

## Presentation Notes.

### Islam Summary: Landscape, Goal and Means, juxtaposed alongside Judaism and Christianity

#### Goal:

**Dwell with God**, with Allah, eternally, in **Jannah** – “Paradise,” referred to in the Quran as the (Garden of) “Eden,” i.e., Heaven

\*Akin to both the goal in Judaism and in Christianity, **or is it?**

But it is described extensively in the Quran as a **physical place**, with jewelry and food, surrounded by eight principal gates, each level generally being divided into a hundred degrees. The highest **level** is known as *firdaws* (sometimes called Eden). It will be entered first by Muhammad, then those who lived in poverty, and then the most pious, such as Ibrahim. Entrants will be greeted by angels with salutations of peace.

The Islamic texts describes life for its immortal inhabitants, one that is happy — without hurt, sorrow, fear or shame — where every wish is fulfilled

Which begs **the intriguing question**, is the Islamic Heaven also occupied with Jews and Christians?

We know that the Jewish Heaven is occupied with Muslims and Christians.

And in contrast, the Christian Heaven is occupied only by Christians, only by those saved via confession of Faith in Christ.

In the Islamic view, for the rest, let's see after we consider the “means” . . . . . ?

#### Landscape:

While anchored in the **same landscape** as Judaism and Christianity, including a. the supremacy of a monotheistic God, b. the origins of humans in the Garden of Eden, and c. the lessons to be learned from the many prophets, including Abraham, who is the also father to them as he is to the Jewish people, Moses and all the other prophets of the Book, as well as the Jesus, there are some fundamental **distinctions** between the Islamic and Judaic and Christian landscapes.

1. **Allah is supreme**, with all good as well as suffering and evil, the result of Him. “Allah” is Arabic for “God.” The one God, beyond imagination, eternal Creator of all, neither begetting nor begotten.

Is **knowable not in and of itself – too all encompassing, but through divine attributes or “names of God,”** such as the Merciful, the Truth, the Living, the Sustainer, the Forgiving, the Judge, the source of Peace, of which there are **99**.

As per the *Qur'an* and Muslim scholarship, Allah is responsible for the creation of **3 types of sentient beings** – the Jinn, the Angels, and the children of Adam – humans, along with all the natural beings.

Before the **creation of Man**, Allah created the **Angels**, out of light, and which had no free will, and the **Jinn** or Genie, made of smokeless fire, with semi-free will.

**Jinn** are spiritual beings of whom humans have little knowledge, serving as a reminder that there exist life forms, living in their own order, with their own revelations and religions, own moral struggles, own accounting before God. The Qur'an describes them as being made of “smokeless fire.”

**Angels** are celestial beings who are perfectly obedient to the divine will of God and help in supervising the processes of creation. The Qur'an describes them as being made of “light.” Among them are **Jibril** – Gabriel, the angel of revelation, the Holy Spirit. **Mika** – Michael, who oversees the natural world, and is said not to have smiled since witnessing the creation of hell. **Israfil**, whose horn will usher in the breaking of the world and the Day of Judgment. And **Izra'il**, the angel of death.

**Children of Adam** are beings created neither of fire nor light, but of clay mingled with the divine spirit. The Children of Adam thus are of both the material and the divine realm. **Born divine and good, God-like, with an innate disposition to virtue.**

Humans have an innate nature, called **fitra**, which leads them to seek, love and serve God. But they also tend to **forget** their true nature and purpose, get distracted by the world, and become arrogant.

The Children of Adam are all born with **equal potential**, but depending on the individual moral choices that are made, they may turn out to be lower than the beasts or nobler than the angels themselves.

A word on the **beasts**. Animals, plants and objects are also part of God's creation, and thus reflect divine attributes. Unlike humans, but like angels, the natural world exists in perfect accord with God's plan, and is considered in a state of *islam*. The relationship between humans and animals is one of **khilafa**, or benevolent governance.

**Iblis**. When Allah created **Adam**, out of clay, He ordered all the angels to bow to him. All the angels did, except one Genie called **Iblis**, who had been elevated to be one of the leaders of the Angels. **Iblis** was proud and considered himself superior. **Iblis** argued that he is superior to Adam, who is made of modified clay, while he himself is made of smokeless fire. For this Allah damned him to Hell for eternity, but gave him respite till the Doomsday at his request. Then and there **Iblis** swore that he would use his time to lead all men astray to burn in **Hell**. Allah replied that there would always be followers of Allah, and that the **paradise of heaven** was available for them and those who followed **Iblis** would go with him to Hell.

**Iblis** sits at the helm of the forces of disobedience and disorder, which collectively are called **Satan**. Satan's God-given role is to be the **adversary of the Children of Adam**, to discourage their innate disposition to God and virtue, and to encourage that which is selfish and rebellious.

**Iblis** has no physical power of his own, as Satan can only "whisper" suggestions into mortal souls. Therefore, for humans, Satan is as much an internal as an external force.

**Jihad** – the cosmic struggle between humanity and Satan is fought out on two plans – the lesser jihad is fought out on the world plan, while the more important, greater jihad is fought

So in this sense, the Islamic **Iblis** is **not understood as a Satan**,@ the Devil, a rival to Allah, a counter-force to God, per se. Satan is not Allah's rival, not of an equal, counter-force, yet each vies for human followers. **Satan is humanity's rival**. Allah is supreme over all. All good and evil deeds are from Allah himself.

\*SUM: God is thus much more akin to Judaism's supreme Yahawah, though He is to be approached with complete submission, for there is no room for arguing or debating with Him in Islam. And the Muslim God is very distinct from than Christianity's Dual Divinity

2. **Thus the World is "Good"** as are all humans, born innocent and good, and they will, on their own accord, **naturally turn to Allah**. Will have **more to say** about this "good" world later.

After their creation, **Adam and Hawwa'** (Adam and Adam=s wife, the name "Eve" is actually not mentioned in the Qur'an) dwelt in Paradise (Al Jannah), where Allah forbade them to go near the cursed tree. *Iblis* - "The Satan" (or *al-Shaitan* in Arabic), **tricked** Adam and Hawwa' into eating from the tree (i.e., humans have **free will to be tricked**). Allah then **expelled** both of them from Heaven and onto Earth, to wander about **not as a punishment**.

In Islam, Allah created humans to send them on to Earth, which he created for them. He was just to see how long the humans, Adam and Hawwa could stay in heaven or paradise.

Then Adam sought to repent to Allah, and Allah taught him the words by which to do so. Allah **forgave** Adam and Hawwa', and told them "Get ye down all from here; and if, as is sure, there comes to you Guidance from me, whosoever follows My guidance, on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve." Adam remained weeping for 40 days, until he repented. Allah shows forgiveness and thus sin not passed down to all descends of Adam.

Thus illustrates role of *Iblis* will try to influence as many of their descendants as he possibly could into sin, so as to be his companions in his final destiny into Hell. *Iblis* who seeks to tempt humans with *whispers* of sinful ideas and discourages them for following and obeying God.

\*Thus Adam and *Hawwa*, and Garden of Eden interpreted as humanity setting forth into world given transgression, but not as punishment, as Allah forgave Adam and shows forgiveness. No chasm between God and humanity that results in "fall from Grace," no "Original Sin." Evil is not passed down to future generations. The Qur=an does not propound a doctrine of original sin, the "fall," nor essential sinfulness of humanity.

3. **Sin** is thus not a state of being, but an act of transgression via forgetting to follow Allah's guidelines. An act of forgetting.

So that **sin** is understood as anything done that goes against Allah and his teachings. An act, and not a state of being. **Of transgressing form, of acting wickedly from, of forgetting to do what Allah guides us to do.**

Human beings are not born sinful, but they are **forgetful**. So that atonement is to overcome this forgetfulness, and is countered only by reminder B **dhiki**. Includes repeated questioning about the primary Qur=anic values: sharing one=s wealth, attending to orphans, the destitute, the disinherited, performing prayer and carrying out good deeds.

And by **acts of repentance**, acts of prayer, of pilgrimage, of charity, of good deeds to the displaced.

In Islam, **human understood as tending to hide**, from others and from ourselves, **what we really are**. We veil who we are. But of course Allah, sees the inner being of each person, and at the moment of truth, will reveal each person, inside and out. The Day of Judgment is a self revealing of what we really are, an accounting of our essence.

\*More akin to Judaism's understanding of Garden and of Sin. And hence no need for the cleansing that results of baptism. Very distinct from Christian interpretation of Garden, and sin.

#### 4. **Duality of a Heaven and Hell**

\*More akin to Christian world view, and not Judaic, with all eventually going to Heaven and lack of Hell. There is no Muslim reference to an **apocalyptic revelation of time**, with a duality of God and Satan battling over supremacy of human souls and a **near future** Day of Judgment, no **Armageddon and Second Coming of the Messiah**.

5. Focus on human **soul**, playing field of accountability, upon which sins placed and atonement given, and a soul that has eternal existence. The **afterlife** is strongly held, either in heaven or hell.

\*More akin to Christian notion and role of soul and the afterlife, than Jewish roles of the sole and afterlife.

6. It is through **Prophets**, beginning with Adam and Ibrahim, then Moses, and the other prophets of the Old Testament, and including Jesus, and ending with Mohammed that God has revealed the true word to humans. The **last** revelation is with Mohammed in **the Qur'an**.

\*But the Jewish **Torah** and the Christian **Gospels** present on the **same level** the revealed word of God as the Qur'an, all of which is the same basic message. Each is the correct word of God, yet each is a **refinement and emending scripture, rending the overall scripture more universal**.

Note: Unlike the Judaic Prophets, the Islamic Prophets are all **free of sin** – Noah did not drink, Lot did not commit incest, David did not commit adultery and so on.

### **Means:**

And while all three religions share the same goal in one's spiritual quest, the means is very **distinct**.

#### **1. Choice and Behavior**

**Choice.** With humans having **free will** and sovereignty, both **Sunni and Shi'i** (though Shi'i emphasizes more) will need to select and choose which path you will follow, and given that chose, with sin potentially resulting. It is a lack of will power that would lead one astray.

Given human sovereignty and free will, it is up to each individual to assume full responsibility to submit, understand and relate to Allah **directly**.

Correspondingly, there is no mediation by a clergy or church hierarchy – no priests, no Pope, no ministers interpreting the scriptures and word of God for you. No doctrinal creed, no theology per se.

Have **Imams** – a man who leads prayers in Mosques, a scholar of the scriptures, and spiritual advisor. For Shia, a Islamic leader who traces his descent to Muhammad or Ali; while for Sunni, a leader of the community. But not an interpreter of the word of Allah.

**Behavior.** Throughout one's life, attempt to show repentance for acts of forgetting and transgression through **acts** of prayer, charity, good deed, i.e., in the **Five Pillars** – 1.

Confession of faith “There is no god but Allah, and Mohammad is His Prophet, 2. Prayer five times a day, 3. Charity, 4. Ramadan (month of fasting), and 5. the Hajj to Mecca.

Emphasize correct behavior – **orthopraxy** over correct belief – orthodoxy, with a focus on moral law over theology

\*More akin to Jewish orthopraxy, of acts of behavioral doing, than Christian testament of faith, of orthodoxy.

And the key behaviors to follow are:

- a. **submission to God** – “only through enslavement to God can one find true freedom” ??
- b. and acts of **charity, compassion and love** for all beings, all humans, regardless of religion – it is a God of compassion that is conveyed in the *Qur’an*

\*shared by Judaism and Christianity, in fact it is the key teaching and central value of every religion we’ve studied this year.

One wonders then why in the name of one’s religion there is a call for so much **hatred and war**, though out human history?

**Extended to a Land Ethic:** And in Islam, it is a love that is extended to the **earth** itself – an environmental earth ethic

Written about extensively by the Islamic scholar, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, in his classic *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of the Modern Man* 1968, revised edition, 2007. Offers one of the most insightful critiques I’ve ever read on the origins of the current ecological crisis and some convincing arguments about what needs to be done to deal with it. His understanding of the Islamic land ethic is based upon the *Qur’an* and in the philosophies and sciences of Islam.

While Islam certainly **inherits** and a continuation of the land ethic developed in its **Judaic and Christian foundations:**

**nature is good, to benefit and be used by humankind** – as referred to in Genesis, “**take dominion over and multiple**” (kept)

\*contrast: From the Christian perspective, Humanity and Nature as each **separate** from the other and not extension and Nature is fundamentally **devoid of spirit** with a focus on the redemption of human souls. (don't keep)

**Al-tawhid:** Islam has had one foot in **Eastern Philosophies and Religions**, encapsulated in Arabic word – **al-tawhid** – the principle of Divine Unity, which runs through every mode of knowledge, be it social, scientific, juridical, or theological, as well as through all being, be it sentient or inanimate.

Islam ultimately acknowledges **unity with Nature, not a separation from it – humanity is a part of Nature, not existing apart from it**

and further, acknowledges that as both Nature and Humanity are Divine creations, and inseparable from each other and from the Divine, each are necessarily **endowed with the Divine spirit**.

**Ayah:** Illustrated in the term used for the verses of the *Qur'an* – **ayah**. Signifies not only the Divine word of God in the pages of a book, but also Divine events occurring in the soul as well as in the phenomenal world

**Thus:** the Divine archetype runs through and links all beings and creation.

“So that the purpose and aim of creation is in fact for God to come to know Himself through His perfect instrument of knowledge that is the Universal Man. Man therefore occupies a particular position in this world. He is at the axis and centre of the cosmic *milieu* at once the master and custodian of nature. By being taught the names of all things he gains domination over them (Judaic/Christian link), but he is given the power only because he is the vicegerent (*khalifah*; a duty of God) of God on earth and the instrument of His Will. Man is given the right to dominate over nature only by virtue of his [shared] theomorphic make-up [with Nature], not as a rebel against heaven.

In fact man is the channel of grace for nature; through his active participation in the spiritual world he casts light into the world of nature. He is the mouth through which nature breathes and lives. Because of the intimate connection between man and nature, the inner state of man is reflected in the external order. Were there to be no more contemplatives and saints, nature would become deprived of the light



that illuminates it and the air which keeps it alive. It explains why, when man's inner being has turned to darkness and chaos, nature is also turned from harmony and beauty to disequilibrium and disorder. Man sees in nature what he is himself and penetrates into the inner meaning of nature only on the condition of being able to delve into the inner depths of his own being and to cease to lie merely on the periphery of his being. Man who lives only on the surface of their being can study nature as something to be manipulated and dominated. But only he who has turned toward the inward dimension of his being can see nature as a symbol, as a transparent reality and come to know and understand it in the real sense" page 96-97

i.e., **to see nature only as profane is to project one's own state of understanding himself**

– **Humanity has a special role, as spiritual caretaker of the garden.**

– **Note:** in Nasr's thesis, he makes a most intriguing argument that early **Christianity was also so oriented**, i.e., maintaining a unity connection with a Nature, a Nature spiritually endowed.

This is best illustrated in the writings of **Francis of Assisi** (1181- 1226). Who wrote in 1224 his famous poem, *Canticle of the Sun*. It is said that one day while Francis was traveling with some companions they happened upon a place in the road where birds filled the trees on either side. Francis told his companions to "wait for me while I go to preach to my sisters the birds." The birds surrounded him, drawn by the power of his voice, and not one of them flew away. Francis spoke to them:

My sister birds, you owe much to God, and you must always and in everyplace give praise to Him; for He has given you freedom to wing through the sky and He has clothed you...you neither sow nor reap, and God feeds you and gives you rivers and fountains for your thirst, and mountains and valleys for shelter, and tall trees for your nests. And although you neither know how to spin or weave, God dresses you and your children, for the Creator loves you greatly and He blesses you abundantly. Therefore... always seek to praise God.

But with the coming of the **European Renaissance** (14<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> Cent.) and **Scientific Revolution** (16<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> Cent.), with their accompanying challenges to

the theological world view and definitions of the cosmos and humanity as advocated by Christianity, in order for it to maintain itself as a viable institution, the Church relinquished to Science and Humanism its claim to Nature, and focused entirely on the redemption of Human Souls. A sort of unspoken truce.

**Compartmentalizing:** science would have dominion over and deal with nature (biology, chemistry, astronomy, physics, anthropology, etc.), while and Christianity would have dominion over and deal with human souls (salvation). And neither would venture into the realm of the other.

**2. The Day of Judgment – Soul Judging Itself.** All of us will then, upon our death, face a **Day of Judgment**, also known the Last Judgment, the Day of Judgment, the Accounting, a fundamental tenet in Islam. But critically for Muslims, it's a judgment not so much directly involving Allah, as some sort of gate keeper, rewarding and punishing one from past deeds, but rather one's own **soul judging itself**. The reveal self, the Soul is held accountable. One's own soul is the Judge on the Day of Judgment. It is not God nor Satan that determines if cool of Heaven or fires of Hell will be your eternal fate, **you are responsible for your own fate**.

As stated previously, humans tend to hide for ourselves and others what we really are; we attempt to veil our true self. But with Death, all is revealed, the true nature of the soul, of how one has lived his or her life, so that one's own life's actions "rise up to accuse or confirm."

\*Distinct from Judaism, which has no Day of Judgment per se,

\*And distinct from Christianity, where atonement and salvation are only through acceptance of Jesus Christ. For Muslim, no need for atonement or salvation, just a Day of Judgment.

\*For Muslims, **Jesus** is a revered Prophet, of equal standing with Ibrahim and Moses, but not the son of God. Only God is incarnate, so the idea of divine incarnation in Jesus as well as the Holy Spirit is rejected. If adhere to, is to commit idolatry and a form of polytheism.

\*More akin to Christian notion, though God does not judge. And there is not a near future Day of the Lord, a Second Coming of the Messiah, and thus accounting and resurrection that result in dwelling in a New Jerusalem for a 1000-year reign of the Lord

3. So who's in Heaven?

According to the Qur'an, when a **child** dies, regardless of the child's parent's religion (Jewish, Christian, Hindu, etc.), that child's soul goes to heaven.

And also according to the Qur'an, the **basic criteria** for salvation for an afterlife in *Jannah* is the belief in: 1. one God, and denial of all others, 2. Last Judgment, 3. Life of good deeds, and 4. in ALL the messengers of Allah as well as believing that Muhammad is the last messenger of God.

If the "**People of the Book**," Jews and Christians, deny and reject Muhammad as the Messenger of God, the Qur'an also asserts that those who reject him are damned in afterlife, and if they reject him in front of the Messenger of God, then they also face dreadful fate in this world and in afterlife (see Imam al-hujjah).

Conversely, a person who discovers monotheism, a "person of the Book," though not having been reached by a messenger, is called **Hanif**. Example, Ibrahim. While ambiguous, it implies the possibility, as with Ibrahim, of "others of the Book" residing in Heaven!

For Muslims, **the other "People of the Book,"** Jews and Christian, have always had a compatible and respected relationship, as exemplified in Moorish, pre-fifteenth century Spain.