

Abrahamic Faith: Contribution to Society and Relevance Today

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In today's time, materialistic science and religion, or more specifically reason and faith, appear to be strangers to one another. "The modern conceptualisation of the sciences is subservient to the idea that reality can only be examined by its highly specific and restricted experimental method. Thus, the modern conceptualisation implies, due to this method, that theories, doctrines, and principles concerning non-observable realities cannot be scientific. A natural consequence of this way of thinking is to be sceptical about metaphysical realities in the belief that the absolute reality is the physical one."ⁱ

Due to science's focus on physical existence, it has understood the human body to be made up of only matter and certain emotions that are driven by impulses. Spirituality is viewed to be outside science and, therefore, it is not considered to be real but purely a concept created by human beings.

The separation of religion and science has resulted in contradictory explanations of how life began and what sustains that life. While science argues that life began through chance, religion attributes existence and life to God. As Unal explains:

"...science regards religion as a set of dogmas requiring blind belief and therefore as scientific and irreconcilable with itself. This unforgivable attitude and denial of creation's supra-natural dimension or its agnosticism are the result of separating science and religion."ⁱⁱ Through such arguments, there are ongoing attempts to extinguish religion from communities and even nations, like Communism in the 20th Century, but these attempts have not been successful.

Humans have physical and spiritual dimensions. Faith and spirituality has a place in society. Four questions have existed in the core of every human: Who am I, where did I come from, where am I going to, and what's the purpose of life? These questions are answered by religions.

In this article, I will focus on the necessity of faith from an intellectual, psychological, ethical, and spiritual perspective. I will also summarise the contribution of the Islamic faith in developing civilizations throughout history.

Nothing in this universe is the result of coincidence. Everything in the universe follows an order, displaying magnificent harmony. Such a harmonious existence can be witnessed in on every single matter that exists. This is true to such an extent that one part's existence necessitates the whole's existence, just as the whole's existence requires all its parts' existence. It is due to this harmonious interrelationship that a single deformed cell may lead to the whole body's death. Similarly a single fruit requires the collaborative and cooperative existence of air, water, soil, and the sun in order to exist. Such harmony and cooperation point to a Creator of order, One who

knows everything in all its relations and characteristics, One who can put everything in order.ⁱⁱⁱ
The creator of that order is God.

To understand the order that exists and to know how to function within it, humanity needs a guide. This guide should be the best humans who have existed in that order. In Islam, these guides are prophets whom are chosen by God. According to Prophet Muhammed (pbuh), God has chosen 124,000 people to serve as prophets. They were of such character that they were trusted even by their fiercest opponents for their trustworthiness. When one person's report is enough to convince us of an event, then 124,000 truthful persons' message cannot be denied. Keeping this principle in mind, the prophets spoke of the Creator, explained the guidelines for living a peaceful life, proclaimed the news of an Afterlife, and warned wrongdoers of a punishment.

These guides were sent with manuals, which are the holy books of Torah sent to Moses, the Psalm sent to David, the Gospel sent to Jesus, and the Qur'an sent to Muhammad (pbuh). We have manuals for things we produce, so it would be irrational and un-Godly if God did not send a guide and a book for humans to follow. God does not neglect the needs of even the smallest of creation, providing the ant with its sustenance, so God will not neglect the spiritual needs of humans.

Core to human's nature is the desire for long lasting happiness. Imagining a perfect job and a good house in the future motivates the student to work harder and even gives pleasure to their efforts. Even greater than that is the desire to live forever. Humans are not satisfied with things that end because they have a boundless capacity of love.^{iv} However, either everything leaves you in this world or you leave everything in this world. If this capacity is not met, life will become meaningless and a torment. Immortality is a human need. God has addressed human need at the simpler level through the creation of air and water, so it is impossible for God to not create an eternal life for humans whom He has granted as guardians of the Earth.

From the ethical point of view

The family is the foundation of the society. Family is not only the cradle of man, but also family is also the cradle of civilization^v. Faith unites families. According to consensus among Muslim scholars, Islam has five aims. One of these aims is to safeguard the family. The Qur'an lists a righteous spouse who is pleasing as one of the greatest blessings a person can receive from God. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) stated that marriage is half of the religion. 13th century scholars Shatibi (d.1388), Imam Ghazzali (1058-1111) and other major scholars found a strong relationship between religiosity and family life. Islam tends to see the family as ultimately good and almost sacred^{vi}

If humans only had a physical dimension, they would love their children only until their children grew up. Core to all religions is spiritual love. Spiritual love sustains relationships and bounds the family together. Spouses and children are viewed as gifts from God. In Islam, it is part of faith to accept the unity of the family in this life and the Hereafter. Death is seen as a temporary separation. If spiritual love did not exist, families would fall apart and society would be in ruins. Aggressive secularism and absolute materialism has contributed to the decline of the family where spiritual love is minimal or non-existent.

Faith plays a significant role in helping humans overcome fears of separation and destruction. Medieval physician and philosopher Ibn Sina or Avicenna (980-1037) explains the role of religion through the following example. When you place a plank on the ground, everyone can walk across it, but when you place the same plank between two cliffs, almost no one will want to walk across it. There is the fear of falling which represents fear of separation and destruction.^{vii} This is where religion plays a significant role. It tells humans that death is not an end to life, but the beginning of a new life.

Faith also connects humans with the entire universe. Just as a student feels connected to another student taking the same class, a human will feel connected to everything and everyone because the Creator is the same. A human can think like this. "Our Creator is the same. Our Provider is the same. Our Designer is the same. Our Giver and Taker of life is the same." Through such an understanding, a human can feel connected to everything through hundreds of ways. Without belief in a higher power, the rest of the universe is cold and unconnected.

This approach plays an important role in decreasing racism and ego-centricism . It was ego-centricism that made Cain to kill Abel. Faith bounds people together as brothers and sisters equal in the eyes of God. Additionally, if humans do not serve and worship the Creator, they will serve other things, such as the ego, power, position, wealth, fame, all things which will not permanently satisfy the human.

We cannot deny the clashes between adherents of different faiths. Unfortunately, throughout history, religion has been exploited or used as a tool to achieve destructive political and other worldly goals. If humans leave the essence of religion which is love, then religion will become dogmatic, and make religion unbearable and vulnerable to conflict. However, the reason of most of the conflicts is not religions. According to contemporary Islamic scholar and thinker Said Nursi, the source of conflict is greed and self-interest.^{viii} Zbigniew Brzezinski, the former US National Security Adviser, estimated in 1993 that at least 167 million lives had been "deliberately extinguished through politically motivated carnage" since the beginning of the 20th century.^{ix}

Religion lies at the foundation of great civilizations.

Bernard Lewis wrote that civilizations formed by Christianity and Islam had religion as the primary defining force and motivation for progress.^x Examples include Romans, Byzantines, Andalus, the Ottoman Empire, and Western Civilization today. Each civilization has benefitted from the achievements of the prior one. The Muslim Arabs translated and worked off Greek and Roman works. The Renaissance developed from Muslim achievements. Claude Lebedel states "Without contacts with the Arab culture, Renaissance probably could not have happened in the 15th and 16th century"^{xi} American historian and Nobel prize winner Martin Kramer said, "If there were Nobel prizes given in the year 1000, the Muslims would take them all."^{xii}

Without the foundation of religion, life loses its meaning. If Van Gough's painting were not attributed to him, the painting would lose its value. If a person does not ascribe all entities to the Creator, then a tree is not a sign of God's supreme order and perfection but is only valuable as firewood. If humans do not accept God's existence, then the world is only materialistic, losing its value once it is destroyed or dead. The world turns into a realm for competition of material goods since they are the only things of value, and this rules out human solidarity. Faith adds meaning to life and value to things beyond their materialistic uses.

Without this meaning, humans are tragic beings. Albert Einstein says, "What is the meaning of human life, or of organic life altogether? To answer this question at all implies a religion. Is there any sense then, you ask, in putting it? I answer, the man who regards his own life and that of his fellow creatures as meaningless is not merely unfortunate but almost disqualified for life."

Einstein continues to say, "I have found no better expression than 'religious' for confidence in the rational nature of reality, insofar as it is accessible to human reason. Whenever this feeling is absent, science degenerates into uninspired empiricism"^{xiii}

The issue today is not religion or dogma, but the lack of people who practice religion in its essence of love. If humans embraced religion in its entirety, particularly its essence of love, then religion would be a solution for many modern problems. Religion demands a sense of responsibility both on the individual and society towards the created and the Creator. If lived by its essence, religion would strengthen family ties and the family experience, solidarity in the community, and enhance efforts to help one another, especially through moral values. Faith based on love makes a person more humanistic. I will conclude with the words of Eboo Patel, who is on US President Barak Obama's Advisory Council on Faith-Based Neighborhood Partnerships and founder of Interfaith Youth Core, "Show me a religion that doesn't care about compassion. Show me a religion that doesn't care about stewardship of the environment. Show me a religion that doesn't care about hospitality"^{xiv}. Moral decadence and aggressive materialism are two viruses which are destroying the society. Cooperation between philosophy and religion is necessary to deal with these diseases.

ⁱ Sebetic, Ali (2009, Nov-Dec). The Islamic Conceptualization of the Sciences. *Fountain Magazine*, p. 43-45

ⁱⁱ Unal A, (2006) *Islam Addresses Contemporary Issues*, New Jersey: The Light. p. 83

ⁱⁱⁱ Gulen, Fethullah, <http://en.fgulen.com/questions-and-answers/1114-does-god-exist.html> retrieved on 20.07.2010

^{iv} Said Nursi, *Flashes*, Translated by Sukran Vahide, p. 32-33
<http://www.risaleinur.us/read/?art=2903&t=The+Third+Flash>

^v Mawdudi, A. A. (1980). *Towards understanding Islam*. (K. Ahmad, Ed. & Trans.).

London: The Islamic Foundation p. 49

^{vi} Omran, A. R. (1994). *Family planning in the legacy of Islam*. London: United Nations

Population Fund.

^{vii} Yucel, Salih, *Prayer and Healing in Islam*, Tughrabooks, New Jersey, 2010 p 27

^{viii} Nursi,Said, (1996) *The Words*, Translated by Sukran Vahide, Sozler Publication, Istanbul p. 412

^{ix ix} Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Out of Control: global turmoil on the eve of the twenty first century* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1993) p. 17.

^x For detail information look at “ What went wrong: Western impact and Middle Eastern response” by Bernard Lewis, Oxford University Press

^{xi} Lebedel,Claude (2006), *Les Croisades, origines et conséquences*, Editions Ouest-France. P.109

^{xii} Mustafa Akyol, *Star Gazetesi*, 21/7/2010

^{xiii} Letter to Maurice Solovine, I January 1, 1951; Einstein Archive 21-174, 80-871, published in *Letters to Solovine*, p. 119.

<http://www.einsteinandreligion.com/religioncomments.html>

^{xiv} <http://www.betterworld.net/quotes/interfaith-quotes-4.htm>