

# The Basic Teachings of Islam

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I am so thankful to be so kindly introduced. Having been asked to talk as simply as possible, I would like to explain the basic teachings of Islam them here today.

## 1. Japanese views on religion and Islam

First, I would like to talk about Japanese views on religion and Islam. As the word “Islam” is frequently heard on TV and in newspapers when wars and terrors occurred, Islam tends to be easily associated with conflict and war. I suspect that most Japanese have such negative images of Islam as troublesome or militant religion.

There are approximately 1.2 billion Muslims, namely one fifth of the world’s population. Most of them, obviously, never support terrors and wars, but live their peaceful daily life today as well as in the past. Though Islam fought with disbelievers in the very beginning, it soon rapidly spread in a peaceful way, and coexisted with Jews and Christians until 19th century. However, Japanese mass media have seldom covered Islamic history and Muslims’ daily life, which may be to some extent responsible for Japanese’ wrong image of Islam.

Though not a specialist, I have considered what Japanese religions are while comparing Islam with them. I have come to believe that Japanese people generally dislike monotheism and strict religious precepts. This view on religion would make, to some extent, it difficult for them to appropriately understand Islam. As for Christianity, another monotheism, as it had a smell of the western culture which Japanese longed for and admired in the Meiji period, many mission schools became popular. Though many Japanese recently prefer wedding ceremonies in Christian churches to those in traditional Shinto shrines, the number of Christians has not increased in Japan. Ryotaro Shiba succinctly spoke that Christianity did not recover its investments in Japan. In other words, though it

spent huge donations for establishing missionary schools, it has not succeeded in raising the number of Japanese Christians. Most Japanese have never stopped their ancestor worship, while they have venerated Buddha and other various gods. This would be a reason why Japanese people dislike monotheisms including Christianity, which order not to worship ancestor and other gods than the one true God.

As for the religious precepts, while some Buddhist monks lead strict ascetic lives at several temples, Japanese Buddhism never has imposed strict precepts on lay Buddhists. At the most, to eat meat and fish was taboo during the Buddhist funeral, but now it is not uncommon to find sashimi being served. Shinto has not had strict precepts concerning daily life. Thus, as the Japanese people have not got accustomed with religious precepts throughout their history, the Islamic prayer five times a day is enough to make them shiver. By contrast, as Muslims are raised in a society where almost all people daily observe religious precepts, they grow and naturally observe such precepts without serious doubt.

Probably influenced by Buddhism, many Japanese suppose that religion is related to death and disease. One becomes religious only when one suffers disease and misfortune, and otherwise, one needs no religion. Oddly enough, though few Japanese Buddhist monks have renounced the world in a full sense, many Japanese tend to consider that the religious life should be in the withdrawal from the world. Consequently, though most Japanese, both lay Buddhists and Shinto believers, perform ceremonies for the dead, including visit to ancestor's tomb, and also participate in seasonal rituals at local Shinto shrines such as New Year's rite (Hatsumoude), they identify themselves with no religion. Muslims could hardly understand these Japanese views of religion. Islam stresses on Muslim's social life, teaching that death or disease is caused by God's decree, and as a result, it is rather indifferent to death and disease. Islam is, so to speak, a religion of those who spend healthy social life, and Muslims should be religious in their family life and economic activities. Compared with Islam, it becomes clear how greatly different Japanese views of religion are from the Muslims'.

Japanese people hardly feel any contradiction when they say that Christianity and Islam have respectively their own only one god. However, the only one god in a monotheistic sense means that all other gods but the one are false gods, which should be destroyed. Logically speaking, a new monotheism should either deny the gods of old monotheisms or recognize them as the same one god of its own with different names. In relation to Japanese religions, any monotheism never allows to worship ancestor and other gods. It performs the memorial service for the

dead, but prohibits worship of them. So far as Japanese people stick to ancestor worship, they are reluctant to convert to monotheism.

## 2. The Foundation and Spread of Islam

Islam is the third monotheism, following Judaism and Christianity. It is a world religion, spreading beyond a single ethnic group. Though the world religion theoretically teaches any individual to convert, children of believers naturally accept the same faith of their parents once the religion is established. In this sense, the world religion becomes to some extent similar to ethnic religions.

Islam began at Mecca, in Saudi Arabia of today, which is the center and the most sacred place of Islam. Islam calls the Arab tribal society before of Islam *Jahiliyyah*, which literally means ignorance. This is a derogatory expression from the point of view of Islam, for it had had no revelation as the source of knowledge and morality. However, it was not completely barbaric, but the Arabs had their own tribal religion, moral and laws. The religion of the *Jahiliyyah* period was of archaic religion, and mainly worshipped ancestors and tribal gods. In other words, it was polytheism, and quite similar to Japanese religion today. I sometimes say that Japan still remains *Jahiliyyah*, when I explain Japanese religions to Muslims. While local gods protect their land in agrarian societies of Japan, Arab tribal gods naturally protected the people themselves, not their land, for most of the Arabs as nomads or caravan traders moved around. While Buddhism has been deeply incorporated in Japan, it did not ban Japanese worships of ancestor and local gods, so these still survive in abundance. In polytheism, where we are surrounded by gods, we do not venerate every god in turn. While we worship our own god, we do not mind if other gods exist. This is polytheism.

A prophet suddenly appeared and began to tell the Arabs of *Jahiliyyah* that their gods were false so as to believe in the one true God. As his teaching denied their traditional religion, it is not surprising that they could hardly believe in him, but mocked at him. This is exactly the same way in which various new religions began. Not only Islam, but Buddhism and Christianity too, when they first began, were merely dubious new religions far from world religions. It was not obvious at first whether Buddha or Jesus were the real man of faith or not. It is only natural that most people regarded the founders as queer, saying others that they should not follow them. Despite this, the first believers and disciples flew to them.

Generally, when a new religion begins, it is a kind of a religious ener-

gy of its founder that makes people attract and convert. It is named the charisma, which originates from God or the religious truth, and bestows the religious authority on the revelation and founder's personality. Without such a miracle power, it would be impossible to convert those who felt satisfied with *Jahiliyyah* life style to a new monotheistic religion.

Islam began around 610 CE with Muhammad experiencing divine revelation and becoming a prophet, and within approximately a hundred years it spread over a vast area, from the Iberian Peninsula and Spain in the west to the Middle East in the east. Having its origins as the religion of Arabian merchants, this expansion increased along the fringes of the Mediterranean Sea and Silk Road trade routes.

Various empires rose and fell one after another in the Islamic world. The most famous in the Middle East are probably the Umayyad dynasty, the Abbasid dynasty, the Ottoman Empire of Turkey and the Safavid dynasty of Iran. In India too, an Islamic state known as the Mogul Empire was temporarily founded. The reason why Pakistan and Bangladesh today are of Islamic countries is due to the fact that, during the Mogul Empire period, many Indians converted to Islam. When India gained the independence from Britain, Hindus and Muslims divided and became independent as separate countries, despite being the same ethnic people.

The center of the modern Islamic world is of course the Middle East. Islam spreads among African countries. Many Muslims lived in Central Asia before the coming of the Soviet Union which banned any religion. After the Soviet Union collapsed, the past faiths, to be surprised, have revived, namely Islam in the Central Asia, and Russian Orthodoxy in most parts of Russia.

As for the South East Asia, the population of Muslim is high in Indonesia and some part of Malaysia. Since early Islamic period, there have been Muslims in Central Asia, western part and also Fujian Province in China as results of trade relations with the Middle East. Additionally, there are quite a number of Black Muslims in America, of which the heavy-weight boxer Muhammad Ali, formerly known as Cassius Clay, is well known. As for Europe, there are many Muslims amongst immigrants there, in relation to whom one may remember that riots occurred in 2005 in France. The immigrant population is growing, with many immigrants from the old African colonies in France and those from Turkey in Germany, which has caused some economic and political problems in one way or another. There are not so many Muslims in Japan, but Muslims live all over the world, and one-fifth of the world's population, one out of five people, is a Muslim. Therefore, it is

extremely important to have dialogue between Buddhism and Islam. It is one of the religions which Japanese must actively learn more about.

Since the Crusaders were defeated by Islam, Christians in Europe have seldom held good impressions of Islam, and instead, prejudice has remained in Europe towards Islam. For even great scholars such as Hegel and Weber viewed Islam in distorted ways. That alone is probably proof enough of Europe's deep prejudice. It seems that today's Americans are dragging the similar prejudice, but I would like to touch a little upon some current issues at the end.

### 3. The Prophet Muhammad and the Qur'an

The word "Islam" means submission, which is same as "Nam" in "Nam myoho renge kyo" and "Nam amida butsu." Its believer is called Muslim (*Muslima*, for female believer), literally meaning "a person devoted to Allah." Allah is the one true God of Islam, and Muhammad is his prophet, who used to be called Mohamet in western languages. He was born at Mecca around 570 CE, and died in 632 CE. He was a merchant of caravan before he became a prophet about 40 years old.

The Qur'an, meaning what should be recited, is the basic sacred book of Islam. As each sentence of the Qur'an is called verse, it sounds poetically when it is recited. Its recitation is often heard from mosques at every corner of cities or on broadcast. As idols are strictly prohibited, there is no statue or image of God in mosque. It is very simple space with nothing but a mark to point out the direction of Mecca. The world religions generally forbid to create visual representations of God, such as images, statues, sculptures and pictures. However, once created, statues of Buddha have been accepted and widely spread, despite the belief that Buddha has no name or image. It is almost same case with Christianity. However strictly the theologies prohibit idols, they are necessary for ordinary believers to sensuously see and feel the existence of God or Buddha. In Islam, the recitation of the Qur'an plays the same function as images of god in other religions, for the recited words of Allah vividly remind Muslims of God.

According to Islam, the Qur'an is nothing but the words which God himself revealed in Arabic. Each time receiving a revelation, Muhammad related it to Arabs without any modification. Of course, they heard it through Muhammad's voice. Those who heard it as merely Muhammad's words remained disbelievers, but only those who could hear it as the authentic God's revelation became Muslims. For Muslims, the Qur'an holds the words directly spoken by Allah in Arabic, in other

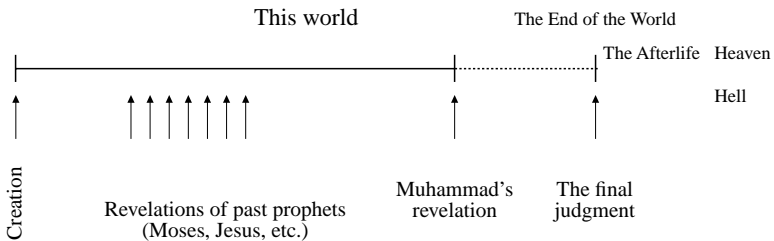
words, the author of the Qur'an is God himself. The Qur'an is so sacred that Muslims became angry and furious when it was insulted or broken.

Because the prophet Muhammad never became a living god, the words he told to his friends and family were not God's words. The words of God, namely the Qur'an, were carefully distinguished from Muhammad's words. Probably when Muhammad conveyed revelations, he might have paid attention to revelations. Muhammad's sayings and deeds were first kept in memory of his intimate followers, and gradually recorded in the *Hadith* (Tradition) after Muhammad died, separated from the Qur'an.

Christians have sometimes misunderstood the sacredness of the Qur'an. In Christianity, Jesus Christ is the incarnation of Logos of God, and the New Testament mostly consists of words and letters of Jesus' disciples. In a sense of the primal locus of divine self-manifestation, the Qur'an in Islam, not Muhammad, should be equated to Jesus Christ in Christianity. This is a key point to rightly understand Islam. In addition, mentioned below, Muhammad could not play the role of savior like Jesus Christ, which is the reason why no priesthood or the church as the institution of priests was not brought forth.

#### 4. The World View and Contents of the Qur'an

The Qur'an is made up of 114 chapters. While each chapter has a title, the title does not symbolize the theme of the chapter. As each chapter contains various topics, the above-mentioned major topics such as the Creation are repeatedly referred to in many chapters. Diagram schematically disposes major themes of the Qur'an in a chronological order. It also shows the Qur'anic world view, beginning with the creation of this world, destruction of it and bringing forth of the Hereafter.



**Diagram**

The Qur'an describes several different ways of Creation. First, God created the world from Nothingness just like in the Old Testament (2:117, 7:54 and so on); secondly He divided Heaven and Earth from the primordial chaos, then the seas from mountains. In any way, God created the whole world and all kinds of creature including mankind, and has ever maintained the natural order such as regular exchange of day and night (35:13). Human beings have already enjoyed God's Mercy so far as they live, for whatever they eat is ultimately brought up on God's Earth. Nevertheless, they forgot God and thankfulness to Him, and have brought disorder on His earth by means of wrong deeds.

Next, there is a group of stories about the prophets in the past. As mentioned above, from the standpoint of the third monotheism Islam, both Judaism and Christianity received the revelations or the Bibles from no god but Allah, the same one God. This Islamic view is similar to Christianity which incorporated the Jewish Bible as the Old Testament, besides the New Testament. The Qur'an states that the same Allah sent Jewish prophets and Jesus with the originally same revelations (5:68–82). Of course, Jews and Christians absolutely denied this, and pointed disparities of teachings. According to the Qur'an, such differences occurred because Jews and Christians willfully abandoned or distorted the revelations. Islam recognizes Jesus as a prophet, but never admits him as the Son of God, stating that it is unthinkable that God had a child (2:116). Since Jesus Christ is the most sacred mysterious truth in Christianity, it seems impossible that Christianity allows the Islamic interpretation on Jesus. In the Qur'anic context, the stories of the previous prophets which tell how they and their revelations were rejected by people encouraged Muhammad and his faithful followers persecuted by Arabs of *Jahiliyah* (7:101 onwards).

The Qur'an mentions nothing about future events in the world history after Muhammad but the Last Judgment. If one produces a movie based on the Qur'anic stories which are described with vivid images, a scene of Muhammad's era suddenly skips to the eschatological one. It starts with blast of angel's trumpet, and the whole cosmic order begins to be utterly destroyed; the stars fall, the earth splits and melts, mountains are scattered like cotton and the sea boils (chapters 81–82). Then the Last Judgment will be held, as similarly taught in Christianity. All men have to be brought forth to the Judgment, and confront with Allah. No one can get rid of it. As soon as the world ends, the dead are brought back to life by God only to receive His Judgment. All who believed in this world will go to Heaven, but those who did not will go to Hell (69:18).

The Qur'an describes so concretely and realistically attitudes and

reactions of men in the scene of the Judgment that its keen observation of human nature surprises us. It also depicts attitudes and reactions of men in scenes of the Judgment; for example, some try to pretend to be a believer, some deplore their careless life, others are just surprised at, or gladly accept God's fair judgment (37:14–33).

Since the idea of Eschatology was not found in *Jahiliyyah* religion, Arabian people of *Jahiliyyah* most radically rejected the resurrection of the dead among the Qur'anic teachings (34:3–8). People asked Muhammad how the dead could rise from the earth. He only answered that he did not know, but also that it would definitely happen because God has promised. As most Japanese people today do not believe in the Eschatology for a rational reason, Arabs of *Jahiliyyah* were rational in a sense.

Since disbelievers do not believe in the Hereafter, Hell does not frighten them. The Qur'an depicts how much upset the disbelievers at the moment of the Last Judgment. According to the Qur'an, some disbelievers wish to convert to Islam as soon as the eschatological moment begins, but such conversion will not be approved. Dragged before God, they have to recognize what their life was, based on the record book of their life, which records whole life in detail, even the most minor deed. One of the most impressive descriptions related to the Judgment is as follows: man tries to deny his sins such as beating or kicking the others even in the Judgment, so God allows man's skin and limbs to speak of testimony, which begin to testify his kicking (41:20–22). This depiction teaches us that the body is really nothing but a part of man's self, though man especially in modern era tends to consider the self-identity only in terms of consciousness. The Qur'anic descriptions on the Last Judgment imply that it is the only chance when everyone recognizes the true dimension of one's own life. So far as man usually interpretatively understands his doings or sayings from his own intention and perspective, ignoring others' reactions, he does not always know the truth of his life.

The Qur'an depicts men's conversations in Heaven and Hell, which are so humanistic and ordinary that it would be hard to imagine that they reside in the eternal spiritual worlds. Believers enjoy the eternal life in Heaven with thankfulness, saying that they were lucky to have become believers without any clear reason for faith. By contrast, men in Hell are ever burning, wail and blame each other for their lack of faith (34:31–34). At a first glance, these descriptions may sound strange, but the Qur'an well teaches us that it is just ordinary people as ourselves who will reside in either Heaven or Hell. Viewed in this way, the Qur'anic depictions are full of keen insight into human being and as such quite



interesting.

Above-mentioned major themes in the Qur'an explain why we must believe in Allah, who God is, what mankind is, what the Eschatology, the Last Judgment and the Hereafter will be. In a word, they tell the one theme, the invitation to faith, from different perspectives. The Qur'an contains both good news, the promise of Paradise, and the warning of Hell. Let us consider how the Qur'anic descriptions function in the mechanism of conversion from *Jahiliyyah* into Islam. The people of *Jahiliyyah* first heard revelations fictional, but gradually converted. Let us liken the Qur'an to a movie again, they were forced to watch the movie against their will. They first considered the Qur'anic stories to be a fictional movie, then some of them who believed that the world of *Jahiliyyah* was the real naturally regarded them as a movie, while the others began to think that the world of this movie might be the real, who would become believers. This shows that the latter accepted the Qur'anic stories as the truth. The power which made them convert is the sacred authority and power of the Qur'an, the words of God.

To the category of "revelations to Muhammad" in Diagram 1, other various topics than what are mentioned above belong. Here is considerable number of rituals and social precepts, which developed to the *Shari'ah*, Islamic legal system, a few centuries later. Besides, God consoles and encourages Muhammad and his followers who suffered by battles with disbelievers of *Jahiliyyah*.

Let us explain the Qur'anic views on human beings and their sins, which help to understand why Islam stresses the *Shari'ah*. As God creates human beings as the synthesis of soul and body, even believers cannot get rid of the bodily existence, so they have sexual desire and appetite. Although Islam seems to be a very strict religion, it admits and tolerates physical desires. If Christianity emphasizes the spirituality by saying that man should not live on bread alone, Islam puts as equal stress on the bodily existence as on the spirituality. Thus in Islam, the domestic life and economic activities should not be despised, but of religious issues as parts of Muslims' lifestyle. This is why social norms are included in Islamic precepts.

Unlike Buddhism, Islam does not require the renouncement, so every Muslim is a lay believer. This is another reason why Islam imposes many strict rituals. Since those who engage in daily social life can not always concentrate on God, Islam teaches a Muslim to pray and concentrate on God only during praying time five times a day. After a prayer, one can again continue his daily life. Japanese who do not get used to

strict religious precepts tend to think that such obligatory prayer is hard to do, and also that it presupposes the self-power to attain to salvation by man's good deeds. Indeed, knowing that Islam does not admit the Christian idea of the original sin, a Japanese historian of religions asked me many years ago if Islam is optimistic about human sinfulness. Since then I kept considering an appropriate answer to his question.

My understanding of the Qur'anic concept of the human sinfulness is as follows. The idea of the original sin is the self-awareness of sin, and does not mean any specific sin but the primal cause of various sins. The *karma* in Buddhism may be somehow equivalent to the original sin, for it is also considered as the cause of misfortunes or sins. Nishida Kitaro states that the religious concept of evil is different from the ethical one, for the religious evil is inherent to everyone, even to a good holy man. If it is so, the religious concept of evil can be interpreted as the human finitude because of which man actually commits sins. Islam also so keenly points to the human finitude that it requests man to obey God.

Nevertheless, Islam does not admit the idea of original sin as well as Judaism. Instead, the Qur'an enumerates many detailed rules concerning to marriage, divorce, inheritance and so on. Most Japanese may be surprised at its detailed descriptions of troubles related to money and sex in the sacred scripture. However, the fact that the Qur'an gives many rules precisely means that it recognizes that mankind in general and even Muslims tend to fight each other, and easily commit sins especially in the above-mentioned cases. In this sense, Islam as seriously recognizes the human sinfulness as Christianity does. Then, what does the difference mean? Since the original sin points to the primary beginning of evil at the mythical past, Christianity seriously inquires why human beings became sinful. Man's sinfulness is forgiven only if man believes in Jesus Christ who died on the cross to redeem mankind's sin. Though the Qur'an states the same myth of the Fall of Adam and Eve, it does not teach the original sin. According to it, God forgave Adam after he regretted his sin, but God expelled Adam and Eve from Paradise to the earth, where human beings forgot God and fought each other, just like the people of *Jahiliyyah*. Even if the people of *Jahiliyyah* had forgotten God and committed sins, those previous sins were forgiven at the moment of their conversion to Islam. But, to remain a disbeliever after hearing the revelation is the worst sin in Islam, which God will never forgive.

Islam puts emphasis on the result of sins which will be clarified on the Day of Last Judgment in the future, and warns disbelievers to believe, and believers not to commit sins. Only those who believe in the

Last Judgment can realize how significant their trivial actions here and now are, for it is their actions that will be judged by God and determine the eternal residence. Most people usually commit trivial misdeeds or malicious actions, but will soon forget them if bothering their conscience for a while. However much does Islam seem to be a this-worldly religion because of its strong concern to man's worldly life, Islam surely is the other-worldly religion because all the worldly actions are always stressed and evaluated from the eschatological dimension.

Related to the Qur'anic views of human beings, let us briefly explain why Islam has no priesthood. Although there are theologians and jurists, they are scholars and do not have any special soteriological authority. As even the Prophet Muhammad was not a savior in a strict sense, no one or institution logically could inherit the function of savior. So there has neither been any mediator between God and lay Muslims, nor a church as a heretical institution in Islam. The Islamic soteriology is nothing but to believe in God and to observe the precepts, which is equally obligatory to all the Muslims, regardless of education, status and money. However, the Prophet Muhammad was yet a charismatic person as the founder of Islam. He was the founder of the Islamic community (*Ummah*), and actually he did his best as a political and even military leader. Most Japanese may be surprised to hear that. However, because Muhammad best understood what Islam should be, he tried to establish the *Ummah* as the Islamic community of Muslims in history, including its socio-political aspect. In a word, Islam is utterly different from Buddhism which basically recommends the renouncement from the socio-political life.

## 5. The *Ummah* and the *Shari'ah*

It is usually said that Islam has no division between church and state, and indeed, it has never had any heretical center or institution such as the Vatican. As the separation of state and religion is considered rational in most modernized countries, Islam seems exceptional and hardly understandable. This is one of the main reasons why the Westerners have misunderstood and held prejudice to Islam for many centuries even today.

Though Islam has had no church, it stresses the significance of the *Ummah*, the Islamic community. It has been, though not institutionalized, surely existent as a religious community in the Muslim world. In the Qur'an, the expression "*ummah muslimah*" is used only once (2:128), meaning a community of Abraham's descendents which as a

community itself will obey to God's will. The *Ummah* is an integral religious community; it is no doubt a community of faith in the same sense of Christian church, but at the same time, a socio-political order where Muslims live their daily life. It is on the *Shari'ah* only that the spiritual and social orders of the *Ummah* are based. Though relations of the Christian church to states changed in the course of history, it is, at least theoretically, independent from state. Christians as well as most Buddhists live their social life in accordance with regional social rules and state laws, somehow different from the religious. It is not easy for man to live in accordance to two different principles. For example, Japanese Christians since the Meiji era have probably experienced this difficulty in Japanese society, where traditional Japanese religions have been strongly influential. Japanese Christians who spiritually converted have to keep following the Japanese social norms and family system. Though Christianity forbids ancestor worship, they may confront with ancestor worship, and have to choose either to discard it against majority's blames or to accept it against Christian teaching. Another example is a Christian theologian living in Kyoto who takes part in a local festival of *Jizo-bon* (a folk religious ceremony for children). This surprised me, but it probably makes sense in order to live without conflict in a local community. Thus, Islam constructed an integral community from the beginning. However, it had to confront another difficulty, for the *Shari'ah* could not be easily modified in accordance with social changes.

As earliest Muslims well understood the Islamic way of religious life, they ignored their old tribal rules and customs of *Jahiliyyah*, and observed Islamic social rules. Since the *Ummah* was established at Medina, Muslims needed various rules concerning both rituals and social actions. During Muhammad's lifetime, some rules were given by revelation, the others were decided by him. After his death, his close followers continued to find new rules, which was the formative process of the *Shari'ah* (see below). When Muslims became majority, those who remained *Jahiliyyah* might be hard to get married and to continue their business with Muslims. So they would become Muslims. This would be a reason why Islam spread rapidly throughout the Arabian Peninsula. Another reason why many Arabian Christians, though Jews did not, became Muslims would be related to Islamic taxation which imposed heavier tax on non-Muslims than Muslims.

Islam is so coherent religion that the people who converted to Islam must have found it comfortable to abide by. Let us briefly refer to Indian Muslims. There were few converts to Christianity in India, though the Britain ruled over it for 300 years. On the other hand, many Indian peo-

ple converted to Islam, and today they live in Pakistan and Bangladesh. Hinduism has a system of precepts called *Hindu Dharma* on which the caste system is based. An Indian Christian would be hard to survive there, for Christianity has neither admitted it nor offered alternative rules of social life such as marriage and economic activities. Because Buddhism took similar attitudes toward Indian caste society, lay Buddhists might be difficult to live in the caste system. If so, it sounds reasonable that Buddhism could not survive there. By contrast, Indian Muslims could observe the *Shari'ah* in cases of marriage and business within Hindu caste society.

The *Ummah* itself is not a state, but a religious community which looks after both the spiritual aspect and social lives of Muslims. However, in order to maintain its social order, it needs the political power and judicial sanction. As a result, the *Ummah* comprehends theoretically a state, or historically plural states, within itself.

It is well-known that Jesus Christ emphasized forgiveness, teaching one who threw stones at prostitutes to forgive them. Of course, Jesus recommended forgiveness based on his teaching of the original sin. Besides, Jesus would do so because he did not wish to govern this worldly social order. Forgiveness, which is very important in religious ethics, is indeed recommended in the Qur'an too; for example, it is preferable not to get back the betrothal money at the case of divorce, if legally allowed. However, the social order can not be justly maintained by forgiveness and conscience alone. Suppose how safely we could drive a car without any traffic regulation but with the spirit of mutual forgiveness. As society is made up of all kinds of individuals with various tempers and personalities, also different in moral, intellectual, physical abilities, we need laws and justice to keep rightly social order in addition to mutual forgiveness and conscience. Law and justice will punish those who transgress rules and injure the others. The fact that we need laws and justice to maintain the social life may be interpreted as an aspect of human weakness, fallibility, finitude and sinfulness in religious sense. Since Islam recognizes the social life as an indispensable aspect of Muslim's religious way of life, Islam developed the *Shari'ah* by means of which the holistic order of the *Ummah* would be maintained.

The *Shari'ah* is extremely important, and a correct understanding of *Shari'ah* is necessary in order to understand Islam. As the *Shari'ah* is a very complex system of precepts, it is not easy to briefly explain its all aspects. The following explanation is referred only to its religious significance and to some basic features. While *Shari'ah* is translated as "Islamic Law," it originally means "a path leading to water place,"

namely the path of life. Incidentally, as Buddhism has “the path of Buddha,” and Jesus said “I am the way,” the relationship between religion and the concept of path seems interesting. As a path is a place where man walks or treads, it somehow presupposes some kind of practice. However, in Buddhism and Christianity, the concept means a spiritual path, and is not articulated into many rules of conduct; it is left to individual faith and conscience how to act in accordance with the religious spirit. Though the Islamic *Shari’ah* holds a meaning of the spirit of devotion, Islam articulates it into detailed rules of conduct, some of which are found in the Qur’an. This is the system of laws, the *Shari’ah* as a system of rules made of various precepts.

Many Japanese know Shinran’s teaching that ordinary men who cannot do ascetic practice will be saved only by belief in Amitabha Buddha. This way of faith seems to be popular among Japanese people. Those who think that one’s deep faith naturally leads to prayer consider it unnecessary to make prayer obligatory, or dislike such coercion. Contrary to Shinran, Islam may consider that it would be difficult for ordinary weak men to keep deep faith without obligatory prayer. Rather, in order to cultivate faith, obligatory practices such as prayer and fasting are necessary. Islam recognizes that it is important to start with ritual action. If one’s faith becomes deep through the obligatory practices, one will continue to do the same practices but without feeling coercion.

The Qur’an says that as God, the creator of human beings, knows best what they can do and what they cannot, He never orders to do what they cannot. Although fasting seems very hard and almost impossible from a Japanese perspective, the Qur’an states that it is within human reach. It is also written that Islamic asceticism is more simplified than the Jewish ones.

## 6. The Five Religious Duties (The Five Pillars)

Islam imposes all believers on five religious duties known as the Five Pillars, and they are well incorporated into everyday life. Prayer (*Salat*) is performed five times a day, and fasting (*Sawm*) is done during a month Ramadan every year. After eating breakfast before sun rise one must keep fasting till sunset during a whole month. Whereas strict observers do not even drink water, children, the sick, the pregnant and lactating mothers do not need fasting. As soon as the sun sets, such signals as fluorescent lights on minarets of Mosques, or drumming, tell the end of fasting of the daytime, and people enjoy *Iftaar* meal with family and friends. Thirdly, the pilgrimage to Mecca (*Hajj*) in the month of pil-

grimage is a duty once through a lifetime. The pilgrimage to Mecca at other seasons is not regarded as *Hajj*, but called *Umrah* (lesser pilgrimage). Those who have completed *Hajj* are highly respected by neighbors. The number of pilgrims is assigned the quota to major Muslim countries every year, and they are chosen from each municipality or region. There are certain programs for *Hajj* in Islamic world: chosen members have to take lessons about manners and etiquette of *Hajj*, using Video tapes today, at certain places in their country before departure, and some religious leaders are delegated as guide by each country.

*Zakat* is stipulated alms, whose amount is to some degree decided by income, whereas *Sadaqa* is a free charity. Both have greatly contributed to social welfare and public service in Islamic society, and still effective today. According to a Turkish student, his father, a farmer, donates a goat as *Zakat* to poor neighbors every year. *Waqf* is a kind of alms, usually the property endowment by means of will after death. As its original meaning is to stop the ownership of property, namely to ascribe it to God, it belongs to nobody, and used for various purposes. When man designates his properties such as land, orchard, and buildings as *waqf*, he decides the purpose and usage, for example, to found a school, library, orphanage, mosque and other facilities, and also appoints a manager. Many public facilities in the Islamic world have been maintained by *waqf*. It should be stressed that Islam has operated such social cooperative systems as *waqf* from the beginning till today.

Finally, the Profession of Faith, *Shahadah*, means to recite "There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is his messenger" in Arabic. If one wishes to convert to Islam, it is enough for one to recite it in Arabic before a religious leader (*Imam*) at any mosque. These Five Pillars are the religious duties of all Muslims. The detailed methods of these practices, and also alternative duties when one could not carry out them, are set out in the *Shari'ah*.

Asides from the ritual precepts mentioned above, the *Shari'ah* comprehends a variety of social norms. Although the idea of *Shari'ah* is quite different from modern state law, it includes several legal rules, mainly regarding family law and commercial law. Additionally, it also includes moral standards, manners, dietary laws forbidding the eating of pork, and so on. In theory, the *Shari'ah* is concerned with all kinds of Muslim acts, both the ritual and the other social acts, and all acts are divided into five categories. The five categories are: obligatory (breaches of which are punishable), meritorious (the fulfillment of which is desirable, but breaches are not punishable), reprehensible (the avoidance of which is desirable, although the perpetration is not punishable), forbid-

den (the perpetration of which is punishable) and, lastly, neutral (doing or not doing of which is permissible). The final category cannot be called a prescript in a usual sense. The majority of acts belong to this category. In a word, any kind of Muslim' acts is covered by the *Shari'ah*. Generally speaking, obligatory and forbidden acts correspond to law, while meritorious and reprehensible acts are moralistic. However, these categories are also applicable to ritual acts and manners. For example, it is laid down in the *Shari'ah* that such and such a way of praying is desirable but not obligatory, or that other manner of prayer is forbidden. To reiterate, all aspects of human lifestyle are governed by a single system of the *Shari'ah* in Islam.

Although Islam definitely denied the religion of *Jahiliyyah*, it adopted a number of customs, customary laws of the *Jahiliyyah* period into the *Shari'ah*. As a reason for this, when a new religion is founded in history, it cannot utterly destroy the previous society and culture to replace it with the new ideal ones. Since Islam as a new religion was established in Arab tribal society at seventh century, it could not but keep somehow continuity with the *Jahiliyyah* society. As well as Christianity and Buddhism, Islam has the universal ideas, but they can not be completely realized at once in the newly founded *Ummah*. Even the Qur'anic precepts reflect, to some extent, customs of *Jahiliyyah*. Marriage with as many as four wives is allowed in the Qur'an. A man could marry many wives during the *Jahiliyyah* period, but Islam limited the number of wives to four. There seemed to be another sociological reason. When Muslims fought with disbelievers at the very beginning, many men died, leaving behind their families. To support them, the Qur'an allows wealthy men to get lawfully married with widows, which can be considered as a policy of welfare for the widows. According to the Qur'an, however, a man has to treat his wives equally in all respects, both financially and spiritually. Therefore, as most male Muslims say today that a wife is more than enough, the monogamy has been popular among ordinary Muslims.

## **7. The Formulation of Shari'ah and Politics**

It took over 100 years after Muhammad's death that the *Shari'ah* was systematized. Although the process of its formation shows some Islamic features, I do not have time to explain it in detail here. I will briefly explain some of the important characteristic. The Qur'an is the primary source of precepts in *Shari'ah*. But as it is not a legal code, the precepts in the Qur'an are far from sufficient to maintain the social order. While



the Prophet lived, revelations continued. Concerning troubles which believers asked or consulted him, sometimes revelations were given, otherwise he himself could judge. The words and practices of the Prophet (*Sunnah*) became exemplar after the Qur'an. It is highly probable that he allowed Muslims to follow some of previous customs of the *Jahiliyyah* period. The Prophet's *Sunnahs* were recorded apart from the Qur'an after his death in a unique literary form called *hadith*. The collection of *hadiths* is called also *Hadith* (The Tradition), which is the second Holy Scripture. Each *hadith* consists of two parts; the main part (*matn*) is the record of the *sunnahs* of the Prophet, and the other part is the genealogy of transmitters (*isnad*) who collected the *sunnahs* from older generations. As Islam never founded an institution of church, the genealogy of transmitters implies the testimony of the *Ummah*, and plays the function of authorizing the record's authenticity. If it had had a church, it would compile the authorized edition of *Hadith*. There are numerous editions of *Hadith* among Sunni Muslims, and Shiite Muslims independently compiled *Hadith*.

Though the Caliphate began after the Prophet's death, the *Shari'ah* was not issued by the caliphs, the successors of the Prophet, for they were political and military leaders but never monopolized all the power. Instead, his close companions solved troubles in various regions of the *Ummah*. Just as Muhammad was not a jurist, they were not jurists, and their judgments were lack of legal skill and seemed arbitrary without any reference to the Qur'anic text. However, because their judgments would be firmly based on the spirit of Islam, they were trusted. As well as the judgments of the Prophet which became *Sunnahs*, those of his companions were used afterwards as precedents. As time went by, born Muslims increased, which means that Islam became a firmly established religion, but also that their faith would become lax. Then, the judgmental criteria of arbitrary judgments would become less trustworthy, and instead of them, the judgments based on the text of the Qur'an and *Hadith* became more popular. To add one more feature, it is speculated that such judgments in early period adopted many local customary rules of the *Jahiliyyah* period.

As jurists gradually grew, methodologies of legal judgments became elaborated. Local jurists continued to solve troubles based on the Qur'an and *Sunnahs*. When no rule was found in the two, they used *ijma'* (consensus) in respective regions, and also *qiyas* (analogical inference) in order to find and validate a new law. Once consensus was reached about a precept among local jurists, this would become valid as a law. Regional difference of laws might be brought forth, because legal issues dif-

ferred from region to region; for example, the right and rules of irrigation were crucial in Iraq where the Tigris and Euphrates rivers flow, but out of concern in Mecca or Medina where no source of water was. In this way, regional schools of law were naturally formulated.

In the Abbasid dynasty, the regional differences in the judicial system were considered inconvenient and attempts to unify them began. What was unified was the priority of the four sources of law; the Qur'an, *Sunnah* and *ijma'* and *qiyas*. In fact, the systematization of *Shari'ah* meant not an issue of legal code, but the confirmation of the four sources of law. While the Qur'an and *Sunnah* are the material sources of laws, *ijma'* and *qiyas* are the methodologies of law findings, which had been used by local groups of jurists. Though *ijma'* seemed to mean the consensus of the *Ummah*, and has been one of the four sources of law, Islam has never held any council or institution for *ijma'*. Certainly this may seem odd, but the idea of *ijma'* may symbolize the authority of the *Ummah*. The *qiyas* is an analogical method of deriving a new rule based on text of the Qur'an and *Sunnahs*. If no precept was found among the first three sources, a jurist could use it. In other word, jurists' discretion was quite limited. These were the formative process of the *Shari'ah*. It must be understood that the systematization of the *Shari'ah* was not enacted by issue of the *Shari'ah* code at a point of time in history, as done in modern state laws, but rather gradually formulated since the lifetime of the Prophet. After the systematization, there still remained different groups of jurists, which resulted in the formation of four orthodox schools of jurisprudence in Sunni Islam.

Though briefly, I would like to explain the idea of politics in Islam. In a word, Islamic politics is basically the rule base on the *Shari'ah*. The *Ummah* is the sphere in which the *Shari'ah* is applied. In the Middle East, where the vast majority of people are Muslims, whole regions, more strictly speaking, each of the modern states, belong to the *Ummah*. In regions like Japan where Muslims remain minority, the *Shari'ah* is applied to individual Muslims, because each Muslim is a member of the *Ummah*.

Immediately after the death of the Prophet, though the *Shari'ah* was not systematized, the caliphs began to rule the *Ummah*. After caliphs lost their power, sultans or shahs of Iran became political rulers of respective states. As long as their reign was based on *Shari'ah*, they were regarded as legitimate rulers of a part of the *Ummah*. The rule by the *Shari'ah* was enabled by the cooperation of political rulers and jurists. The caliph or any political rulers had to obey the *Shari'ah*, and had no authority to revise or interpret it. Although the jurists could inter-

pret and even revise the *Shari'ah*, they had no real political power and had to conform to the contemporary political system. It is not appropriate to consider the jurists as the religious authority, and caliphs as the secular power, for the *Shari'ah*, different from modern state law, includes both ritual and social precepts. Even when the *Shari'ah* was finally systematized, it did not cover all the cases. In such cases, caliphs or sultans enacted laws or ordinances unrelated to the *Shari'ah*, of which the *Qanun* legal code in the Ottoman Empire is a famous example.

Today the modern Islamic world is divided into numerous states, and most of them have adopted a Western system of law. Though the *Shari'ah* has not been effective in modern political, economic and social cases, it has still been effective to the full extent in a part of ritual precepts such as prayer and fasting, and also to some extent, in that of family law.

## 8. Islam and Modernization

Finally, I would like to briefly talk about Islam and modernization. Parts of the Middle East were gradually colonized by the great powers of Europe. Muslims somehow tried to adopt this modern Western science, technology and system of education. That was the beginning of modernization, which was similar to Japanese modernization.

The Ottoman Empire had started accommodating some modern Western systems earlier than the other parts of Islamic world. However, since Islam is a religion highly integrated with the society, early Islamic Modernists considered it necessary to reform and modernize Islamic systems, especially the *Shari'ah*, at the same time as introducing Western systems. This is an obvious difference from the Japanese modernization. Though it was an ideal goal that Modernization would be achieved along the twin-tracks of Westernization and Islamic reformation, the simultaneous advancement of these two aims was found difficult soon. Then, the Islamic modernization divided into two lines, the Westernization and the Islamic reform. Islam labeled the former as secularism, and the latter as revivalism.

Japan rapidly adopted Western systems and succeeded in the modernization, partly because neither Shinto nor Buddhism was strongly opposed to it. For the reason mentioned above, however, some Muslims were anxious that religion and state would have to be separated, if the Western systems were introduced. If so, Islam would cease to be Islam. Their anxiety seems reasonable, for such integration would be the basis

of Islam. However, most Islamic states began to advance Westernization, while harsh opposition to secular modernization occurred from some groups of Modernists. The way the latter has chosen is what is today known as fundamentalism, which is called revivalism by them. It is called so, because their ideal is not Westernization, but the Islamic modernization based on the Qur'an and *Sunnah*.

Fundamentalists wish to establish a modern Islamic society based of the Qur'an. They do want to modernize their society and also to achieve economic growth. Nevertheless, their trials seemingly have remained unsuccessful, for their understanding of the Qur'an tends to rely on literal interpretation of the Qur'an which reflects historical situations of Arabian society in the seventh century, such as discrimination against women. Thus, their policies actually seem anti-modernist, as found in Iran Islamic Republic and also in the Taliban, though Fundamentalists have tried to found an Islamic modern society in a true sense. Logically speaking, it would not be impossible to interpret the Qur'an more rationally and freely, and radical modern interpretations may meet their original aim. But it would be safer for them to be faithful to the letters of the Qur'an.

Although Islamic opposition to the separation of religion and state may seem unbelievable and anachronistic from Japanese and Western perspectives, the basic Islamic view of humanity is certainly coherent and reasonable. Probably there seems to remain a room for examining if the western standard is universally valid or not.

No doubt, Muslims have a sense of pride that they were once more advanced area than Europe. For Muslims, Christianity is the same monotheism, sharing the same revelation from the same God, and in addition, the Qur'an itself is, in today's jargon, the latest update among the revelations. Therefore, Muslims do not want to ask Christians about modernization. They think that even democracy would probably be achievable if the Qur'an is interpreted afresh. This is also an underlying factor which supports revivalism.

Let us mention a little about the anti-American feeling among Muslims. The anti-American stance of fundamentalists is not a simple clash of religions, but rather mainly an issue of economics, and antipathy towards contemporary international politics led by the West. The countries of the Middle East, other than those which produce oil, are still impoverished. Although their establishments have followed the Western initiatives and received various kinds of financial aids, the economic inequality has not been solved. The fundamentalists actually have been carrying out medical aids and supported the poor in Egypt and other

places. Even though most Muslims criticize terrorism which killed many innocent lives, it seems to be a fact that their hidden emotional anger might be released through terrorism.

Although I do not agree with Muslims' terrorism either, I do not agree with American and Israeli militant reactions towards it without serious efforts to resolve the economic inequity and the Palestinian issue. Long ago when Islam was dominant in the world, it was comparatively tolerant to both Christianity and Judaism. In any era, the stronger and the wealthier should tolerate the weak, and hence, in the present situation, the West should more tolerate Muslims.

Both Japan and the Islamic world belonged to different traditions from that of Europe before modernization. Islam seems to have taken time to discuss on ways of modernization at the gateway to modernization, and as a result the pace of modernization has been delayed. By contrast, Japan advanced and completed Westernization without any serious discussion on its future discrepancies, and today, more than a hundred years later, many Japanese customs and ideas have remained which clearly differ from the West. Generally speaking, an indigenous culture with highly developed tradition will not easily lose it, even if it is modernized and westernized. Probably, if the Islamic world had rapidly advanced Westernization, Islamic traditions would no doubt have survived. If we examine the process and manners of Japanese modernization in comparison with the Islamic ones, we will discover some features of Japanese culture and religions which are hardly found out by comparison with the Western culture and religion. In this sense, the study of Islam is important.