

4 Why Keep Going?

Given all the issues I faced you might wonder why I kept reading the Quran. The book felt right to me in many ways. Ways that made it impossible for me to put it down and walk away.

Probably the recognition in the Quran of many paths to God played the most important role in this for me. Unlike other religious writings I read, the Quran says anyone who believes in God and the Last Day and works righteousness will be rewarded, no matter what the name of their religion. I found this within the first few pages of the scripture:

Surely, those who believe, those who are Jewish, the Christians, and the converts; anyone who (1) believes in God, and (2) believes in the Last Day, and (3) leads a righteous life, will receive their recompense from their Lord. They have nothing to fear, nor will they grieve.

(Quran: The Final Testament 2:62)

This validated my long-held belief that what you call yourself has no importance; only your heart counts.¹ This verse repeats almost word for word in 5:69.

I still wondered what the Quran meant by “righteousness”. In the West this word often has a negative connotation for those who see it as “self-righteousness”. The Quran specifically defines it for Muslims:

Righteousness is not turning your faces towards the east or the west. Righteous are those who believe in God, the Last Day, the angels, the scripture, and the prophets; and they give the money, cheerfully, to the relatives, the orphans, the needy, the traveling alien, the beggars, and to free the slaves; and they observe the Contact Prayers (Salat) and give the obligatory charity (Zakat); and they keep their word whenever they make a promise; and they steadfastly persevere in the face of persecution, hardship, and war. These are the truthful; these are the righteous.

(Quran: The Final Testament 2:177)

The only other references in the Quran to turning one’s face in a specific direction discuss the *qiblah* or the direction Muslims face when they pray. In saying righteousness is not turning to the east or west, I believe God tells us righteousness does not depend only on ritual. It depends on one’s intentions, the belief in one’s heart, and our devotion to our Creator. It also has to do with the way one treats others. Obeying God’s commands to pray, give charity, and avoid sin provide other important aspects of righteousness. These all define the basic level of righteousness. For those who wish to attain the highest ranks at their Lord, He provides the following to indicate how we can work toward that:

¹ I do not know exactly where I first got this idea. It may have originated from something I heard or read as quite a young child because I cannot remember a time when I did not hold this belief.

During the night, you shall meditate for extra credit, that your Lord may raise you to an honorable rank.

(Quran: The Final Testament 17:79)

We have seen from Verses 2:62 and 5:69 righteousness does not confine itself to the followers of one religion. This next verse tells us God gave different rites and revelations to different congregations. He tests us through these differences and tells us to “*compete in righteousness*”:

...For each of you, we have decreed laws and different rites. Had God willed, He could have made you one congregation. But He thus puts you to the test through the revelations He has given each of you. You shall compete in righteousness....

(Quran: The Final Testament 5:48)

So, God gave different congregations different rites and revelations and we should be competing, not in the worldly sense, but in righteousness. We could have all been one faith if that were God’s will, but He chose to test us with each other. So we should not be attacking other faiths and blaming one another. Rather we should be striving to be righteous and also urging each other on to greater righteousness.

I am sad some Muslims do not have that understanding. Rather they believe only the organized religion called Islam is correct. Perhaps this comes from two verses, which I believe these Muslims totally misunderstand.

If read incorrectly one can understand them to mean the opposite of what we saw in the previously quoted verses. I quote the pertinent sentence from the first verse:

The only religion approved by God is “Submission....”
(Quran: The Final Testament 3:19)

If you do not translate the word “Submission” from the Arabic and leave it “Islam,” you can understand God accepts only the organized religion of Islam. This totally masks the actual teaching. God accepts your religion only if you surrender your will and life to Him. As Verses 2:62 and 5:69 say above, God accepts anyone who believes in Him and the Last Day and works righteousness. They will reap their reward.

On the other hand if one does not surrender to God, He does not accept that:

If anyone desires A religion other than Islam (submission to God), / Never will it be accepted / Of him....
(The Holy Quran III:85 [3:85])

Unless one truly lets go of her or his ego, belief in their personal power and surrenders to God, He will not accept them.

The Quran says anyone can be a Submitter (“Muslim” in Arabic) no matter what they call themselves or their religion. The Quran calls Jesus and his followers Muslims or Submitters in English, as well as Moses and his followers (see Verses 3:52 and 10:84 for examples).

In addition, Quran honors the previous scriptures:

We have sent down the Torah, containing guidance and light. Ruling in accordance with it were the Jewish prophets, as well as the rabbis and the priests....
(Quran: The Final Testament 5:44)

We see here the Torah contains “*guidance and light*”. Thus one can gain guidance and light from reading and following it. The Quran uses the same phrase to describe the Gospels in the following verse:

...We sent Jesus, the son of Mary, confirming the previous scripture, the Torah. We gave him the Gospel, containing guidance and light, and confirming the previous scriptures, the Torah, and augmenting its guidance and light, and to enlighten the righteous.
(Quran: The Final Testament 5:46)

So the Gospels also contain “*guidance and light*”. In some areas human distortion entered into the earlier scriptures. Anyone who does even a cursory study of the Bible’s history finds this. Since many years passed before the Bible was written down, such distortion can be explained. However the truth still shines clearly in both the Old and New Testaments.

The Quran not only honors the previous scriptures but God commands Muslims to believe in the revelations given to earlier prophets:

Say, “We believe in God, and in what was sent down to us, and in what was sent down to Abraham, Ismail, Isaac, Jacob, and the Patriarchs; and in what was given to Moses and Jesus, and all the prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction among any of them. To Him alone we are submitters.”
(Quran: The Final Testament 2:136)

Thus the previous scriptures contain guidance and light, and Muslims are to believe in them (excepting of course the few places where human distortions contradict the Quran).

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Its beautiful verses on nature also drew me to the Quran. When I first read these verses, tears came to my eyes and emotion swelled my heart. Though I have read them again and again I still find they sing in my core.

I could quote verse after verse. Here I give you a few of my favorite passages:

God is the One who causes the grains and the seeds to crack and germinate. He produces the living from the dead, and the dead from the living. Such is God; how could you deviate! At the crack of dawn, He causes the morning to emerge. He made the night still, and He rendered the sun and the moon to serve as calculation devices. Such is the design of the Almighty, the Omniscient. And He is the One who made the stars to guide you during the darkness, on land and on sea..... He is the One who sends down from the sky water, whereby we produce all kinds of plants. We produce from the green material multitudes of complex grains, palm trees with hanging clusters, and gardens of grapes,

olives and pomegranate; fruits that are similar, yet dissimilar. Note their fruits as they grow and ripen. These are signs for people who believe.
(Quran: The Final Testament 6:95-97 & 99)

I love these verses. The thought of the morning emerging “*at the crack of dawn*” and all the beautiful fruits and the heavenly bodies makes me so aware of the great blessings God gives us all.

He is the One who shows you the lightning as a source of fear, as well as hope, and He initiates the loaded clouds. The thunder praises His glory, and so do the angels, out of reverence for Him. He sends the lightning bolts, which strike in accordance with His will. Yet, they argue about God, though His power is awesome.
(Quran: The Final Testament 13:12-13)

How beautiful I find remembering the lightning as something that gives both fear and hope. I also love the idea of thunder praising God, as do the angels in awe. That makes me shiver with awe myself.

Glory be to the One who created all kinds of plants from the earth, as well as themselves, and other creations that they do not even know. Another sign for them is the night: we remove the daylight therefrom, whereupon they are in darkness. The sun sets into a specific location, according to the design of the Almighty, the Omniscient. The moon we designed to appear in stages, until it becomes like an old curved sheath. The sun is never to catch up with the moon—the night and the day never deviate—each of them is floating in its own orbit.
(Quran: The Final Testament 36:36-40)

Here I especially love the thought of the moon “*like an old curved sheath*” and the sun never catching up with it but each “*floating in its own orbit*”.

Nature has always provided a refuge for me. As a child I felt close to God only when sitting or moving outside with the birds and the wildflowers, feeling the breeze in my hair and the warmth of the sun. I still find nothing more centering for me than a walk in God’s beautiful creation.

While nature provided a refuge for me, I was perhaps an overly sensitive child. Seeing a dead animal caused me great grief. If I had known the animal the grief often overwhelmed me. Just thinking about my departed dogs and cats brought gushing tears for years after their deaths.

Finding the following verse gave me the greatest relief:

All the creatures on earth, and all the birds that fly with wings, are communities like you. We did not leave anything out of this book. To their Lord, all these creatures will be summoned.
(Quran: The Final Testament 6:38)

As this verse says, all creatures will return to God. God does not exclude animals from heaven. The animals worship Him and He knows all their actions, just as He does ours. This next verse says that of the birds:

Do you not realize that everyone in the heavens and the earth glorifies God, even the birds as they fly in a column? Each knows its prayer and its glorification. God is fully

aware of everything they do.
(Quran: The Final Testament 24:41)

It amazed me that not only animals worship and return to God. Even plants and what we think of as inanimate objects prostrate to God:

Do you not realize that to God prostrates everyone in the heavens and the earth, and the sun, and the moon, and the stars, and the mountains, and the trees, and the animals, and many people?...
(Quran: The Final Testament 22:18)

The Quran also says things that we consider nonliving have awareness and knowingly submit to their Creator. In this verse God speaks to the sky and the earth:

Then He turned to the sky, when it was still gas, and said to it, and to the earth, "Come into existence, willingly or unwillingly." They said, "We come willingly."
(Quran: The Final Testament 41:11)

Normally we think of the sky and earth as things with no intelligence, but this verse shows they have the ability to decide whether to submit or not. It indicates our planet Earth has a consciousness and willingly submits to God.

That knowledge gave me a totally different view of the world. Now I know God takes care of the lovely creatures around me and when they die they go back to Him. Their deaths no longer give me a greater sorrow than that of people. Since they submit to God without questioning, they hold a much better position with God than I do.

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The clarification of God's power, which I found in the Quran, awoke something new in me. I had grown up hearing God was Omnipotent but He seemed unable to do things like stop disasters. But Quran told me I needed to reexamine my view:

They do not value God as He should be valued. God is the Most Powerful, the Almighty.
(Quran: The Final Testament 22:74)

Then it told me:

To God belongs all the forces in the heavens and the earth. God is Almighty, Most Wise.
(Quran: The Final Testament 48:7)

And it told me God could be partially defined as:

Doer of whatever He wills.
(Quran: The Final Testament 85:16)

It also said:

To God belongs the sovereignty of the heavens and the earth. God is Omnipotent.
(Quran: The Final Testament 3:189)

I still did not totally understand but this felt much better than thinking God could not stop bad things from happening. Quite a bit later I read the story of Moses' teacher in Chapter 18 of the Quran. That story tells of how Moses asks to follow his teacher. The teacher says he will not be able to stand being with him but Moses promises not to question anything and they go along. His teacher then proceeds to do some outrageous things: he drills a hole in a ship, kills a young boy, and repairs a fence for people who have refused to help them. After each incident Moses breaks his promise not to ask questions and finally asks too many questions. The teacher then tells him:

He said, "Now we have to part company. But I will explain to you everything you could not stand. As for the ship, it belonged to poor fishermen, and I wanted to render it defective. There was a king coming after them, who was confiscating every ship, forcibly. As for the boy, his parents were good believers, and we saw that he was going to burden them with his transgression and disbelief. We willed that your Lord substitute in his place another son; one who is better in righteousness and kindness. As for the wall, it belonged to two orphan boys in the city. Under it, there was a treasure that belonged to them. Because their father was a righteous man, your Lord wanted them to grow up and attain full strength, then extract their treasure. Such is mercy from your Lord. I did none of that of my own volition. This is the explanation of the things you could not stand."
(Quran: The Final Testament 18:78-82)

This story showed me we don't see the whole picture. We often do not have information we need to judge something good or bad. God may do something very good in something that looks very bad.

To explain the things going on in my own life I found the following verse:

Anything good that happens to you is from God, and anything bad that happens to you is from you. We have sent you as a messenger to the people, and God suffices as witness.
(Quran: The Final Testament 4:79)

As time went on I began to realize the bad things happening in my life happened mostly when I had broken one of God's commandments or began to stray from His guidance. The bad things acted like pinches warning me something needed fixing.

Finally I began to recognize the full impact of God's Omniscience and Omnipotence. He controls everything that happens. Humans just think they control their lives. God gives us free will so it appears we do what we want, but in truth:

Whatever you will is in accordance with God's will. God is Omniscient, Wise.
(Quran: The Final Testament 76:30)

You might ask why God controls everything if we have free will. Perhaps this next verse will indicate an answer:

We will certainly put you to the test, in order to distinguish those among you who strive, and steadfastly persevere. We must expose your true qualities.
(Quran: The Final Testament 47:31)

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Yet another area touched a chord for me. The Quran tells us we should treat each other in the best possible manner:

Tell My servants to treat each other in the best possible manner, for the devil will always try to drive a wedge among them....
(Quran: The Final Testament 17:53)

We must treat each other well. Neither our relationship to each other nor our station in society matter; we must treat *all* people well as this next verse makes clear:

...You shall regard the parents, the relatives, the orphans, the poor, the related neighbor, the unrelated neighbor, the close associate, the traveling alien, and your servants. God does not like the arrogant show-offs.
(Quran: The Final Testament 4:36)

God tells us to treat everyone well, those who are related and those who are strangers, the free and the slave. He also says we should not be proud of ourselves as 57:23 shows.

And we should not make fun of others either as individuals or as groups:

O you who believe, no people shall ridicule other people, for they may be better than they. Nor shall any women ridicule other women, for they may be better than they. Nor shall you mock one another, or make fun of your names....
(Quran: The Final Testament 49:11)

God tells us here ridicule and mockery equate with wickedness. If you find yourself caught in this behavior and do not repent then you become a transgressor.

We must respect other peoples and recognize that in God's eyes only our striving to please Him gives us value.

O people, we created you from the same male and female, and rendered you distinct peoples and tribes, that you may recognize one another. The best among you in the sight of God is the most righteous....
(Quran: The Final Testament 49:13)

Thus your tribe or nationality or race or the name of your religion has no importance. One's faith, righteousness, studying the scripture, submitting to God, etc. are all important. Thus true equality exists for all people in the Quran.

Throughout the Quran God condemns tyranny and oppression. The following shows one of the strongest condemnations:

...Oppression is worse than murder...."
(Quran: The Final Testament 2:217)

Describing oppression as "*worse than murder*" makes it something we must struggle against. The oppression that so often manifests in Muslim nations goes against the Quran. God also forbids aggression:

*You may fight in the cause of God against those who attack you, but **do not aggress**. God does not love the aggressors.*
(Quran: The Final Testament 2:190 - emphasis added)

Often in the West we associate Islam with aggression. Sadly Muslims can become very aggressive, but at those times they go against the truth of the religion. In fact one of God's names is "the Peace":

He is the One God; there is no other god beside Him. The King, the Most Sacred, the Peace....

(Quran: The Final Testament 59:23 - emphasis added)

God forbids aggression and tells us to treat each other well. If we all lived according to these principles it would make an amazing difference for every person on this planet.

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Until I read the Quran the concept of the hereafter never came into focus for me. I believed we did not just disappear when we died because that made no sense to me. But what actually happens remained a total mystery.

I had no concept of heaven and hell at all. I more or less thought when we died we probably all just went into a new reality where we lived similarly to how we lived on earth.

Then the Quran told me in several verses our souls will have weight in the hereafter and that weight will determine our position:

The scales will be set on that day, equitably. Those whose weights are heavy will be the winners. As for those whose weights are light, they will be the ones who lost their souls, as a consequence of disregarding our revelations, unjustly.

(Quran: The Final Testament 7:8-9)

Such are the ones who disbelieved in the revelations of their Lord and in meeting Him. Therefore, their works are in vain; on the Day of Resurrection, they have no weight.

(Quran: The Final Testament 18:105)

As for those whose weights are heavy, they will be the winners. Those whose weights are light are the ones who lost their souls; they abide in Hell forever.

(Quran: The Final Testament 23:102-103)

Verses 101:6-11 have the same message that if we disregard God's commandments in the scripture our soul's weights will be light, which is a miserable state. However, I still needed one more piece of information to get a better grasp of the whole subject. Reading Verse 40:72 and its footnote in Rashad Khalifa's translation finally provided that piece:

*In the Inferno, * then in the Fire, they will burn.*

*40:72 Those who did not prepare themselves will suffer tremendously in the presence of God, on the Day of Judgment. They cannot stand the closeness to God due to lack of sufficient growth and development of their souls. I am using "Inferno" to describe this particular situation ([55:44](#)). Preparation of the soul is accomplished by the rites decreed by God.

Now I understand if you cannot stand to stay in God's presence you will have to go far from Him, which then becomes hell. For the righteous, He rewards them with closeness to Him:

Then there is the elite of the elite. They are those who will be closest (to God). In the gardens of bliss.

(Quran: The Final Testament 56:10-12)

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One final thing drew me to the Quran. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, as a young person I was torn between my desire for a spiritual path and my dislike of organized religion. The Quran says our connection with God has no intermediaries. We connect directly with our Creator. Thus if you follow just the Quran, Islam does not become an organized religion in the normal sense. The following verse shows the directness of our connection with God:

Say, "All intercession belongs to God." ... to Him you will be returned.
(Quran: The Final Testament 39:44)

Though we can pray to God to help others, those prayers are not effective unless they agree with God's will (Verse 34:23). Thus ultimately no one can intercede with God for us and He is the only one we need to please. We will answer only to Him and no one can help us except God:

Say, "Shall I seek other than God as a lord, when He is the Lord of all things? No soul benefits except from its own works, and none bears the burden of another...."
(Quran: The Final Testament 6:164)

This makes sense, for even if someone else could remove our sins it would not help because our souls would still be too shrunken to withstand the immense energy of God's physical presence, so we would have to run away to hell to survive.

Perhaps most importantly, no one can guide us but God, though He may guide us through others. Also, we cannot guide anyone else:

You cannot guide the ones you love. God is the only One who guides in accordance with His will, and in accordance with His knowledge of those who deserve the guidance.
(Quran: The Final Testament 28:56)

Thus we have a very direct and immediate relationship with God. He tells us He is closer to us than our jugular vein (50:16). With this knowledge, a major burden lifted from me. I no longer felt I had to stumble through life alone.

Many things in the Quran bound me to it from the very beginning. I now understood while the religion I had been taught as Islam contained much inequity, the Islam of the Quran does not. While I would encounter several other issues as time went on, so much in the Quran touched my soul that I could not just walk away from it no matter what.

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Many traditional Muslims believe on the Day of Judgment prophet Muhammad will intercede for them and save them from Hell. However, the Quran tells us the messengers of God will be worried about their own fates (21:28). The following little story deals with this belief.

On the Day of Judgment, there was a man who was worried for his own neck, walking here and there, waiting for his Lord's judgment.

There was another man there who believed that the Prophet would come and intercede on his behalf. He went to the first man, saying, "What's the matter?"

"Didn't you accept God and His messengers during your life time on the earth?"

"Yes," he replied.

"Then, don't worry! Just take a seat and wait! The Prophet will soon come and intercede in our behalf; there is nothing to be worried about!"

The first man looked at him strangely and replied, "I am the Prophet".

(As told by Irandokht, from Iran)

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I am not the only one who found the Quran to be very different from what I expected in the beginning. This sister did as well and she tells her story here.

Why Be A Muslim?

Why keep going is a valid question. In the face of persecution and prejudice in this country, why would anyone want to call themselves a Muslim? My mom worried that I was joining some kind of weird cult. A friend and I were followed by a security guard in the airport after we prayed the dawn prayer prior to boarding our flight. And certainly the way Islam is practiced and portrayed around the world is not that inviting.

I can only say that God guided me to this right path. I was not interested in finding an organized religion, but in conversations with a friend, I came to realize that Islam—as it was meant to be, not as it was practiced—was what I had come to believe. After many such discussions, I asked her for a Quran, though I didn't want a Quran. The words came out of my mouth, but I never meant to say them. But it was a gift from God. As I began reading the book, I was hooked. The way it's written—the repetition, the transition from topic to topic, the beauty of the language, the references to nature and animals, the inclusiveness—all of it brought me right in. I *knew* it was the truth.

I have to say that it still took me a little while to commit to the practices, and God allowed me that time to become secure in my beliefs. And I keep going now because I know that God is guiding me and supporting me and protecting me. I see the positive changes in my life. I'm more patient, less judgmental, more forgiving, less worried. In spite of what most people see as "Islam"—with its terrorists and its oppression—true submission to God's will brings peace and joy. And nothing in this world compares to what awaits the righteous in Heaven.

—LK, U.S.A

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And why do I keep going now, all these years after I first began following the Quran? I cannot even imagine a better path for me. Not that I believe this is the only path. But God proves to me daily that way fills my life with joy and contentment.

Take today for example. I spent most of the time for my day's work outside in the warm sun working to help clean up our land. The birds were singing, a few clouds added their beauty to the blue sky, and most of the snow that fell last week has melted or sublimated into the clean air. As I worked I found myself commemorating and thanking my Creator for all the beauty around me. Thanking Him also for the new peace that grows within me now that I am away from the chaos of cities. Daily I sense myself rooting deeper into this blessed land. As I do so, I feel reconnected to the part of me that grew up spending as much time outside as I could. With that reconnection there comes also a realization that God has always been there blessing me in ways I am just beginning to sense through the spiritual practices He provided me through my faith, now based solely on His Own words in the scripture.

Tomorrow will be my birthday and as I grow older physically I feel as if my heart grows younger and lighter, perhaps a bit wiser, and definitely more contented. I pray this transformation continues to give me deeper insight into myself and, more important to me now, into what I need to do to become closer to God. For I have come to sense the truth of what a very wise friend shared with me many years ago, "Being close to God is paradise and being far from God is hell."

For me right now, living on this land where I can focus more and more on who I am and on God is a taste of paradise.