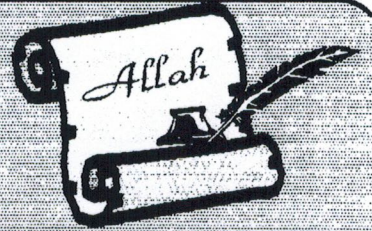


Somos...

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Unity of the Divine

Why it matters to believe in One God

Colossal bronze statues of Buddha tower shimmeringly over terraced paddies and awed rice farmers in a Cambodian valley. In downtown Tokyo, a bell is rung in the hope of summoning a god at a Shinto shrine. A hapless chicken meets its fate in a South Bronx basement, not to provide drumsticks, but to satisfy the bloodlust of a Yoruban god. In a Barrio botanica, brightly-painted plaster casts of saints crowd shelves amid the pungent aromas of herbs and incense, Catholicism's thin veil over an ancient African religion.

Polytheism, the belief that there are many gods, once dominated the ancient world. Even now, one-third to one-half of the world's population still claim allegiance to polytheistic faiths. We live, however, in a country where the vast majority claim adherence to

Christianity which, along with Judaism and Islam, claim to be monotheistic religions. Monotheism, the flip-side of idol-worship, is the belief that there is but one and only one God. Even a nominally religious Christian believes that there is only one God and is averse to the open worship of multiple deities. Monotheism, the purest and most sublime notion of Godhead, was not meant to remain exclusively in the world of ideas but to be reflected in the lives of people. Yet this belief, as it is understood by modern Christian society, has done little to prevent it from gradually slipping into an abyss of spiritual and moral degeneration. A closer look at the true meaning of monotheism should provide the answers to this apparent paradox.

THE TRUE MEANING OF MONOTHEISM

The cornerstone of the Islamic faith is concisely expressed in the sentence *la ilaha illallah* (there is no deity but Allah). This Arabic phrase is known as the *kalimah*. It is important to analyze this phrase in order to understand the fundamental difference between Islamic monotheism and its variants. Literally, the phrase means that there is *no ilah but Allah*. The word *ilah* is loosely translated as god

but there are other significant implications.

The word *ilah* not only means god but it refers to any being or institution which you feel has authority over you or to which you owe obedience. For example, it is pretty clear that an idol-worshipper who sacrifices a chicken to appease one idol, lights candles and incense to another to ward off evil spirits, and offers prayers and offerings to yet another to obtain fame and fortune has a lot of *ilahs* in his life. He is offering to other *ilahs* acts of worship and obedience when these acts are reserved for one God alone. So for him the phrase *la ilaha illallah* (there is no god (*ilah*) but Allah, the One True God, does not apply.

Similarly, when you ask of someone a thing which only the One True God can grant, such as forgiveness and salvation from hell, then you treat whoever you ask as an *ilah*. Directing prayers to people who haven't been on the earth for over a thousand years such as Siddhartha Gautama Buddha, Jesus Christ (may Allah's peace be upon him) and his venerable mother Mary (may Allah have mercy on her) definitely fall into this category. In the Islamic view, those priests who believe they can forgive sins in effect try to usurp the power of forgiveness which belongs to the only God. If you have been wronged, no one can stand in your place to forgive the wrongdoer. As it is your sole right to forgive a wrong done to you, it is solely Allah's right to forgive disobedience of His commands.

These are some of the most obvious examples of *ilahs* other than Allah that can creep into religious worship. Now let us see how hidden *ilahs* can dominate nearly every aspect of our society and culture by delving deeper into the meaning of the word.

The pagan Arabs, among whom the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) first appeared over 1400 years,

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understood immediately the significance of the statement that there is no *ilah* but Allah. They were well aware that Allah was the Creator of all things and the Supreme Power of the universe.

“Say: ‘Who is it that gives you all sustenance from the sky and earth, governs sight and hearing, brings forth life from dead (matter) and death from the living, and plans the affairs of man?’ They will all say ‘Allah’.”

Al Qur’an, Surah Yumus 10:31

“If you asked them who created them, they would surely say, ‘Allah’.”

Al Qur’an, Surah Az Zukhruf 43:87

The Arabs worshipped 360 gods at the time of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) but claimed they did so only to gain nearness to the Supreme God, Allah.

“We only worship them so that they may bring us closer to Allah.”

Al Qur’an Surah Az Zumar 39:3

The pagan Arabs believed that Allah was the Supreme Lord and only worshipped other gods as intermediaries yet Allah called them polytheists and heathens for doing so. Those of you who light candles, make offerings, and pray to images of saints or others in the hope that they can do things for you or serve as a go-between with God should think about this.

Yet the Arabs knew that the word *ilah* meant more than a mere idol. They knew that the statement *no ilah but Allah* meant that there was no being worthy of authority, obedience, and worship but Allah.

This meant that all their laws, social and cultural customs, and their form of rule were no longer valid in the eyes of those who converted to this belief. They rightly saw this as a threat to their way of life because this *kalimah* declared that only the One True God, Lord and Master of the universe, and King of all creation had the right to legislate for mankind.

All systems of life which did not govern by the laws of the Creator were declared illegitimate. Whatever Allah declared legal was legal and whatever he declared illegal was illegal and the only sources for these laws were the Qur’an, His last revelation to mankind, and the example of His last prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

The presumed legitimacy of their way of life crumbled before this bold declaration as Allah proclaimed that only a way of life of total submission to His will, Islam, would be acceptable to Him.

The struggle that followed inflicted torture and atrocities on those who *completely* submitted to Allah’s will, the true meaning of the word Muslim.

After 23 years of tremendous trial, tribulation, and bloodshed, the pagan Arabs could not extinguish the flame of truth which burned in these Muslims’ hearts. During that time Allah revealed to His Prophet (peace be upon him) in the Qur’an a complete way of life covering all spheres of life: social, moral, spiritual, political, and economic.

Then, with victory in sight, Allah made this stirring proclamation:

“This day have those who reject Faith given up all hope of your religion. Yet fear them not but fear Me. This day have I perfected your religion for you, completed My favor upon you, and have chosen Islam as your religion.”

Al Qur’an, Surah Al Maida 5:3

But you may be obeying and worshipping more *ilahs* than you imagine. If you believe that your government can make legal what Allah has made illegal such as wine, pork, and collecting interest, then it has become an *ilah* you worship beside Allah. If you believe it’s okay for a woman to stand soaking wet on a beach in July in what amounts to little more than her underwear, then you have allowed society to dictate what is acceptable disregarding Allah’s will. And if a flirtatious wink from your neighbor’s daughter or wife has you diving under the sheets with her, then you have taken your lust as your god, your *ilah*, seeking to please it with the same eagerness which should be reserved for the Creator of all things.

As a result, millions of alcoholics and drug addicts haunt our society rending our social fabric by increasing our divorce rates and accelerating the breakdown of the family. Social and economic injustice has fostered the growth of despair in inner cities and the rise of crime and terror. Tens of thousands of women each year endure the horror of sexual assault both on the streets and in their own homes causing physical and incalculable psychological damage. And sexually transmitted diseases, like the super-VD AIDS, proliferate in pandemic proportions at a terrible price in human misery.

“Corruption has spread over land and sea because of what men’s hands have done. That He may make them taste the fruit of their deeds and perhaps they may turn away from evil.”

Al Qur’an, Surah Ar Rum 30:41

Allah also says in the Qur’an:

“Surely Allah does not change the condition of a people until they change that which is in their own hearts.”

Al Qur’an, Surah Ar Ra’d 13:11

Only by both believing *and* practicing true monotheism can we save our society from a free-fall over the precipice toward spiritual and moral destruction.

Monotheism and You

Even in these modern times, there are still millions who openly worship Allah’s created things, taking as gods rivers, stones, trees, lightning and thunder, planets, the sun, the moon, and stars. Even human beings are worshipped and prayed to as do the Christians with Jesus and his mother, Mary (peace be upon them both) and the so-called Black Muslims, known also by the misnomer Nation of Islam, a heretical group posing as true Muslims who believe that Allah came in the person of a man named W.D. Fard.



Al Madrasa Al Islamiyya

*Seventeen Years of Excellence In
Islamic Education*

On a quiet residential side street in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn, a daily ritual has become a familiar sight from the months of September to June. Residents have become accustomed to the sights and sounds of blue-clad young Muslims in rustling khimars and kufis on their way to the oldest accredited Islamic educational institution in the New York metropolitan area, Al Madrasa Al Islamiyya.

Al Madrasa Al Islamiyya, founded in 1977 in a suburban setting overlooking the Verrazano Bridge in Staten Island, has over the years provided Muslim children with an innovative and comprehensive curriculum designed to meet their special cultural and educational needs. The stated objective of the school is to enable students to assimilate the teachings of Islam through an educational medium. This is achieved through a broad academic curriculum including Language Arts, the Sciences, Social Science, and Mathematics. In addition, the study of the Qur'an, Hadith (the recorded sayings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)), the Arabic language, and Islamic history give Al Madrasa Al Islamiyya its unique character. The Islamic Studies program provides a strong basis for uniting academic excellence and Islamic morality. This is considered essential for personal and social growth.

A School in Crisis

As valuable and vital as this service is to the burgeoning Muslim community, it has not received the support one would expect for so important an institution. In 1987, Al Madrasa relocated to Central Brooklyn where it could be more accessible to the Muslim community. But financial difficulties and community indifference have plagued the school ever since. Despite the obvious concern expressed for our Muslim youth, the school has not been able to raise the necessary funds to purchase their own facility. As a consequence,

Al Madrasa has had to survive in cramped, leased quarters while barely being able to stave off eviction. And current fund-raising efforts have been unable to realize the goal of owning their own facility which would result in an expansion of current programs and the possibility of government funding.

A Legacy of Neglect

Though Al Madrasa Al Islamiyya is in danger of permanently closing its doors, it has received shockingly little support from the Muslim community, especially the indigenous American Muslim community who should be particularly concerned with the establishment of indigenous Muslim educational institutions. This state of affairs exists despite the fact that many of the metropolitan area's top Muslim leaders have had children educated at Al Madrasa notably Rashid Adib, Imam of Masjid Muhsin Khalifa, Imam Ibrahim of Masjid Al Ikhwah, Imam Siraj Wahaj of Masjid At Taqwa, Imam Al Amin of Masjid Al Muminin, and Dr. Ahmad Jaber, Chairman of the Board of Directors at State Street and treasurer of the Bay Ridge "Al Madrasa Al Islamiyya", a project which has exacerbated an already bad situation and has led to much confusion.

Though Al Madrasa Al Islamiyya has been in existence since 1977 and has been legally incorporated since 1978, this school in Bay Ridge has usurped and used its name for solicitation of funds almost definitely ensuring that some funds that were meant for the real Al Madrasa were diverted to the other school instead. It is hoped that this dilemma can be solved equitably and that Al Madrasa Al Islamiyya receives its proper recognition and aid.

Our survival as a viable religious community is dependent on our ability to transmit our beliefs and values to our young. Otherwise, many of our present Muslim families will become mere one-generational flashes in the historical pan. Moral and financial support is needed now to keep alive Al Madrasa and its vital job of preserving the Islamic education of our youth.

If you are interested in contributing to this noble cause please send your tax-deductible contributions to:

Al Madrasa Al Islamiyya
1669 Bedford Avenue
Brooklyn, New York 11225

Alianza Islamica Starts Its Second Year

The past year has been one of trials and triumphs for Alianza Islamica. When it first opened the doors of its Barrio headquarters a little over a year ago, AI was a bold, experimental initiative. The first organization of its kind in the metropolitan area to use a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural approach to presenting the message of Islam, AI is now recognized as a pioneer and innovator in the field of Islamic *dawah*, the process of calling or inviting people to Islam.

From the very beginning, AI has tried to establish links with the community in the spirit of service. Among the programs AI has tried to implement are GED classes, weekend religious instruction for both adults and youth, family and marital counseling, substance abuse counseling and an AIDS workshop, meetings with the local block association with which it helped organize a neighborhood watch, and meetings with local politicians such as Manhattan Councilman Adam Clayton Powell to discuss a security patrol and other neighborhood safety issues.

But big problems remain. Lack of funds is a persistent problem which leads to a shortage of supplies: stationery, pamphlets, leaflets (especially in Spanish) and blank video tape which is used to record special events. Lack of funds also prevents an expansion of services to an appropriate level. Even paying the rent has been a month-to-month struggle.

But AI has survived its first year improbably stronger than when it started given the adversity it has had to overcome. Its membership has increased impressively and, in a perhaps intangible way, its presence has helped to create a more positive image of Islam and to remove some of the confusion and misconceptions about this religion in the minds of the people of the community.

Internal organizational changes, an unprecedented cooperative relationship with community leaders, local politicians, and the police, and the addition of skilled members have positioned AI well for entry into its second year, if Allah so wills.

An Editorial

On Dinosaurs, Chaos, and Jurassic Park

The movie *Jurassic Park* has become an international sensation. It was wildly received by the public and has grossed over 700 million dollars worldwide. Virtually all the movie-going public in the United States has seen it and it stands to make millions more whenever it is released on video. It set a new standard for public entertainment with its thrilling action and incredibly realistic special effects which, for an instant of suspended belief, brought long-extinct dinosaurs back to life.

Yet beyond the standard Hollywood stock of thrills and chills, there was a deeper and more poignant message which is expounded in greater detail in Michael Crichton's book of the same title. *Jurassic Park* questioned not the feasibility of dinosaur regeneration through genetic engineering, which is theoretically possible, but the ethical question of whether it should be attempted at all. It also questioned whether man is equipped to harness the forces his technology is poised to unleash. Michael Crichton, who also co-wrote the screenplay, introduces the public to a little-known but important mathematical theory which has vast implications and is being made widely known for the first time: chaos.

A Chaotic World: A New Reality

Chaos deals with predictability in complex systems. The main thrust of chaos theory is that traditional mathematical models fail to accurately predict phenomena in complex systems. For example, computers were first developed to predict weather nearly a half century ago. Yet even with the most complex computer systems it is still impossible to accurately predict the weather. Even if you let drops of water fall on the precise spot on your hand repeatedly each drop would behave differently than the one that preceded it due to a multiplicity of factors ranging from

microscopic imperfections of the skin to minute changes in the flow of water.

Man's record in predicting and controlling complex systems is abysmal. Witness the mess he has made of the earth's ecosystem and the environmental tragedy that engulfs the planet.

A Grave Miscalculation

Even though mankind has not been able to accurately predict whether it will rain next month, people have been more presumptuous in their belief that they can take on the most complex of all systems and try to provide a solution for it: human life. Scholars, philosophers, and ideologues have presumed to provide the answers that have perplexed mankind. Yet nothing has proved more difficult and elusive than providing a system of life for human beings that does not end up in injustice, misery, chaos, and disintegration.

All great ancient civilizations believed that theirs was the pinnacle of progress and development, in hindsight a colossally preposterous assumption considering that most were built on brutality and slave labor. This country also, in trying to maintain its international reputation as the fortress of justice and democracy, tries to downplay the role slavery and the near-annihilation of the American Indian had in the building of its empire.

Islam in a Chaotic World

Muslims, on the other hand, do not consider it a fault if they, of their own force of intellect, cannot provide the crucial answers. They acknowledge their own ignorance and realize that something so vast and complicated is beyond their ability to grasp. Therefore, in humility, they turn to the Creator of this immense universe Who alone knows the hidden mysteries of life. Through the Prophets (peace be upon them all), Allah, Lord of all the worlds has provided mankind with the answers to the most perplexing questions and has gifted his creatures with a system of life in consonance with their true nature.

Islam is such a wonderful and perfect solution precisely *because* man had nothing to do with its formulation. As the movie *Jurassic Park* showed, man was not prepared to cope with the

forces his technology had unleashed. How much more valid is his ignorance when it comes to himself and how much greater the need to recognize his limitations and submit himself wholly to the One Who designed and fashioned him and is closer to him than his jugular vein?

Allianza Islámica is a private institution dedicated to the research and dissemination of the history, tradition, and culture of the authentic Prophets of God, the Most High. AI is exclusively poised for the betterment of all persons, both Spanish-speaking or not, who are in accord with the stated goal and purpose of Allianza Islámica.

For more information regarding Alianza Islámica please call (212) 427-1142, Monday-Friday, (closed Wednesdays) 10:00 AM-5:00 PM, or write: Alianza Islámica, Office of Public Affairs, 1717 Lexington Avenue, El Barrio, New York 10029

Allianza Islámica es una institución privada dedicada al rebuscamiento y la diseminación de la historia, la tradición y la cultura de los auténticos Profetas de Dios, El Todopoderoso.

AI brinda sus servicios a todos, latinos o no, y ofrecemos nuestra mano abierta a toda la comunidad. Para información llame a (212) 427-1142 lunes a viernes (cerrados los miércoles) 10:00 AM-5:00 PM o escribanos a Alianza Islámica, 1717 Lexington Avenue, El Barrio, NY 10029