatred and strife, Islam is a way to achieve inner and societal peace (Kenneth L. Jenkins, 1986).

There is much misinformation and propaganda against Islam these days, so it is natural for you to feel distrust and even hate. **We are here to set the record straight; but we can only do so if you are willing to listen to our side of the story.** REMEMBER: With dialogue comes understanding.

Islam - Static or Dynamic?

Q. Religions evolve as time passes. Most religions have, but why is Islam still struggling to modernize in today's secular and largely diverse world?

The assumption is that since other religions have changed over time, Islam should change over time. We refute this understanding because Islam is not just a religion but a complete guide for living a life that is in harmony with the Creator and in tune with all of His creation. If we believe that there is such a thing as absolute truth and absolute values, then we must also believe that God would champion such values.

The principles, values, and fundamental rulings should be constant; valid for all times and all peoples. It is only the implementation of the principles or the auxiliary rulings that should be open to change. Otherwise, how can we know we are still walking on God's Guidance?

There is some misconception that re-interpreting Islamic Law stopped back in the Middle Ages. This is totally false. Colonial domination and rapid technological change forced Islamic scholars across the board to revisit many previous rulings to make them relevant to their times. Re-interpreting Islamic Law is alive and well in this day and age, even in Saudi Arabia. So what are the conditions where re-interpreting Islamic Law would be seen as legitimate and not just cherry-picking and wishful-thinking?

Let us start with the full passage in the Qur'an on the subject:

Surely, for men and women who have surrendered [to God]—believing men and believing women, obedient men and obedient women, truthful men and truthful women, patient men and patient women, humble men and humble women, charitable men and charitable women, fasting men and fasting women, men and women who guard their chastity, men and women who are ever mindful of God—God is ready with forgiveness and an immense reward. It is not fitting for a believing man or woman to exercise any choice in his or her own affairs once God and His Messenger have reached a decision upon them. Anyone who disobeys God and His Messenger is in manifest error. (33:35-36)

Now let us look at a well-known, authentic saying of the Prophet:

The Prophet sent Mu'adh to Yemen and asked him: "How will you judge the cases?" He replied: "I will judge according to the Book of Allah." The Prophet asked: "But if you do not get anything there, what will you do?" He said: "I will refer to the Sunnah of the Prophet." The Prophet asked: "But if you do not get it even there, what will you do?" He replied: "I will exercise my judgment." Hearing this, the Prophet patted Mu'adh on the shoulder and said: "Praise be to Allah who has guided the Messenger of His Messenger to what pleases His Messenger."

So we go to the Qur'an first, then the Sunnah, then the understanding of the Companions, and then finally the personal interpretation of a qualified scholar. So what does this entail? There are many classifications of texts that are used to see if a decisive ruling has been stipulated by the Qur'an, the Sunnah, or the Companions. I will mention only the top three:

1. Conditional vs. Unconditional
2. Specific vs. General
3. Implicit vs. Explicit

Without going into too much gory details, if the text of the Qur'an, or the Hadith, or the saying of a Companion can be shown to be Explicit or General or Unconditional, then the ruling of the text is DECISIVE and therefore not open to further interpretation (as per the above verse). Furthermore, if the text-in-question is Conditional or Specific and it can be shown that the situation-in-question meets the Conditions or Specification of the text-

in-question, then again the ruling of the text is DECISIVE and so not open to further interpretation. Only if both of these if-statements are false can a scholar legitimately make a ruling that is different from previous rulings.

We will give three examples for better understanding.

1. Adultery is Explicitly, Generally, and Unconditionally denounced in both Qur'an and Sunnah. Therefore, no matter how many people would like to indulge in adultery and fornication, this act is a sinful and condemned action in Islam. No amount of "culture" or widespread acceptance can change its ethical and moral status in the eyes of God and God-fearing men as something inappropriate for humans to do.

2. Alcoholic drinks are Explicitly and Conditionally prohibited in the Qur'an and Sunnah. The only Condition where this prohibition is relaxed is the case of extreme need or coercion. So if a person is dying of thirst in the desert and he stumbles across a bottle of wine, there is no sin on him if he drinks it to quench his thirst. If someone forces him to drink, again there is no sin on him. However, in the absence of these qualifying conditions, then consumption of alcoholic drinks are ethically and morally inappropriate in the eyes of God and God-fearing men, regardless of its popularity.

3. Cigarettes are not mentioned in either Qur'an or Sunnah. When they became available in the early 17th century, Islamic scholars looked at similar substances to decide whether they were permissible. At that time, the closest thing that resembled them was raw garlic and onion: they left a bad odor in one's mouth after consuming them. So scholars gave them the same ruling: "discouraged," it is better not to smoke, but no sin if you do.

In the latter half of the 20th century, research emerged about the toxicity and danger these products pose to smokers and people around smokers. So Islamic scholars revisited the rulings. Why? Because the conditions that were known at the time of the first ruling were no longer true. It was now known that cigarettes are harmful, so their analogy is no longer to bad-smelling but benign garlic and onions. Since the Prophet said, "Do not harm and do not be harmed," they now have the same ruling as poison: "prohibited."

In conclusion, the constancy of Islamic Law is a benefit, not a liability. It allows Muslims the world over and throughout the centuries to maintain a

TOP 15 TOUGH QUESTIONS ON ISLAM

common cultural identity and set of cultural norms that bring out the best in individuals and societies. This is because we believe that God designed all ethical guidelines and rules for our individual and collective benefit.

Salvation, Tolerance, and Guidance

Q. The Qur'an is clear about the punishment that Allah has in store for non-Muslims just on the basis of their faith. By these verses, a person of the standing of Mahatma Gandhi or Mother Teresa will go to hell just because they believe in gods other than Allah. Why is it that their deeds are not taken into account? According to [other] verses, it is Allah himself that has sealed the hearts, ears and eyes of the disbelievers and then sends them to burning hell for their faith, how does this reconcile with the premise of a merciful and loving god?

To begin, we remind ourselves that Allah is simply the Arabic word for “The God”, so I will use Allah and God interchangeably in our discussion. I mention this so there is no misunderstanding. Now then, there are three separate topics that this question addresses:

- A. Why is Islam called a religion of tolerance?
- B. Why is it that the good deeds of disbelievers are not taken into account?
- C. How is it fair for God to punish disbelievers when He says that He leads them astray?

We will address these topics in separate sections, God-willing.

TOLERANCE

This topic confounds two separate issues as if they were related or inter-dependent.

1. To say that “Islam is a religion of tolerance” means Islam teaches its followers to be fair, kind, and cordial with followers of other religions.

2. To say that “God will punish those who died as disbelievers” means Islam teaches that God has criteria for how He will judge humanity and that the one most-critical criteria is correct /belief in God.

These two statements are not contradictory. I can easily say “*God will punish disbelievers in the Here-After,*” and at the same time say “*God has commanded us to treat disbelievers with excellence and fairness in the Here-and-Now.*”

Islam teaches that people will be resurrected body and soul to be judged by God according to their faith and deeds. Paradise is for those who dedicated their worship only to God, who continuously sought His forgiveness, and who lived moral lives according to the authentic teachings of their Prophet and Scripture. Hell is the final dwelling place of those who denied God, worshiped other beings besides God, or rejected the call of the prophets.

Hell is also the temporary abode of those who had faith, but led sinful, unrepentant lives. This is because the Qur’an says: **Surely, God will not forgive the ascribing of partners to Him. But He forgives whoever He will for anything other than that. Whoever ascribes partners to God has strayed far indeed. (4:116)**

So those who had faith, but led sinful, unrepentant lives will be punished in Hell until their sins have been purged and their souls have been purified. Once this purification is complete, by God’s mercy they will be taken out of Hell and admitted into Paradise.

This is because the Qur’an tells us that the whole REASON why God created people on this earth was so they could know God. This worldly life is just a test to see who would seek to know God; and from this knowledge, love God; and from this love, worship and serve Him on HIS terms not ours. Therefore, a person who denies God or refuses to worship Him as He has commanded has failed to fulfill his purpose of existence.

Having said all that, a person who denies God still has all the rights to life, wealth, family, honor, and intellect that a Muslim has. These are fundamental

human rights in Islamic law, regardless of whether a human being believes or disbelieves. So a disbeliever has the right to “live their lives;” however, Islam teaches that the final state of such a person is NOT the same as one who believes.

The Qur'an says:

There is no compulsion in faith... (2:256)

If your Lord had so wished, all would have believed; will you then force people to believe? (10:99)

Say, “This is Truth from your Lord”: Let he who wishes believe, and let he who wishes reject... (18:29)

The Prophet said, *“Whoever hurts a non-Muslim at peace with us hurts me, and he who hurts me offends God”* and, *“He who hurts a non-Muslim at peace with us, I am his adversary; and I shall be his adversary on the Day of Judgment”* and, *“Anyone who kills a non-Muslim who has a pact of peace with us will not smell the fragrance of Paradise.”*

From this, Islamic scholars are unanimous that the life, property, and honor of non-Muslims who do not attack Muslims or drive them from their homes are as sacred as the life, property and honor of Muslims.

That is what tolerance means. It means that even though I believe that what you are doing is wrong and that you will be held to reckoning because of it, I still treat you with good words and kind acts. God alone judges men, so God alone has the right to punish men for their disbelief in Him. This is not intolerance; this is God's right as *The Law-Giver* to make commandments and His right as *The Reckoner* to punish people in the Here-After for failing to obey His commandments.

In conclusion, the issue of Here-After punishment of disbelievers by God is separate and independent from the issue of righteous treatment towards disbelievers by believers. Therefore, Islam IS a religion of tolerance because it EXPLICITLY teaches in both Qur'an and Hadith that Muslims must treat non-Muslims who do not commit aggression with honor, fairness, and excellence.

SALVATION

What are the requirements of salvation? Why is it that even a good person

would go to hell for being an atheist or a believer in Trinity or a believer of multiple gods?

We have already said in the previous section that God has rights, and His most important right is that we worship Him and only Him. This is the first commandment: **“Thou shalt have no other gods before God.”** This is the creed of Islam and of all the Prophets before Muhammad: *“O People, know that your god is One God, and He has decreed that you worship none but Him.”*

We start the new discussion with the factoid that the good deeds of the disbelievers ARE in fact, taken into account. The key to paradise is belief in God as ONE, without partners.

With that key of right behavior towards the **Creator**, you are allowed to enter paradise. *Then* the right/wrong behavior you had towards the **creation** will determine your final level of reward in paradise. More right behavior means more reward. More wrong behavior means less reward. But God alone knows this and God alone decides.

Without that key of right behavior towards the **Creator**, you are not allowed to enter paradise, so you enter hell. *Then* the right/wrong behavior you had towards the **creation** will determine your final level of punishment in hell. More right behavior means less punishment. More wrong behavior means more punishment. But God alone knows this and God alone decides.

As for those who never met a prophet, let me show you a quote from Dr. Sherman Jackson, a well-known Muslim scholar at the University of California. He translated many classical books and is well respected in the field. In his introduction to Imam Al-Ghazali’s famous book **Theological Tolerance**, Dr. Jackson explains this issue as follows:

Al-Ghazali goes on, however, to insist that God’s mercy will encompass non-Muslims as well, including “most of the Christians of Byzantium and the [non-Muslim] Turks of the age.” These people he divides into three categories: 1) those who never heard so much as the name Muhammad; 2) those who heard his name and had access to concrete and authentic information about his life and mission; 3) those who heard of him but received wrong, insufficient, or misleading information about this life and mission. According to Al-Ghazali, it is only those of the second category, who came into reliable and concrete information about Muhammad and,

in a spirit of defiance, persist in rejecting his prophet-hood, who will dwell forever in Hellfire. This is because only such people can be said to be guilty of deeming the Prophet to be a liar. As for those of the first and third categories, these will be covered by God's all-encompassing mercy. For, ultimately, their non-acceptance of Muhammad's prophet-hood is free of defiance and attributable to circumstances beyond their control.

So this is the condition for eternal hell-fire. Otherwise, they may serve time in hell and after that— by God's mercy —they may or may not be released and admitted to paradise. In these cases, only God knows their final destination.

So when the Qur'an says in (3:85) that the only acceptable religion is "Islam," it is referring to the people who actually met the Prophet Muhammad during his lifetime or who received accurate, comprehensive information about the Prophet's message but rejected the call. The occasion of this revelation was when the Prophet was debating with a delegation of Christian priests near the end of his life.

However, when the Qur'an says in (2:62) that previous believers, Jews, Christians, and Sabians will have their reward, it is referring to people who never met the Prophet either due to time or distance. The occasion of this revelation was when one of the Prophet's companions expressed his worry that the Christians he knew back in Persia told him another Prophet would appear in Arabia but they died before they could travel with him.

GUIDANCE

What is the nature of human free will? What is the nature of God's Power over and Knowledge of His creatures? Why is it that the Qur'an mentions Guiding and "Misguiding?"

People are responsible for their actions. If this were not the case, then punishing the wicked would be injustice and rewarding the righteous would be a joke. God does not jest, and He did not create this world as some form of amusement. In addition, it is written many many times in the Qur'an that "Never is God unjust to His creatures." So we conclude that human free will is genuine.

God's power and knowledge over His Kingdom is absolute. Nothing

happens without his Knowledge, Permission, and Power. For this reason, people and events are called “*asbaab*” which is Arabic for “causes” but God is called “*al-musabbib*” which is Arabic for “the causer.” So in this sense, He is the ultimate decider of what happens on earth. However, His decision takes into account the free will, intention, and agency of human beings. For this reason the Qur’an mentions that God has *allowed* people to go astray.

It is NOT the case that God is the active cause of their disbelief and hypocrisy. Rather God is Sublime and gives everyone what they are striving for. He who exerts effort to get closer to God will be guided and helped and his repentant urges will be amplified. He who exerts effort to turn away from God will be left to his choice and his sinful urges will be amplified.

This concept of evil intentions collapsing on the perpetrator is a common theme in the Qur’an. The point is that God takes the evil intentions of deceivers and plotters and the misguided and repays them like for like. So God does NOT deceive Man, but he allows those men who deceive others to have a false sense of security regarding God’s Judgment. God does NOT plot against Man, but He allows evil plots to fall in on the heads of the evil plotters. God does NOT misguide Man, but He allows those who stubbornly cling to misguidance to continue going further and further astray.

So those who persistently disbelieve and do evil on earth will find their destiny forever dark. This is why the Qur’an says: **And remember, Moses said to his people: “O my people! why do ye vex and insult me, though ye know that I am the apostle of Allah (sent) to you?” Then when they went wrong, Allah let their hearts go wrong. For Allah guides not those who are rebellious transgressors. (61.5)**

However, anyone who sincerely turns to God will find God responsive and forgiving. This is why it is mentioned in the end of 42.13: **Allah chooses to Himself those whom He pleases, and guides to Himself those who turn to Him.** It is also written in 13.27: **The Disbelievers say: “Why is not a sign sent down to him from his Lord?” Say: “Truly Allah leaves to stray whom He will; But He guides to Himself those who turn to Him in penitence.”**

Finally, it is written that **“God does not desire Disbelief for his Ser-**

vants,” so we know that any who transgress will be allowed to transgress by their own free will, not by God “forcing” them to transgress and then punishing them for that transgression.

III

QUESTIONS ABOUT ISLAMIC HISTORY

Religion of Peace?

Q. I have heard Islam referred to as the 'religion of peace' by Muslims. I understand that Islam's teachings, as well as much of the Qur'an, promotes peace, social justice, etc. Yet Islam was spread through wars, occupations, conquests of nations and kingdoms. I don't understand how it can be claimed that it is peaceful, when it was spread through such violent means. There are passages alluding to ambushing polytheists (please correct me if I'm wrong), which is not indicative of self-defense.

Jihad is spiritual in general and physical in particular. Jihad means "struggle" so the general meaning is "struggling" against the evil temptations the self and of Satan. However, in particular cases related to social justice and establishing security, it also means speaking out against oppression and injustice. This is known as "Jihad of the Tongue" or "Jihad of the Pen." However, Islam does permit its followers to bear arms to and mobilize armies for the community's defense, to stop aggression and persecution, and to establish security in the land so people can live without fear.

The verses that mention "ambush" and "preparing to attack" the disbelievers was revealed in the context of the Meccan pagans who had signed a peace treaty with the Muslims of Medina and then broke it by ambushing one of the non-Muslim tribes that had allied with Medina. This act of treachery is why God commanded the Muslims of that time to go on the offensive

and fight these pagans until they were subdued. These verses are not a general commandment because elsewhere in the Qur'an it says, **"If the enemy sues for peace, then incline to peace."** Therefore, Muslim scholars understand that in general, a Muslim political body should honor all overtures to cease-fires and peace agreements, and that only in specific cases of previous treachery does the Muslim authority have the option of "ambush" and "preparing to attack."

Sheikh Hânî al-Jubayr, former judge of the Jeddah Supreme Court of Saudi Arabia, has said the following:

If the non-Muslim country did not attack the Muslim one nor mobilize itself to prevent the practice and spread of Islam, nor transgress against mosques, nor work to oppress the Muslim people in their right to profess their faith and decry unbelief, then it is not for the Muslim country to attack that country. Jihad of a military nature was only permitted to help Muslims defend their religion and remove oppression from the people. The Persians and Romans did in fact start aggression against Islam and attack the Muslims first. The Chosroe of Persia had gone so far as to order his commander in Yemen specifically to kill the Prophet (peace be upon him). The Romans mobilized their forces to fight the Prophet (peace be upon him), and the Muslims confronted them in the Battles of Mu'tah and Tabûk during the Prophet's lifetime.

The early Muslims lived in a time when the default status of countries was to be "at war" until there was a formal "peace treaty." We now live in a world where the default status is to be "at peace" until there is a "declaration of war." It is not Islam that was spread by violence; rather it is the Muslim empire that spread this way. What I mean is that we must not confuse the political expansion of the Arabs by warfare with the religious expansion of Islam. The political powers of the time lived by maxim "conquer or be conquered" and the Muslim powers lived the same way. They were playing the same "Great Game" as the rest of the civilizations around them.

Apostasy in Islam

Q. Why does Islam sentence apostates to death?

This interpretation has NO support from the Qur'an and only tenuous support from the Prophet's sayings. Al-Azhar University—which was and continues to be one of THE most influential authority in Sunni Islam— issued a fatwa confirming this in 1958.

When the Ottoman Empire united the Islamic empire under a single leadership, it officially abolished any death penalties for apostates that were in place at the time. At this point, it wasn't widely practiced at all, but the Ottomans made it basically illegal. The Caliph—who was the ultimate authority at the time— pointed out that the Qur'an didn't support this punishment. Close inspection of relevant Hadith, and a clear understanding of how they interconnect with one another, showed there is no support there either.

At the time, the Ottomans were attempting to reform old practices and bring Islam back to what it was intended to be without cultural interference. The National Law of 1869, for example, guaranteed all citizens equality under the law regardless of ethnicity or religion. Basically, they embraced change and had open minds. When WWI happened, the Ottoman Empire was broken up and the path to enlightened reform and open-mindedness was closed with their defeat. The fallout of this interrupted reformation

is still felt today. Extremist and fundamental Muslims began to take on a heavy political ideology that was largely anti-western due to the effects of colonialism, among other things.

Rejecting the laws mandated by the Qur'an is not necessary for reform to occur in Islam. Rather, a change in UNDERSTANDING is what is needed. The Qur'an never states that apostates should be killed. That's the bottom line. There is a verse that states **Let there be no compulsion in religion: truth is distinct from error (2:256)**. Every Muslim knows this verse. Clearly inconsistent with the idea of killing apostates. God is telling us that people have free will and freedom of choice.

Here's an example of the actual practice of religious choice: a man named Hussein bin Salim bin Awf had two daughters. Both of them were Christians. He attempted to persuade them to Islam but they declined. He then went to the Prophet (pbuh) and asked him for permission to force his daughters into Islam. This verse was revealed from this instance and forbade parents from forcing their children into a specific religion.

Further, the Qur'an states, **And if your Lord had pleased, surely all those who are in the earth would have believed; will you then force the people until they believe? (10:99)**. God is saying that people have no authority here. More importantly, this verse informs that not everyone will believe, and that it is incredulous to force belief. Muslims should also worry about themselves and their own relationship with God, not another person's choices: **And had God willed, He could have made you all one community, but He leaves astray whom He wills and guides whom He wills. But you shall certainly be called to account for what you used to do (16:93)**. These phrases are repeated many, many times in the Qur'an — No one but God can bring people into faith. So why would they be killed for leaving?! How does that possibly make sense? And yet another verse: **Say: This is the Truth is from your Lord; so let him who please believe and let him who please disbelieve (18:29)**. And yet another verse: **So remind. You are only a reminder. You have no control over them (88:21-22)**.

There are people during the time of the Prophet (pbuh) that believed then disbelieved and believed again (and maybe disbelieved again). Clearly,

people were entering and leaving the religion of their own free will during the Prophet's (pbuh) time. God does not say to kill these people. Rather, God says, **Those who believe then disbelieve, again believe and again disbelieve, then increase in disbelief, Allah will never forgive them nor guide them to the Way (4:137).** The punishment is in the afterlife. Period. It's God's punishment, not an earthly one.

So where did this idea come from? What were the exact words of the Prophet that led some scholars to believe that apostasy should be punished by death? Do we have any other authentic sayings of the Prophet that are actual direct quotes? Yes we do. He said, *"The blood of a Muslim, who confesses that there is no God but God and that I am His Apostle, cannot be shed except in three cases: (1) In penalty for murder, (2) a married person who commits adultery and (3) the one who reverts from Islam (apostates) and leaves the community"* (Sahih Bukhari, Vol. 12, Book ad-Diyat, Number 6878, p.209).

So there are 3 instances in which a Muslim can be killed: (1) murdering another, (2) committing adultery, and (3) apostasy combined with LEAVING THE COMMUNITY. Leaving the community can be further explained when we look even closer at the issue in another Hadith: *"The blood of a Muslim, who confesses that none has the right to be worshiped but God and that I am His Apostle, cannot be shed except in three cases: (1) a married person who commits adultery; he is to be stoned and (2) a man who went out fighting against God and His Messenger; he is to be killed or crucified or exiled from the land and (3) a man who murders another person; he is to be killed on account of it"* (Sunan Abu Dawud, Vol. 4, Number 4353, p. 126).

So we see that "leaving the community" refers to a man who changed sides and fought against the Muslims; this is basically committing treason. Killing a Muslim outside of these boundaries is obviously going outside of the Prophet's (pbuh) orders. These Hadith are so similar with 3 reasons listed with 2 of them identical, the third reason is clarified with the second Hadith. There are only 3 legitimate reasons for the death penalty, and apostasy is not one of them *unless* they apostatize to wage war against the Muslim community.

At the time of the Prophet (pbuh), there was serious conflict between the pagans in Mecca and the Muslims in Medina. Some Muslims apostatized

because they had no desire to fight against their own families and would rather fight with them. Others apostatized because they felt they couldn't possibly win due to the number and force they were facing. The bigger problem were those who joined the Muslims falsely with the intention to abandon them and fight against them in their greatest time of need. The Qur'an says: **A section of the People of the Book say: 'Believe in the morning what is revealed to those who believe, and reject it at the end of the day, so they may themselves turn back (Qur'an, 3:72).**

The people who were executed for apostasy were not peaceful. They had deadly intentions that amounted to high treason against the nation. The Prophet (pbuh) was the leader of that community and nation. Apostasy was connected with defection and treason here. It was not simply changing one's mind, rather it was joining the enemy (the Meccans).

Ultimately, neither conservative scholars or Islamophobes who love to cling to this issue can make a case of killing apostates without ignoring those verses of the Qur'an which calls for tolerance and forbids compulsion. I am not sure how this is unclear to people but alas it seems it is. We can also point out the fact that there was a Bedouin who apostatized in the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad, leaving the Islamic city-state of Medina; he abandoned both his religious and national identity (as the two were fused back then). Instead of punishing the man, the Prophet Muhammad simply replied by saying: *"Medina is like a furnace: it expels its impurities and brightens its good."* (Sahih Al-Bukhari, Vol.9, No.316, pp.241)

If the "revealed" prescribed punishment for apostasy was death, the Prophet (pbuh) would have been the first to carry out the punishment. In fact, the Prophet did not even prescribe any punishment against that Bedouin, nor send anyone to arrest him as an "apostate," nor imprison him, nor demand him to recant. In addition, vigilante justice was explicitly forbidden by the Prophet, so Muslims who take it on themselves to execute apostates are actually disobeying God and His Prophet.

Islam and Slavery

Q. Why didn't Islam abolish the institution of slavery?

1. Prophet Muhammad urged Muslims to liberate slaves:

"Whoever frees a slave, Allah will set free from Hell every limb of his body for every limb of the slave's body." [Sahih Muslim: Book 20, Hadith 28]

2. He taught that slaves should be treated them with kindness:

*"They are your **brethren**. Allah has put them under your authority; so he who has his brother under his authority must feed him from what he eats and clothe him with what he wears, and not impose on him work which is too much for him; but if he does so, he must help him."* [Sunan Abi Dawud: Book 43, Hadith 386]

3. He taught that abusing a slave was a SIN requiring freeing that slave:

"He who slaps his slave or beats him, the expiation for it is that he should set him free." [Sahih Muslim: Book 27, Hadith 46]

4. If a slave asks for his freedom, the believer is obligated to do so. He must also help him with funds in order to prepare him to be a free man: **"And if any of your slaves ask you for a deed in writing (for emancipation), then grant it to them; If you know good in them: give them something out of what Allah has given to you."** (Qur'an 24:33)

5. Muslims who were unable to marry free women because of financial limits were given permission to marry their slave women *with her consent*. If she give birth to a child from this union, that child was automatically free,

so slave-status was not inherited. Also, after the husband's death, she also becomes automatically free.

So instead of forbidding the institution itself, Islam forbade the inhumane treatment that was responsible for the injustice and continuance of that institution. This is the more humane solution given the reality on the ground in that time and place. The Qur'an and the Prophet attacked the *slave mentality* present in both slave and master. Masters and slaves were commanded that "*your slaves are your brethren*," and they were given time to have this teaching enforced by the Prophet and his Companions. So slaves became enfranchised to seek their freedom, and masters became more conscious of their slaves' welfare.

Just because a law forbids the mistreatment of slaves, it does not mean God approves of slavery. God's revelations and laws to the children of Israel took into account their culture and condition. Likewise, the instructions in the Qur'an remedied the culture and condition of 7th century Arabia. Even Jesus (pbuh) makes a specific point to clarify that the Old Testament's laws were not God's ideal but instead were instituted due to the hardness of the people's hearts.

All the Companions freed their slaves before they died. It is a FACT that the second Caliph Umar ibn Al-Khattab (12 - 22 AH) ordered all slaves in the empire to be freed. He is even quoted as saying, "*Do not enslave those whose mothers bore them free*." Also, the Caliph Umar ibn Abdul-Aziz (95 - 98 AH) spent from the public treasury to feed all the hungry, house all the poor, help all singles get married, and free all the captives. After all these social needs were met, there was still money to go around such that there was no longer anyone left to accept this charity.

The Qur'an and the Prophet closed all doors for people to enter slavery except being captured in war.

The Qur'an and the Prophet commanded kindness to slaves and forbade abusing them.

The Qur'an and the Prophet opened many doors for people to leave slavery. Add this all up and you see that

1. The number of new slaves would decrease.

2. The condition of current slaves would improve.
3. The number of freed slaves would increase.

Thus we see how Islam put in place rules that would lead to the disappearance of slavery without the turmoil of sudden abolishment.

IV

QUESTIONS ABOUT ISLAM AND MODERNITY

Islam and Homosexuality

Q. I grew up as part of the Queer community in the West, so what is Islam's view of homosexuality and how can that be reconciled with the Queer lifestyle?

The verses of the Qur'an and the sayings of the Prophet are both explicit in their condemnation of sexual relations between same-sex partners; therefore homosexual actions are considered sinful in Islam.

Many people who have same-sex attraction report struggling with feelings of guilt in addition to feeling alienated and abandoned by their family. Sometimes, they also express doubt that they can abandon their same-sex lifestyle due to their belief that these sexual preferences are involuntary and they cannot help that they were created this way. However, in order to reconcile this stance with homosexual desires, we must understand that attraction is not action, behavior is not an identity, and desires are not inevitable.

Attraction is not action

In Islam, a person is not judged for merely experiencing a desire (to the extent that it is beyond their control), but only for what that person chooses to do – or not to do – with this desire. **It is critical to strongly distinguish**

between same-sex desires and fulfilling those desires in the form of actions.

Practically all Islamic philosophy and law depends on this distinction, not just in questions of sexual conduct but also in the matters of speech, ritual, and transactions. A person is not diseased or cursed just because they experience same-sex attractions. Only an action can be *haram*, not a person.

Islam considers homosexual *behavior* to be the result of a choice. Of course, sexual inclinations exist in people for a variety of natural and unnatural acts, from fornication to rape to necrophilia to bestiality. Human beings are not slaves to their desires or unable to do except that which they have been conditioned to do. People choose, and God holds them responsible for their choices. Same-sex attraction, like most other traits, is caused by a mix of genes and environment, although we don't know how much of each for every case. The same goes for alcoholism, anger and aggression, and other "bad habits," character flaws, and spiritual pathology. Same-sex desires and tendencies can be viewed as something which can be **overcome** by *controlling* one's self. Just as one might be inclined towards overeating or fornication or pornography, one might have an inclination to same-sex attraction.

Behavior is not an identity

No doubt, controlling one's desires from manifesting into action is a struggle, but the essence of this line of advice is the critical point that even if sexual attractions (whether same-sex or otherwise) manifest into actions, this behavior **is not** identity. Sexual desires are feelings that everyone must contend with in their daily journey towards God. Deconstructing behavior from identity means **rejecting the narrative** that a person (Muslim or otherwise) who experience same-sex attractions or indulges in same-sex behavior should be given a special label or "self-identify" as "gay," "queer," "homosexual," or "LGBT." There is a distinction and a difference between a person's behavior and their identity. To conflate the two has the effect of elevating sexual desires and making them a core part of personal identity.

(Salam 2016)

Desires are not inevitable

A person's companions influence their viewpoints; which is why Islam teaches us to distance ourselves from sinful lifestyles and the people who practice and promote sinful lifestyles. Desires do not form in a vacuum; they are influenced by the surroundings.

Therefore, those who struggle with same-sex desires they must acknowledge that they are not at all different from those who have been conditioned or accustomed to fornicate, or commit theft or murder, or who have become addicted to watching pornography. All of these are destructive habits that one learns through continuous exposure or conditioning.

A person struggling with same-sex attractions can be reminded that these desires ebb and flow, and it is not determined that a person who has these feelings now will continue to have them with the same intensity throughout their lives. Some people with same-sex attraction are not positively repulsed by the other sex; therefore, some of these might be able to see themselves with an opposite-gender spouse one day, if the right person and conditions came along. Other people have no attraction toward the opposite sex at all and may even cringe at the thought of engaging them romantically. In these cases, choosing a life of celibacy or devoting all energy into community or religious service can be their solution. (*Salam 2016*)

The point is that the desire felt in the current moment is not inevitable or everlasting, nor does it have to define how one chooses to manage these attractions.

Why is Sharia and Islamic Law So Harsh?

By Dr. Jonathan Brown

<https://yaqeeninstitute.org/jonathan-brown/stoning-and-hand-cutting-understanding-the-hudud-and-the-shariah-in-islam/>

The central principle in the application of the Hudud punishments is maximizing mercy. This was formulated clearly in a Hadith attributed to the Prophet that was also echoed by prominent Companions, among them his wife Aisha and the Caliphs Umar and Ali. The best attested version states, *“Ward off the Hudud as much as you all can, and if you find a way out for the person, then let them go. For it is better for the authority to err in mercy than to err in punishment.”* Within a century of the Prophet’s death Muslim scholars had digested this Hadith into the crucial legal principle of ‘Ward off the Hudud by ambiguities.’

Why would a message seeking to establish an order of law set up harsh punishments but then make them almost impossible to apply?

When my students read about Shariah law, their first reaction after learning about the Hudud is ‘Why have punishments you’re not going to apply?’ This question strikes at the root of the incongruity between modern law and how many view the Shariah. Although it seems obvious and, indeed, essential to many today, the notion that a legal system should function as a routinized and efficiently ordered machine stripped of cultural fictions and traditions is fairly new. It is a product of legal reforms envisioned by modernists like the

English philosopher and jurist Jeremy Bentham (d. 1832).

Prior to the comprehensive legal reforms in American and British law from the mid nineteenth century to the mid twentieth, having laws on the books that were not intended to be applied was normal. In fact, it's still a feature of law today in the US. How many times do we see signs warning us that littering will be punished by a maximum fine of \$1000? How many of us know anyone who has been fined \$1000 for littering? How many college students are allowed to drink under the age of 21? To quote the conservative legal scholar Robert George (and also Paul of Tarsus), law is our teacher. It is not just a means of resolving disputes or maintaining order. It is a statement by authoritative voices within a society of how that society should be.

Simply put, pre-modern states did not have the means to engage in the type of law enforcement that we consider normal today, particularly preventative policing and the investigation of mundane crimes. This important fact lies behind the severity of punishments found in Islamic law and in many pre-modern legal systems for that matter. Though scholars of criminal law continue to disagree on the best means of deterring crime, a common approach has been the utilitarian one formalized by Bentham. Its basic premise is the following equation:

(E)xpected Punishment/Deterrent power = (S)everity of Punishment x
(P)robability of getting caught

$$E = S \times P$$

In a system where there are few or no police or where the police do not busy themselves investigating crimes, moderately intelligent criminals faced little chance of being caught. According to the $E = S \times P$ equation, if the probability (P) of being caught is minuscule, then in order for any meaningful deterrent effect to be created the severity of punishment (S) must be mammoth. Frightening punishments were seen as the only way to deter potential criminals whom police (what few there were) would never be able to reach. We can see this clearly in Britain in the 1700's and early 1800's. In 1820 there were over two hundred crimes punishable by death in Britain, including stealing firewood and poaching fish from another's fishpond. The colony of Virginia had the death penalty for taking vegetables or fruits from

a garden.

But, similar to the Hudud, few people convicted of these offenses were actually executed. Putting thousands of petty offenders to death was not the intention of the law in Britain nor its colonies. Scaring people into not breaking the law was. Inevitably, judges and juries would find procedural loopholes to reduce the punishment, such as purposely undervaluing stolen goods to drop the crime from grand larceny (punishable by death) to petty larceny (punishable by flogging).

And we can see how the mind-boggling advances in technology and administrative capacity in the mid 1800's changed Britain's legal landscape. More effective policing, better prisons and, more importantly, better municipal services and a much-advanced economy meant that more offenders were caught and convicted. (P) went up dramatically, so (S) dropped accordingly. By 1900 Britain had only four death-penalty offenses.

The bottom line is that many modern objections to the Shariah in general and to the Hudud in particular are not about specific punishments. They are about many Muslims' insistence that acts like fornication should be condemned as criminal in the first place. Perhaps they are even about the insistence that such acts should be deemed morally reprehensible at all.

It's worth considering that the crimes human societies have judged the most acutely harmful – murder and rape – are not included among the agreed upon Hudud crimes. Perhaps the Hudud are not necessarily the most grievous crimes in terms of the toll they take on their victims or society. Fornication and Hudud-level theft are offenses almost by definition done in private, as intoxication could be as well. They are done out of the sight of all but God. Perhaps these stringent laws, which God's mercy has made almost impossible to apply, exist primarily to remind people of the enormity of the sins that they usually get away with.

Islamic Inheritance Law

Q. Why do women inherit less than men?

First of all, in some cases, the mother receives equal inheritance as the father. In other cases, she receives twice as much as the father. So women receiving half of men is not true across the board. Only when the money is going to a matched pair of descendants (like sister/brother or son/daughter) does the man get twice the share of the woman.

Now even with the examples of when a woman inherits equal to or more than a man, the question you have I think is why continue to use this model when there are many cases where the woman inherits half the man? The reply is that Islamic social law is a complete system that cannot be taken piecemeal. Since Islamic social law requires men to maintain and provide for the women of their immediate family, then it must also require them to inherit more. The old joke about a wife telling her husband, “What’s mine is mine, and what’s yours is mine,” is literally true and enforceable in Islam. If a man does NOT financially pay for his wife, children, and unmarried sisters, they can take him to COURT and demand spousal support, child support, and sibling support. According to Dr. Wael Hallaq, historical court records show that Muslim women sought and ***gained*** their rights more often than not.

Interestingly, Western scholars commented that Islamic Inheritance Law redistributed wealth so much that wealth is difficult to aggregate. This means

that oligarchies of “noble” families did not develop in Muslim world like in Europe. In a sense, the death of a wealthy Muslim benefited more people and society in general.

So the greater share of inheritance is tied to a greater share of responsibility. This is fair. Unfortunately, there are Muslims nowadays who demand their share of inheritance but do not fulfill their obligation to spend on the women in their circles (wife, sisters, daughters, etc). This is not fair. But this is a sin on those Muslim men, not a fault in the Islamic inheritance laws.

V

QUESTIONS ABOUT WOMEN'S ISSUES

Polygamy in Islam

Q. Why is polygamy allowed in Islam?

By Abu Amina Elias (Justin Parrott):

During the time of Biblical revelations, polygamy was common. It was accepted religiously socially, and morally; and there was no objection to it. Jews and Christians have no basis to criticize Islam for allowing polygamy, as the Bible does not forbid it nor place any legal or moral restrictions upon it.

In fact, most human societies practice some form of polygamous marriages. According to the Ethnographic Atlas Codebook, of the 1,231 societies under study, 186 were monogamous, 453 had occasional polygamy, 588 had frequent polygamy, and 4 had polyandry (multiple husbands). So the view that polygamy is immoral is merely a *particular* cultural norm, NOT a universally recognized majority.

At the time of the Prophet, the practice of polygamy was common and deeply-rooted in the social life. The Qur'an did not ignore the practice or discard it, nor did it let it continue unchecked. As with other prevailing social customs, the Qur'an stepped in to organize the institution and polish it in such a way as to eradicate its traditional evils and preserve its benefits.

The benevolent intervention of the Qur'an made polygamy permissible *only* with the following specific conditions. This permission is valid with 4 wives maximum. The additional wife, if ever taken, enjoys the same rights

and privileges as the first one. Equality between the wives in treatment, provisions and kindness is a prerequisite of polygamy and MUST be fulfilled by anyone who takes more than one wife.

The Qur'an says: **If you fear that you will not deal justly with the orphan girls, then marry those that please you of other women, two or three or four. But if you fear that you will not be just, then marry only one or those your right hand possesses ... (4:3)**

This verse was revealed after the Battle of Uhud in which many men were killed, leaving widows and orphans for the Muslim survivors to support. Marriage was one way of protecting those widows and orphans. The Qur'an made this warning and gave that choice to protect the orphans and prevent the guardians from doing injustice to them.

With this background it is apparent that Islam did not invent polygamy, and that by introducing the above regulations, it does not encourage it as a rule. It did not abolish it because that would have been *in theory* only, and people would have continued the practice as before.

So should a Muslim man marry a second wife?

Marrying more than one wife is allowed in Islam because there are circumstances in human history when it is necessary. So it is permissible with conditions because Islam is suitable for all times and places. It is not an unearned male privilege. It is not a means for men to gain pleasure at the expense of women. The key concern related to polygamy, and marriage in general, is that it must be practiced justly and fairly.

The Qur'an says: **You will never be able to be just between your wives, even if it is your ardent desire. Do not incline to one of them and leave the other neglected. If you are righteous and fear Allah, then Allah is ever forgiving and merciful. (4:129)**

An-Nawawi commented on these verses, writing: *"It is said in explanation of the verse that you may not wrong them in their rights. It is forbidden to marry more than four wives and it is recommended to be limited to one wife out of fear of wronging them or failing to be just."*

Al-Shafi'i said: *"I prefer a man to limit himself to one wife, even though it is permissible for him to marry more, due to the saying of Allah Almighty: If you*

fear you will not be just, then only one.

Al-Mawardi explained: *“Al-Shafi’i recommended that a man limit himself to one wife, even though it is permissible for him to marry more, in order to protect himself from wronging them by inclining more to some of them or being unable to spend equally upon them.”*

Ibn Khatib said: *“The majority of our scholars recommend marrying only one wife.”*

Al-Buhuti wrote: *“It is recommended to marry only one wife if he can maintain chastity with her, as it might expose him to what is forbidden.”*

Al-Shirbini wrote: *“It is the Sunnah (tradition) not to marry more than one wife without an obvious need.”*

So In some social and historical contexts, polygamy could be beneficial and this is why it is permissible with conditions. Some societies have a need to maintain replacement fertility rates, or to care for widows, or to bring family lines together through marriage. In these situations, polygamy may even be necessary if it is performed fairly and for a good purpose.

However, not all social and historical contexts are the same. In many situations, polygamy is not recommended if there is no pressing need for it. Muslim scholars have been making this point for at least the last seven hundred years.

Furthermore, a man must consider the emotional impact that marrying additional wives would have on his first wife. The Prophet (pbuh) prohibited Ali from marrying a second wife while his daughter Fatimah was still alive, because of the emotional harm it might do to her.

Unfortunately, in our times. . . A man might get bored with his older wife, so he unilaterally decides to marry a second younger wife against his first wife’s wishes. A man might also contract a secret second marriage in another country without his first wife and children even knowing about it. These are violations of Islamic teachings.

However. . . As a legal protection, it is permissible for women or their guardians to stipulate a condition in the marriage contract: That the husband may not marry a second wife without her knowledge or against her will. If he does so, either in public or secret, she has the right to divorce him.

Ibn Qudamah wrote: *“When he marries her and accepts her conditions that she would not be taken out of her house or her country, then she is entitled to her condition... If he marries her and accepts her condition that he will not marry another wife against her will, then she is entitled to separate from him if he marries another wife.”*

In conclusion: Islam permits conditional and restricted polygamy; because it is in the *best interest* of humanity as a whole to keep this institution. Believing men, those who sincerely fear Allah, would understand the gravity of the situation and should be *hesitant* to take another wife without a good reason for doing so.

Husbands and Wives

Q. Does the Qur'an (4:34) really condone a man striking his wife? I find it difficult to reconcile this concept with what I have been told a woman's position is within Islam.

You are correct that the general teachings of honoring women and mothers belie this surface translation. What is the context of this verse?

Once, our Prophet peace be upon him was approached with questions *"What if the wife flirts with other men, or can't be trusted to honor her husband's vow? How should it be dealt with?"* The answer to those two questions came in 4:34-35.

All of these complaints cover the Arabic word *Nushuz*: infidelity, disloyalty, desertion. So the first thing we understand is that the verse is not talking about a woman who disagrees with her husband about some matter or if she refuses to do some task or another; it is a serious violation of the wedding vow of chastity and loyalty. Mu'awiyah bin Haydah Al-Qushayri said, *"O Allah's Messenger! What is the right that the wife of one of us has on him"* The Prophet said, *"That you feed her when you eat and clothe her when you buy clothes for yourself, and that you do not strike her face, nor curse her, nor abandon her, except in the house."*

Jabir said that during the Farewell Hajj, the Prophet said, *"Fear Allah regarding women, for they are your assistants. You have the right on them that they*

*do not allow any man whom you dislike to enter your dwelling. But if they do that, then **adribuhuna darban ghaira mubarrih**. They have a right on you that you provide them with their provision and clothes, in a reasonable manner."*

adribuhuna means "strike them"

darban means "a striking"

ghaira means "without"

mubarrih means "pain"

So we see that the verse talks about a serious violation of the marriage vow of fidelity and loyalty. Also, even when a man is authorized by God to discipline his wife, *he cannot strike the face nor can he cause pain. **The Prophet never struck his wives, ever. This is our ideal example.*** When he wanted to discipline one of his servants, he would express his displeasure with a tap of a twig, **so we see that this "striking" is symbolic.** This is the limit set by God and His Prophet. This is the limit of how Muslims can lawfully act. There is a nice short talk by one of my favorite Islamic speakers, Nouman Ali Khan, about this:

<http://podcast.bayyinah.com/2016/10/11/hitting-women-thats-messed-up-nouman-ali-khan/>

Women's Testimony

Q. The Qur'an (2:282) talks about women being accorded half the intellectual standing of men. Although this may have been the accepted norm in the 6th century, it is no longer applicable today!

Nowhere in the Qur'an is it stated that a woman is worth half a man. The verse above merely says that when writing a contract of deferred debt, two men are preferred; and if two men cannot be found, then one man and two women.

This verse is understood to be advisory, not regulatory. That means that it is a recommendation, not a binding command. The scholars understand this because there is a general rule in Islamic Jurisprudence that states: *"If there is a command in the Qur'an that the Prophet sometimes did not implement, then the command is understood to be a suggestion or advice from the Creator to Humanity."* It is a known fact that the Prophet sometimes made a contract for deferred debt without any witnesses at all, therefore, this verse is just advisory (an advice for the time and place revealed) and not regulatory (a law to be binding on all people and all times).

Islam expects men to be the breadwinners of their families. Since financial responsibility is shouldered by men, they were expected to be well versed in financial transactions as compared to women. As a second option, the witness can be one man and two women, so that if one of the women errs

the other can remind her. The Arabic word used in the Qur'an is 'Tadhil' which means 'confused' or 'to err'. Many have wrongly translated this word as 'to forget'. Thus financial transactions constitute the only case in which two female witnesses are equal to one male witness, and even then, only in cases where the financial experience of women is substantially less than that of men, as was the case in 7th century Arabia.

There are some scholars who are of the opinion that the rule of two female witnesses equal to one male witness should be applied to all the cases. This cannot be agreed upon because one particular verse of the Qur'an from Surat Noor chapter 24, verse 6 clearly equates one female witness and one male witness.

In addition, it is well known that a **single woman's testimony** was accepted as decisive in cases of adultery, rape, theft, murder, determining the start of Ramadan, and narrating the Sayings of the Prophet. Clearly, these cases are more serious than witnessing a financial contract for deferred debt, so the intellectual capacity of women to bear witness and relate information must be upheld as being equal to that of a man in-so-far as her individual memory and intelligence are concerned. This is the same as any man giving testimony. The trustworthiness of the testimony of a witness is directly proportional to the character and intellect of that witness (male or female), the more trustworthy their testimonies. So there is no difference.

VI

BONUS

QUESTIONS TO THE AUTHOR

Q. I would like to know what do you love about Islam? What is it about Islam that keeps you engaged? How has Islam informed your life and your decisions? How have you dealt with the current climate of fear in the US?

What keeps me engaged in Islam is my relationship with the Qur'an. Most of the scholars that I've studied highlight how a Muslim's faith is best when that person is close to the Qur'an. A Muslim whose faith is tied to a person or scholar or social community will often be let down and disappointed at some point, and this can shatter that Muslim's trust and belief in Islam. However, the Qur'an is the touch-stone of a strong Muslim's faith. No matter what a particular Muslim does or how a group of Muslims act, the Qur'an does not change, nor does it betray a person. This is not surprising since Muslims maintain that the Qur'an is the very Word of God that has been preserved and will stay preserved until the Day of Judgment. Every prophet was given a sign to prove to his people that he was really a prophet and not crazy or an impostor. However every prophet except Muhammad was given signs or miracles that could only be seen by their contemporaries... Muhammad was given a miracle that could be continually seen even by people after his time. That miracle is the Qur'an.

When I first started soul-searching at age 15, I researched all the world religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Taoism).

From my science background, I already had concluded on my own that this perfectly balanced universe pointed to the existence of a Creator, a Designer. From my own experience with prayer and how it was often answered, I concluded on my own that the Creator was concerned with His creation and not just left it to fend for itself (as Deism claims). This pointed me to look more deeply at the Theistic traditions. Finally, as a corollary to the Creator answering His creatures prayers, it logically followed to me that such a Creator must necessarily have expectations and criteria for His creatures, which means there must be a Divine reward for following His will and a Divine punishment for disobeying His will. This was the thought process that led me to conclude that there is such a thing as “the right religion” or the “correct way to God.”

Once I came to these realizations, I found that the only religion that could stand up to my philosophical and scientific scrutiny was Islam. A large part of this was due to the historical integrity of the Qur'an. No other world scripture can claim to be exactly the same as it was revealed to its prophet. None. Christian and Jewish scholars acknowledge that the new and old testaments both have been edited and written by people who came much later than Jesus and Moses, respectively. The Qur'an does not have this weakness.

Secondly, the Qur'an is the only scripture that can be read and interpreted literally without conflicting with any proven scientific or historical facts. This is amazing compared to the contradictions that the old and new testament have in them. So what keeps me on this path (even when many Muslims do very horrible things in the name of Islam) is the simple fact that I cannot explain the origin and content of the Qur'an by human or natural means. Muhammad was illiterate and unlearned, and the Arabs of the 7th century were an ignorant and backwards society, so the style and information in the Qur'an could not have come from them. Since we know for a historical fact that nobody has edited the Qur'an for over 14 centuries, the only satisfactory explanation for how such a book could appear 1437 years ago in such a backward part of the world is Divine Revelation.

As for how Islam informs my life and decisions, it informed who I married and how I raise my kids. It informs what job I take (even with engineering

degree, I refuse to work in the defense industry) and the friends I have. My faith teaches me that even “job-sponsored” happy hours are not appropriate to attend due to the alcohol that is served and the flirtations that occur. My faith teaches me that it is not appropriate to develop friendships with women because that is a temptation that can undermine the strength and integrity of the family so I have no female friends. My faith teaches me that we were put on this earth to seek God, and by seeking God, knowing God, and from knowing God, loving God; therefore our purpose in life is to SERVE God. As a result, this knowledge that my life has a purpose that will be judged on its performance keeps my recreational and hobbies minimal. Yes, I relax and play games with my kids, but I do not fall into that habit that I see a lot of my co-workers and former classmates fall into: which is living a life consumed by the latest fashion, the latest TV serials, the latest movie/music trends, or endless wasting of time on cards, games, Facebook, and so on.

As for how I deal with the climate of fear, it is easier for me since I grew up here and don’t have an accent. My wife still does, but she is assertive about her rights and she will speak up and speak out if anybody gives her any disrespect in the street or in a store. It is amazing how quickly people get their act together when they see that you know your rights and are unafraid to call the authorities to secure them. America, even with this climate, is still run by laws not people, so the institutions are bound to protect its citizens, even those who were born on other shores.

Final Thoughts

“You will never understand a man until you walk a mile in his shoes.”

Thank you for walking a mile with me on my journey of interfaith conversations. It has always been by belief that understanding comes with dialogue, and I pray this booklet has added understanding and benefit to you. As an author, I love feedback, so please tell me what you liked, what you loved, and even what you hated. I would love to hear from you, so feel free to contact me at ahmed@whatwouldamuslimsay.net.

If you liked these conversations, you can check out the entire series here: <https://www.whatwouldamuslimsay.net/books/>

What Would a Muslim Say is a series of books documenting my experiences as an interfaith volunteer, showcasing everyday people asking real questions and getting real answers about Islam. These books can answer questions, build bridges, and promote understanding.

Finally, I need to ask a favor. Word-of-mouth is crucial for any author to succeed; so if you found this booklet and the Resource Packs useful or beneficial, *please tell your friends and colleagues about this site and encourage them to subscribe*. Even if it is just one or two referrals, it would make all the difference and would be very much appreciated!

May peace be with you,

Ahmed Lotfy Rashed

www.WhatWouldAMuslimSay.net

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