

Journey to the Heart of God: Part 4: "The Five Pillars of Faith and Islam"

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Scripture: Quran: 42:13, 2:285

Today I have a story. Last Sunday, I came and stood up here without giving any connection of who I am. Who I represent and how can I connect to my Christian brothers and sisters. So I noticed that there might be something short in that kind of presentation. So today, I wanted to really give and teach about how I am connected as a Muslim Imam standing here on Sunday before wonderful Christian believers and talking to them. Is this happening in Heaven? We are not in Heaven yet. We hope and pray that we will be.

So the story start from an old man taking his wife and baby all away. Traveling from Jerusalem, Palestine, all the way to the wilderness of Paran. The wilderness of Paran. That's a biblical term. Biblical story. He left his wife and baby infant there and he wanted to go back to his first wife. Well, how, what did that story, how can he has wife here and wife there? The old man is prophet Abraham, peace be upon him. And when his wife, Sarah, felt she is barren, she cannot bore a child, she offered him her maid Hagar as a wife, in order to bare a child and that child will continue that prophet hood in the lineage of Abraham.

So, Sarah was very righteous and had a very good intention, and Abraham got Hagar, and Hagar became pregnant. And Hagar had the first baby of Abraham, called Ishmael. And then the will of God, according now to the Islamic narrative, the will of God wanted Abraham to take Hagar and her son to a different location because God knew that Sarah, 13 years later, would bear a child. It's not because of any tension between Sarah and Hagar. It's not because Sarah felt jealous that Hagar became pregnant. She was willingly offering Hagar as a wife. So Abraham took Hagar and her baby to the wilderness of Paran and he left them there and he started his way back to Jerusalem. "Where are you leaving us?" Did not answer. Leaving them in the middle of nowhere at that time, that spot really was nowhere. There was no town, no people, no travelers, no Bedouin, no caravan, nothing. It just the GPS of God. He was following the GPS of God, "Drop her there." He drop her there.

Yes. They had a strong signal even in the middle of nowhere. So he drop her there and then took his way back. "Is it God who commanded you to do so?" And he said, "Yes." Then Hagar said, "Never ever God will leave us alone." And he continued his way, and he made a very beautiful prayer. With tears and heart, that is so attached to his son. He was eagerly looking for a baby, and when he had the baby, God told him, "Take him far away from you. Leave your heart fully to me." Again, God had a plan.

So he left Hagar and her baby Ishmael in the wilderness of Paran. Now the word Paran, are the valleys surrounding Mecca and the Arabia land. Where Hagar, Ishmael and his kids, Kedar, and

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the children of Kedar grow up there. So Hagar ran out of water and supply very short. So she starts running between two close hills looking for any traveler, any caravan coming and she could not see any. So she did that like seven times. At the end, God is watching. God is not sleeping, he is watching and he knows and he knew. And he knows all what will happen 'til the day of judgment and after the day of judgment. He had a plan, which we don't recognize. God send Gabriel, angel Gabriel to beat underneath the baby and spring out the water called Zamzam. That was the water from that day, up 'til today, until the day of judgment, will spring out and give that kind of holy kind of water.

All the pilgrims who go to Mecca, the first thing they want to do is to drink from that water and maybe rub their bodies and take a little bit, you know, home to do, sometimes shower with that kind of blessed water. Of course, you have water, you start having those wild birds flying around and this is the kind of navigation for the Bedouin traveling in the desert. When they see birds over certain area, then this area may have some kind of water or people or food. So they took that direction and they found Hagar and her son. And so they ask "Can you share some water with us?" "Yes." And then "Can you share, spare some food with us?"

And here in that spot is where the earliest small congregation of believers started. Ishmael grew up and Abraham was visiting from time to time and he delivered the prophet hood. When Ishmael was 13 years old, Isaac was born and Abraham delivered to Isaac the prophet hood too. Before 13 years old, Abraham was tested about that love, that love he has to God. He was shown in his dream that he is commanded to slaughter his only son. And when the Bible says his only son, the Muslim narrative is Ishmael. Because at that time, Ishmael was the only son. And Abraham did the same, almost the same, maybe, story? That then applied on Isaac, but what was in our narrative, is about Ishmael and God ransomed Ishmael with a big ram.

So what do Muslims do when they go to pilgrimage? They commemorate the story of Abraham, Ishmael, Hagar running between the hills, and living there with the history; connecting themselves, connecting ourselves, to Abraham and Adam and the whole believers of that time. So from Ishmael, later, later, later on, came Muhammad. And from Isaac, came Moses and Jesus. And now this when I stand here, I'm standing next to my cousins. You belong to Jesus, I belong to Muhammad. Muhammad and Jesus, when they go up, they are coming from the same father, but they are cousins. They are cousins. One branch coming from Ishmael, one branch coming from Isaac. So this way, now I'm clearing my identity. You know, my ID is that I am your cousin.

Not only cousins of the Jews, I'm cousins here, too. Now, imagine Abraham had two sons and he is teaching two sons, his two sons. Do you think he is teaching them different? Would you imagine that he would be teaching them different? "You do this, you do different. You do this, you do different." We assume we understand that he taught his children the same message. The same simple basic message.

And this is where, when we speak about similarities, we have a huge area of similarities for Muslim, Christian and Jew to dwell around on it. So, today I'm going to talk briefly about the Five Pillars of Faith that Muhammad learned from God and the Five Pillars of Practice that he also learned. So the Five Pillars of Faith are pillars that we believe, Muslims believe in. And when I'm counting, please try to convert that to your faith, to some extent, to see how far or close we are from each other.

Muslims believe in God the creator. The one, the supreme, the high. His name in Arabic language is Allah. So when we hear the word Allah, Allah is not the God of the moon as I read in some

books, or some website, he is the same God who spoke to Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad. He has no space, no time, no way to describe him because he is God the creator. Our brain cannot even go beyond this world to put a definition or a certain description to God. So we believe in that one God. Since Muslims are a very strong, monotheistic kind of people. We believe in his angels, that God has angels, staff, working for him. Like robot, they are programmed. They are programmed, they do only what they have been asked to do. They don't process yes and no. So it's not expected for them to reject any order of God.

And out of many of those angels, like the angel of Death, angels between the believers, angels who take your supplications and prayers, we believe in two main angels that are 24/7 living with us. One sitting on the right shoulder, and one sitting on the left shoulder. Did you know that before? No. All right, now I am telling you. But they are very light. You won't feel they are there, but they are there. So be careful, you are under surveillance.

The one on the right shoulder record the good deeds. The one on the left shoulder record the bad deeds. And this is how Muslims believe that our salvation is not posted on us, or enforced on us just because we are Muslims, we have to earn our salvation through the good deeds. Good deeds is when you live your life properly and fully and happily through the commandments of God. And God has given us, like an extra privilege by every good deed will be multiplied automatically 10 times. And every bad deed will be only considered one. And actually the good deeds can go from 10 times to 700 times to open check. You don't know how many zeroes God will put for one good deed that is really done from the depth of your heart.

So these two, when somebody dies, they unplug their chest, their hard drive, and they save it somewhere. God knows. And when we resurrect for the day of judgment, and stand in the court of God, they replug it again, and we will see all what we have done. Good or bad. And then we will be accounted for all what we have done. Good or bad. This is how we believe about the angels in that way. Now the question would come, "Would God need really angels to work for him?" This is for us to understand the equation. It's not for God. God is God. He can, he can do whatever he wants in unbelievable ways, but when he set certain category, it's for us human to understand it. So these are the two angels that we need really to watch good. Keep that one working hard, and keep that one really relaxing 24/7. Keep him out of the picture.

Believing in angels, believing in prophets and messengers. That God, when he created human being, in order for those human being to be able to live their life properly and happily, God created something called dealership. And those dealerships are the prophets and the messengers. And when they teach, they need to leave something like the user manual in your brand new car. So those holy books are the user manual that we use when we are a little bit far away from the dealer. We can open it and come back to read properly and discipline ourselves. Those dealership, those prophets and messengers, they are human being. Born and raised up as a human being, but they are infallible. Their character, their faith character is infallible. That they delivered the message properly and fully without any change. And we have at least 24 names that matching what is in the Quran and what is in the Bible, starting from Adam, peace be upon him, coming all the way to the last prophet, Muhammad, peace be upon him.

Within that category, we believe that Jesus, peace be upon him, is one of those very respectful prophets and messengers. So here we have a slight difference between the definition of prophet from the Bible and definition of prophet in the Islamic theology. They are perfect. They are

good people. They wouldn't make mistake like Prophet Lot, who got drunk and he slept with his two daughters. You know, we don't peg that kind of stories. We feel that this is a kind of human error happened on or entered the Bible during the time of the canonization of the Bible. So these are perfect people. So for me, if I want to say this balcony is for the prophets and messengers, all of them on the same shelf. Muhammad next to Moses, next to Jesus, next to Abraham, David, Solomon, Job, John, Joanna, Lot, all of them, those 24, we believe in them. So before I am a Muslim, I am a Christian in that way and I am a Jew in that way, all right. We believe in them.

And since we believe in them, number four, we believe in the books revealed on them, that originally they had the genuine books in their hand. The Psalms of David, the scripture of Abraham, we believe that Abraham had a scripture. And David had the Psalms and Moses had the Torah, and Jesus had the Gospel and Muhammad had the Quran. And we do further believe that the Quran survived in the same language that was revealed on the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. And that's why the Quran in English is not considered Quran, it's considered translation of the meaning of the Quran. But the Quran, the word of God, is the Arabic language and is the same as Muhammad left it, peace be upon him, before he died.

Now, coming across talking about the prophets and messengers, and this is the area where we have sometimes little bit of difference, and it might be the right time to address those kind of differences. Muslim don't believe that Jesus, peace be upon him, was crucified. We believe that when the soldiers broke through the room, God saved him by taking him up to Heaven and he's still alive in Heaven and we believe in his second return. And that his second return will be in Damascus, Syria. In Damascus, Syria. He will not be back to Jerusalem because the Jews already treated him badly there, so he won't think to come back so they cheat him again, so he'll be coming to Syria.

And the way I look at what is happening in Syria and the surrounding area, it's just a preparation, screening kind, to get a better generation, and better people and better believers who would be worthy enough and good enough to meet and receive Jesus of that time. My personal input about that one. So Muslims don't believe in crucifixion, but they believe in Jesus and he is in Heaven waiting for the end of the time. We don't believe in Trinity, but we believe that these prophets and messengers, these are the best human being that God chose to represent the message. To represent the message. And we believe in the miraculous birth of Jesus, as much as we believe in the miraculous birth of our mother Eve and our father Adam. And that has been mentioned and circulated in the Bible and in the Quran.

Now the number Five of that Pillars of Belief, is believing in the day of judgment. That we are all going to have the day of our report cards. We are studying good, working hard during our life and we need to get reward for what we have done. Either promoted or God forbidden, something else. So we, and since we believe in the day of judgment, then literally we believe in Hell and Heaven. Literally we believe in Hell and Heaven and that our actions will be with the good belief in God, it will be the one that will pass us quickly to Heaven, hopefully. When God created us, he did not aim to put us in any hardship other than live this very limited life and try to earn your credit to come back to Heaven and enjoy life in Heaven the way Adam and Eve used to enjoy it there.

So these are Five Pillars of Faith. How much we are really far away from each other? Far away. 50%? 40%? 30% 20%? You have to say something. 10%? I will come to 0%. No it's not 0%. We have very, very small and limited kind of differences, which I claim and I admit, that clergies like me and others, have played a kind of role in creating those kind of differences. In creating those kind of

differences. Why I feel comfortable to speak about the differences here? Because we are mature enough and great enough to live our life and enjoy our 95, 99% of our similarities and enjoy our life with God in that way. So these are Five Pillars of Faith. Again, believing in God, angels and prophets and messengers, books and day of judgment. I don't think we are far away from each other. I don't think.

Yet, let's move to the Five Pillars of Practice. Now this is something we believe in. This is something we practice. We do it. The first one is the Muslim ID. What will make you Muslim is to confess that God is one, that I belong to the school of God, and the school that is led by Muhammad. Meaning, the way to God is through the teaching of Muhammad. God is one and Muhammad is the messenger of God. The very statement that Muslim believe, at the time of Jesus, that statement was, for his school, "God is one and he is the teacher, the guide, the leader of the caravan to God." God is one and Jesus the prophet of God. God is one and Moses the prophet of God. God is one and Abraham the prophet of God. This is our ID. The first Pillar for Muslim is to confess and admit, I bear witness that there is no God but Allah, and that Muhammad is the messenger of God.

The second one, Muslim pray Five times a day. Five times, stationed where you come back to recharge your energy and your spirituality with God because during that day, we tend sometimes because of our daily actions to forget about God. So we may do something wrong. We may cheat. We may do lie here. We may forget, we may harm people. Every time you come to worship and do the service, or do the prayer to forgive, try to ask for forgiveness for what you have done. Five times a day. From early of dawn time until late evening. You come time after time. Do we need to come to the mosque? No. You can pray at your office, in your home, in the parking lot. In the rest area, wherever you find a clean spot, you can stand. You can do that kind of prayer. Five times a day.

Muslims fast the month of Ramadan, and we have been told in the Quran that fasting has been mandated to Muslim as it was mandated on those before Islam. So Christians and Jews and other believers of God have been commanded to fast too. And fast is not a starvation. Fasting is a kind of time where you uphold your spirituality in addition to your body, by going through certain routine of diet. So no food, no drink, no smoking, nothing in the stomach from the dawn time until sunset, with some exceptions and accommodations for sick people or old people, or pregnant sisters. So Ramadan is month number nine on the lunar calendar and we fast 30 days and I think some of you have joined us or maybe observed or have the knowledge of what am I doing when we are fasting. Usually at the time of the breaking the fast, we invite our neighbors or our friends to come and join us.

And number four, Muslims believe or practice as part of our practice, and this is a mandation, this is something we have to do it. The way have to pray, the way we have to fast, the way we have to do something called Zakat. Zakat is the alms-giving. Two and a half percent of my saving, when my saving exceed a certain amount of money, then I have to share two and a half percent with the poor. Two and a half percent with the poor.

And the last one is doing the pilgrimage trip once in our lifetime. And this pilgrimage trip will come at certain time, it's not through the year. It's a certain month and certain days of that month. And that's why you'll hear some kind of, you know, bad news sometimes about people stampeding, people dead, people this, people that, you are talking about around 3 million people in a very small city, doing the ritual and moving in this ritual together at the same time from place to place. So definitely you will have certain percentage of those destined to death, 3 million in maybe one week. You know, to do that. The Saudi government has improved that situation a lot by making wider places and more safe, secure and safety places and things are getting much better. But what do we do in Hajj? In pilgrimage?

We commemorate again, the story of Abraham and his son Ishmael and when he was going to slaughter his son, and how Satan appeared to him and Abraham stoned the Satan at one time, and appeared to him again and stoned him again. Appeared to him for the third time and stoned him for the third time. And this is where Muslims go and imitate exactly what Abraham did, they are doing this physically with the hope that inside the heart and the mind, we are really stoning Devil and Satan away from our life. Muslims in their prayer, they pray the direction of Mecca or the Kaaba, that cubic shaped building inside the biggest mosque there in Mecca. And why is that? Simply because this is the first temple ever built to recognize God on earth. When Adam and Eve descended on Earth, they built that one to worship inside. So out of appreciation and connection with the older, I mean the old believers and Adam and all who came after him, we take that direction into that temple.

Kaaba is a stone, and other than stone has no other significance rather than the meaning of it and the meaning of that structure. So these are Five Pillars of Practice. Believing in God, I mean, God is one and Muhammad is the messenger of God. We will talk about this later. Prayer. Christians pray. Different prayer, but the principle and the concept are there. Fasting. Christians fast. A little bit different here and there, maybe the logistic, but we have the concept. Alms-giving. Christians do pay alms-giving. And pilgrimage. Muslims do pilgrimage to Mecca, Christians do pilgrimage to Jerusalem. So how far we are from each other?

Again, as a principle. Leave you away from what the clergies may say. As the principles, we are not far from each other. Both of us ride in vehicles on the same way. My vehicle has different brand than others, but both of us are riding vehicle and marching or driving in the same direction. So these are Five and Five that I want really to share with you today and bring you closer really, to who we are and how we connect with our Muslim neighbors in that sense. Muslims have to observe their life to the highest level of righteousness in order to earn their good credit. Their good credit. Muslims believe that the Quran told us that whoever exhausts the life of one, he is as if he exhausted the life of all of humanity, not 10, not 100, the whole of humanity. We are not allowed to exhaust even the life of animal if it was not for a necessity of eating in that sense.

So even as a hobby, to shoot the animal, that is not allowed in Islam. This is how sensitive we are to the human life and the life in general. Some of the misconception about, "Are all the Arab Muslims?" No. We have around 300 million probably of Muslim Arab and we have plenty of Christians and Jewish Arab. You know. The largest country, the largest population country, Muslim population country, is Indonesia. And they are non-Arab. And big percentage of Muslims with the number, is in Asia, or far Asia. I mean, south and far Asia, in that situations. Middle Eastern, not necessarily Muslims, the majority of them are Muslims, but they are Arab, and Arab countries, or Middle East is not only the Arab countries. North Africa is considered Middle East. You can count from Egypt, Sudan, all the way to Libya, that is considered also Middle East.

So these are kinds of principles and issues I wanted to share with you today and I hope I have really made myself closer and closer to you by learning about our Five and Five Pillars. With those Five and Five now, we have the two wings of the bird ready for the bird to fly. So thank you very much for allowing me today to speak to you, with you.