



Islam has spread far and wide across the globe and today, about one in five people in the world is a follower of the Islamic faith. It cuts across racial and cultural barriers and there are few people in the world that have not heard of Prophet Muhammad or who do not have some knowledge of the Quran.

However, the focus on terrorism in recent years may have resulted in an inaccurate and biased view of Islam and of Muslims in general. Islam is not responsible for the Muslims involved in terrorism and violence and these Muslims make up only a tiny fraction of the vast majority of practising Muslims who adhere to Islam and find peace and happiness in it. Thus it is important for the world to discover what Islam is really about.

This book explores the fundamental beliefs of Islam from its conception to the practices of its adherents. Presented in a simple and concise way, it explains the different aspects of the faith in topical form, with numerous quotations provided from the Quran and the Hadith. Through this book, readers will be able to better understand and appreciate the truths and expectations of Islam, and hopefully work together to build a safer and more harmonious society for everyone.



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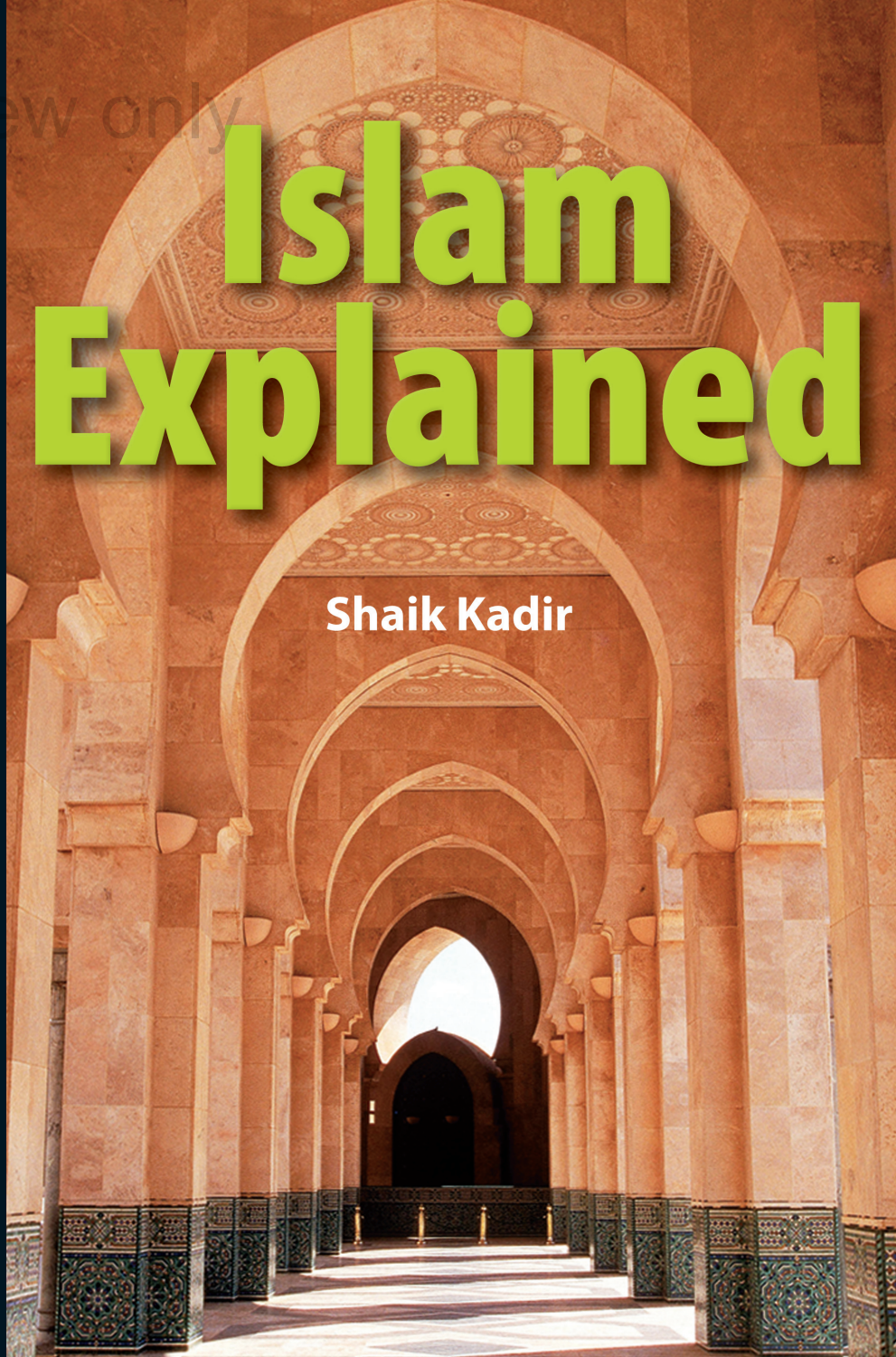


Islam Explained

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Shaik Kadir



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Published by Marshall Cavendish Editions
An imprint of Marshall Cavendish International
1 New Industrial Road, Singapore 536196

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National Library Board Singapore Cataloguing in Publication Data

Shaik Kadir.
Islam explained / Shaik Kadir. – Singapore : Marshall Cavendish Editions, c2006.
p. cm.
ISBN-13 : 978-981-261-278-6 (pbk.)
ISBN-10 : 981-261-278-5 (pbk.)

1. Islam. 2. Islamic ethics. 3. Islam – Customs and practices.
I. Title.

BP161.3
297 -- dc22 SLS2006032097

Printed in Singapore by Craft Print International Ltd.

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Introduction

Islam expanded rapidly within the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad. The religion has travelled far and wide and continues to spread fast. Today, one in five people in the world is a follower of the Islamic faith. Islam embraces the lives of various races and cultures across the globe, including the USA and Europe.

The Islamic religion provides comprehensive guidance in spiritual and social matters, with rules and regulations on everyday issues such as hygiene, diet, education, work, the roles of men and women and positive work attitude.

Islam teaches its adherents to live a balanced life between seeking the bounties of this world and preparing for the bliss of the Hereafter. Islam does not preach terrorism, violence or any other obnoxious acts. On the contrary, the Quran says: "Who is better in speech than one who calls (mankind) to God, work righteousness, and says 'I am of those who bow in Islam.'" (41:33) This verse informs the Muslim that he ought to observe the following three main obligations:

- To call people to God—that is, to call people to the Divine Path of Righteousness.
- To work righteousness—that is, to carry out righteous deeds and actions.
- To bow to Islam—that is, to completely follow the teachings of Islam.

There can be no greater or so sublime a duty than to undertake these three noble obligations in bringing and sustaining goodness, truth and beauty on earth. Indeed, undertaking such responsibilities would be the source of the Muslim's honour, pride and dignity.

Islam is not responsible for those Muslims involved in terrorism and violence. These misguided Muslims make up only a tiny fraction of the vast majority of practising Muslims who adhere to Islam and find peace and happiness in it. People should know what Islam really is. They should explore Islam. They should discover Islam.

This book would certainly meet the demand of such a seeker of knowledge by providing him an insight into this beautiful, rational, dynamic and forward-looking religion.

When exploring and discovering Islam, it is vital to look at Islam from a total approach—from its concept to the practices of its adherents. To facilitate this approach, the book has been written very simply and concisely in topical form with numerous quotations provided from the Quran (Words of God) and the Hadith (sayings and deeds of the Prophet) as reference to the topics presented.

Indeed no one book is able to provide answers to all the imaginable questions or to thoroughly satisfy every seeker of knowledge. This book is no different. Anyone requiring an in-depth knowledge on any aspect of Islam may consult relevant books written in English by Muslim academics and scholars, and even approach local Muslim organisations for advice.

Finally, this handy book is dedicated to anyone and everyone, irrespective of race, religion or culture, who reads it to know and understand Islam and Muslims better so that together we can live harmoniously, respecting one another, and working towards making the world a better place to live in.

Shaik Kadir

Initial notes

Some explanation is required for the way certain words, spelling and expressions are used in this book.

Special Terms

All special Islamic terms are written in italics and their interpretation is given immediately in bracket, like "*khutbah* (sermon)", instead of placing the words and their interpretation in a separate glossary at the end of the book.

The term "*solat* (Islamic prayers)" is used instead of the term "prayers" because "*solat*" is a very special and formalised activity totally different from "prayer".

Salutation for Prophets

When the name of Prophet Muhammad is mentioned, Muslims say "*Sallallah alaihi wasallam*" which means "Peace be upon him", often abbreviated to PBUH in Islamic literature. This is a salutation made as a mark of respect and love for Prophet Muhammad as well as all the prophets of Islam. In this book, the salutation is omitted. Muslim readers are free to make the salutation as and when they come across their names.

Voice of God

The voice in the Quran (which is in Arabic) is always God's. In the Quran, God speaks directly to Prophet Muhammad, Muslims, believers or mankind. At times, God refers to Himself as "God" ("Allah") and "He"; sometimes as "I", and at other times as "We", depending on

the aura, tone and situation of the speech He makes. In the Arabic language, "We" is used in the singular sense by authorities as a mark of politeness, hence "We" is not indicative of a plural pronoun. God is one and only in Islam.

Direct Speeches

The expression "God says..." is used when quoting from the Quran. This approach is used because the entire Quran contains God's Words. However, only words and verses in the original language, Arabic, are God's Words. Those in any language, including English, are merely interpretations, as translation from the original to any other language is impossible to be rendered with exact meaning.

Sometimes instead of the phrase "God says...", "The Quran says..." is used. As the whole of the Quran contains God's Words, both phrases mean the same.

References

Every chapter of the Quran has a name. For example, Chapter 7 of the Quran is called "Al-A'raf" (The Heights) but in this book, the name of the chapter is omitted; instead the chapter number and the verse number are given in the bracket. The chapter number is mentioned first. An example is verse 38, taken from Chapter 30, which is called "Ar-Rum" (The Roman Empire). The verse is quoted thus: "God says: 'Give what is due to kindred, the needy and the wayfarer. That is best for those who seek God, and it is they who will prosper.'" (30:38) (See Appendix A for the names of all the chapters of the Quran and their respective interpretation in English.)

Sometimes readers may find the same Quranic references given at different places of the book but the verses quoted look different. This is not a typo error but because the actual verse in the Quran is a long verse and so a part of it is quoted in one section to support certain narration and another part of the verse is quoted elsewhere to support another subject.

The Hadith

The Words of God are contained in the Quran, while the words of Prophet Muhammad are contained in the Hadith. Like the quotations

from the Quran, those from the Hadith have their references. The references are omitted in this book as they are usually lengthy. Instead, the expression “The Prophet said: ...” is used when quoting from the Hadith, a common practice of many Muslim writers.

Malay Spelling

Certain words, like “*Insha-Allah*” (God willing), “*Ishak*” (the fifth and last prayer of the day) and “*Shawal*” (tenth month of the Muslim calendar) have not been spelt “*Insya-Allah*”, “*Isyak*” and “*Syawal*” respectively according to the official Romanised Malay spelling. This is because readers from countries outside Singapore and Malaysia may find it difficult to pronounce these words when they are spelt with “sy” for “sh”.

For Review only

1 Intelligent Beings

God, in His plan, created three kinds of intelligent beings—angels, Satan and humankind—each with specific nature and characteristics. God created the angels and Satan without the endowment of choice. Angels and Satan do not eat, drink or sleep and are neither male nor female. They are invisible to human beings. God then created human beings (represented by Adam and Eve) who were endowed with choice. As such, God sent prophets from time to time to guide them.

ANGELS AND SATAN

The nature and characteristics of angels and Satan are different from those of human beings.

Angels

Angels have been created solely to obey God in performing certain spiritual responsibilities. The Quran says: “They do not disobey God in what (God) commands them to do.” (66:6)

Angels are the noblest and purest beings. With the command of God, they can make themselves visible in various forms, even to be like a human being, until they have completed their spiritual duties as commanded to do so by God.

The most well-known angel is Jibrail (Gabriel) who is the Archangel. Nicknamed the “Spirit of Faith and Truth” (26:193) and the “Holy Spirit” (16:102), he was given the task of delivering God’s Revelations to all the

prophets, including Jesus Christ and Prophet Muhammad (2:97), as well as strengthening their faith (2:87) and that of all believers (58:22).

Angels also came to Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ, bringing the news that she had been chosen by God to conceive Jesus Christ (without a male intervention) (3:42–46), and to the mother of Prophet Moses to inform her about the safety of the infant Moses (28:7).

Angels pray for the well-being of all human beings. God says: “The Angels celebrate the praises of their Lord, and pray for forgiveness for all beings on earth.” (42:5)

In the Hereafter, angels will greet the people in Heaven with the “*Salam*” (Greeting of Peace). God says: “The Angels will enter (Heaven) from every door, (and say to the people) ‘Peace be upon you’. See, how excellent is the final Home!” (13:23–24)

Satan

In the Quran, Satan (Shaitan) is referred to as the “Evil One”. Satan lives to “excite enmity and hatred” (5:94) among human beings in multifarious ways. Therefore, God advises people: “Follow not the footsteps of the Evil One for he is to you an avowed enemy.” (2:208) This is so because Satan had himself vowed that he would “lie in wait for them” (7:16) and “assault them from before them and behind them, from their right and their left” (7:17).

The “assault” of Satan from every direction means that he can approach his victim in any subtle way. God warns: “O you who believe! Follow not Satan’s footsteps. If any will follow the footsteps of Satan, he (Satan) will but command what is shameful and wrong.” (24:21)

To people who ignored the teachings of God and fell into disgrace, God would ask them: “Did I not warn you, O children of Adam, that you should not worship Satan for he was to you an enemy avowed? ...He did lead astray a great multitude of you. Did you not then understand?” (34:60–62)

God assures the believer that Satan will not harm him if he obeys God in ways He has shown in His Guidance. God says: “Whosoever follows My Guidance, on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.” (2:38)

Indeed, Satan acknowledges that he will not be able to tempt or

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harm all sincere and true believers, meaning people who closely follow God’s Guidance. God quotes Satan as saying “By Your Power, I will put all people in the wrong, except those who are sincere and purified (by Your Grace).” (38:83)

ADAM AND EVE

In Islam, the creation of human beings was in God’s Plan. His Plan was to have human beings on earth when the earth was ready for human habitation.

The first human beings—Adam and Eve—were created from clay at the same time. Just as human beings are developed for a specified period in the mother’s womb before they are delivered into the world, Adam and Eve were placed in a very special and highly suited place for nurturing to take place—Paradise—and then put on earth to procreate and populate the globe.

God gave Adam and Eve a soul, conscience, knowledge and the ability to make choices, all special attributes that were not given to any of His other non-human living creatures. They dwelt in Paradise as husband and wife. When Adam had learned to follow God’s command seriously, his status as the father of mankind was enhanced. The Quran says: “His Lord chose him (from His grace); He turned to him and gave him guidance.” (20:122) He, thus, became Islam’s first prophet.

When Adam and Eve were ready for their worldly roles, God assures Prophet Adam of his prophetic mission: “As is sure, there comes to you Guidance from Me, so whosoever (of your descendants) follows My Guidance, will not lose his way, nor fall into misery.” (20:123)

A Hadith says that Adam and Eve appeared on earth not far from each other, and so after a short period of wandering, they were reunited at Jabal Rahmah (Mount of Mercy) in the plain of Arafah, a few kilometres away from Mecca.

The plain of Arafah is where all pilgrims congregate during their Haj to listen to the Haj sermon. Mount Rahmah is also where Prophet Muhammad had stood and delivered his sermon during his last

pilgrimage, known as the Farewell Pilgrimage.

NATURE OF HUMAN BEINGS

Human beings have been created “in the best form” (95:4) with intelligence, abilities and compassion. God says: “We have endowed them with the faculties of hearing, seeing, heart (feeling) and intellect (understanding).” (23:78) & (46:26)

Islam says that man came into this world with *fitrah* (naturally good and pure state) regardless of whether he was born into a Muslim or non-Muslim family. A baby at birth is pure, innocent and sinless. Prophet Muhammad said that “each child is born with *fitrah*”.

Prophet Muhammad explained that, as the child grows up, temptations and negative influences and other external forces influence and change his natural disposition. Islam, therefore, teaches man to maintain his natural disposition as best as he can by doing good and refraining from doing unrighteous acts. God says: “Those who do right and refrain from wrong have a great reward.” (3:172)

Unlike the angels (who do good only) and Satan (who does bad only), man, with his intelligence and freedom of choice, can do good and evil, or change from good to evil or vice versa. As such, he can rise to the level of dignity, the angelic level, or fall to the level of degradation, the satanic level. He can act virtuously and reach the zenith of worldly sublimation and spiritual perfection or act immorally and sink to the deepest pit of disgrace and humiliation. His worldly and spiritual destiny lies in his own hands.

But God, in His mercy and compassion, sent prophets throughout the ages to teach man God’s “religion of right” (6:161), one that teaches man to “Serve God and eschew evil” (16:36), so as to give him the opportunity to understand both good and evil and allow him to make his choice.

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2 God-guided Path

“Read! In the name of your Lord.” (96:1) This was the very first Revelation, indeed a command, Prophet Muhammad received from God in preparation for his 23-year-long prophetic mission. The Revelations make up the Quran, which means “the Reading”.

Islam is neither a new religion nor introduced by Prophet Muhammad, but one that has been delivered in developmental stages through the ages by numerous prophets of God. Prophet Muhammad was the final Prophet sent to deliver God’s Religion for mankind called “Islam”, a word suggesting peace and bliss.

ESTABLISHMENT OF ISLAM

The Hadith (sayings and deeds of Prophet Muhammad) mentions that God sent more than 124,000 chosen men, commonly called prophets, to various communities in different parts of the earth and at various periods in time. They came to teach and deliver the “religion of right” (6:161), in various stages that suited the people of that time. All the prophets taught the essence of Islam, that is “Serve God and eschew evil.” (16:36) God says: “The same religion has He (God) established for you as that which He has enjoined on Noah—that which We (God) have sent by Inspiration to you (O Muhammad), and which We enjoined on Abraham, Moses and Jesus.” (42:13)

When the time was finally ripe for the God-sent religion to be completed for universal application—for all people and for all time—

God chose Prophet Muhammad for the task. He became “the Seal of the Prophets” (33:40), the final prophet in the long line of chosen men sent by God to guide people.

With the enhancement and completion of the “religion of right”, God gave it a name—Islam. God says: “This day I have enhanced your *Deen* (believers way of life) for you, completed My favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion.” (5:4) The “religion of right” was thus formally established with a name.

Islam means “Peace, upheld through total submission to God”. It places emphasis on the attainment of the well-being of the believer, both in this world and for the Hereafter. It is a religion for anyone, without any restriction on race or locality. It is for all mankind.

THE STRAIGHT WAY

Islam teaches Muslims to keep a balance between extremes, rejecting both licentiousness and exaggerated self-denial. God says: “This (Islam) is My Way, leading straight; follow it: follow not other paths.” (2:256) Anyone deviating from the straight path or straying from it would be exposed to negative temptations.

Islam is the God-guided Straight Way (6:161) to the Hereafter; it is a sort of “fast lane”. The very first chapter of the Quran, “Al-Fatiha”, is a popular *do’a* (supplication) in itself. A short chapter of seven verses only, its fifth and sixth verses go thus: “(Praise be to God ...) You do we worship and Your help do we seek. Guide us on the Straight Way, the way on whom You have bestowed Your Grace...” (1:5–6)

Two meanings are conspicuous in the term “the Straight Way”:

- First, the “Straight Way, a religion of right” (6:161) is one that is righteous and desired, embodying universal values such as tolerance, humility and dignity.
- Second, it is a path that is essential for “balanced” living. This path leads Muslims neither to neglect the world and concentrate only on the good of the Hereafter nor to forget the Hereafter and focus only on the good of this world. Islam does not encourage extreme leanings.

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Thus, Islam teaches that Muslims ought to be exemplary in their moral conduct and, at the same time, enjoy the earthly life. God says:

- “Do not neglect your share in this world.” (28:77)
- “When the *solat* (Islamic prayers) has been performed, disperse you through the land and seek the Bounty of God ... that you may prosper.” (62:10)
- “It is God who has made the earth manageable for you: so traverse you through its regions and enjoy of the sustenance which God furnishes.” (67:15)

In daily social matters too, Islam advocates balance. It:

- neither encourages lavish spending nor miserliness: “Those who, when they spend, are not extravagant and not niggardly, but hold a just (balance) between those extremes.” (25:67)
- discourages exceeding limits: “O you who believe! Do not forbid the good things which God has made lawful to you, and do not exceed limits.” (5:90)
- discourages waste: “Eat and drink but do not waste, for God does not love those who waste.” (7:71)

Islam teaches people to indulge positively in worldly and spiritual pursuits concurrently. The balanced attitude towards material and spiritual well-being is reflected in this Quranic supplication: “Our Lord and Sustainer, grant us good in this world and good in the Hereafter.” (2:201)

Muslims are described in the Quran as a balanced community: “We made you an *ummah* (world Islamic community) justly balanced.” (2:143) They are therefore expected to avoid all extreme dealings and activities, and, together with all other people, irrespective of their colour or creed, strive towards the progress of mankind.

Islam advocates both belief and action. The “belief” aspect of Islam is embodied in its Six Articles of Faith, while its “action” or practical aspects are embodied in the Five Pillars of Islam. (See Appendices B and C for the details.) Together they form the foundation of the Muslim’s life, providing spiritual solace and worldly bliss.

About the Author

Shaik Kadir holds a Master in Education degree from the University of Sheffield, UK. He received training in teaching and journalism both locally and overseas, and has years of experience as a teacher and journalist. Currently, he is a senior lecturer (in lifeskills) at the Institute of Technical Education, Singapore.

His numerous writings have been published in many magazines in Singapore and in other countries. Many of his articles have also appeared in local newspapers such as *The Straits Times* and *Berita Harian*.

Kadir is the author of several books, one of which was an autobiographical novel, *A Kite in the Evening Sky*, first published in 1989 and the revised edition in 2000.

His other works include five earlier books on aspects of Islam: *Read!—The Islamic Inspiration on Guidance, Wisdom and Progress* (1986), *The Straight Way—Answers and Questions Put Forward by Non-Muslims* (1993), *The Haj—The Annual Pilgrimage of Islam* (1995), *Commanding a Dynamic Islamic Personality* (2000), and *Inside Islam—101 Questions and Answers* (2004).