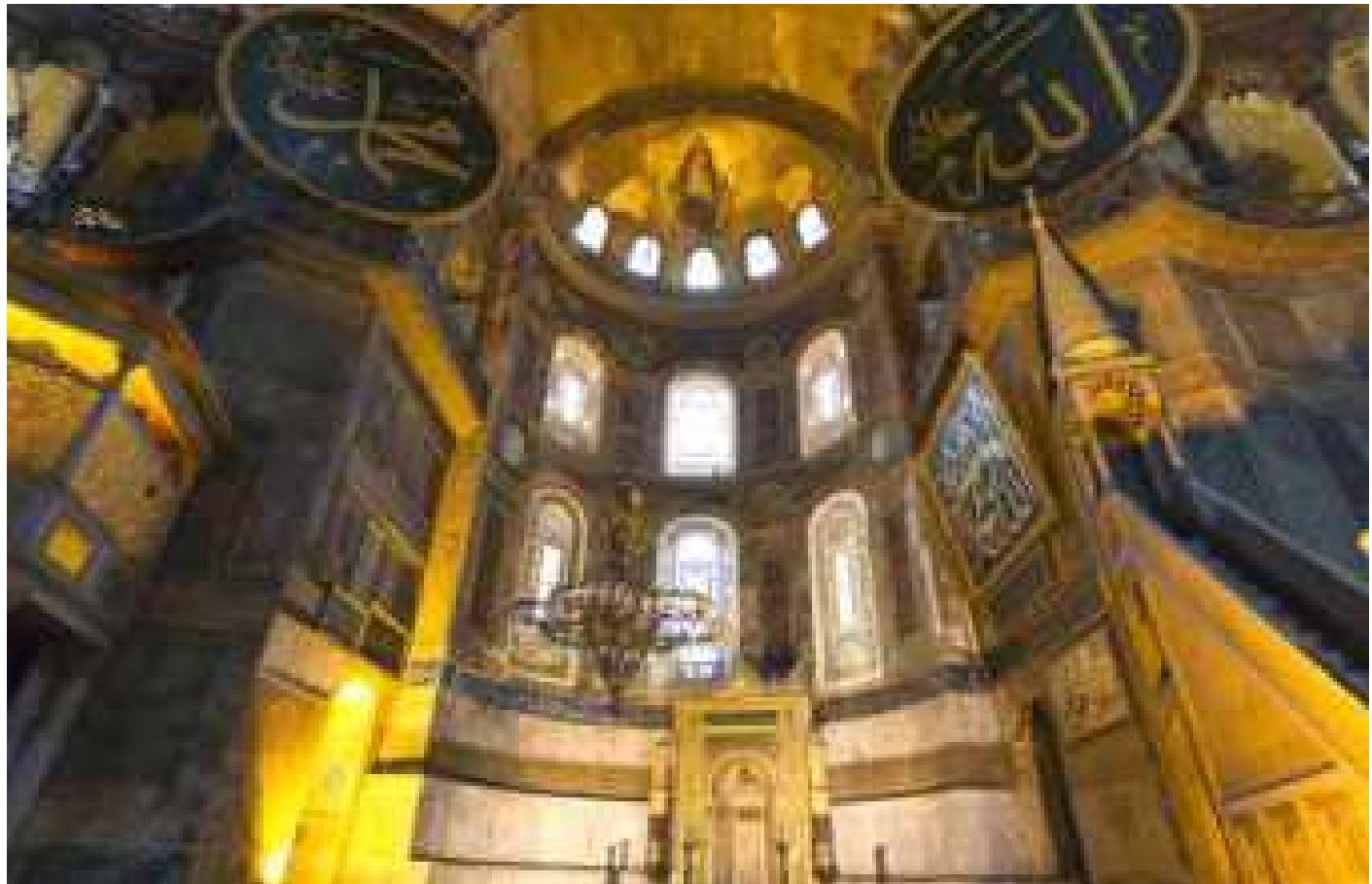


Five Primary Principles Defining Islam



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I- Freedom of Belief

Contrary to extremists and fanatics' claims, Islam treasures the freedom of belief. Moreover, religious persecution is scorned upon in Islam. The Qur'an states that belief can only be proper by conviction, not coercion:

Say; (It is) the truth from the Lord of you (all). Then whosoever will let him believe, and whosoever will let him disbelieve. Qur'an 18:2

Allah also said:

No compulsion is there in religion. Rectitude has become clear from error. So whosoever rejects evil and believes in God, has laid hold of the firmest handle, un-breaking; God is All-hearing, All-knowing. Qur'an 2:256

As explicit as can be—God commands—no one is compelled to live by any faith, including Islam. In Another verse, Allah states:

If it had been the Lord's will, they would all have believed, all who are on earth! Will you then [Muhammad] compel mankind against their will to believe! Qur'an 10:99

The freedom of belief's philosophy is woven into the fabric of Islamic doctrines so tightly that it is impossible to extinguish it. Dr. Mustapfa Zayd al-Azhary² in his two 600 page volumes, "The Abrogated Verses of the Qur'an," states that there are 141 verses in the Qur'an supporting the freedom of belief and the sanctioning of authoritative means over such belief. Examples of these verses follow:

Allah SWT said:

(Muhammad) tell them, "Clear proofs have come unto you from your Lord, so whoso sees, it is for his own good, and whoso is blind is blind to his own hurt. And (say) I am not (here) to watch over your doings. Qur'an 6:104

If it had been Allah's plan, they would not have taken false gods: but We made you not one to watch over their doings, nor are you set over them to dispose of their affairs. Qur'an 6:10

Whoever pays heed unto the Apostle pays to heed unto God, thereby; and as for those who turn away – We have not sent you to be their warden [governing their doing]. Qur'an 4:80

Say oh disbelievers! I do not worship what you worship, nor do you worship what I worship, nor will I ever worship what you worship, nor will you ever worship what I shall worship, you follow your religion and I follow mine. Qur'an 109:1-6

But if they turn away [from your guidance, O Prophet, know that] We have not sent you to be their governor: you are not bound to do more than deliver the message [entrusted to you]... Qur'an 42:48

In His wisdom, Allah created people capable of differentiating between the good and bad and left them free to choose either path and faith. Islam, with all liberty, enforces the human nature of liberal thinking, devising, and exploring to **advance the vehicle of spirit and of life**. In the meantime, disdained are those who make authority over one's belief, for it violates God's venerated "freedom of belief." The law of the land, accepted moralities and character apply to all people equally, irrespective of their belief.

II- Mercy

Mercy is the second central theme in the discussion. Its manifestation is recognized in every Islamic facet. The primary mercies are that of Allah. "Giving mercy is inherent in God's nature," explains Oxford World's Classics. Allah, Who sustained and fashioned all creations, revealed the Scriptures as guidance and a healing for the ills of His creations. The Qur'an states:

Lo! Allah is, for mankind, Full of Pity, Merciful. Qur'an 22:65

O mankind, there has to come to your instruction from your Lord and a healing for what is in the chest [heart or conscious] and guidance and mercy for the believers. Qur'an 10:57

And We send down of the Qur'an that which is healing and mercy for the believers. Qur'an 17:82

Allah the Most Merciful The Compassionate (al-Rahman al-Rahim), two of the most common and momentous attributes of Allah are al-Rahman and al-Rahim, traditionally translated as 'Allah the Most Merciful the Compassionate.' Every Surah of the Qur'an starts with 'In the name of Allah al-Rahman al-Rahim.' Unlike the traditional translations, in their version of the English translation of the Qur'an, Oxford World Press** translated "In the name of God al-Rahman al-Rahim," as "In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy the Giver of Mercy," stating,

The addition of the word 'Lord' is intended to this aspect of the term, while al-Rahim is in an intensive form suggesting that the quality of giving mercy is inherent in God's nature.

****Oxford University Press, NY, NY, MAS Abdel Haleem 2004, 2005, 2010**

Due to man's weakness and dependence on Allah's mercy, Muslims are reminded to begin every affair, initiative, action, and intent with, "In the name of Allah al-Rahman al-Rahim."

Muslim scholars explain that both al-Rahman and al-Rahim attributes are endless and extensive attributes for mercy. However, al-Rahman exemplifies the universal and major mercies, such as the Sun giving warmth to earth's creations for survival; provided the wind to carry the clouds about from the oceans, loaded with heavy rain, and in dropping it on dead land to produce fruits, crops and vegetation for people and other creations to feed on; created the ozone layer to protect people and animals from harmful space radiations; shaped the atmosphere for people and other creations to breath and communicate; allowed the day and night for laboring and resting; reserved Heaven and Hell as a reward to encourage good, and punishment to prevent evil.

On the other hand, al-Rahim covers distinctive, personal, situational and circumstantial' dependent mercies. This category of Allah's mercies can never be totally encompassed or counted. Examples are: individual's creation: the facial look, the hair, the eyes, etc.; escaping injury from an accident or natural disasters; the love and care in mothers for their newborn, and the newborn's ability to suckle from the breasts of their mothers; the variety and level of services of man to man, and the list of Allah's favors and mercies on man and the rest of the creation continue and may never be fully reckoned or comprehended.



But whoever kills a believer intentionally – his recompense is Hell, wherein he will abide eternally, and Allah has become angry with him and has cursed him and has prepared for him a great punishment. Qur'an 4:93

Mercy: Proactive and Reactive

Unlike the classical understanding of mercy as being compassionate toward an offender, mercy in Islam can also be a benediction and a gift from Allah. [Dr. Saeed Khan](#) explained this concept to Cor unum convention, at the Vatican, on the 10th anniversary of "Deus Caritas EST," Feb. 25-26, 2016, and later to CNN. The convention's emphasis was on the special retreat for the Year of Mercy, which Pope Francis spoke to thousands of priests.

Dr. Khan explained:

While the conventional understanding of mercy is typically 'showing compassion and forgiveness for those in need,' in Islam mercy also means a blessing and a gift, he said. The concept of mercy as both a blessing and a gift shows God's omniscience and omnipotence in the sense that mercy is proactively given, rather than simply reactively received by someone seeking forgiveness.

Dr. Khan added,

That the various prophets throughout history, including Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Ishmael, Jesus, and Mohamed, are also mercies on mankind because they have been the ones to transmit and convey the divine message.

Mercy in Relational Aspect

a) Treating People with Respect

Islam instructs Muslims to address others rationally changing their hearts and minds about the wrong, not by negating or insulting ways. Allah SWT said:

Speak fair [righteous words] to people. Qur'an 2:83

Note that the above verses are not just calling upon Muslims to address other Muslims nicely, but rather calling on Muslims to address 'an-Nas' all people, nicely.

In yet another verse, the Qur'an states:

And do not insult those they invoke other than Allah, lest they insult Allah in enmity without knowledge. Qur'an 6:108

b) Courteously Greet People

Showing politeness to others is a great and rewarding work in Islam. 'Return the greetings in a like manner or better,' Allah commands Muslims. The well-being of a society is affected by the way people deal with one another. Civility and courtesy are one kind of mercy in a society. The Qur'an instructs Muslims:

And when a [courteous] greeting is offered you, meet it still with a greeting more courteous or [at least] of equal courtesy. Indeed, Allah takes careful account of all things. Qur'an 4:86

c) Repel Evil with Good

Changing enmity into friendship is another graceful act of mercy. Islam teaches:

Not equal are the good deed and the bad deed. Repel evil with that which is better, and then the one who is hostile to you will become a devoted friend. Qur'an 41:34-35

Prophet Muhammad encouraged people to be merciful to others, he said:

He who is not merciful to others, Allah will not be merciful to him. –Bukhari and Muslim

The Prophet also said:

No man is a true believer unless he desires for his brother [in humanity] that, what he wishes for himself. –Bukhari and Muslim

The choice of words in a speech or address is essential in Islam. Using kind words for any event is Godly and dutiful.

And tell My servants to say that which is best. Indeed, Satan induces [dissension] among them. Indeed, Satan is ever, to humankind, a clear enemy. Qur'an 17:53

d) Disseminate Religion Warmly

The guidance of Allah for inviting and calling people to Him or Islam is by wisdom and kindness, not by coups and assassinations; not at gunpoint or arrogance, nor the hatred and negation. Allah eloquently illustrates this approach by saying:

Invite (all) to the way of your Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching, and discuss with them in ways that are best and most gracious. Qur'an, 16:25

Relational compassion with rationality, eliminates fear, arguments, and strife; it relegates intolerance, bias, and dogmatism. Such relational aspects are manifestations of mercy. Allah teaches:

Repel evil with what is better. We are most knowing what they describe. Qur'an 23:96

Prophet Muhammad as a Mercy

Teachings and acts of mercy observed throughout Prophet Muhammad's life. His kind nature not confined to Muslims, but preferably to all people, the near and far, and friend and foe; to all of God's universe. The Prophet taught,

Have mercy on those on earth; you get the mercy from Him Who is in the heavens [Allah]. -Al-Dailami

The Prophet also said:

Allah said, if you desire my mercy, have mercy on my creation. -Al-Dailami

The Prophet hastened the formal prayer for a crying child. When asked why he was accelerating the prayer, he answered,

I began the prayer intending to lengthen it, but as presently as I hear a weeping child; I hastened so that I would not trouble his praying mother. -Bukhari and Muslim

Muhammad's Mercy for his Foe

There are many examples of Muhammad's mercy for his opponents. Clear cases in pardoning the Meccans and his missionary trip to al-Taif.

Pardoning the Meccans

At his crest of power as the leader of Arabia, after he re-entered Mecca, Prophet Muhammad let its people go free:

Go about wherever you may; you are set free.

His pardon was granted despite the Meccan's 18 years of persecution and torture of Muslims. He could have easily persecuted the Meccans—he had the upper hand, and persecution was the norm. His compassionate and forgiving nature reduced all ills and injuries he and his people afflicted, to nothing. It is no wonder why Allah ascribed Muhammad in the Qur'an as 'mercy to the worlds.'

And We have not sent you (O Muhammad), but as a mercy to the worlds. Qur'an 21:107

Muhammad's Missionary Trip to Al-Taif

Tiring of Meccan's assaults and rejection, in the 8th year after the first revelation, Muhammad started looking for other than the Meccans to address his cause. He sought al-Ta'if, 90 miles southwest of Mecca in the hope of finding collaboration from its people. It must have been painful for Muhammad to have arrived at such a determination. He recognized that if he left the city, his life would be endangered by the lawlessness of Arabia, and the unknowns, if Muhammad had to turn back to Mecca, he would have to obtain a new clan to protect him, which might not be possible.

In al-Ta'if the Prophet was turned down by its three leaders. One leader said to him, "If God sent you, I will tear down the suspensions of the Ka'ba. The second leader told him, "Couldn't God find anyone else other than you to send? The third leader refused to meet with the Prophet. He sent with his servant this message, "I do not ask to speak to you. Because, if you are a messenger of God as you claim, then you are too great of a person for me to speak, and if you are a liar, it is not befitting for me to talk to you." -Al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah

Knowing the consequences if he returned to Mecca, Muhammad appealed to them to conceal the news of rejection from the Meccans or to allow him to stay amongst them. His plea was also rejected. Instead of the expected kindness, they turned loose their children to follow him and hurled rocks at him until he was severely cut. He bled until the blood seeped out of his shoes. Just outside the town, he prayed these words:

O my God, unto You I complain of my weakness, of my helplessness and of my lowliness before men. O Most Merciful of the merciful, You are Lord of the weak. And You are my Lord. Into whose hands will You entrust me? Onto some far off stranger who will ill-treat me? Or onto a foe whom You have empowered against me? I care not if Your wrath is not on me...

Upon this prayer, the Angel of Mountains came to Prophet Muhammad asking his permission to close the two mountains on the people of al-Ta'if, but despite his deepest wounds of rejection, Muhammad replied:

No, Oh my God guides my people, for they knew not [the truth]. Oh my God brings from their offspring people who pray and testify to Your oneness. -Al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah

The Prophet was magnanimous, as his zeal for public security and forgiveness, indeed overpowered his anger and self-injuries. Testifying to this fact, God revealed:

And indeed you are of a high moral character. Qur'an 68:4

III- Justice and Ihssan (charitable acts above and beyond justice)

Even though justice is an objection in everything and every action in Islam, nonetheless, Islam seeks something warmer and more humane than just fairness, and that is ihssan, the doing of good over and above equity. The Qur'an states:

God commands justice, ihssan, the doing of goodness beyond justice, and liberality to kith and kin, and He forbids all destructive deeds, injustice, and rebellion. Qur'an 16:90

Islam favors returning good for ill and forgiving inflicted harms; it considers discrimination in color, lineage, religion or national origin as acts of corruption. The same is true for deeds of deception, embezzlement, slavery, and the intrusion on the rights of others.

O humankind! We created you from a single pair of a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes, that you might come to know and cherish one another (for cooperation, not that you may despise each other). Verily the most honorable of you in the sight of God are the most righteous. Qur'an 49:13

A Christian Copt Receives Justice in the Court of a Muslim Caliph

An exciting story of a Coptic Christian and the son of the Muslim governor of Egypt, Amr ibn al-Aas over a horse race winning is an example of Islamic justice. Contesting the Christian's victory, the son of Amr hit the Christian on his head, saying, "I am the son of the two honorable." As the former raised a complaint to the Muslim Caliph, Umar Ibn al-Khattab in Medina in the Arabian Peninsula, the Caliph summoned the governor of Egypt and his son to come before him in Medina for a hearing. Determined that it was the governor's son's fault, and in the presence of the prominent men of the state, the audience ended with Caliph giving the Christian a whip to beat his adversary.

Upon the Christian took revenge for himself, The Caliph asked the Christian to beat his father, the governor of Egypt. The Christian decline, saying, "I have obtained justice." At this point, 'Amr, the governor of Egypt asked: Why beat me oh Prince of the Faithful? The Caliph replied with these famous words "Why do you enslave people, yet their mothers delivered them free? It was because of your position [as a governor of Egypt] that your son commit the wrong."

Such expected paradigm can only be in the many teachings of the Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad on justice, liberty, and the safeguards of the rights of every citizen and every creation.

IV- Inner-self Purification, Tazkiyah

God commands,

He has certainly succeeded who (tazakka) purifies himself. Qur'an 87:14

Tazkiyah is one of the essential spiritual fundamental teachings of Islam. Just as the body requires food to stay healthy, the soul too needs its spiritual nourishment. Tazkiyah is the foundation for achieving closeness to Allah. Building character and morality in people has been yet another part of Tazkiyah.

***The day when neither wealth nor sons shall profit,
except for him who comes to God with a pure heart. Qur'an 26:88-89***

Cleansing of hearts and minds from vices and sins, engaging with the 99 attributes of Allah, observing humility, piety, generosity, hospitality, patience, forgiveness, and Ihssan are elemental teachings in the school of Tazkiyah.

The centrality and importance of Tazkiyah to Islam is reflected in Allah's eight-oaths verses:

***By the Sun and his (glorious) splendor;
By the Moon, as she follows him;
By the day as it reveals (the Sun's) glory;
By the Night as it conceals it;
By the Firmament and its (incredible) structure;
By the Earth and its (vast) expanse;
By the Nafs (Soul),
And the proportion and order were given to it and its enlightenment as to its wrong and its right
Accurately, he succeeds who purifies it (yuzakeeha)
And he fails who corrupts it! (Dassaha) Qur'an 91:1-10***

The Remembrance of Allah, Thikru-Allah

One of the most important constituents of Tazkiyah is the remembrance of Allah. This recollection has to be made in the heart and the mind first and be acted upon by the body and the senses next.

Piety and humility are functions related to the heart and spirit, and hence must be earned by the core. Knowing about a pile of gold for grip means grasping it, not doing anything about it. To obtain piety and humility one must practice hours in contemplation and remembering Allah, His attributes and His signs on earth and in the heavens.

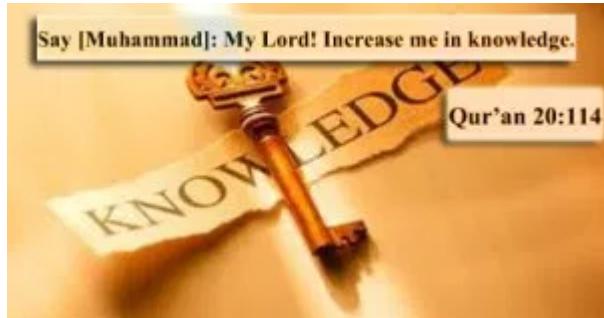
The same goes for what displeases Allah. Learning about a rattlesnake nearing means avoiding it, not tying it around the neck. Obtaining closeness to Allah means making no sinful approaches. Preventing immoral acts starts from one's inner-thoughts, heart, and mind. Restraining one's body parts actions, or moves from sin, watching one's tongue, sight and hearing are other deliberate actions to be made not to cross the boundaries and limit set by Allah.

***Say (O Muhammad) Truly, Allah leaves to stray whom He will
(as a result of their choice of going astray) but He guides to
Himself those who turn to Him in repentance, those who believe,
and whose hearts find satisfaction in the remembrance of Allah,
for without doubt in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest. Qur'an 13:27-28***

The ninety-nine noble attributes of Allah. Such as The Forgiver, The Light, The Guide, The Subduer, The Shaper of Unique Beauty, The Provider, The Known, The Constrictor, The Exalter, The All-Hearing, The All-Seeing, The Watchful, and The Just, The Loving, The Source of All Goodness, and The Clement are examples of knowledge about Allah necessary for the spiritual enrichment. Each dignified attribute is an institution that speaks about Allah's ability, capability and eternity. The more one knows about these ascribes, the more engagement in loving Allah, and the more the sinful acts become infrequent. Such approaches and traits are elemental to safe and tranquil societies.

V- Obtaining Knowledge (Ilm) and Practicing Wisdom (Al Hikmah)

Learning and reasoning are the fifth defining principle of Islam.



God will raise those among you who believe, and those who acquire knowledge to higher ranks.
Qur'an 58:11

Obtaining Knowledge

The first revelation to the unlettered Prophet Muhammad was,

Read in the name of your Lord.... Qur'an 96:1

Learning useful knowledge is an obligation on every Muslim. Prophet Muhammad said:

Obtaining knowledge is an obligation on every male and female. -Muslim. Al-Termizi

The angels spread their wings [as in pleasure and service] for the seeker of knowledge. -Sunan Ibn Majah and Abu al-Drdaa

Reasoning

On the other hand, wisdom means a total insight and having sound judgment concerning a matter or situation through understanding the cause and effect phenomena. Al-Hikmah dictates to do what is appropriate in the right manner, at the right time, and in the right place. Islam teaches that failures avoided by proper education, study, and research. The Prophet said:

When attempting to conduct an affair, you must study [predict] its outcome. If good, proceed, otherwise do not. -Ibn al-Mubarak, see al-Jamim' al-Sagheer, volume 1, page 28

Knowledge, wisdom, and Tazkiyah are the building blocks of a successful people, all of which Prophet Muhammad taught. These schools represent the mortal, spiritual and religious domains of life. With these principles, Prophet Muhammad founded a prosperous nation that liberated one half of the then known world from tyranny, superstition, and squabble.

It is not surprising that many world historians, leaders and philosophers honored Prophet Muhammad for his outstanding accomplishments and character. For example, regarding the essentials of human greatness, the historian Lamar Tine states:

If greatness of purpose, smallness of means and astounding results are the three criteria of human genius, who could dare to compare any great man in modern history than Muhammad.

The most famous men created arms, laws and empires only. They founded, if anything at all, no more than material powers which often crumbled away before their eyes.

This man moved not only armies, legislation, empires, peoples and dynasties, but millions of men in one-third of the then inhabited world; and more than that, he moved the altars, the gods, the religions, the ideas, the beliefs, and souls....

His forbearance in victory, his ambition, which was entirely devoted to one idea and in no manner striving for an empire; His endless prayers, his mystic conversations with God, his death and his triumph after death; all these attest not to an imposture but to a firm conviction which gave him the power to restore a dogma.

Philosopher, orator, apostle, legislator, warrior, conqueror of ideas, restorer of rational dogmas, of a cult without images, the founder of twenty terrestrial empires and of one spiritual empire that is Muhammad.

As regards to all the standards by which human greatness may be measured, we may well ask, 'Is there any man greater than he? Alphonse De Lamar Tine, Histoire De la Turquie, Paris, 1854 Vol. II, PP 276-277

Dr. Michael Hart of *The 100, A RANKING OF THE MOST INFLUENTIAL PERSONS IN HISTORY*, named Prophet Muhammad as the first one.

My choice of Muhammad to lead the list of the world's most influential persons may surprise some readers and may be questioned by others, but he was the only man in history who was supremely successful on both the religious and secular levels.

The five primary principles of Islam are meant to augment the human life and to pursue happiness. Such means are to conquer all acts of corruption, vice, and discords that are derogatory to suitable living for all people. The Qur'an states:

Exulted He who holds all control in His hands, who has power over all things; Who created death and life to test you and reveal which of you does best—He is the Mighty, the Forgiving. Qur'an 67:1 and 2