

## Travelers on the Straight Path: Truth Seekers

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### Abstract

*This article analyzes the concepts of al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm (the Straight Path) and istiḳāma (steadfastness) and how they guide one to the Qur'ānic roadmap to success in this world and in the hereafter. Al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm is a methodology to define, verify, correct, and establish our concepts, principles, and relationships. I apply the hermeneutic of reading the divine text as a structural unity (al-waḥda al-binā'iyya li-l-Qur'ān). After defining al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm, I suggest that a holistic reading of the Qur'ān can help believers rebuild istiḳāma from within it, a specific methodological approach. I present al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm as a roadmap that envisions the characteristics of upright and righteous truth seekers and true believers following Prophet Abraham's religion and carried on by Prophet Muhammad and his umma to arrive at the Straight Path (Qur'ān 3:68). I close by stressing that it is imperative to become upright by remaining steadfast on the Straight Path. It is by remaining steadfast that individuals can restore balance in their relationships, uniting together as one family.*

**Keywords:** *al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm, istiḳāma, the Straight Path, steadfastness, Abraham, Prophet Muhammad, family, guidance, Qur'ān*

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

### Introduction

Ever since the beginning of the 20th century, social change worldwide has been more significant than at any other period in human history. As a result, new challenges have arisen. One long-held belief, that humanity is one family, is now surrounded with confusion and ambiguity because humanity is terribly divided, as can easily be seen in the dysfunctional relations in families, communities, and societies at all levels. The resulting unsafe environment is filled with friction, conflict, and abusive relations. Given this reality, people are searching for ways to restore balance to human relations.

This article's envisioned solution calls for seeking true guidance to find the right path. In general, this means requesting advice, direction, or assistance from someone in a position of authority or who is expected to provide wise counsel. However, true guidance entails much more than providing information, for its ultimate goal is to help people realize their potential, capacity for self-direction, and ability to solve their problems via proper choices and adjustments. The Qur'ān proposes that this can be achieved by following the Straight Path (*al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm* [الصراط المستقيم]).

Presented below is the methodology that helps truth seekers find true guidance. Once they enter upon this path, any confusion or uncertainty will be replaced with clarity and certainty as they progress toward the final destination. Moreover, it describes how to remain steadfast so that the travelers can find ways to restore balance in human relations, ways that are grounded in compassion, justice, respect, care, and forgiveness. With this, individuals, united together as one family, can hold each other accountable for their endeavors (Qur'ān 4:1).

Muslims must begin seeking guidance by reflecting on the Qur'ān's first *sūrah* (chapter), namely, *al-Fātiḥa* (The Opening). Muslims recite it at least seventeen times during their daily prayers, when they call for guidance.

In the Name of God,<sup>1</sup> the Merciful, the Beneficent. Praise be to Allah, the Lord of all the worlds. The Compassionate, the Merciful. Master of the Day of Judgment. You alone do we worship and to You alone do we turn for help. Guide us on the Straight Path. The path of those on whom You have bestowed Your favors, not those who have incurred Your wrath, nor those who have gone astray. (Qur'ān 1: 1-7)

Muslims frequently recite the sixth *āyah* (verse) “*Ihdinā al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*” (Guide us to the Straight Path).<sup>2</sup> *Ihdinā* (اهدنا), if not followed by a preposition, means “guide us through, and all the way to the end, of the Straight Path.” Another important point here is that it is a plural term. The previous *āyah*, “You alone do we worship and to You alone do we turn for help” (Qur'ān 1:5), means that we are asking Allah to guide us all together, regardless if one prays alone, with his/her family, or in congregation.

We ask for guidance and help for other people because God the Exalted has said: “By Time, humanity is at a loss, except for those who believe, do good deeds, urge one another to hold on to the truth, and urge one another to perseverance” (Qur'ān 103:1-3). This declares that the travelers must remind each other to worship, strive, seek help, establish families and communities, and continue supplicating *together*. Doing so places them “among those He has blessed, such as the messengers, the truthful, those who bear witness to the truth, and the righteous – what excellent companions these are!” (Qur'ān 4:69).

<sup>1</sup> The meaning of God in this article is Allah, the Creator, the Sustainer: “God has the Most Beautiful Names. So call upon Him by them...” (Qur'ān 7:180; see also Qur'ān 59:22-24). “We” refers to the Royal We. Muslims believe that “[t]here is nothing like Him, for He [alone] is the All-Hearing, All-Seeing” (Qur'ān 42:11). This article uses Qur'ānic translations from multiple sources, available at <https://qurano.com/>.

<sup>2</sup> For further readings on the *sūrah*, review: Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's *Tafsīr mafātīḥ al-ghāyib* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1981); Abū al-Fida Ismā'īl ibn Kathīr's *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm* (Beirut: Mu'assasa al-Kutub al-Thaqafiya, 1996); Muḥammad al-Ṭāhīr ibn 'Āshūr's *Al-Taḥrīr wa-l-Tanwīr* (Tunis: al-Dar al-Tunisiya li-l-Nashr, 1984). See Al-Ṭabarī's *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad Shākīr and Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākīr (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1961); al-Zamakhsharī's *al-Kashshāf*, 2d ed., ed. Muṣṭafā Ḥusyan Aḥmad (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Istiqāma, 1952).

But where can people find true guidance? The Merciful, Beneficent, Lord of the Worlds answers the supplication immediately in the following *sūrah*: “This is the Book; there is no doubt about it, a guidance (*huda*) for *al-muttaqīn* (truth seekers), those who are mindful of Allah [while seeking the truth]” (Qur’ān 2:2-5). In other words, the Qur’ān guides the truth seeker to the Straight Path, one that guarantees success and happiness in this world and in the hereafter. Being the true guidance, this mercy is bestowed upon humanity with beauty, simplicity, clarity, harmony, and in full accordance with human nature.<sup>3</sup>

Muslims believe that because the Qur’ān is the final divine guidance, its meanings, themes, and directives are suitable for all generations, regardless of progress, circumstances, and the means available to them. Its full meaning can only be attained by turning to it with understanding, reflection, and contemplation; unearthing its treasures; and reciting it constantly.<sup>4</sup> Every generation will benefit from it in accordance with its members’ abilities and efforts, for its commands remain applicable as life develops and progresses. For example, the five daily prayers are designed to transform the worshippers’ perception, habits, and behaviors. Prayer should open up their hearts and minds so they can reflect on the meaning and the purpose of their every action and evaluate it in light of following the Qur’ānic teachings.

In this article, I first analyze the Qur’ānic concepts of *ihdīnā al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm* and then outline the Straight Path’s roadmap as the methodology to find answers to any challenge. By attempting to understand the Qur’ān on its own terms, I then apply the methodology of *al-wahda al-binā’iyya li-l-Qur’an* (the Qur’ān’s structural unity),<sup>5</sup> which conceptualizes it as perfect in all its *suwar* (chapters; sing. *sūrah*), *āyāt* (verses; sing. *āyah*), words, letters, and parts – one unit. This holistic method reads the Qur’ān as a unified text through its linguistic, structural, and conceptual elements, because when read in this way, the divine text represents an integrated whole. When readers read to understand a certain word in a certain *sūrah*, they trace it throughout the Qur’ān to attain a better understanding of both it and its relevance. This approach helps to observe this term’s movement and how it reveals more meanings based on the surrounding context without violating its original meaning. I will then examine the methodology of reading the creation as it was

<sup>3</sup> Reflect on Qur’ān 6:157; 7:52 and 203; 10:57; 12:111; 16: 64 and 89; 17:82; 27:77; 28:86; 29:51; 31:3; and 45:20.

<sup>4</sup> See Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawzīyyah, Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr. 2020. *Ranks of the divine seekers: A parallel English-Arabic text*. Translated by Ovamir Anjum. Brill. <https://brill.com/display/title/55284>.

<sup>5</sup> For more details on the classical and contemporary debates concerning this method’s genealogy, see Alwani, Zainab. 2018. “Al-wahda al-binā’iyya li-l-Qur’ān: A Methodology for Understanding the Qur’an in the Modern Day.” *Journal of Islamic Faith and Practice* 1, no. 1 (March): 7-27; Abd al-Hamid al-Farahi’s *Qur’anic Vocabulary New Looks in the Interpretation of Qur’anic Words*, ed. Muhammad Ajmal Ayoub Aslihi (Beirut: Dār al-Gārb al-Islāmī, 2002); and Afaki, Abdul Rahim. “The Qur’an — A Coherent Structure or an Atomistic Collection of Verses: Critical Analysis of Wahīduddīn Khan’s Remarks on Nazm al-Qur’ān.” Published January 5, 2012 on the website of the London Academy of Iranian Studies, retrieved from <https://iranianstudies.org/2012/01/05/the-quran-a-coherent-structure-or-an-atomistic-collection-of-verses-critical-analysis-of-wah%EF%80%A8iduddin-khans-remarks-on-nazm-al-quran/>.

implemented by Prophet Abraham and learn how to combine the two readings of the Qur'ān and the creation (Qur'ān 96:1-5).

This article aims to answer the following questions: What is the meaning of the Straight Path (*al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*) and steadfastness (*istiqāma*)? What roadmap should be followed? What is the divine plan and direction that keeps humanity on the Straight Path? What are the root causes of deviation? What are the tools and mechanisms that help people discern it? How does the Qur'ān assess this through the prophets' and messengers' experiences? How did prophets Abraham and Muhammad (peace be upon them) establish and model *istiqāma*? How can we achieve it in the context of individuals, family, and society?

We apply this approach by analyzing the meaning of *al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm* and *istiqāma* by tracing how their derivation from their root words lead to constructing the foundational concept of *al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm* as a way of life. These two terms share the same root word, *q-w-m*, which has about twenty-five forms occurring 652 times in the Qur'ān. *Istiqāma* is mentioned ten times in eight *sūrahs*. Reading it conceptually to trace it in different *sūrahs* can lead to defining its meaning both theoretically and practically.

Prophet Abraham is presented as a model for Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon them) and his *umma* to follow: “Indeed, the most worthy of Abraham among the people are those who followed him [in submission to Allah] and this prophet [i.e., Muhammad, peace be upon him] and those who believe [in his message]. And Allah is the Ally of the believers” (Qur'ān 3:68). Finally, the article's conclusion provides some general recommendations for Muslim families and communities to stay on the Straight Path.

### Humanity Calling for Guidance (*Ihdinā*<sup>6</sup>)

Since the descent of Adam and Eve on Earth, Allah promised to give true guidance to humanity. In the creation story, Allah said: “You shall all descend from it [Paradise]. Guidance shall reach you from Me. Those who follow My guidance shall have nothing to fear nor shall they grieve, but those who deny Our revelations shall have the fire, wherein they shall abide” (Qur'ān 2:38-39). Here, human beings are given choice (free will) so they can either follow the revelations or listen to Satan, who mobilizes all his power to undermine their position as God's representatives on Earth (Qur'ān 2:30-34). At the end of this journey, everyone returns to the Creator, via death, with their good and bad deeds.

Right from the beginning, humanity was taught how to be guided to the Straight Path, defeat evil, and make that choice for themselves. Adam and Eve were allowed access to all the fruits of Paradise except for one tree. That tree may be seen as a symbol of the things forbidden, for without it there would be no free will for them to exercise during their trials (Qutb 2001a, 45). Remember that the Creator is the Light and the ultimate source of light that dispels all darkness in the heavens and Earth: “Light upon light” (Qur'ān 24:35).

<sup>6</sup> The root word *h-d-y*, which occurs in the Qur'ān 291 times in 11 forms, means to guide, rightly guide, explain, clarify; road, daylight, piety; a present, gift, and a sacrificial offering (Badawi and Abdel Haleem 2007). Its opposite is *ḍalāl* (ضلال). Derived from the root *ḍ-l-l*, it is mentioned 191 times in 11 forms. It means deviation from what is right, straying from the right path, losing one's way, to get lost, go astray, drift, delusion, confused, error, deception, misguided, to be unable to locate something, heedlessness, and ignorant (Badawi and Abdel Haleem 2007; Al Nuzhi 2013).

The aim is to make one's heart aspire to see this light: "God guides to His light one who He wills [to be guided]. Those who open their hearts to the light will see it, because it spreads far and wide in the heavens and Earth" (Qur'ān 24:35-38). The human heart that looks for it will always find it. In the midst of confusion, people can always access their internal guidance system and establish a bond between themselves and the Creator. On the other hand, those who ignore this internal guidance will disconnect themselves from the Creator and then from themselves (Qur'ān 59:19).

Humanity was created as the best creation and given cognitive and reflective abilities, as well as intelligence ('*aqī*) and heart (*qalb*), to enable them to distinguish between good and evil. The Compassionate sent prophets and messengers as role models of steadfastness. They remained upstanding wherever and whenever they lived, confronting challenges similar to those faced by people throughout history. This allows people to relate to the prophets' narratives and experiences and thereby derive lessons and meanings to help them make good decisions.

It is those who believe and do not taint their faith with wrongdoing are the ones who will feel secure, as they follow the right path [and it is they who are rightly guided]. This was the argument We gave Abraham against his people. We elevate in rank whoever We please. Surely your Lord is All-Wise, All-Knowing. And We blessed him with Isaac and Jacob. We guided them all as We previously guided Noah and those among his descendants: David, Solomon, Job, Joseph, Moses, and Aaron. This is how We reward the good-doers. Likewise, [We guided] Zachariah, John, Jesus, and Elias, who were all of the righteous. [We also guided] Ishmael, Elisha, Jonah, and Lot, favoring each over other people [of their time]. And [We favored] some of their forefathers, their descendants, and their brothers. We chose them and **guided them to the Straight Path**. That is the guidance of Allah by which He guides whomever He wills of His servants. But if they had associated others with Allah, then worthless for them would be whatever they were doing. Those were the ones to whom We gave the Book, wisdom, and prophethood. But if they [i.e., the disbelievers] deny it, then We have already entrusted it to a people who will never disbelieve in it. Those are the ones whom Allah has guided, so from their guidance take an example. So follow their guidance. Say, "I ask no reward of you for this [Qur'ān]—it is a reminder to the whole world." (Qur'ān 6:82-90)

The Qur'ān presents a general review of the truth seekers' experiences, beginning with Noah and ending with Muhammad (peace be upon them), the final messenger who was given the final revealed book that preserves and relates the true stories of earlier people: "We relate to you [O Prophet] the best of stories through Our revelation of this Qur'ān, though before this you were totally unaware [of them]" (Qur'ān 12:3). As a result, people can derive lessons from them: "There is a lesson in the stories of such people for those who understand. This revelation is no fabrication: it is a confirmation of the truth of what was sent before it; an explanation of everything; a guide and a blessing for those who believe" (Qur'ān 12:111).

All the prophets were role models, either as followers and/or leaders. The Qur'ān clearly demonstrates that the prophets and messengers followed, delivered, and advocated the same fundamental principles and guidelines: Submission to Allah alone, not associating any partners with Him, and following only Allah's guidance in both submission and worship. These are coupled with the beliefs that this present life is a test and that the person will be rewarded or punished in the life to come. As a result, a person's Allah-given freedom of choice is the basis of this test in distinguishing between truth and falsehood.

### Who Designed the Straight Path?

The first *sūrah* (*al-Fātiḥa*) outlines Islam's foundational beliefs, concepts, and relationships. It clearly defines the relationship between Allah, the Creator, with humanity and the universe and establishes the fundamental principle of *tawḥīd* (no deity in people's hearts and minds other than Allah). Once people have submitted to Allah alone and sought His help and guidance, they have achieved total liberation from **the tyranny of all worldly powers**. *Tawḥīd* gives believers their ultimate freedom. Therefore, the opening *sūrah* describes the truth seekers' (*al-muttaqūn*) attitude and states that the Lord (*Rabb*) of the Universe is the source of all true knowledge. The divine attributes of the Compassionate (*al-Raḥmān*) and the Merciful (*al-Raḥīm*) encompass all aspects and meanings of mercy.

God introduces Himself with the *āyah*: "All praise and gratitude is due to Allah, the Sustainer of all the Worlds (*Rabb*)," thereby clearly stating that He takes care of, nourishes, and fosters everything that exists through every stage of its existence (the Ultimate *Murabbī*) (Alwani 2019). In addition, *Al-Rabb* conveys the concepts of guiding, monitoring, accomplishing, cherishing, sustaining, and bringing to maturity via a process of spiritual evolution from the earliest state to the highest level of righteousness. Affirming Allah's absolute and active sovereignty over all creations is necessary to **relieve humanity from any source of ambiguity, confusion, and fear**.

The usage of *Rabb* in the first *āyah*, "Praise be to *Rabb*, the Lord of all the worlds," reassures humanity that a vigilant and caring *Rabb* is in charge of this world and will never abandon or forsake it. Hundreds of verses describe His blessings and illustrate His care. Allah confirmed that He distributes the means of livelihood and takes care of all His creations, so people do not need to worry about such things. The greatest blessing is that He provides guidance for everyone as long as they are alive. With this, the *sūrah* clearly outlines the fundamental principles and the Qur'ānic higher values: *Tawḥīd* and believing in the One, the Creator and the Designer of the worlds. This enables believers to grow in purity (*tazkiyah* [holistic purification]) so they can establish *'umran* (taking care of the Earth and its inhabitants by building, cultivating, and establishing peace, justice, and balance globally).

To achieve this, one's intention should be to remove what is harmful and establish and preserve what is good. Therefore, it is imperative to establish an honest dialogue within the Muslim and the global communities. Indeed, this is the true meaning of *'ibāda* (worship), which can only be realized and fulfilled when the highest values are fully integrated (Alwani 2014). In *Sūrah al-Fātiḥa*, people are asking God to guide them to the Straight Path. God continues to reveal His love and mercy upon humanity by teaching where, from whom, and how to find guidance during this journey. However, it depends on

their choice to get close to Allah or not. Those who decide to ignore the warning road signs go astray. The *sūrah* reveals that some people were blessed to follow the Straight Path and accept the guidance while others reject it, thereby earning God's anger and going astray (Qur'ān 1:7).

### What Does *al-Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaqīm* Mean?

The Qur'ān defines its concepts in its own way. For the purpose of clarity, it uses various traits, characteristics, attributes, and qualities to explain and illustrate the significance of all specific concepts. It also gives the opposite qualities so people can envision the action's outcome(s) and consequences. Since human beings are constantly moving and are on a journey, Allah declares: "It is He who has made Earth manageable for you, so move about in its regions and eat from His provisions. And to Him is the resurrection [of all]" (Qur'ān 67:15). Therefore, providing a clear roadmap that makes travelling easier is important. The Qur'ān uses various terms to explain and describe the roads and paths: *ṭarīq*, *sabīl*, and *ṣirāṭ* (Badawi and Abdel Haleem 2007; Al Nuzhi 2013).

*Ṭarīq* (path) is derived from the root *ṭ-r-q* (road, way, method, to strike, to knock, to arrive at night, and to happen). It appears in the Qur'ān in four forms in eleven places: *Ṭāriq* twice (Qur'ān 86:1-3); *ṭarīq* four times (Qur'ān 4:168-169 and 20:77); *ṭarīq mustaqīm* once: "They declared, 'O our fellow jinn! We have truly heard a scripture revealed after Moses, confirming what came before it. It guides to the truth and the Straight Way'" (Qur'ān 46:30); *ṭarīqa* three times in the sense of behavior, line of conduct, dignitary (Qur'ān 72:16, 20:104, and 20:63), and *ṭarā'iq* once as layers (Qur'ān 23:17) and a second time as factions or sects (Qur'ān 72:11). Given this, *ṭarīq* encompasses different meanings and can be used for either good or bad.

Tracing *sabīl* (path) through the Qur'ān reveals that all its meanings connect with the original linguistic meaning: extended (road) (Al-Iṣfahānī, n.d., 223). *Sabīl* is mentioned 175 times and always in the noun form. Sixty-five times it is mentioned with Allah (i.e., *sabīl Allah*), and eleven times with the pronoun (i.e., His way). As the *āyah* states: "And do not say of those who are killed in the **cause of God** [*sabīl Allah*] that they are dead" (Qur'ān 2:154).

The root word *s-b-l* means road, highway, to cause rain to fall in heavy showers, clothes that reach the ankles, or heat to put forth its ears. It occurs 170 times in the Qur'ān: 160 times as *sabīl* and 10 times in the plural form of *subul*. *Sabīl* means the path that leads to something, whether good or evil: "Call to the path of your Lord" (Qur'ān 16:125) and "This is how We make Our signs clear, so the path of the wicked may become distinct" (Qur'ān 6:55), respectively. Allah Almighty explains further:

I will turn away from My signs those who act unjustly with arrogance in the land. And even if they were to see every sign, they still would not believe in them. If they see the Right Path, they will not take it. But if they see a crooked path, they will follow it. This is because they denied Our signs and were heedless of them. (Qur'ān 7:146)

and “Say: ‘This is my path based on clear evidence; I, and all who follow me, Glory be to Allah, and I am not among those who associate partners with Allah’” (Qur’ān 12:108). With this, *sabīl* can be understood as a side road that leads to a *ṣirāṭ*, provided that it is combined with the name of Allah.

According to Arabic grammar, *al-ṣirāṭ*, the name of a path designed and named by Allah, is a very unique term that has no plural (Badawi and Abdel Haleem 2007; Al-Iṣfahānī, n.d., 230 and 280). Allah describes it: “Indeed, this is My Path — perfectly straight. So follow it and do not follow other paths, for they will lead you away from His Way. This is what He has commanded you, so perhaps you will be conscious [of Allah] (Qur’ān 6:153). According to the meaning given in Arabic dictionaries, this path swallows the walker. This means that when one looks at an obvious asphalt road, the person walking on this road is engulfed by the road. *Ṣirāṭ*, derived from the root *ṣ-r-ṭ*, is mentioned forty-five times in the Qur’ān. *Al-Ṣirāṭ*, combined with *al-mustaqīm*, occurs thirty-three times and is commonly understood as *the* path that leads to God: “Say, [O Prophet,] ‘Surely my Lord has guided me to the Straight Path, a perfect way, the faith of Abraham, the upright, who was not one of the polytheists’” (Qur’ān 6:161).

It is an easy road, because the direction is clear and well defined. In addition, one must believe and trust the roadmap’s source and know that its earlier travelers arrived safely and happily:

And so We have sent to you [O Prophet] a revelation by Our command. You did not know of [this] Book and faith [before]. But We have made it a light, by which We guide whoever We will of Our servants. And you are truly leading [all] to the Straight Path — the Path of Allah, to Whom belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the Earth. Surely to Allah all matters will return [for judgment]. (Qur’ān 42:52-53)

The Straight Path, the clear way of proper conduct and correct religious belief and practice, enables the believers who are willing to begin their journey on it to follow the divine roadmap and join the blessed people at its end (Qur’ān 1:6). This clear highway contains numerous road signs to help believers discern warning signs of potential dangers ahead; a need for special caution, being constantly alert, and maybe requiring various maneuvers due to internal or external distractions; and warning one to slow down and be prepared to stop, if necessary, because a special situation or hazard is ahead.

### **The Warning Signs of Deviation from the Straight Path**

Clearly, *al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm* is restricted to be used only as the good path. But what can lead to deviation from it? Here, one needs to understand the opposite of “straight,” which is *‘-w-j* (crookedness, to be twisted around, to bend up, to divert). It occurs nine times in the Qur’ān.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Recite: Qur’ān 3:99; 7:45 and 86; 11:19; 18:1; 20:107-108; and 39:28.



The main sign of deviation is the lack of a clear end goal, for this leads to an aimless life with no sense of accountability (Qur'ān 14:3). As a result, one will follow anything, anyone, and any path. Thus, Allah warns people against following Satan and their inner lower desires.

**First**, He provides an extensive description of Satan's plan to deceive people until they fall under Satan's command:

O you who believe, do not follow the footsteps of Satan. Whoever follows the footsteps of Satan, [should know that] he orders [one to commit] shameful acts and evil deeds. Had it not been for Allah's grace and mercy upon you, none of you would have ever been purified. But Allah purifies whoever He wills. And Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing. (Qur'ān 24:21)

The Qur'ān gives examples of such people who have fallen under Satan's command:

[Remember] the tribes of 'Ād and Thamūd: their history is made clear to you by [what is left of] their dwelling places. Satan made their [evil] deeds appealing to them, hindering them from the [Right] Way, although they were capable of reasoning. [Remember] Qārūn and Pharaoh and Hāmān: Moses brought them clear signs, but they behaved arrogantly on the earth. They could not escape Us. (Qur'ān 29:38-39)

and “And of the people is he who disputes about Allah without knowledge and follows every rebellious devil. It has been decreed for him [i.e., every devil] that whoever takes them as a guide will be misguided and led by them into the torment of the Blaze” (Qur'ān 22:3-4).

The Qur'ān reveals how this attitude develops in people's mind and heart: “Indeed, those who do not expect the meeting with Us and are satisfied with the life of this world and feel secure therein and those who are heedless of Our signs” (Qur'ān 10:7). Moreover, “those who prefer the life of this world over the life to come, who turn others from God's way, trying to make it [appear] crooked: such people have gone far astray” (Qur'ān 14:3). Consequently, the person will develop an extreme love of this temporary life:

And you will surely find them the most greedy of people for life – [even] more than those who associate others with Allah. One of them wishes that he could be granted life a thousand years, but it would not remove him in the least from the [coming] punishment that he should be granted life. And Allah is Seeing of what they do. (Qur'ān 2:96)

**Second**, the Qur'ān describes the state of people who follow their inner lower desires and ego:

And relate to them [O Prophet] the story of the one to whom We gave Our signs, but he abandoned them, so Satan took hold of him, and he became a deviant. If it

had been Our will, We could have used these signs to raise him high, but instead he clung to the earth and followed his own desires – he was like a dog that pants with a lolling tongue whether you drive it away or leave it alone. Such is the image of those who reject Our signs. Tell them the story so that they may reflect. (Qur’ān 7:175-176)

The decision to continue or to stop following one’s desires is life’s most crucial decision: “So if they fail to respond to you, then know that they only follow their desires. And who could be more astray than those who follow their desires with no guidance from Allah? Surely Allah does not guide the wrongdoing people” (Qur’ān 28:50). The Most Merciful keeps reminding people of His love and care for them: “Allah wants to accept your repentance – to turn to you in grace –, but those who follow their desires wish to see you deviate entirely [from Allah’s Way]” (Qur’ān 4:27). He continues explaining:

Is one who worships devoutly during the hour of the night, prostrating himself or standing [in adoration], who takes heed of the Hereafter, and who places his hope in the Mercy of his Lord – [like one who does not]? Say: “Are those equal, those who know and those who do not know? It is those who are endued with understanding that receive admonition.” (Qur’ān 39:9)

and “Have you seen those who have taken their own desires as their god? [And so] Allah left them to stray knowingly, sealed their hearing and hearts, and placed a cover on their sight. Who then can guide them after Allah? Will you [all] not then be mindful?” (Qur’ān 45:23). The Qur’ān reveals their final destination:

And [beware of] the Day when the wrongdoer will bite his own hand [in regret] and say, “Oh! I wish I had followed the Way along with the Messenger! Oh, woe to me! I wish I had not taken that one as a friend. It was he who truly made me stray from the revelation after it had reached me.” (Qur’ān 25:27-28)

### **How Do the Travelers Who Have Gone Astray Return to the Path?**

The Qur’ān clearly explains that people have only themselves to blame if they have gone astray: “Indeed, Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves” (Qur’ān 13:11). As following the Straight Path ensures the travelers’/believers’ safety, the Qur’ān provides a comprehensive plan with important tools and clear signs to keep their attention focused on the road. One of these is paying attention to internal and external threats. However, the internal struggle can be a greater threat:

And keep yourself patient [by being] with those who call upon their Lord in the morning and the evening, seeking His face [i.e., acceptance]. And let not your eyes pass beyond them, desiring adornments of the worldly life, and do not obey one whose heart We have made heedless of Our remembrance and who follows his desire and whose affair is ever [in] neglect. (Qur’ān 18:28)

In sum, people choose what type of future they will have.

Allah, the All-Wise, teaches those who have turned to Him and repented to “Remember your Lord inwardly with humility and reverence and in a moderate tone of voice, both morning and evening. And do not be one of the heedless” (Qur’ān 7:205). However, sometimes the believers need to be more cautious. For example, the Qur’ān informs them:

And if an evil suggestion comes to you from Satan, then seek refuge in Allah. Indeed, He is Hearing and Knowing. Indeed, when Satan whispers to those mindful [of Allah], they remember [their Lord,] then they start to see [things] clearly. As for their brethren [i.e., the devils], they draw them deeper into error and do not relax in their efforts. (Qur’ān 7:200-202)

Also, people use pressure to distract the believers: “If you do not bring them a sign [which they demanded], they ask, ‘Why do you not make it yourself?’ Say, ‘I only follow what is revealed to me from my Lord; this [Qur’ān] is [nothing but] insights from your Lord, and Guidance, and mercy, for those who believe’” (Qur’ān 7:203). The Qur’ān continues to provide guidance and remind the believers of a very important way to tackle all such distractions:

So when the Qur’ān is recited, then listen to it [attentively] and pay attention that you may receive mercy. And remember your Lord inwardly, in all humility and in reverence, without raising your voice, [and in a moderate tone of voice], in the mornings and in the evenings – do not be one of the heedless. Indeed, those who are near your Lord are not prevented by arrogance from His worship, and they exalt Him, and to Him they prostrate. (Qur’ān 7:204-206)

In this way, the Qur’ān elevates people’s consciences to a sublime level, thereby purifying them of all traces of heedlessness.

### **The Direction to the Straight Path**

Mustaqīm (المستقيم) and Q-W-M (ق-و-م)

*Mustaqīm* and *istiqāma* share the same root word, *q-w-m* (Badawi and Abdel Haleem 2007), which has twenty-two or more forms that occur 660 times in the Qur’ān. Every word can be considered a sign that helps people move one step ahead on the Straight Path. *Q-w-m* implies doing something continuously, being constant, following up with it, and making sure that it is done correctly without deviation or swerving. In addition, it also means to stand up, establish, be upright, rise; to revolt, resist, rebel; to erupt, outbreak; to set up, reside, be constant; to be straight, estimate, value, stand firm for justice; location, backbone, support, pillar, substance, overseer, guardian, and leader.

Tracing its root word guides us to the comprehensive roadmap of *al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*. Every word can be considered a sign that helps people move ahead on the Straight Path. Some of the words are foundational concepts; others are sub-concepts. Here,

we will focus on the foundational ones. The journey of tracing *q-w-m* defines the Straight Path's beginning point with *Al-Qayyūm* and ends with the final destination: *al-qiyaamah*.

#### Al-Qayyūm (القَيُّوم)

*Al-Qayyūm* is an attribute of Allah, the Eternal, Guardian, Benefactor Supporter of all, the Constant, the Everlasting, the Independent. The Qur'ān describes this attribute in three *āyāt*: "Allah! There is no deity [worthy of worship] except Him, the Ever-Living, All-Sustaining" (Qur'ān 3:2);

Allah! There is no deity [worthy of worship] except Him, the Ever-Living, All-Sustaining. Neither slumber nor sleep overtakes Him. To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth. Who could possibly intercede with Him without His permission? He [fully] knows what is ahead of them and what is behind them, but no one can grasp any of His knowledge – except what He wills [to reveal]. His throne extends over the heavens and the earth, and the preservation of both does not weary Him. He is the Most High, the Most Great. (Qur'ān 2:255)

and "And all faces will be humbled before the Ever-Living, All-Sustaining. And those burdened with wrongdoing will be in loss" (Qur'ān 20:111). *Al-Qayyūm* is the One who maintains the existence, for if Allah were to stop taking care of people even for a second, everything would fall apart. This means that the Straight Path's first foundational step is to establish a strong relationship with Allah (*Al-Qayyūm*), the Sustainer of all that exists.

#### Qiyam (قيام) and al-Dīn al-Qiyam (الدين القيم)

*Qiyam* means the true, straight, upright religion, *al-dīn al-qiyam* (الدين القيم). According to the Qur'ān, the true religion (الدين القيم) is the way of Abraham: "Say, 'Indeed, my Lord has guided me to a Straight Path – and correct/upright religion – the way of Abraham, inclining toward truth. And he was not among those who associated others with Allah'" (Qur'ān 6:161). Why does the Qur'ān introduce Abraham's religion as the true one?

Prophet Abraham's journey on the path as a truth seeker started early in his life, for he grew up in a family whose main source of income was making gods/idols. This led him to ask logical questions about the meaning of "god," its attributes, and its role in life. The Qur'ān presents Abraham's conversations with his father and his people in various places, which illustrate his ability to contemplate his surroundings. This led him to connect different things in the world together, recognize the relationship between them to establish his conclusions, and eventually find the right path. The Qur'ān illustrates this:

And [remember] when Abraham said to his father, Āzar, "Do you take idols as gods? It is clear to me that you and your people are entirely misguided." In this way We showed Abraham mighty dominion over the heavens and the earth, so that he might be firm in belief. When the night grew dark upon him, he saw a star and said, "This is my Lord!" But when it was set, he said, "I do not love things that are set." Then when he saw the moon rising, he said, "This one is my Lord!" But when it disappeared, he said, "If my Lord does not guide me, I will certainly be one of the

misguided people.” Then when he saw the sun shining, he said, “This must be my Lord – it is the greatest!” But again when it set, he declared, “O my people! I totally reject whatever you associate [with Allah in worship].” This led him to announce: “I have turned my face towards the One Who has originated the heavens and the earth – being upright – and I am not one of the polytheists.” (Qur’ān 6:74-79)

The Qur’ān relates what happened next:

We had granted Abraham sound judgment early on, for We knew him well. [Remember] when he questioned his father and his people, “What are these statues to which you are so devoted?” They replied, “We found our forefathers worshipping them.” He responded, “Indeed, you and your forefathers have been clearly astray.” They asked, “Have you come to us with the truth, or is this a joke?” He said, “Listen! Your true Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth, He who created them, and I am a witness to this.” [Then he said to himself,] “By Allah! I will surely plot against your idols after you have turned your backs and gone away.” He broke them all into pieces, but left the biggest one for them to return to. They protested, “Who dared do this to our gods? It must be an evildoer!” Some said, “We heard a young man, called Abraham, speaking [ill] of them.” They demanded, “Bring him before the eyes of the people, so that they may witness [his trial].” They asked, “Was it you who did this to our gods, O Abraham?” He replied [sarcastically], “No, this one – the biggest of them – did it! So ask them, if they can talk!” So they came back to their senses, saying [to one another], “You yourselves are truly the wrongdoers!” but then they lapsed again and said, “You know very well these gods cannot speak.” He rebuked [them], “Do you then worship – instead of Allah – what can neither benefit nor harm you in any way? Shame on you and whatever you worship instead of Allah! Do you not have any sense?” They concluded, “Burn him up to avenge your gods, if you must act.” But We said, “Fire, be cool and safe for Abraham.” They had sought to harm him, but We made them the worst losers. (Qur’ān 21:51-70)

The question is, what idols do people follow today?

Abraham’s clear vision of *tawhīd* enabled him to see the world holistically. This *tawhīdī* worldview helped him develop the ability to connect things together and see that this world was created according to a perfect system and that discovering the relationship between things enables one to find the ultimate truth (the Creator). **The Qur’ān explains Prophet Abraham’s religion** and his belief clearly, reveals his position and advocacy for the true message with comprehensive evidence, and illustrates how believing in Allah liberated him from all shackles and enabled him to declare his freedom:

“For me, I have set my face, firmly and truly, towards the One Who created the heavens and the earth, and never shall I give partners to Allah.” And his people argued with him. He responded, “Are you arguing with me about Allah, while He has guided me? I am not afraid of whatever [idols] you associate with Him – [none

can harm me,] unless my Lord so wills. My Lord encompasses everything in [His] knowledge. Will you not be mindful? And how should I fear your associate-gods, while you have no fear in associating [others] with Allah – a practice He has never authorized? Which side has more right to security? [Tell me] if you really know! It is [only] those who are faithful and do not tarnish their faith with falsehood, who are guaranteed security and are [rightly] guided.” (Qur’ān 6:79-82)

His search for the truth reveals that people may explore the universe and connect things and establish systems based on their studies and experiences. However, if these endeavors are not grounded in believing in Allah, the outcome will lead to the wrong path because the Designer, namely Allah, has the original blueprint of all creations. In His capacity as the Most Merciful, He sent prophets and messengers to teach humanity how to understand these systems so they can achieve the best result in both this life and the hereafter. At that time, all truth seekers will surrender themselves to the Creator of heaven and Earth with humility, as did Prophet Abraham. If they think of themselves as the Creator, they will go astray. The Qur’ān describes this attitude as follows: “Allah taught humanity what it did not know. Most certainly, one exceeds all bounds, once they think they are self-sufficient. Surely to your Lord all must return” (Qur’ān 96:5-8).

In other words, acquiring knowledge without recognizing Allah as its main source leads to arrogance and ingratitude by acting as a god to control people by using the systems He created. This attitude was – and continues to be – dangerous, creates corruption and division among the powerful and the powerless, and has to be challenged. Prophet Abraham modeled this by recognizing the king’s arrogance and challenging him:

Have you not considered the man who disputed with Abraham about his Lord [merely] because Allah had given him power to rule? When Abraham said, “It is my Lord who gives life and death,” he said, “I too give life and death.” So Abraham said, “Allah brings the sun from the east; so bring it from the west.” The disbeliever was dumbfounded: Allah does not guide those who do evil. (Qur’ān 2:258)

Understanding the danger of this attitude, Prophet Abraham stood against the king (the aggressor) to show people how powerless he was. Out of His mercy, Allah, the Great and the Sovereign of the universe, sent Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) to humanity and instructed him to follow Prophet Abraham’s true religion (*al-dīn al-qiyam*):

So be steadfast in the upright/correct religion (*al-dīn al-qiyam*), [O Prophet], before the coming of a Day from Allah that cannot be averted. On that Day the people will be divided: Those who rejected the truth will bear the burden of that rejection, and those who did good deeds will have made good provision for themselves. (Qur’ān 30:43-44)

This foremost and fundamental truth is emphasized throughout the Qur’ān and is the foundation upon which all human concepts and systems are established. The true

religion should be based purely on the belief in Allah’s absolute oneness and stressing that faith resides in the believer’s heart; it is not inherited through blood or ancestral lineage:

And whoever does righteous deeds, whether male or female, while being a believer – those will enter Paradise and will not be wronged, [even as much as] the speck on a date seed. Who could be better in religion than those who surrender themselves wholly to Allah, do good, and follow the religion of Abraham, who was true in faith? Allah took Abraham as a close friend. (Qur’ān 4:124- 125)

#### Qawm (قوم)

*Qawm* is mentioned more than 300 times in the Qur’ān to include various people and nations, describe a group of people in general, an earlier nation that had existed during a certain prophet’s specific time and place, or to describe a nation with certain characteristics. The Qur’ān explains the purpose of creating peoples with different genders, colors, races and ethnic groups, and languages:

O People! We created you from a single [pair] of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other [not that you may despise each other]. Verily the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is the one most mindful of Him: And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted [with all things]. (Qur’ān 49:13)

Therefore, it shows how people, regardless of time and place, have responded to the prophets and messengers sent to remind them of the fundamental principles and purpose of their existence. The peoples’ reactions to the message differed; however, the majority of them rejected it. Examples of this use of *qawm* include: “Allah does not change the condition of a people unless they change what is in themselves” (Qur’ān 13:11); “Indeed, We sent Noah to his people. He said, ‘O my people! Worship Allah – you have no other god except Him. I truly fear for you the torment of a tremendous Day’” (Qur’ān 7:59); and “Then from the farthest end of the city a man came, rushing. He advised, ‘O my people! Follow the messengers’” (Qur’ān 36:20-26). In this case, *qawm* reveals how peoples’ reactions impact their behaviors, practices, and relationships. The Qur’ān teaches the believers how to identify any such thoughts, ideologies, or practices by challenging the claimants.

#### Maqām (مقام)

*Maqām* is mentioned 14 times with such various meanings as location, an honored station, rank or position, or a specific job (Badawi and Abdel Haleem 2007). As we continue following Abraham’s journey, the Qur’ān describes the significance of *Maqām Abraham* not only as a physical location, but also as the representation of the complete foundation of the first House on Earth for the worship of Allah. After completing this divine project, Allah commands Muslims: “Make the place where Abraham stood as a place of prayer” (Qur’ān 2:125).

The following *āyāt* explain the significance of this House: In addition to being where the declaration of *tawhīd* was first announced (i.e., There is no deity worthy to be worshiped except Allah):

We made the House [i.e., the Ka’bah] a resort for people and a sanctuary: “Make the place where Abraham stood as a place of prayer.” We assigned Abraham and Ishmael the task of purifying My House for those who walk around it, those who sojourn there for meditation, and those who bow down and prostrate themselves in prayer. (Qur’ān 2:125)

The Qur’ān explains further:

Say, “Allah speaks the truth, so follow Abraham’s religion: he had true faith and he was never an idolater.” Surely the first House [of worship] established for humanity is the one at Bakkah [i.e., Makka] – a blessed sanctuary and a source of guidance for [all] people. In it are clear signs and the standing place of Abraham. Whoever enters it shall be safe. Pilgrimage to this House is an obligation by Allah upon whoever is able among the people. And whoever disbelieves, then surely Allah is not in need of [any of His] creation. (Qur’ān 3:95-97)

Contemplating these *āyāt* reveals that they contain the model for people to establish any project based on the Qur’ānic concept of *‘umran*. The purpose statement is clear and encapsulates the desired outcome: building a place to worship Allah, one that should be a blessed place of guidance for everyone. Allah entrusted its management to those who believe in Allah and the mission: “He had true faith and he was never an idolater” (Qur’ān 3:95). A purpose-driven project creates a sense of ownership and pride, which inspires the believers to succeed. This translated into the team’s supplication, who envisioned *tawhīd* as a worldview in one’s activities and relationships:

As Abraham and Ishmael raised the foundations of the House, [they prayed]: “Our Lord, accept this from us; You are the One that hears all and knows all. Our Lord, make us surrender ourselves to You, and make out of our offspring a community that will surrender itself to You. Show us our ways of worship and accept our repentance; You are the One who accepts repentance, the Merciful. Our Lord! Raise from among them a messenger who will recite to them Your revelations, teach them the Book and wisdom, and purify them. Indeed, You [alone] are the Almighty, All-Wise.” Who but a foolish person would turn away from the faith of Abraham? We certainly chose him in this life, and in the Hereafter he will surely be among the righteous. When his Lord ordered him, “Submit [to My Will],” he responded, “I submit to the Lord of all worlds.” (Qur’ān 2:127-131)

And



The mosques of Allah are only to be maintained by those who believe in Allah and the Last Day and establish regular prayers, and practice regular charity, and fear none [at all] except Allah. It is expected that those will be of the [rightly] guided. Do you consider giving water to pilgrims and tending al-Masjid al-Ḥaram to be equal to the deeds of those who believe in Allah and the Last Day and who strive in Allah's path? They are not equal in the sight of Allah. And Allah does not guide the wrongdoing people. (Qur'ān 9:18-19)

Makka is called the Mother City because it is honored by this House, a sanctuary in which everyone enjoys peace. From it, the call of *tawḥīd* was announced for the first time on a truly universal level. Believers make pilgrimage to it, declaring their submission to Allah, and honoring the birthplace of His call. It is the model house of worship for every house of believers in which prayer is established, and thus should be the model as a safe and peaceful place. Its characteristics should be replicated and implemented worldwide – in our homes, mosques, schools, community centers, organizations, and societies. Wherever Muslims reside, these places must be a source and center of peace and security. Allah presents humanity with a holistic model for a city in which people find complete peace – spiritually, physically, environmentally, socioeconomically, and culturally.

#### Istiqāma (استقامة): The Way of Life

*Istiqāma*, mentioned ten times in eight *sūrahs*, means to go straight, become upright, and follow the correct path. The Qur'ān seeks to establish and articulate upright concepts and fundamental principles on which the community should be raised, and to provide a course for righteous and dignified human beings. The prophets and messengers were sent as role models in terms of remaining steadfast in every aspect of life and advocating for the true religion:

He has ordained for you of religion what He enjoined upon Noah and that which We have revealed to you, [O Muhammad], and what We enjoined upon Abraham and Moses and Jesus – to establish the religion and not be divided therein. Difficult for those who associate others with Allah is that to which you invite them. Allah chooses for Himself whom He wills and guides to Himself whoever turns back [to Him]. And they did not become divided until after knowledge had come to them – out of jealous animosity between themselves. And if not for a word that preceded from your Lord until a specified time, it would have been concluded between them. And indeed, those who were granted inheritance of the Book after them are, concerning it, in disquieting doubt. Now then, for that [reason], call [them to the Faith], and stand steadfast as you are commanded, nor follow their vain desires; but say; “I believe in what Allah has revealed of the Book [i.e., the Qur'an] and I have been commanded to do justice among you. Allah is our Lord and your Lord; for us [is the responsibility for] our deeds, and for you your deeds. There is no contention between us and you. Allah will bring us together, and to Him is [our] Final destination.” (Qur'ān 42:13-15)

Allowing no element of despair to disrupt his work, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) continued to call on people to accept the message. Despite the unrelenting opposition, arrogance, and hostility they faced, the prophets were often directed to remain patient. In Sūrah Hūd, Allah laid down this foundation:

Therefore, be steadfast as you are commanded, together with those who turn [in submission to Allah] with you. And let none of you transgress. Surely, He sees all you do. Do not rely on those who do evil, or the Fire may touch you, and then you will have no one to protect you from Allah, nor will you be helped. Establish prayers at both ends of the day and in the early watches of the night. Surely, good deeds erase evil ones. This is a reminder for those who are thoughtful. And be patient in adversity; God does not fail to reward those who do good. (Qur’ān 11:112-115)

Taking this path requires patience and steadfastness. A Companion once asked Prophet Muhammad: “O Messenger of Allah, tell me something about Islam which I can ask of no one but you.” He (peace be upon him) said, “Say ‘I believe in Allah’ — and then be steadfast” (Riyād aṣ-Ṣāliḥīn, ḥadīth 85; Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim no. 38, bk. 1, ḥadīth 66).

Allah describes the state of steadfast people and the beautiful reward they will receive in the afterlife:

As for those who say, “Our Lord is God” and then remain steadfast [take the Straight Path towards Him], the angels come down to them and say, “Have no fear or grief, but rejoice in the good news of Paradise, which you have been promised. We are your allies in this world and in the world to come, where you will have everything you desire and ask for. As a welcoming gift from the Most Forgiving, Most Merciful One.” (Qur’ān 41:30-31)

The Qur’ān describes the personality, discourse, and fine manner of the person advocating this message: The person’s good word is combined with good action and confirmed with self-surrender to Allah, and the intention is pure and sincere, free of self-interest. A forbearing attitude requires a good heart, one that can forgive when it might otherwise return evil with its like.

Who speaks better than someone who calls people to Allah, does what is right, and says, “I am truly one of those who submit? [ lit., Muslims].” Good and evil cannot be equal. Respond [to evil] with what is best, then the one you are in a feud with will become like a close friend. But only those who are steadfast in patience, only those who are blessed with great righteousness, will attain such goodness. And if [at any time] you are tempted by Satan, then seek refuge with Allah. Indeed, He [alone] is the All-Hearing, All-Knowing. (Qur’ān 41:30-36)

Establishing Prayer (إقامة الصلاة)

*Aqāma* (أقام) is mentioned fifty-four times in the Qur’ān, primarily in the context of establishing prayer (*al-ṣalāh*),<sup>8</sup> defined as a state of mindfulness and remaining focused, attentive, and determined in whatever one undertakes (Al-Iṣfahānī, n.d., 416-418). Managing something means to deal with it skillfully, efficiently, orderly, and continuously. When used with *ṣalāh*, *aqīmū al-ṣalāh* (أقيموا الصلاة), it means to establish, manage, uphold, observe, keep up, and continue with your *ṣalāh*. It is defined in this context as going forward, progressing, evolving, advancing, and enlightenment.

Prophet Abraham modeled the true meaning of *ṣalāh*, the expected outcome, and how to achieve the best result of establishing it among individuals, families, and communities. His open communication with Allah through *du‘ā’* and *ṣalāh* elevated him to the rank of *Khalīl Allah* (Allah’s close friend) (Qur’ān 4:125). Prayer engages the worshipper with God in a holistic way physically, psychologically, emotionally, intellectually, environmentally, and socially: “I am God; there is no deity but Me. So worship Me and keep up the prayer so that you remember Me” (Qur’ān 20:14). It also provides a regular interruption of the day’s activities to focus one’s mind and heart on the first priority of life: serving God.

Prayer is a central pillar of a Muslim’s life, both for the individual and the larger Muslim community. Facing the *qiblah* (the direction of Makka), worshippers stand to begin the prayer. Prayer plays a great role. In sum, it promotes *taqwa* (piety) and can help one develop self-awareness by establishing his/her relationship with Allah, other people, and the environment. Satan, the believers’ ultimate enemy, tries to lead people astray from the path of righteousness. Prayer trains the worshipper to defeat Satan. To prevent one’s self from falling into lewdness, Muslims must take refuge in it: “[O Prophet], recite what has been revealed to you of the Book; keep up the prayer: prayer restrains outrageous and unacceptable behavior. Remembering God is greater: God knows everything you are doing” (Qur’ān 29:45).

Abraham’s constant supplication for his offspring illustrated how he envisioned the future, asked Allah for His help, and placed his trust in Him to make the dream come true.

[Remember] when Abraham prayed, “My Lord! Make this city [of Makka] secure, and keep me and my offspring away from the worship of idols. My Lord! They have caused many people to go astray. So whoever follows me is with me, and whoever disobeys me — then surely You are [still] All-Forgiving, Most Merciful. Our Lord! I have settled some of my offspring in a barren valley, near Your Sacred House, our Lord, so that they may establish prayer. So make the hearts of [believing] people incline towards them and provide them with fruits, so perhaps they will be thankful. Our Lord! You certainly know what we conceal and what we reveal. Nothing on earth or in heaven is hidden from Allah. All praise is for Allah who has blessed me with Ishmael and Isaac in my old age. My Lord is indeed the Hearer of [all] prayers. O my Lord! Make me one who establishes regular Prayer, and also [raise such] among my offspring, O our Lord! And accept my Prayer. Our

<sup>8</sup> Recite Qur’ān 2:177; 2:277; 7:170; 9:5; 9:11; 9:18; 13:22; and 21:73.

Lord, forgive me, my parents, and the believers on the Day of Reckoning.” (Qur’ān 14:36-41)

Believing families and communities should follow this model all the time. The Qur’ān emphasizes in many places how Allah accepted Abraham’s supplication and that his vision became true through subsequent generations. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was **one of his offspring who was elevated to the high rank:**

So establish the regular prayers in the period from the time the sun is past its zenith till the darkness of the night, and [recite] the Qur’ān at dawn – dawn recitation is always witnessed – and during the night wake up and pray (*tahajjud*), as an extra offering of your own, so that your Lord may raise you to a [highly] praised status. (Qur’ān 17:78-79)

Doing this in a complete way, as Allah orders, will lead to raising true believers who will raise believing families and communities.

#### Qawwāmūn (قَوَّامُونَ): Establishing Justice on All Levels

The Qur’ān declares:

Believers! Be ever steadfast in upholding equity, bearing witness to the truth for the sake of God, even though it be against yourselves, or your parents and kin. Whether the person concerned be rich or poor, God’s claim takes precedence over [the claims of] either of them. Do not, then, follow your own desires, lest you swerve from justice. If you distort [the truth] or decline to do justice, then [know that] God is indeed aware of all that you do. (Qur’ān 4:135)

It also states: “You who believe, be steadfast in your devotion to God and bear witness impartially: do not let hatred of others lead you away from justice, but adhere to justice, for that is closer to awareness of God. Be mindful of God: God is well aware of all that you do” (Qur’ān 4:8). Justice is concerned with both an inward quality of the soul and an outward quality of virtue. People have to be just with themselves and with others. The Qur’ān informs humanity that the essence of morality comes from moral responsibility, that every person is responsible for his/her actions, and thereby transforms loyalty into personal morality: “No burdened soul shall bear the burden of another, and every person will be accountable on the Day of Judgment for himself” (Qur’ān 6:164, 17:15, and 35:18).

This is reflected most clearly in terms of rights and obligations. As the familial system’s basic characteristic is mutual care, Islam builds its structure on a solid and sound foundation of natural human inclinations that have a basic role to fulfill in human life. Family ties are genuine and natural, as opposed to being invented by any generation or indeed by the cumulative wisdom of all generations. As these ties have a profound effect on preserving and improving human life, no argument against their necessity and effect is worth any consideration. In view of this, Islam makes mutual care within the family the cornerstone of its system of social care and security (Qutb 2001b, 20). Inheritance is one

aspect of that, as well as an essential element of its economic system, for care within the family or the local community creates feelings of compassion that, in turn, promote cooperation in a most natural way. Moreover, these feelings constitute a net gain for humanity, one that anyone who has its interests at heart cannot dismiss. Furthermore, family care in particular leaves certain effects that are in harmony with human nature.

The Day of Resurrection (القيامة), Al-Muqām (مُقَام), and Muqāmah (مُقَامَة)

*Al-Qiyāmah*, mentioned about seventy times in the Qur’ān, means rising and resurrection: “We will set up the scales of justice on the Day of Resurrection, so no soul will be wronged in the least. And [even] if a deed is the weight of a mustard seed, We will bring it forth” (Qur’ān 21:47).

*Al-Muqām* (مُقَام) means the permanent residence (Qur’ān 25:66 and 76), and *muqāmah* (مُقَامَة) means abode: “And they will say, ‘Praise be to Allah, Who has kept away from us all [causes of] sorrow. Our Lord is indeed All-Forgiving, Most Appreciative. [He is the One] Who – out of His grace – has settled us in the Home of Everlasting Stay, where we will be touched by neither fatigue nor weariness.’” (Qur’ān 35:34-35).

**Conclusion: How Travelers Remain Steadfast Together on the Straight Path, Cultivating Family and Community Relationships**

The Qur’ān seeks to establish and articulate the upright concepts and sound principles on which individuals, families, and communities can be raised and to provide a course for righteous and dignified human beings. Its enduring qualities, which are eternal, are essential for reviving the Muslim family and an Islamic society. No other source can provide people with the inspiration, practical guidance, and complete way of life they need to make the world a safe place for everyone (Qur’ān 2:126). “They are those who, when We establish them in the land, establish the prayer, pay the prescribed alms, advocate what is right, and forbid what is wrong: And to Allah belongs the outcome of [all] matters” (Qur’ān 22:41). This cannot be achieved unless all Muslims build their personal relationships with the Qur’ān and make it their best companion. Several steps are involved in cultivating such a culture.

**First:** The Qur’ān presents Prophet Abraham as the model whom Prophet Muhammad and his *ummah* represent: “He came to his Lord with a sound heart” (Qur’ān 37:84) and

Indeed, Abraham was an *ummah* – truly an example: devoutly obedient to Allah, [perfectly] upright and he was not of those who associate others with Allah. He was grateful for the blessings of Allah. [So] He chose him and guided him to the Straight Path. We blessed him with all goodness in this world and in the Hereafter he will certainly be among the righteous. Then We revealed to you [O Prophet]: “Follow the faith of Abraham, the upright, who was not one of the polytheists.” (Qur’ān 16:120-123)

Say [O Muhammad]: “O humanity, verily, I am the Messenger of God to all of you, [sent by Him] unto whom the dominion over the heavens and the earth belongs.

There is no deity except Him; He [alone] gives life and causes death.” Believe, then, in God and His Messenger – the unlettered Prophet, who believes in God and His words – and follow him so that you may be guided.” (Qur’ān 7:158)

**Second:** Prophet Muhammad was sent as mercy to the worlds (Qur’ān 21:107) to establish a justly balanced community (*ummatan waṣṭan*). “We have made you [believers] into a justly balanced community, so that you may bear witness [to the truth] before others and so that the Messenger may bear witness [to it] before you” (Qur’ān 2:143). The *ummah*’s role can be fulfilled once the majority of its members become among the second and third categories of the following *āyah*: “We have given this Book to such of Our servants as We choose: among them are some who wrong their own souls; some follow a middle course; and some who, by God’s leave, are foremost in deeds of goodness. That is the greatest favor” (Qur’ān 35:32).

**Third:** The Prophet (peace be upon him) raised a justly balanced community, one firmly connected with the Qur’ān:

Just as We have sent you a messenger from among yourselves – reciting to you Our revelations, causing you to grow in purity, teaching you the Book and wisdom, and teaching you what you never knew. So remember Me; I will remember you. And thank Me, and never be ungrateful. (Qur’ān 2:150-151).

All Muslims are urged to:

- Practice *tilāwa*: Spread knowledge and provide everyone with access to the divine message by reciting, memorizing, contemplating, conveying, and following the revealed Book of God to grow in purity (*tazkiyah*).
- Practice *tazkiyah*: Mentor people’s growth in terms of spirituality, intellectually, emotionally, and socially.
- Teach: The Prophet’s pedagogical method emphasizes implementing the Qur’ān to gain *ḥikma* (wisdom) (e.g., Qur’ān 2:129, 3:164, and 62:2). The Qur’ān assesses and guides its readers during this process.

Cultivating this specific culture requires the family’s and the community’s collective efforts. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) proposed a profound plan, comprised of three concepts and goals, to bring the community together: *ta’āruf* (getting to know one another genuinely; Qur’ān 49:13), *ta’āluf* (building harmonious relationships within the community; Qur’ān 3:103 and 8:63), and *ta’āwun* (collaborating with one another; Qur’ān 5:2). By cultivating these trust- and compassion-based relationships, he encouraged everyone to read, contemplate, and gain knowledge and wisdom.

Reading, reciting, contemplating, and conveying the Qur’ānic *āyāt* and message are core to attaining *tazkiyah*, the holistic purification that transcends personal spirituality and leads to interpersonal growth. This constant process of purification maintains one’s spiritual health, removes what interrupts its growth, and moves it toward the height of purification. In sum, *tazkiyah* is the process of building the quality of one’s God-consciousness and inner personality, which resides in the heart and must be sound and healthy to receive the divine wisdom.

**Fourth:** Contemporary Muslims need to connect with the Qur’ān in the above-mentioned ways so they can acquire a better and a more holistic understanding of the world and their role in it. “Read,” as Qur’ān 96:1 proclaims, is both a command and a comprehensive guide that teaches believers how to read the Book of God and to engage with His creation so that they may one day attain and reflect holistic purification (*tazkiyah*) in every aspect of their lives. To achieve this, it affirms the following plan of action: The reader seeks God’s refuge against Satan by preparing the atmosphere for reciting God’s Book. The ensuing sense of purity strengthens his/her bond with God so that s/he is free from any other preoccupation with any aspect of the world of evil that Satan represents. Satan “has no power over those who believe and place their trust in their Lord” (Qur’ān 16:99). Those who appeal to God alone and have no loyalty to any other bond are free of Satan’s power. Much as he may whisper to them, their bond with God protects them from following his way. They may slip and commit errors, but they will always cleanse their hearts from Satan’s influence and turn to God in repentance (Qur’ān 16:98-100). Allah promised the believers to change their state of fear into security and peace when they worship Him alone and not associate anything with Him (Qur’ān 24:55-56). Remember,

O believers! If you are mindful of Allah, He will grant you a standard [to distinguish between right and wrong], absolve you of your sins, and forgive you. And Allah is the Lord of infinite bounty. (Qur’ān 8:29)

You who believe! Be mindful of God, and let every soul consider carefully what it sends ahead for tomorrow; be mindful of God, for God is well aware of everything you do. (Qur’ān 59:18)

Believers, be mindful of God, and speak words of appropriate justice. That He may amend and make your conduct sound and forgive you your sins; He who obeys God and His Messenger, has already attained the highest achievement. (Qur’ān 33:70-71)

The believers, both men and women, are guardians of one another. They encourage good and forbid evil, establish prayer and pay alms-tax, and obey Allah and His Messenger. It is they who will be shown Allah’s mercy. Surely Allah is Almighty, All-Wise. (Qur’ān 9:71)

Allah keeps firm those who believe, with the firm word, in worldly life and in the Hereafter. And Allah sends astray the wrongdoers. And Allah does what He wills. (Qur’ān 14:27)

O believers! Be steadfast, persevere in patience in such perseverance; strengthen each other; and be always mindful of Allah; that you may prosper. (Qur’ān 3:200)

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