

**The Universal Truths of Islam and Mimetic Anthropology:
The *Tawhid* of God and the *Tawhid* of Being Human**

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In his book *Girard and Theology*, Michael Kirwan discusses the Qur’anic doctrine of *naskh*, or abrogation. He states, “the struggle for pacific rather than militant versions of Islam would seem to require a modification of this doctrine, in such a way that violent interpretations are not given priority.”¹

The *naskh* doctrine and a pacific interpretation of the Qur’an in conversation with mimetic anthropology is the topic that I would like to explore in this paper. I hope this paper might contribute to a faithful and practical approach to understanding the relationship between Islam, nonviolence, and mimetic anthropology.

I am not a Muslim, so, for me, any attempt to be faithful to Islam has inherent difficulties. The best any outsider can do when studying another religion is to view that religion through the lens of faithful practitioners. In that spirit I have chosen our keynote speaker Tariq Ramadan and Abdul Ghaffar Khan as our primary guides.

In his book *Radical Reform*, Tariq Ramadan states that Islam has always been in a state of reformation,² but that the present human condition requires a further step that he refers to as a new reading of sacred texts that must include the human sciences. Ramadan states that this further step is “a reform aiming to change the world—as well as providing a *new reading* of the texts—[that] cannot rely only on text expertise, but requires a full and equal integration of all available human knowledge.”³

The “full and equal integration of all available human knowledge” is nothing new to Islam. Islam is not a religion of one Book, the Quran, but of two Books: The Book of the Qur’an and the Book of the Universe. The Book of the Universe does not refer to a literal book, but to the natural world. The two Books are composed of signs that point to the presence of God.⁴ Both Books are revelatory gifts from God and they are “not opposed, each of them completes the other, gives it meaning and reaches toward the divine.”⁵ Ramadan states that “The Book of the Universe and the social sciences that unfold there open the doors (to) ... human reason.”⁶ Since the two Books are not opposed, a better understanding of the Universe would necessarily lead to a better understanding and possibly a “new reading,” as Ramadan suggests, of the Qur’an.

¹ Michael Kirwan, *Girard and Theology* (New York: T&T Clark, 2009) 131.

² Tariq Ramadan, *Radical Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) 13.

³ Ramadan, *Radical Reform*, 33. Italics added.

⁴ See Ramadan, *Radical Reform*, 88.

⁵ Ramadan, *Radical Reform*, 99.

⁶ Ramadan, *Radical Reform*, 107.

The two Books mean that it is incumbent upon Muslims to look not only to the Qur'an, but also to the science of the natural world in order to better understand God's revealed truth. Therefore, there is nothing to prevent Muslims from studying mimetic anthropology. In fact, if it is part of the Book of the Universe, Muslims would be obligated to study mimetic anthropology. As Ramadan states, "The task of human intelligence is to read the world's reality, to grasp its meaning and infer its grammar."⁷ Islam and mimetic anthropology both make universal claims about the world's reality. The question is, "Are those claims opposed to one another, or might they complete one another, might they give meaning to one another, and help us to better understand God?"

Mimetic Anthropology

Mimetic Anthropology is a social science, and thus part of Islam's Book of the Universe. Like all sciences, it looks to the natural world to explore its hypothesis. There are three important aspects to mimetic anthropology. First, humans are creatures that desire. Mimetic anthropology claims that our desires are not autonomous, but that we non-consciously model our desires to one another and that we "Desire according to the (desires of the) Other."⁸ This mimetic, or imitative, aspect of desire is non-conscious; we are rarely aware of the mimetic nature of our desires. Mimetic desire always has an acquisitive aspect to it; we selfishly desire the objects that the "Other," or our model desires or possesses. This imitative desire leads to a rivalry with the model. As Girard states in *Evolution and Conversion*, "The model that encourages mimetic rivalry isn't necessarily worse than we are, he is maybe much better, but he desires in the same way we do, selfishly, avidly, therefore we imitate his selfishness, and he is a bad model for us, just as we will be a bad model for him in the process of doubling that is bound to take place as soon as the rivalry escalates."⁹ It is not differences that lead to conflict, but the lack of differences through commonly shared desires that lead to escalating conflict.

The second aspect of mimetic anthropology is the scapegoat mechanism. Mimetic desire for objects leads to mutual frustration as a rivalry escalates. Soon, the rivalry is no longer about the object; the rivalry turns into a mutual desire to defeat the "other." Escalating rivalry spreads throughout the community and threatens the community's survival with a war of all against all. Mutual frustration over finds an outlet in an accusational and violent form against an "other," a scapegoat. Peace is restored with the exclusion or murder of the scapegoat. Girard states that the "importance of the scapegoat mechanism (is that) it channels the collective violence against one arbitrarily chosen member of the community, and this victim becomes the common enemy of the entire community, which is reconciled as a result."¹⁰ The peace that results from the sacrificial scapegoat mechanism enables culture to form. Culture is maintained by a set of differences rooted in the human non-conscious distinction of "us" and "them," or "that." Whenever a cultural crisis reappears and chaotic violence threatens a

⁷ Ramadan, *Radical Reform*, 96.

⁸ Rene Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965), 5.

⁹ Rene Girard, Pierpaolo Antonello and Joao Cezar de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion* (New York: Continuum International Publishing), 63.

¹⁰ Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, 65.

community, a ritual re-enactment of the original scapegoating violence restores peace. Girard claims that “ritual is the imitation and reenactment of spontaneous, unanimous violence”¹¹ that channels collective violence towards a scapegoat and brings temporary peace to the community. Violence takes on a sacred life of its own, “The *modus operandi* of violence—sometimes reciprocal and pernicious, sometimes unanimous and beneficial—is then taken as the model for the entire universe.”¹² Violence thus appropriates a sacred dimension that transcends humanity’s ability to control it. Humans then fall under a Myth that calls us to deny our own violence and project it onto God or the gods. The denial of violence means that there is no way to critique our violence.

The third aspect of Mimetic Anthropology is that mimetic desire and the scapegoat mechanism are revealed in Judeo-Christian Scriptures. In those Scriptures, the sacred aspect of violence¹³ begins to be associated not with God, but with Satan. Satan is the supreme model of violence for humans; Satan desires humans to fall into rivalry, accusation, and murder. Girard states that those who fall under the spell of the Satanic scapegoat mechanism “have the devil for a father because it is the desires of the devil that they want to fulfill and not the desires of God.”¹⁴ The problem is that Satan has infected the whole world, including holy texts, such as the Bible. According to mimetic theory, what makes the Bible a holy text is that it is in travail against its own infection of Satanic violence. Satan is so convincing, so alluring, that humans associate Satan’s violence with God’s desires. The Bible struggles against and critiques this human view of a violent God. Specifically for Christians, God’s desire, as seen through the biblical account of Jesus, is to offer the gift of love, a gift that has nothing to do with violence. God’s desire is to expose the violent Satanic scapegoat mechanism that creates victims as a lie, absorb its violence, and offer forgiveness and reconciliation. God’s love and desire to expose the scapegoat mechanism is consistent. God cannot be “other” than that desire. Mimetic theory claims that faith is one’s trust that God does not desire to create victims, but that God “sides with victims, with scapegoats”¹⁵ of culture.

Here, we see that God and Satan are the two supreme models for humans. We have the freedom to follow either model – to love or to destroy.

Mimetic anthropology and Islam both make universal truth claims about God and human beings. If they are both correct in their claims, we would expect to find an explanation of desire, conflict, and violence in the Qur’an. We would expect to find a critique of human violence and a critique of the universal human projection of violence onto God. We would also find in Islam a God who sides with the victims of culture without desiring to turn the oppressors into victims..

Islam and Mimetic Anthropology

¹¹ Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 99.

¹² Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 96.

¹³ Girard states in *Violence and the Sacred* that “Violence and the sacred are inseparable.” 19.

¹⁴ Rene Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001) 39-40.

¹⁵ James Williams, ed., *The Girard Reader*, (New York: The Crossroads Publishing Company, 1996, 2005) 290.

Islamic Theology: The *Tawhid* of God

Authentic Islamic theology, and any discussion of the Qur’anic message, must begin and end with the concept of *tawhid*. *Tawhid* refers to the absolute Oneness of God. Ramadan says that *tawhid* expresses God as “the first Principle, Creator of all, eternally present in history and at each moment, He is the Most High, beyond all that is, infinitely near, closer to each of us than (our) jugular vein. He is the One, the Only One, the Absolute, Justice, Truth, and Light.”¹⁶

The essential message of the Qur’an is God’s *tawhid* and this concept is epitomized in Surah 59.22-24:

He is God: there is no god other than Him, It is He who knows what is hidden as well as what is in the open, He is the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy. He is God: there is no god other than Him, the Controller, the Holy One, Source of Peace, Granter of Security, Guardian over all, the Almighty, the Compeller, the Truly Great; God is far above anything they consider to be his partner. He is God: the Creator, the Originator, the Shaper. The Best of names belong to Him. Everything in the heavens and earth glorifies Him: He is the Almighty and Wise.

What does it mean for God to be *tawhid*? In its historical context, Pre-Islamic Arabia is known to Muslims as the *Jahaliyah*, or the “Age of Ignorance.” Pre-Islamic Arabia was largely ignorant about God because they had not received a revelation from God.¹⁷ It is often assumed today that this was a polytheistic culture, but that is not quite right. The culture was more henotheistic.¹⁸ Henotheism is the belief in a single high God. Pre-Islamic Arabia called this high God *al-Lah*, or the God. This high God is entirely transcendent and has very little concern about the world. Between the transcendent high God and the world are intermediaries, angels or lesser gods, to whom one can pray so that the intermediary might send our prayers to the high God. For most Pre-Islamic Arabians the high God was not concerned about the world or about human affairs. One’s political, economic, and social position in life was determined by the mystery of Time or Fate. “Time had pre-arranged the four fundamentals of existence: food, the sex of children, happiness or misery, and one’s life span.”¹⁹

This ignorance about God – that God is transcendent and not at all concerned about the world or human affairs – meant that the vast majority of Arabians during this time were ignorant about the victims of their culture. They had little desire to care for the victims of their culture

¹⁶ Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) 12.

¹⁷ See Karen Armstrong’s chapter, “*Jahaliyah*” in her book *Muhammad: A Biography of a Prophet* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992).

¹⁸ Henotheism is a term coined by Friedrich Max Muller and can be found in a book called *Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion as Illustrated by the Religions of India* (London: Logmans, Green, and Co., 1878), 290. For its relationship to Pre-Islamic Arabia, see Reza Aslan’s *No god but God* (New York: Random House, 2005), 8, 40.

¹⁹ Farid Esack, *The Qur’an: A User’s Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2005), 34.

because they could not perceive how their cultural practices, assumptions, roles, and institutions led to the creation of victims. Fate was in control; there were no victims.

Islam brought a radical challenge to Pre-Islamic Arabia. The message of *tawhid* meant that there are no intermediaries between the world and God. It meant that God is not transcendent, and uncaring, but radically present and concerned about the world. Ramadan states the significance of Islam's message of *tawhid* for all humans is that "The One has forever been accompanying us, His creation, from our beginnings to our end. This is the very meaning of *tawhid* (the Oneness of God) and of the Quranic formula that refers to humankind's destiny as well as to that of each individual: 'To God we belong and to Him we return.'"²⁰

The Qur'an describes God's immanence by saying that God is closer to us than our "jugular vein" (50:16). God's radical immanence means that God is ultimately concerned about the world and is especially concerned with the victims of culture. This transformation of theology had an ethical dimension to care for the vulnerable. As Reza Aslan states in his book *No god but God*,

In the strongest terms, (the Qur'an, and thus) Muhammad decried the mistreatment and exploitation of the weak and unprotected. He called for an end to false contracts and the practice of usury that had made slaves of the poor. He spoke of the rights of the underprivileged and the oppressed, and made the astonishing claim that it was the duty of the rich and powerful to take care of them. "Do not oppress the orphan," the Quran commands, "and do not drive away the beggar" (93:9-10).²¹

Indeed, the Qur'an told Muhammad and his Companions, "Whatever you give should be for parents, close relatives, orphans, the needy, and travelers" (2:215). That verse is ethical commentary on the theological truth of God's *tawhid* – since God cares about the vulnerable members of culture, so should Muslims.

There can be no more vulnerable member of culture than infants. Pre-Islamic Arabia viewed female infants as a burden to society. They were another mouth to feed and weakened the power of a tribe. Female infanticide was a common practice, as baby girls were buried in the Arabian sand. The culture did not think view babies as victims. Their violence was projected onto idols, thus they did not bear responsibility for their violence. Surah 6:137 states, "their idols have induced many of the pagans to kill their own children, bringing them ruin and confusion in their faith." The Qur'an revealed the innocence of these victims of culture: "do not kill your children from fear of poverty; We will provide for you and for them" (6:151). The Qur'an began the process for Pre-Islamic Arabians to open their minds and hearts to the *tawhid* of God, the God who is radically present, who provides for our needs, and who stands with the victims of culture.²²

²⁰ Ramadan, *In the Footsteps of the Prophet* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007) 1.

²¹ Aslan, *No god but God*, 40.

²² See Toshihiko Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an* (Montreal: McGill Queens University Press, 2002).

Many complained to Muhammad about the Qur'an's challenge to transform the culture of violence in Pre-Islamic Arabia and the Qur'an speaks to the difficulty of this cultural transformation. Surah 7:28 states "Yet, when [these people] do something disgraceful they say, 'We found our fathers doing this,' and 'God has commanded us to do this.' Say [Prophet], 'God does not command disgraceful deeds.'" The Qur'an called for a radical transformation in the cultural understanding of God: This is a God who stands with the victims of culture. It was a message that would necessarily put Muhammad into conflict with the powerful elite of Mecca, indeed, with his own tribe, the Quraysh.

Yet, once the message of God's *tawhid* was revealed to Muhammad, he could not deny the God who was radically present in and radically concerned about the world and the way humans treat one another, especially the victims of culture. This was the message of *tawhid*.

Ramadan states that "to understand Islam is to grasp the meaning and significance of the multiple dimensions of *tawhid*."²³ *Tawhid* means that God cannot be other than this radical concern, but the multiple dimensions of *tawhid* means that God's concern can manifest in multiple ways. The multiple dimensions within God's *tawhid* cannot conflict. This is the essential argument of this paper: A consistent theology of *tawhid* necessarily means that God is consistent, that there can be no conflict within God; God cannot have conflicting wills, or conflicting desires. To associate conflicting desires within the One God would contradict the *tawhid*, or absolute Oneness, of God. God has multiple dimensions; for example, God is the Lord and Giver of Mercy, and the "Source of Peace." If God is the Lord and Giver of Mercy and the Source of Peace, then *tawhid* means that nothing within God can conflict with Mercy and Peace. To locate conflict, rivalry, and violence with or within God is to break the fundamental theological concept of *tawhid*.

Naskh/Abrogation

This brings us back to Michael Kirwan's exploration of the concept of *naskh*, or abrogation. This is a very complicated concept. Farid Esack, for example, states that, "Despite the emphasis on a sound knowledge of *naskh*, there is probably no other genre in Qur'anic Studies to rival it in confusion regarding its validity, meaning, and applicability."²⁴

The whole of the Book of the Quran, which Muslims faithfully acknowledge as God's Word, as well as the whole of the Book of the Universe, must be abrogated by, or interpreted through, the Oneness of God, in whom there can be no conflicting desires. *In other words, any naskh doctrine of abrogation must itself be abrogated by the doctrine of tawhid that states God is Mercy and Peace.* Muslims cannot associate any desires within God that contradicts Peace, otherwise they would break the essential doctrine of *tawhid*.

²³ Ramadan, *Western Muslims*, 12.

²⁴ Esack, *The Qur'an: A User's Guide*, 127. Here, Esack states that the early usage of *naskh* "did not necessarily include 'abrogation', with which it subsequently came to be synonymous."

The Qur'an and The Great Abrogation

What could be called “The Great Qur’anic Abrogation” is so obvious, so clear, that it is easy to take for granted. Muslims refer to it as the “*basmalah*.” This is a formulaic prayer that introduces 113 of 114 Surahs, or chapters, of the Qur’an,²⁵ and is the lens that the Qur’an provides to use when interpreting the Book of the Qur’an and the Book of the Universe. The *basmalah* has been translated in various ways, but the formula is essentially, “In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.” In his commentary on the Qur’an, Abdullah Yusuf Ali explains the implications of God’s Grace and Mercy, stating that God’s

Mercy may imply pity, long suffering, patience, and forgiveness, all of which the sinner needs and God Most Merciful bestows in abundant measure. But there is a Mercy that goes before even the need arises, the Grace which is ever watchful, and flows from God Most Gracious to all His creatures, protecting them, preserving them, guiding them, and leading them to clearer light and higher life.²⁶

The *basmalah* is essential to understanding God’s *tawhid* of Grace and Mercy. As Ali suggests above, God’s Grace and Mercy are pure gift. The *basmalah* reveals God’s ultimate desire to offer Grace and Mercy before we even need it, indeed, before we even ask for it. Ramadan states that Muslims are required to “go beyond a restrictive interpretation based on literal faithfulness to a text with no consideration to the context and with no sense of priorities.”²⁷ There can be no doubt that the *basmalah* reveals the context and priorities of God’s desire in the Qur’an, which is to offer Grace beyond the human understanding of grace and Mercy beyond the human understanding of mercy. All must be abrogated to those universal principles of God’s desire.

The great sin within Islam is for humans to forget the essential Oneness of God,²⁸ and thus associate something to God other than God’s Grace and Mercy. Forgetting the Oneness of God is sinful, but not because it offends God. The Qur’an is a reminder of God’s *tawhid* and states to Muhammad about those who have forgotten or don’t believe in the reminder “[Prophet], do not be grieved by those who disbelieve. They will not harm God in the least” (3:176). Humans only harm themselves, as God gives us the freedom to cultivate sinful practices, as surah 3:178 states, “The disbelievers should not think that it is better for them that We give them more time: when We give them more time they become more sinful.” Humans cannot harm or

²⁵ Surah 9 does not begin with the *basmalah*. For a brief discussion of the multiple theories about the missing *basmalah*, see Esack, *The Qur’an*, 60-61. Many scholars believe that surah 9 is the continuation of surah 8, which explains the missing *basmalah*.

²⁶ Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Qur’an: Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Elmhurst, NY: Tahrike Tarsile Qur’an, Inc, 4th edition, 2002), 14, n. 19.

²⁷ Ramadan, *Western Muslims*, 162.

²⁸ See Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity* (New York: Harper Collins, 2002), 6-7.

offend God because, as the Qur'an states, "Your Lord is self-sufficient and full of mercy." (6:133).

The Qur'an also states that God's self sufficiency, Grace, and Mercy mean that God takes the side of the victims of culture and seeks to provide for their needs, as seen in this verse concerning the inheritance policy for wives, orphans, and the needy: "Men shall have a share in what their parents and closest relatives leave, and women shall have a share in what their parents and closest relatives leave, whether the legacy be small or large: this is ordained by God. If other relatives, orphans, or needy people are present at the distribution, give them something too, and speak kindly to them" (4:7-8). Before the message of Islam, women and orphans were excluded from any inheritance, which led them into poverty. Many men rebelled when the Islamic inheritance code was established because they felt they needed to inherit all the money in order to keep their business alive. Muhammad, and the Qur'an, insisted on giving to the vulnerable of culture because of God's radical concern for the vulnerable. As the verse states, this concern includes "anyone in need."²⁹

Near the end of this section on inheritance, the Qur'an states that there should be "no harm done to anyone: this is a commandment from God: God is all knowing and benign to all" (4:12). Here, the phrase "God is ... benign to all," is made in the context of inheritance rights. A consistent theology of *tawhid* means that if God's Grace and Mercy lead God to be benign, or harmless, to all in one situation, then the consistency of God's Grace and Mercy must lead God to be consistently benign in all situations.³⁰

The Holy Qur'an: The Word of God

Muslims believe that the Qur'an is the Word of God. Ramadan states that this is one of the pillars of the faith and he continues to say that, "The problem lies not in the divine nature of the origin of the text but in the way it is read. One may read the Qur'an in the conviction that it is the Word of God without in the least minimizing the amount of human reasoning that must be invested in order for the Text to become accessible."³¹ The Qur'an reveals the need for humans to use our reason in 6:97-98, "We have made our signs clear for those who have knowledge . . . We have made our revelations clear for those who understand."

The important question that needs to be asked is, "How is the Qur'an the Word of God?" The physical book must be respected, but the paper, the ink, and the cover are not the Word of God. If a Muslim were to say that the physical book is the Word of God, he or she would fall into the same trap Muslims accuse Christians of falling into in worshipping a physical being. For Muslims, the Qur'an is the Word of God as it is spoken. When the angel Gabriel came to Muhammad and told him to "Recite!"³² (96:1). Muhammad didn't recite from a physical book.

²⁹ See Reza Aslan, *No God but God*, 62.

³⁰ Notice that the theological statement that God is benign leads to the human ethical precept that there should be "no harm done to anyone."

³¹ Ramadan, *Western Muslims and The Future of Islam*, 231-232.

³² See surah 96:1-5. Also, Ramadan, *In the Footsteps of the Prophet*, 29.

It's not the physical book of the Qur'an that is the Word of God; a Muslim cannot hold the Word of God in his or her hand. This is part of how a Muslim can participate in the paradoxical immanence and transcendence of God. God is immanent in that a Muslim can speak the Word of God, and yet God is transcendent in that a Muslim cannot hold onto the Word of God. The Qur'an as the Word of God is elusive and transcends our ability to grasp it and hold it.³³

With that understanding of the immanence and transcendence of the Qur'an in mind, we move forward, firmly, but respectfully and with humility, to explore the Qur'an's possible relationship with mimetic anthropology.

The Holy Qur'an: A Text in Travail or a Text in *Jihad*

I have made the claim that the Qur'an must be interpreted through the *tawhid* of God's Grace and Mercy. What, then, are we to make of violent passages in the Qur'an?³⁴ Here we can use mimetic anthropology's insights into holy texts.

In his book *The Scapegoat*, René Girard describes the mythical cover up of violence in a chapter entitled, "The Science of Myth." He writes, "As religion and cultures are formed and perpetuated, the violence is hidden."³⁵ For Girard, Myth seeks to hide the human violence that infects our world, that infects even our holy texts. Gospel, as opposed to myth, both acknowledges human violence and also critiques human violence. This is what makes the Bible not a mythical text, but a holy text. It is a holy book because it is a text in travail; it struggles against and critiques the violence within it.

With this definition of "Myth" and "Gospel" we can begin to see how the Qur'an is not a mythical text. The Qur'an makes no attempt to hide the violence that infects it. The good news is that the Qur'an critiques its violence. To label this critique as "Gospel" might be slightly inappropriate, although the Qur'an does use the term.³⁶ It might be more appropriate to call it "Truth." The Qur'an reveals the Truth that God does not desire violence, but that God stands with the victims of culture and desires Peace, Mercy, and Grace.

The Qur'an is a text in travail. Like the Bible, it is a holy text that struggles against its own promotion of human violence and its own violent understanding of God. "Travail" is probably not the right word to use. A better way to phrase it might be, "The Qur'an is a text in *jihad*." Of course, I can understand how a Muslim would be uncomfortable with that statement. Is it a threat to the doctrine that the Qur'an is the Word of God? Or, could there be something like an

³³ For more on this topic, see Farid Esack, *The Qur'an*, 20, 30.

³⁴ For an interesting discussion on Islam and the violent sacred, see "The Problems of Violence and Conflict in Islam," by Qamar-ul Huda and Robert Hamerton-Kelly's response in *Contagion: Journal of Mimesis and Culture*, Volume 9 (Spring 2002), 80-108.

³⁵ René Girard, *The Scapegoat* (Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press, 1986), 95.

³⁶ For example, see 5:46.

Islamic concept of *accommodation*?³⁷ Could the Word of God accommodate Itself to humans by revealing to us what it means to be in *jihad*? If so, it would be because of God's *tawhid* of Grace and Mercy, and it would reveal that God loves humans so much that God would model for us how to struggle with our own violence.

Jihad is "the struggle of the soul to overcome the sinful obstacles that keep a person from God."³⁸ As Khaled Abou El Fadl states,

Jihad simply means to strive hard or struggle in pursuit of a just cause, and according to the Prophet of Islam, the highest form of jihad is the struggle waged to cleanse oneself from the vices of the heart. Holy war (*al-harb al-muqaddasah*) is not an expression used by the Qur'anic text or Muslim theologians.³⁹

The fundamental Qur'anic concept of the *tawhid* of God's Mercy and Grace abrogates, or critiques, any Qur'anic concept of a violent God. A consistent theology of *tawhid* means that God is Peace, Grace, and Mercy, thus, God is not violent. Some might argue that God can mysteriously contain elements that human reason perceives as contradictory, yet the Qur'an insists that humans use our reason. For example, surah 6:151 starts, "Say, 'I will tell you what the Lord has really forbidden you. Do not ascribe anything as a partner to Him,'" the verse ends saying, "perhaps you will use your reason." Reason is a gift from God that we should use in order to have a better understanding of our world and of God. We should then reason that to attribute violence with God's Mercy, Grace, and Peace is to ascribe a partner that is "other" than God and thus would contradict the concept of *tawhid*.

There are passages in the Qur'an that seem to attribute violence to God, but those passages are critiqued by images of a nonviolent God. For example, many passages that deal with the *eschaton*, the last days, seem to have the image of a violent God. Those passages are not much different than Matthew 25:31-46 where Jesus separates the sheep from the goats and actively sends the goats to "eternal punishment" (Matt 25:46). Here are two verses from the Qur'an that speaks about members of the Quraysh, Muhammad's own tribe, who refused to believe in the message and persecuted the Muslim community,

As for those who disbelieve neither their possessions nor their children will help them against God—they will be companions in the Fire, there to remain—and whatever they give away in this life will be nullified: a frosty wind strikes and destroys the harvest of people who have wronged themselves. It was not God who wronged them; they wronged themselves (3:116-117).

³⁷ This might be an imposition of a Christian term, see Daniel Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding* (WMB Eerdmans, 1991, 2004) 402 for more on *accommodation*.

³⁸ Aslan, *No god but God*, 81.

³⁹ Khaled Abou El Fadl, *The Place of Tolerance in Islam*, (Boston, Beacon Press, 2002) 19.

Within those two verses, the image of a violent God is critiqued. It looks as though God is against those Quraysh who refused to believe and sends them to the eternal Fire, but then it repeats the previously mentioned idea that God is benign to all, “It was not God who wronged them; they wronged themselves.”

God’s desire may be for Peace, Grace, and Mercy, but there are passages in the Qur’an where God “ordains” humans to be violent and there were times that Muhammad participated in war. Before Muhammad went to war, *jihad* was a purely spiritual struggle against the egocentric, selfish, and violent aspects within one’s self. This has always been the primary, or greater, *jihad*. The lesser *jihad* is what Ramadan calls “*al-qital*, necessary armed resistance in the face of armed aggression, self defense against oppressors.”⁴⁰ The lesser *jihad* is a defensive war that is permitted to protect Muslims and their communities against invasion and oppression. This lesser *jihad* may be necessary at times, but it is never to be desired, and it is never holy.⁴¹

Muhammad’s lesser *jihad* came from a conflict with his own tribe, the Quraysh. The Quraysh was the political, religious, and economic powerhouse of Arabia, and the powerful members of the Quraysh had little concern for the poor and vulnerable members of society. Muhammad’s message that God was ultimately concerned about the victims of their culture threatened the power of the Quraysh, who sought to oppressively thwart Muhammad’s message. With the continued violent aggression of the Quraysh, whose goal was to exterminate Muhammad and the early Muslim community called the *Ummah*, Muhammad participated in the lesser *jihad*.

Surah 2:216 states, “Fighting is ordained for you, though you dislike it.” War may be necessary, but it is critiqued as something one should never enjoy. Some commentators state that Muslims inherently desire war. If there are Muslims who desire war, it is not because they are Muslim; it is because they are human. Any Muslim who desires war is critiqued by this verse. Three other verses, Surah 2:190-193, which are often viewed as the most violent passages in the Qur’an, states,

Fight in God’s cause against those who fight you, but do not overstep the limits: God does not love those who overstep the limits. Kill them wherever you encounter them and drive them out from where they drove you out, for persecution is more serious than killing. Do not fight them at the Sacred Mosque unless they fight you there. If they do fight you, kill them—this is what such disbelievers deserve—but if they stop, then God is most forgiving and merciful. Fight them until there is no more persecution, and worship is devoted to God. If they cease hostilities, there can be no further hostility, except toward aggressors.

Now, one could easily criticize such verses in the Qur’an to argue that the Islamic God is inherently violent. As mimetic anthropologists, we can appreciate this passage of the Qur’an,

⁴⁰ Ramadan, *In the Footsteps of the Prophet*, 98.

⁴¹ See El Fadl, *The Place of Tolerance in Islam*, 19 where he states, “Interestingly, Islamic tradition does not have a notion of Holy War.” The term was first used by Christians during the crusades.

because it makes no attempt to mythically hide violence. We can appreciate the Qur'an even more, because it doesn't stop at revealing violence; it also critiques violence.

When the oppressed gain power, as the early Muslims did, there can be a tendency for the oppressed to become the oppressors and create victims. This passage warns against that tendency: "do not overstep the limits." By limiting war the Qur'an critiques war and claims that we must take responsibility for our violence. War is not an end in and of itself. The passage also states, "If they cease hostilities, there can be no further hostility." There can be no revenge; all violence must stop. God does not desire war.⁴² The point is that God stands with the oppressed, so don't become the oppressors. God does not desire a cycle of victim making, where the oppressors become the victims. Surah 16:90 confirms this interpretation, "God commands justice, doing good, and generosity towards relatives and He forbids what is shameful, blameworthy, and oppressive. He teaches you, so that you may take heed."

Further evidence of the Qur'an's internal *jihad* is provided just eight verses after the phrase "Fighting is ordained for you, though you dislike it." Surah 2:224 states, "[Believers], do not allow your oaths in God's name to hinder you from doing good, being mindful of God and making peace between you and people." This verse implies that what might be viewed as a "religious obligations to kill in an act of defense" is abrogated by God's Grace and Mercy. When we are mindful of God's *tawhid* of Grace and Mercy, we are led to do good deeds for others and to seek peace with our enemies, even in the midst of war.

Ramadan states that, "The only purpose of *jihad*, of intimate or collective resistance against the would-be oppression of one's instincts or other people's would-be aggression, must indeed be the search for peace, never the aim for tension, conflict, or war."⁴³ Just before discussing the Battle at Badr, the Qur'an tells Muhammad what his disposition should be toward those who had betrayed him and became his enemy, "We have made Our revelation clear for you; will you not use your reason? This is how it is: here you are, you love them, but they do not love you" (3:118-119). The Qur'an makes the astonishing⁴⁴ claim to love those who betray you. Love, according to the Qur'an, necessarily leads to forgiveness. The Qur'an warned Muhammad about betrayals and advised him, "you will always find treachery in all but a few of them. Overlook this and pardon them" (5:13). God's revelation and human reason unite in a radical love and forgiveness that includes even enemies. The theological concept of *tawhid*—God's grace and mercy—leads away from the desire to oppress or to destroy our enemies. God's *tawhid* leads toward the hope and desire for reconciliation with enemies. As the Qur'an states, "Remember God's favour to you: you were enemies and then He brought your hearts together and you became brothers by His grace" (3:103). Muhammad knew that all war is based on a lie that reconciliation is impossible, and when we participate in war we participate in a lie.

⁴² Whenever one claims that *jihad* means that Muslims are in a necessary and never ending violent struggle against the West, one bears false witness against Islam.

⁴³ Ramadan, *Radical Reform*, 139.

⁴⁴ Is that kind of love un-human? Can it only come from God?

Muhammad was consistent with the Qur'an's critique of war when he exclaimed to one of his early followers, "war is deceit!"⁴⁵

If God is Grace and Mercy, if God is benign to all, then where does violence come from? To explore the answers to that question, we need to begin with Islamic anthropology.

Islamic Anthropology: The *Tawhid* of Being Human and Mimetic Anthropology

Any Islamic anthropology must begin and end with the *tawhid* of being human. Islam's main message is that God's desire for humans is consistent with God's Grace and Mercy. Islam means submission and the goal for a Muslim is to submit to God's Grace and Mercy and freely imitate that Grace and Mercy to one another. The word "Islam" is often simply translated as "submission," but it has strong connotations of "peace" and "self-giving."⁴⁶ One's submission to God is an act of receiving one's identity from God's Grace and Mercy. All of creation is a result of God's Self-Giving, Grace, and Mercy and God's desire is for humans to imitate that grace and mercy to one another.

God created humans through God's Grace and Mercy. According to the Qur'an, this means that all humans were created "in the finest state" (95:4). The Qur'an also reveals that humans were created from "one soul" (7:189). These two verses reveal the universal *tawhid* of being human.

The problem is that when we forget this universally shared "finest state" and the "one soul" that exists within ourselves and within others. Forgetting this, we forget God's *tawhid* and humanity's *tawhid*. We begin to make accusations of difference that lead to scapegoating. God's desire is clearly stated in Surah 49:13, which states, "Humankind! We created you from a single (pair) of male and female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other (not that you may despise each other)."⁴⁷ Although humans exist in a plurality, humanity is one before the Gracious and Merciful God. Differences between human beings are not meant to lead to accusations of difference and scapegoating. No, humanity's differences are meant to lead us into knowing and loving what is other, and what is yet one. The *tawhid* of being human washes away all scapegoating categories, so that we may live in God's Grace and Mercy by imitating God's Grace and Mercy to one another.

God did not create humans so that they would be violent with one another. All violence, even the violence found in the Qur'an, is against the Qur'anic God who desires Mercy and Grace. In the Qur'anic story of human creation, God tells the angels God's plan, saying, "I am putting a successor on earth." The angels replied with envy, "How can You put someone there who will cause damage and bloodshed, when we celebrate Your praise and proclaim Your holiness" (emphasis added.) Here, the Qur'anic creation story reveals that it is humans, not God, that creates bloodshed. God replies to the angels, "I know things you do not" (2:30). The angels

⁴⁵ Ramadan, *In the Footsteps of the Prophet*, 143.

⁴⁶ Ramadan, *In the Footsteps of the Prophet*, 1.

⁴⁷ Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Qur'an*, 1407.

make an accusation of complete difference between themselves and humanity. “We are pure and good,” the angels imply, “While *those* humans are violent and destructive.” The angels’ accusation was inherently violent, as it was based on a desire to cast out human beings. One of the angels, Iblis, or Satan, was full of pride and refused to honor God’s creation of human beings.

The story does not elaborate on God’s reply to the angels, “I know things you do not.” The meaning of the statement could seem mysterious, if we understand it outside of the context of God’s *Tawhid*. God only knows, and thus, only desires, Grace and Mercy. God has no choice. If God were other than Grace and Mercy, God would not be God.

But the Qur’an insists that humans have a choice, and that choice is based on desire. God does not force God’s desire onto humans, but allows us freedom. Surah 6:39 states, “Those who reject our signs are deaf, dumb, and in total darkness. God leaves whoever he will to stray, and sets whoever He will on a straight path.” We can desire God as a model or Satan as a model. We will submit to one or the other. This is the question Islamic anthropology asks, “Who will you model your desires after? God or Satan?” The Qur’an states, “You who believe, enter wholeheartedly into submission to God and do not follow in Satan’s footsteps, for he is your sworn enemy” (2:208). In Surah 4:119, Satan talks to God about what he will do to humans: “I will mislead them and incite vain desires in them; I will command them to slit the ears of cattle;⁴⁸ I will command them to tamper with God’s creation.” The verse goes on to say, “Whoever chooses Satan as a patron instead of God is utterly ruined.” According to the Qur’an, no matter how much we justify violence and war, these are false human realities rooted in Satan’s desire to cause enmity, hatred, and destruction. Satan’s spell is so strong that if left to our own selves, our own desires, we will be seduced by Satan and non-consciously follow Satan. In Surah 7.26-27 God tells the “Children of Adam, We have given you garments to cover your nakedness and as adornment for you; the garment of God-consciousness is the best of all garments—this is one of God’s signs so that people may take heed. Children of Adam, do not let Satan seduce you.” Satan’s seduction causes us to forget our shared *tawhid* and make accusations of difference and thus we become “each other’s enemies” (2:36, 7:24). According to the Qur’an, Satan has seduced all human souls to be prone to selfishness (4:128).⁴⁹ Since we are all prone to selfish desire, we need to continuously seek the transformation of our selfish desires towards altruistic giving. As the Quran states, “Do not covet what God has given to some of you more than others ... (but) give them their share” (4:32-33.) Here we see the mimetic anthropological truth that humans desire according to the desires of the other and that shared desire leads to envy. The Qur’an asks, “Do they envy [other] people for the bounty God has granted them?” (4:56).

⁴⁸ An anti-sacrificial verse.

⁴⁹ This verse doesn’t specifically mention Satan, but, in its literary context, nine verses earlier (verse 119), mentioned above, Satan says, “I will mislead them and incite vain desires in them.” When we choose Satan as a model or patron, we will fall into vain and selfish desires that lead to rivalry with one another, especially those we are closest to, such as a husband or wife.

Internal mediation leads to rivalry when our desire is primarily to seek the approval of others. Either we do not receive the approval we desire, or we constantly have to perform better to gain approval. This is part of Satan's seduction, because the truth is that we are not self-sufficient, and so we seek the approval of others. Thus, we fall into rivalry. External mediation is when we desire according to the desire of someone, or some thing, that transcends our historical or ontological context. For the Qur'an, this external mediation is to desire the approval not of other people, but of God, who is self-sufficient and forgives. Surah 2:263-265 states,

A kind word and forgiveness is better than a charitable deed followed by hurtful [words]: God is self-sufficient, forbearing. You who believe, do not cancel out your charitable deeds with reminders and hurtful words, like someone who spends his wealth only to be seen by people, not believing in God and the Last Day. Such a person is like a rock with earth on it: heavy rain falls and leaves it completely bare. Such people get no rewards for their work: God does not guide the disbelievers. But those who spend their wealth in order to gain God's approval, and as an affirmation of their own faith, are like a garden on a hill: heavy rain falls and it produces double its normal yield; even if no heavy rains fall, it will still be watered by the dew. God sees all that you do.

Satan's seduction causes humans to forget the universal human *tawhid* of being created from "one soul" and in the "finest state," thus becoming something like the angels by making accusations of difference. Satan desires to seduce humans with intoxicating selfish desires that lead us over and against others. This is the Satanic myth of violence. Satan puts a veil over our eyes so that we do not see the victims of our culture. The only way out of this trap is to intentionally cloth ourselves in the garments of God-consciousness—and trust God's *tawhid* of Grace and Mercy, that leads to forgiveness. Surah 2:268 states, "Satan threatens you with the prospect of poverty and commands you to do foul deeds; God promises you His forgiveness and His abundance: God is limitless and all knowing."

Although the Qur'an is clear that we were not created to despise each other, the Qur'an is also clear that we often do despise each other and that we are violent with one another. The Qur'an explains selfish desire as Satanic – "Satan seeks to incite hatred and enmity among you" (5:91).⁵⁰ We begin to desire selfishly and we are influenced by others who are under Satan's spell of hatred, enmity, and selfish desire. The Qur'an warns, "But many lead others astray by their desires" (6:119).⁵¹ The Qur'an also speaks to the non-conscious aspect of desire, when it states that the "evil doers" who cause corruption in the land are not aware of what they are doing. Surah 2:11-12 states, "When it is said to them, 'do not cause corruption in the land,' they say, 'We are only putting things right,' but really they are causing corruption, *though they do not realize it*" (emphasis added). Here we see the non-conscious aspect of mimetic

⁵⁰ The context of this verse refers to intoxicants and gambling as ways Satan incites hatred and enmity. The desire for intoxication and gambling can easily become selfish and lead us into rivalry with one another, but clearly Satan is not limited to stirring human rivalry through intoxicants and gambling.

⁵¹ Verse deals with those who eat meat that is not permitted.

anthropology that leads to scapegoating revealed in the Qur'an. We rarely realize the pain and destruction we cause to others in the name of our own definition of "Goodness."

Islam and mimetic anthropology both claim that we desire according to the desires of others and that we choose our models non-consciously. Once we hear this message, we are enabled to take responsibility and consciously choose our models. The Quran states, "Should I seek a Lord other than God, when He is the Lord of all things? Each soul is responsible for its own actions; no soul will bear the burden of another. You will all return to your Lord in the end, and He will tell you the truth about your differences." (6:164). After hearing the message of the Qur'an, we must take responsibility for our own actions, but, the truth is that we will fail. Failure is inevitable, which is why the Qur'an insists that God's Grace and Mercy is freely given.

The Qur'an is clear that humans necessarily choose models, and, if left to the non-conscious, we are likely to choose Satanic models of hatred, enmity and selfish desires. The Qur'an is a warning against modeling our lives after Satan. Instead, it seeks to guide humans in submitting to God's Grace and Mercy and imitating that Grace and Mercy to one another.

Tariq Ramadan and Islamic Ethics: Humility and the Higher Objectives

In the introduction to his book *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, Tariq Ramadan explains his general mission and challenge to his fellow Muslims: "to understand the universality of the message of Islam and to highlight the means we are given to help us live in our own time, in the West, with respect for ourselves and for others."⁵² Islam's universal message describes the human responsibility to God and to one another in our present historical context. "Muslim morality," explains Ramadan, "is entirely based on awareness of one's responsibility before the Creator and among humankind. To be with the One is to serve one's fellows."⁵³

Islamic ethics is about promoting the "good." What is the "good" according to Islam? The essence of Qur'anic ethics is given in 2:177:

Goodness does not consist in turning your face towards East or West. The truly good are those who believe in God and the Last Day, in the angels, the Scripture, and the prophets; who give away some of their wealth, however much they cherish it, to their relatives, to orphans, the needy, travelers and beggars, and to liberate those in bondage; those who keep up the prayer and pay the prescribed alms; who keep pledges whenever they make them; who are steadfast in misfortune, adversity, and times of danger. These are the ones who are true, and it is they who are aware of God.

⁵² Ramadan, *Western Muslims*, 13.

⁵³ Ramadan, *Western Muslims*, 153.

Again we see the theological significance of the *tawhid* of God. Belief in the One God who is radically present in the world has an ethical component of caring for those in need. The principles Ramadan elaborates are meant to give “a capacity to anticipate and transform reality *in order to* harmonize the definitive objectives of ethics and human behavior in history.”⁵⁴ In other words, Islamic ethics encourage Muslims to look at their present reality and transform it in light of the *tawhid* of God and the *tawhid* of humanity.

Humility and Moralism

For Ramadan, Islamic ethics begin with humility. “Humility,” Ramadan states, “is the state that allows the human being to enter into its humanity. Humility is the source of all ethics.”⁵⁵ As a faithful Muslim, Ramadan receives this understanding of the importance of humility through the Qur’an, which states, “No vision can take Him in, but He takes in all visions” (6:103). Humans are finite creatures, prone to selfish desires and misunderstanding God and one another.

The problem with striving to be good, is that it can lead to a sense of moralism, where one defines oneself as “good” over and against an “other.” That mentality only leads to further scapegoating. False moralism takes pride in its own goodness, saying, “We are better than you.” Ramadan claims that Islam seeks to lead Muslims out of this divisive and isolating trap of egoism. Instead, Islam seeks to open the hearts of Muslims so they may enter into humble and respectful relationships with the “other.” “Priority must be given,” states Ramadan, “to achieving this opening up of minds and hearts: to be oneself not in opposition to the Other but alongside him, with him, dealing with our differences in active proximity, not in isolated corners of our intellectual and social ghettos.”⁵⁶ As mimetic anthropologists, we might only add, “dealing with our differences and *similarities* in active proximity.” Islamic ethics should lead Muslims to examine their individual and communal lives in a spirit of humility and repentance.

Muhammad as Model for Humility

Muhammad is the ultimate human model for Muslims. The Qur’an states, “The Messenger of God is an excellent model for those of you who put your hope in God and the Last Day and remember Him often” (33:21). The interesting thing about the Qur’anic description of “good” and Muhammad being “an excellent model” is that Muhammad was not always good. Ramadan recounts an episode from Muhammad’s life when his community was violently oppressed in Mecca. Muhammad sought protection from a powerful chief named Walid. While Muhammad made his case to Walid for his protection of the Muslim community, a blind Muslim, who was poor and old, interrupted Muhammad and asked him to recite a few surahs from the Qur’an. This irritated Muhammad and he soon scolded the man. Walid then refused to listen to Muhammad and the community was left unsupported.

⁵⁴ Ramadan, *Radical Reform*, 122.

⁵⁵ Ramadan, *Western Muslims*, 18.

⁵⁶ Ramadan, *Western Muslims*, 110.

Muhammad could easily have scapegoated the blind man and blamed him for the incident and for the continued vulnerability of the Muslim community. The community likely would have followed Muhammad, and their frustrations from being persecuted could have easily found an outlet in this blind, old, and poverty stricken man. Soon, though, Muhammad received a revelation from God that criticized his behavior and spoke to the innocence of the man. The Qur'an states, "He (that is, Muhammad) frowned and turned away when the blind man came to him—for all you know, he might have grown in spirit, or taken note of something useful to him . . . from the one who has come to you full of eagerness and awe you allow yourself to be distracted. No indeed!" (80.1-4, 8-11).⁵⁷

God's Word was in travail against Muhammad's very human desire to protect the community, but the community's protection was not to come at the expense of the vulnerable – he must not scapegoat, even if it is done in the name of whatever he deemed "good." Ramadan reflects on this episode, saying:

The Prophet, moved by his desire to protect his community, is here reproached by his Educator (that is, God), who teaches him never to turn away from a human being, regardless of whatever difficult circumstances the Prophet might be facing, even though the person might be poor, old, and blind . . . this moral slip is recorded in the Qur'an, which through this story teaches Muslims never to neglect a human being, never to turn away from the poor and needy, but rather to serve and love them.⁵⁸

The Qur'an warns that even religious desires to protect the community can lead to scapegoating, something that even Muhammad was prone to doing to his fellow Muslims. It warned Muhammad, again, "Do not drive away those who call upon their Lord morning and evening, seeking nothing but His Face . . . if you drove the believers away, you would become one of the evil doers" (6:52). As a believer, Muhammad would become like one of the "evil doers" if he drove out, or scapegoated, a vulnerable member of his society. Here we see that there was not a lot of difference between Muhammad and those that the Qur'an calls "evil doers" who "cause corruption in the land" say "'We are only putting things right,' but really they are causing corruption, though they do not realize it" (2:11-12). Muhammad was just as human as the "evil doers" and thus just as prone to scapegoating. The difference was that Muhammad knew he was prone to scapegoating, and so he was in travail, or in *jihad*, against his own tendency to scapegoat.

Humility and the *Ummah*

⁵⁷ If mimetic anthropologists want to insist that the Qur'an is not the Word of God, then we must admit that this is an amazing self critique that Muhammad made. It shows Muhammad was in travail/*jihad* with himself. I would suggest that a critique like that has something to do with God.

⁵⁸ Ramadan, *In the Footsteps of the Prophet*, 48.

The way the members of the *Ummah*, or Muslim community, treat one another is of vital theological and ethical significance. The *Ummah* is God's community, and thus should reflect God's *tawhid* of Grace and Mercy to the world. That being said, there may be no more important Qur'anic verse that points to humility than Surah 3:105, which states, "Do not be like those who, after they have been given clear revelation, split into factions and fall into disputes: a terrible punishment awaits such people." Like Jesus' great prayer to his Father in John 17:22 "that they may be one as we are one" should be cause for Christian humility, this passage from the Qur'an should be cause for Muslim humility. Christians and Muslims have broken into factions that cause us to forget the eternal essence of human *tawhid*. Factions allow groups to make violent accusations of difference and define themselves over and against the "other." This leads to a violence of our own making, and as the Qur'an warns, "a terrible punishment awaits" us.

Ramadan's Higher Objectives of Ethics

Hope lies in the Qur'an's ethical objectives. The Qur'an "primarily deals with general principles"⁵⁹ of ethics. The first principle is *al-din*, which often gets translated simply as religion. *Al-din* does refer to religion, but not in a narrow sense of one religion, such as Islam. It refers to "religion in the vastest sense as the sacred norm into which the whole of life is to be molded. It is the total way of life grounded in teachings that have issued from God."⁶⁰ The higher objectives of Islam are to protect the, "recognition of the One . . . and of *al-maslahah*—in the sense of the common good and interest of humankind and the universe."⁶¹ Ramadan states, "Faith in God and knowledge, in light of the divine, must have as their immediate consequences a behavior, a way of acting that respects an ethic and promotes good."⁶² *Al-din* is primarily the recognition in God's *tawhid* of Grace and Mercy, which is the cause of God's ultimate concern for the world, especially for the victims of culture. Thus, the recognition of *al-din* leads to the recognition of humanity's *tawhid* and the promotion of the common good for all humans. The higher objectives of Islam are meant to allow Muslims to work with people of other religious background who share common ethical concerns. As the Qur'an states, "Each community has its own direction to which it turns: race to do good deeds" (2:148).

Working from the recognition of *al-din* and the common good, Ramadan states 13 higher objectives that elaborate on human *tawhid* and our responsibility for one another. The 13 higher objectives are to promote the "Dignity (of humankind, living species, and Nature), Welfare, Knowledge, Creativity, Autonomy, Development, Equality, Freedom, Justice,

⁵⁹ Ramadan, *Radical Reform*, 97.

⁶⁰ Nasr, *The Heart of Islam*, 16.

⁶¹ Ramadan, *Radical Reform*, 138. I left out "and of the Way". The "Way" refers to *al-shariah*. Ramadan admits that the concept of *al-shariah* has been betrayed by many Muslims. "the *Shariah*," Ramadan states, "insofar as it is the expression of the 'way to faithfulness,' deduced and constructed a posteriori, is the work of human intellect." *Al-Sharia* is not a law, at least not as law is commonly understood. For Muslims, it is the way of living into the *tawhid* of God's Grace and Mercy. As such, it must be in *jihad* with itself and critiqued by God's Grace and Mercy. For more, see Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, 31-61.

⁶² Ramadan, *In the Footsteps of the Prophet*, 32.

Fraternity, Love, Solidarity, and Diversity.”⁶³ Ramadan’s vision for the future of Islam comes from the Qur’an. It’s a vision that he states is “open, shared, inclusive, and dynamic, rather than fearful, exclusive, rigid, and closed.”⁶⁴ It is a vision that is open to the other, yet prophetically critiques human practices of exclusion, scapegoating, and violence.

What might it look like for a Muslim to live like this?

Abdul Ghaffar Khan: Faith, Love, and Nonviolence

Today’s world is traveling in some strange direction. You see that the world is going toward destruction and violence. And the specialty of violence is to create hatred among people and fear. I am a believer in nonviolence and I say that no peace or tranquility will descend upon the people of the world until nonviolence is practiced, because nonviolence is love and it stirs courage in people.

-Abdul Ghaffar Khan, 1985

Abdul Ghaffar Khan was a Muslim who was moved by his faith to live a life of nonviolence. He was born in 1890 in the Northwest Frontier Province of British India into a Pathan tribe. Pathan culture was well known by the British to be fiercely violent and cruel. Pathans were stuck in a cycle of internal feuds that culminated in revenge killings. The British Empire was locked in a series of wars with the Northwest Province. The British were successful in The First Afghan War of 1838, but in 1842 the Pathans sought revenge, massacring a British force of 4,500. These violent acts produced fear and hatred among the Pathans and the British people respectively, each believing their own violence was justified because of the barbaric acts of the “other.”⁶⁵

Khan knew this cycle of violence had to change because he believed the Pathan culture of violence was self-destructive. His people had been “dispossessed of their freedom, he held, only because of their own self destructive tendencies.”⁶⁶ There was a better way, and Khan found it in his faith. He stated that “It is my inmost conviction that Islam is work, faith, and love and without these the name ‘Muslim’ is sounding brass and tinkling cymbal. The Koran makes it absolutely clear that faith in One God without a second, and good works, are enough to secure a man his salvation.”⁶⁷ His interpretation of the Qur’an led him to live a life of love and nonviolence.

⁶³ Ramadan, *Radical Reform*, 139.

⁶⁴ Ramadan, *Radical Reform*, 295.

⁶⁵ Eknath Easwaran, *Nonviolent Soldier of Islam*, (Tomales, CA: Nilgiri Press, 1999) 96

⁶⁶ Easwaran, *Nonviolent Soldier of Islam*, 95.

⁶⁷ Easwaran, *Nonviolent Soldier of Islam*, 63

Khan's faith led him to serve his people by attempting to root out injustice. For example, education was only available to rich young men. He created schools for the poor and for girls. But he continued to be deeply troubled by the culture of violence. How could this culture of violence be stopped? Education was part of the key, but it wasn't enough.

At this crucial time, Khan met Gandhi. He was inspired by Gandhi's courage and commitment to nonviolence, and took that commitment upon himself. Some may wonder how a monotheistic Muslim and a polytheistic Hindu could get along so well, but there is a long tradition of such relationships. It is commonly known that Muslims respect Jews and Christians as *dhimmi*, or "People of the Book."⁶⁸ According to Reza Aslan, the "People of the Book" were "spiritual cousins who, as opposed to the pagans and polytheists of Arabia, worshipped the same God, read the same scriptures, and shared the same moral values as [the] Muslim community."⁶⁹ Khan included Hindus as "People of the Book." In doing so, Khan was not making a religious innovation, but was following Islamic tradition and the Qur'anic verse, "There can be no compulsion in religion" (2:256). "When Islam expanded into Iran and India, both the dualist Zoroastrians and certain polytheistic Hindu sects were designated as"⁷⁰ People of the Book. As such, they were protected under Islamic Law.

Khan began to make speeches to his people about nonviolence. He recruited his students, who in turn recruited others. Many Pathans who were deeply rooted in a culture of violence, dropped their weapons and lived a life of nonviolence against British occupation. The key for Khan was to link God with love. Khan said, "The Holy Prophet Mohammed came into this world and taught us: 'That man is a Muslim who never hurts anyone by word or deed, but who works for the benefit and happiness of God's creatures. Belief in God is to love one's fellowmen.'"⁷¹ He formed a nonviolent army called Khudai Khidmatgars, "Servants of God." They refused to retaliate, signing a contract in which they stated:

I am a Khudai Khidmatgar; and as God needs no service, but serving his creation is serving him, I promise to serve humanity in the name of God.

I promise to refrain from violence and from taking revenge. I promise to forgive those who oppress me or treat me with cruelty.

I promise to refrain from taking part in feuds and quarrels and from creating enmity.

⁶⁸ Aslan, *No god but God*, 268.

⁶⁹ Aslan, *No god but God*, 100.

⁷⁰ Aslan, *No god but God*, 268.

⁷¹ Easwaran, *Nonviolent Soldier of Islam*, 55.

I promise to treat every Pathan as my brother and friend.

I promise to refrain from antisocial customs and practices.

I promise to live a simple life, to practice virtue and refrain from evil.

I promise to practice good manners and good behavior and not to lead a life of idleness.

I promise to devote at least two hours a day to social work.⁷²

Their understanding of God as Grace, Mercy, Love, and Compassion was at the heart of the movement, therefore they would forgive everyone, including their enemies. The second point of the contract is the epitome of grace for people of any religious tradition: there was no need for the British oppressors to admit they were wrong and in need of forgiveness, they were already forgiven.

The surprising thing was that this radical belief in love, nonviolence, and forgiveness worked. Pathan violence didn't work. It only created hatred and fear among the British people. Pathan nonviolent resistance allowed the British to see their own violence and the suffering it caused for what it really was: absurd and inhumane.

Through his faith, Khan encouraged his non-violent army to not inflict violence upon the British, but to absorb violence and offer forgiveness in return. This story, told by Jean Akhtar Cerrina, describes an event where this absorption of violence and refusal to retaliate occurred: It was early on 23 April 1930 when the British Government arrested Abdul Ghaffar Khan. The British Empire was worried that Khan's growing popularity would cause problems for the Empire. Khan charismatically spoke against the Empire, and his followers became increasingly loyal to his cause. He just raised an army of soldiers, the Khudai Khidmatgars (the Servants of God), comprised mostly of men from the infamously violent Pashtun tribe, who now strictly practice nonviolence. After Khan's arrest the Khudai Khidmatgars and many other Indians gathered in the hot morning sun of India to protest Khan's arrest and British rule. They met in the square of the village of Peshawar (what is now the far Northwest Territory of Pakistan). In the peaceful crowd were mothers, babies, children, old men and women, and men from the legendary Pashtun tribe who were well known for their courage, violence, and code of revenge.

Unexpectedly, two British armored vehicles careened into the square, killing and wounding some of the peaceful protesters. Soldiers jumped out of the vehicles with their guns ready to fire. The crowd held to the nonviolence of their leader, even though he was not there. The protesters simply picked up the wounded and the dead and carried them to safety.

⁷² Easwaran, *Nonviolent Soldier of Islam*, 98.

The British soldiers lined up and raised their guns. The crowd held their ground as shots indiscriminately flew into the air. Blood filled the square as the women and their babies fell dead to the ground. Old men, women, and children screamed in horror as they were shot. The brave men of the Pashtun tribe simply walked into the bullets, opening their shirts so there would be no resistance between their skin and the ammunition. They willingly chose to accept death rather than inflict violence upon another human being. The shooting began in the late morning and continued until just before 5:00 p.m. The shooting would have continued, but the British commander ordered a troop of Indian soldiers to carry on the massacre. After witnessing what just occurred, the Indian soldiers refused to join in the slaughter of their fellow Indians. On that fateful day, more than one thousand peaceful protesters lay wounded and more than two hundred lay dead.⁷³

Khan's leadership solidified the Pashtun commitment to nonviolence. Throughout the struggle for freedom, the Muslim Abdul Ghaffar Khan and his Servants of God would look to their faith and play an important role in using love and nonviolence to secure the liberation of India, but unfortunately, few have ever heard of him. His faith in Islam led him to forgive and love his enemies even in the face of brutal violence. He is a beacon of hope for our strange world that continues to travel toward destruction and violence. Khan shows us that the way to change hearts and minds is not through violent actions or violent words, but through faith, love, and nonviolence.

Conclusion

God's *tawhid* means that God cannot be other than Grace and Mercy, thus, God stands with the victims of culture. I hope to have shown that Islam and mimetic anthropology are "not opposed," but that "each of them completes the other, gives it meaning and reaches toward the divine."⁷⁴ As a Christian, I indeed have theological difference with Muslims, and those differences need to be shared with one another. For example, I'm not about to stop sharing the beauty of the Trinity or the importance of the Incarnation.⁷⁵ Still, I don't think there is a need for accusations of difference. For accusations can go on forever, and we miss the point. What we need more than ever is to challenge one another to live in the light of God's *tawhid* of Grace, Mercy, and Love.

The Good News of God's *tawhid*, the Good News of God's Truth, is that it is not isolated in one religious tradition. It takes some humility to admit this, because we desire to hold onto the Truth. This leads us to internal mediation of escalating mimetic rivalry. If we are lucky, no, if we are blessed, the Truth holds us. In God's Truth, all of our dirty scapegoating categories are washed clean by the Truth. Once held by God's Truth, we are free to move forward in God's Grace, Mercy, and Love. That Truth, God's Truth, is something we ought to celebrate together.

⁷³ See Jean Akhtar Cerrina, *Islam's Peaceful Warrior*, (Philidelphia: Xlibris, 2003) 13-14.

⁷⁴ Ramadan, *Radical Reform*, 99.

⁷⁵ See surah 4:171.

I conclude with surah 2:148 from the Qur'an:

“Each community has its own direction to which it turns: race to do good deeds and wherever you are, God will bring you together. God has power to do everything”

Quranic Verses Used in Order of Appearance

All verses taken from *The Qur'an: A New Translation* by M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, unless otherwise noted.

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1. 59:22-24: He is God: there is no god other than Him, It is He who knows what is hidden as well as what is in the open, He is the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy. He is God: there is no god other than Him, the Controller, the Holy One, Source of Peace, Granter of Security, Guardian over all, the Almighty, the Compeller, the Truly Great; God is far above anything they consider to be his partner. He is God: the Creator, the Originator, the Shaper. The Best of names belong to Him. Everything in the heavens and earth glorifies Him: He is the Almighty and Wise.

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2. 50:16: We created man—We know what his soul whispers to him: We are closer to him than his jugular vein.
3. 93:9-10: So do not be harsh with the orphan and do not chide the one who asks for help.
4. 2:215: They ask you [Prophet] what they should give. Say, “Whatever you give should be for parents, close relatives, orphans, the needy, and travelers. God is well aware of whatever good you do.”
5. 6:137: In the same way, their idols have induced many of the pagans to kill their own children, bringing them ruin and confusion in their faith: if God had willed otherwise they would not have done this, so [Prophet] leave them to their own devices.
6. 6:151: Say, “Come, I will tell you what your Lord has really forbidden you. Do not ascribe anything as a partner to Him; be good to your parents; do not kill your children from fear of poverty’ – We will provide for you and for them – ‘stay well away from committing obscenities, whether openly or in secret; do not take the life God has made sacred, except by right. This is what He commands you to do: perhaps you will use your reason.

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7. 7:28: Yet, when [these people] do something disgraceful they say, ‘We found our fathers doing this,’ and ‘God has commanded us to do this.’ Say [Prophet], ‘God does not command disgraceful deeds. How can you say about God things that you do not know [to be true]?’

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8. 3:176: “[Prophet], do not be grieved by those who disbelieve. They will not harm God in the least; it is God’s will that they will have no share in the Hereafter—a terrible torment awaits them”
9. 3:178: “The disbelievers should not think that it is better for them that We give them more time: when We give them more time they become more sinful—a shameful torment awaits them.”

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10. 6:133: “Your Lord is self-sufficient and full of mercy. If he pleased, He could remove you and put others in your place, just as he produced you from the offspring of other people.”
11. 4:7-8: Men shall have a share in what their parents and closest relatives leave, and women shall have a share in what their parents and closest relatives leave, whether the legacy be small or large: this is ordained by God. If other relatives, orphans, or needy people are present at the distribution, give them something too, and speak kindly to them.
12. 4:12: You inherit half of what your wives leave, if they have no children; if they have children, you inherit a quarter. [In all cases, the distribution comes] after payment of any bequests or debts. If a man or woman dies leaving no children or parents, but a single brother or sister, he or she should take one-sixth of the inheritance; if there are more siblings, they share one-third between them. [In all cases, the distribution comes] after payment of any bequests or debts, with no harm done to anyone: this is a commandment from God: God is all knowing and benign to all.
13. 6:97-98: It is He who made the stars, so that they can guide you when land and sea are dark: We have made the signs clear for those who have knowledge. It is He who first produced you from a single soul, then gave you a place to stay [in life] and a resting place [after death]. We have made Our revelations clear to those who understand.
14. 96:1: Read! In the name of your Lord who created.

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15. 6:151: Come, I will tell you what your Lord has really forbidden you. Do not ascribe anything as a partner to Him; be good to your parents; do not kill your children from fear of poverty’ – We will provide for you and for them – ‘stay well away from committing obscenities, whether openly or in secret; do not take the life God has made sacred, except by right. This is what He commands you to do: perhaps you will use your reason.
16. 3:116-117: As for those who disbelieve neither their possessions nor their children will help them against God—they will be companions in the Fire, there to remain—and whatever they give away in this life will be nullified: a frosty wind strikes and destroys the harvest of people who have wronged themselves. It was not God who wronged them; they wronged themselves.

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17. 2:216: Fighting is ordained for you, though you dislike it. You may dislike something, although it is good for you, or like something although it is bad for you: God knows and you do not.
18. 2:190-193: Fight in God's cause against those who fight you, but do not overstep the limits: God does not love those who overstep the limits. Kill them wherever you encounter them and drive them out from where they drove you out, for persecution is more serious than killing. Do not fight them at the Sacred Mosque unless they fight you there. If they do fight you, kill them—this is what such disbelievers deserve—but if they stop, then God is most forgiving and merciful. Fight them until there is no more persecution, and worship is devoted to God. If they cease hostilities, there can be no further hostility, except toward aggressors.

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19. 16:90: "God commands justice, doing good, and generosity towards relatives and He forbids what is shameful, blameworthy, and oppressive. He teaches you, so that you may take heed."
20. 2:224: [Believers], do not allow your oaths in God's name to hinder you from doing good, being mindful of God and making peace between you and people."
21. 3:118-119: You who believe, do not take for your intimates such outsiders as spare no effort to ruin you and want to see you suffer: their hatred is evident from their mouths, but what their hearts conceal is far worse. We have made Our revelations clear for you; will you not use your reason? This is how it is: here you are, you love them, but they do not love you; you believe in the Scriptures and when they meet you, they say, "We believe," but when they are alone, they bit their fingertips in rage at you. [Prophet], say, "Die of rage if you wish."
22. 5:13: But they broke their pledge, so We distanced them [from Us] and hardened their hearts. They distort the meaning of [revealed] words and have forgotten some of what they were told to remember: you [Prophet] will always find treachery in all but a few of them. Overlook this and pardon them: God loves those who do good.
23. 3:103: Hold fast to God's rope, all of you; do not split into factions. Remember God's favour to you: you were enemies and then He brought your hearts together and you became brothers by His grace; you were about to fall into a pit of Fire and he saved you from it—in this way God makes his revelation clear to you so that you may be rightly guided.

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24. 95:4 "We create man in the finest state" (95:4). Verses 5-8 continue, "then reduce him to the lowest of the low, except those who believe and do good deeds—they will have an unfailing reward. After this, what makes you [man] deny the Judgment? Is God not the most decisive of judges?"

25. 7:189-191: It is He who created you all from one soul, and from it made its mate so that he might find comfort in her: when one of them lies with his wife and she conceives a light burden, going about freely, then grows heavy, they both pray to God, their Lord, "If you give us a good child we shall certainly be grateful," and yet when He gives them a good child they ascribe some of what He has granted them to others. God is far above the partners they set up alongside Him! How can they set up with Him these partners that create nothing and are themselves created?
26. 49:13, taken from Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary*, states, "Humankind! We created you from a single (pair) of male and female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other (not that you may despise each other)."
27. 2:30: [Prophet], when your Lord told the angels, "I am putting a successor on earth," they said, "How can You put someone there who will cause damage and bloodshed, when we celebrate Your praise and proclaim Your holiness?" but He said, "I know things you do not."

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28. 6:39: Those who reject our signs are deaf, dumb, and in total darkness. God leaves whoever he will to stray, and sets whoever He will on a straight path.
29. 2:208: You who believe, enter wholeheartedly into submission to God and do not follow in Satan's footsteps, for he is your sworn enemy.
30. 4:119-120: [Satan] said "I will mislead them and incite vain desires in them; I will command them to slit the ears of cattle; I will command them to tamper with God's creation." Whoever chooses Satan as a patron instead of God is utterly ruined: He makes them promises and raises false hopes, but Satan's promises are nothing but delusions.
31. 7:26-27: Children of Adam, We have given you garments to cover your nakedness and as adornment for you; the garment of God-consciousness is the best of all garments—this is one of God's signs, so that people may take heed. Children of Adam, do not let Satan seduce you, as he did your parents, causing them to leave the Garden, stripping them of their garments to expose their nakedness to them: he and his forces can see you from where you cannot see them: We have made evil ones allies to those who do not believe.
32. a. 2:36: But Satan made them slip, and removed them from the state they were in. We said, "Get out, all of you! You are each other's enemy. On earth you will have a place to stay and livelihood for a time."
 b. 7:23-24: They replied, "Our Lord, we have wronged our souls: if You do not forgive us and have mercy, we shall be lost. He said, "All of you get out! You are each other's enemies. On earth you will have a place to stay and a livelihood—for a time."
33. 4:128: If a wife fears high-handedness, or alienation from her husband, neither of them will be blamed if they come to a peaceful settlement, for peace is best. Although human souls are prone to selfishness, if you do good and are mindful of God, He is well aware of all that you do.

34. 4:32-33: Do not covet what God has given to some of you more than others—men have the portion they have earned; and women the portion they have earned—you should rather ask God for some of His bounty: He has full knowledge of everything.
35. 4:56: Do they envy [other] people for the bounty God has granted them? We gave the descendents of Abraham the Scripture and wisdom—We gave them a great kingdom.

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36. 2:263-265: A kind word and forgiveness is better than a charitable deed followed by hurtful [words]: God is self-sufficient, forbearing. You who believe, do not cancel out your charitable deeds with reminders and hurtful words, like someone who spends his wealth only to be seen by people, not believing in God and the Last Day. Such a person is like a rock with earth on it: heavy rain falls and leaves it completely bare. Such people get no rewards for their work: God does not guide the disbelievers. But those who spend their wealth in order to gain God's approval, and as an affirmation of their own faith, are like a garden on a hill: heavy rain falls and it produces double its normal yield; even if no heavy rains fall, it will still be watered by the dew. God sees all that you do.
37. 2:268: Satan threatens you with the prospect of poverty and commands you to do foul deeds; God promises you His forgiveness and His abundance: God is limitless and all knowing.
38. 5:91: With intoxicants and gambling, Satan seeks only to incite enmity and hatred among you, and to stop you remembering God and prayer. Will you not give them up?
39. 6:119: Why should you not eat such animals when God has already fully explained what He has forbidden you, except when forced by hunger? But many lead others astray by their desires, without any true knowledge: your Lord knows best who oversteps the limit.
40. 2:11-12: When it is said to them, "Do not cause corruption in the land," they say, "We are only putting things right," but really they are causing corruption, though they do not realize it.

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41. 6:164: Say, "Should I seek a Lord other than God, when He is the Lord of all things?" Each soul is responsible for its own actions; no soul will bear the burden of another. You will all return to your Lord in the end, and He will tell you the truth about your difference.
42. 2:177: Goodness does not consist in turning your face towards East or West. The truly good are those who believe in God and the Last Day, in the angels, the Scripture, and the prophets; who give away some of their wealth, however much they cherish it, to their relatives, to orphans, the needy, travelers and beggars, and to liberate those in bondage; those who keep up the prayer and pay the prescribed alms; who keep pledges whenever they make them; who are steadfast in misfortune, adversity, and times of danger. These are the ones who are true, and it is they who are aware of God

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43. 6:103: No vision can take Him in, but He takes in all vision. He is the All Subtle, the All Aware.
44. 33:21: The Messenger of God is an excellent model for those of you who put your hope in God, and the Last Days and remember Him often.

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45. 80.1-16: He frowned and turned away when the blind man came to him—for all you know he might have grown in spirit or taken not of something useful to him. For the self-satisfied one, you go out of your way—though you are not to be blamed for his lack of spiritual growth—but from the one who has come to you full of eagerness and awe you allow yourself to be distracted. No indeed! This Qur'an is a lesson from which those who wish to be taught should learn, [written] on honoured, exalted, pure pages, by the hands of noble and virtuous scribes.
46. 6:52: Do not drive away those who call upon their Lord morning and evening, seeking nothing but His Face. You are in no way accountable for them, nor they for you; if you drove the believers away, you would become one of the evil doers.
47. 2:11-12: When it is said to them, "Do not cause corruption in the land," they say, "We are only putting things right," but really they are causing corruption, though they do not realize it.

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48. 3:105: Do not be like those who, after they have been given clear revelation, split into factions and fall into disputes: a terrible punishment awaits such people.
49. 2:148: Each community has its own direction to which it turns: race to do good deeds and wherever you are, God will bring you together. God has power to do everything.

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50. 2:256: There is no compulsion in religion: true guidance has become distinct from error, so whoever rejects false gods and believes in God has grasped the firmest hand-hold, one that will never break. God is all hearing and all knowing.

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51. 2:148: "Each community has its own direction to which it turns: race to do good deeds and wherever you are, God will bring you together. God has power to do everything.

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