

Fast 20: Fundamentals of Islam — 2

- Continuing with the verse from the last Study, we quote below its beginning:

<p>“It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards the East and the West, but righteous is the one who believes in Allah, and the Last Day, and the angels and the Book and the prophets, and gives away wealth out of love for Him to the near of kin and the orphans and the needy and the traveller and to those who ask and to set slaves free and keeps up prayer and gives the due charity (<i>zakat</i>)... ..” — ch. 2, v. 177</p>	<p>لَيْسَ الْبِرَّ أَنْ تُوَلُّوا وُجُوهَكُمْ قِبَلَ الْمَشْرِقِ وَالْمَغْرِبِ وَلَكِنَّ الْبِرَّ مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةِ وَالْكِتَابِ وَالنَّبِيِّينَ وَآتَى الْمَالَ عَلَى حُبِّهِ ذَوِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْيَتَامَىٰ وَالْمَسْكِينِ وَالْإِنْسَانَ السَّبِيلَ وَالسَّائِلِينَ وَفِي الرِّقَابِ وَأَقَامَ الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَى الزَّكَاةَ</p>
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- We finished the last Study by starting to go through the five fundamental beliefs of Islam listed in this verse, and what they mean in practice. Belief in Allah has been covered already.
 - The second is belief in the Last Day. It means that there is more to life than the present physical world that we live in, and that human life does not end at death but a person’s deeds sow the seeds of the next life. Even if a good deed does not bear any fruit in this life, it will be of benefit for us for the next life. Even if a bad deed goes unaccounted for in this life, we will be held accountable for it in the next life.
 - The third item of belief, angels, means that whenever we feel the urge within us to do a good deed, we must do it, without letting the urge pass away. It is an angel which draws us towards good deeds and we must respond to it.
 - The fourth item is belief in “the Book”. But the Quran says elsewhere that Muslims must believe in “His Books” (ch. 2, v. 285), and believe in the Quran as well as “the Book which He revealed before” (ch. 4, v. 136). So “the Book” mentioned here in ch. 2, v. 177 means all revelation from God, from that given to previous prophets to that given to the Holy Prophet Muhammad. This is confirmed by the following verse where the Holy Prophet is addressed:

<p>“And We have revealed to you the Book with the truth, verifying what is (already) before it of the Book and a guardian over it, so judge between them by what Allah has revealed, and do not follow their low desires, (turning away) from the truth that has come to you.” — ch. 5, v. 48</p>	<p>وَأَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَمُهَيِّئًا عَلَيْهِ فَاحِكُم بَيْنَهُم بِمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ وَلَا تَتَّبِعْ أَهْوَاءَهُمْ عَمَّا جَاءَكَ مِنَ الْحَقِّ</p>
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Here all revelation before the Quran is called a “Book”, even though the Quran mentions a number of books before it.

The meaning of belief in the Book is also clear from this last verse. It means to treat the Quran as our highest guide and authority, a judge over everything else. Just as the Quran came as a guardian and judge over the books before it, it is also a judge over all later Islamic literature, including Hadith, books of Islamic law, and opinions of Muslim scholars whether ancient or modern.

- The fifth item of belief is prophets. This means that we take the Holy Prophet Muhammad as our exemplar in all aspects of our lives, whether religious worship or our dealings with other people. Also, as we have indicated in these Studies by referring to earlier prophets such as Moses and Jesus, we can learn from their examples as well. Their sayings, as found in the scriptures of earlier religions, are often also inspiring when they are explaining in their own way the concepts which are accepted in Islam. An example is the saying of Jesus in the Gospels about fasting, which he quoted from the Torah, which we saw in Study 1: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God”.
- Immediately after the five points of belief required for a righteous person, their next quality is described as follows: “and gives away wealth out of love for Him to ...”, and then there is a list of deserving people. This again shows that acting on Islamic teachings is not done as a ritual but with understanding and feeling of the heart. Belief should lead a person to act out of love for God to help all those in need.

The expression “and gives away wealth out of love for Him” in this verse is very often translated as: “and gives away wealth despite their love for it”. That is also a commendable act, overcoming one’s love for wealth to give it to others. That also illustrates that Islamic duties are not performed as mere rituals but you have to overcome your own temptation for your wealth in order to give to others.

- A list is then given of people in need, to whom a righteous person should give: “the near of kin and the orphans and the needy and the traveller and to those who ask and to set slaves free”. It is after this list that the verse says: “and keeps up prayer and gives the due charity (*zakat*)”. Now in case of both prayer and *zakat*, certain rules have to be followed, and because of this there is a tendency for them to become rituals to be performed according to certain set regulations. Here the Quran has relegated them and placed them after mentioning the kinds of needy people who must be helped. This indicates that to give wealth out of love for God is of greater importance than fulfilling the rules and regulations pertaining to prayer and *zakat*.