

The Quran and its Message

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Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

WHAT IS THE TRUE DEFINITION OF 'DEEN' FROM A QURAN'S PERSPECTIVE?

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Often, a very casual use of the term 'deen' is made which is usually translated as 'religion' in English with a general understanding that it comprises a set of beliefs and practices of a **religious nature**. This restrictive understanding finds little support from the Quran.

A study of the Quran presents the reader with a wider definition of what is actually referred to when it refers to 'Deen'.

009:036

"Indeed! the number of the months with God is twelve months by God's ordinance in the day that He created the heavens and the earth. Four of them are sacred: that is the right religion (**Arabic: Deen**)"

This verse should raise some immediate questions as to what is really meant by the term 'Deen'. How can 12 months and the sacredness of four of them be referred to as the right religion?

Similarly, with regards the story of Joseph we note that the system of law specific to the King of Egypt is also defined as 'Deen'.

012:076

" Then he (Joseph) began the search with their bags before his brother's bag, then he produced it from his brother's bag. Thus did We contrive for Joseph. He could not have taken his brother according to the king's law (**Arabic: Deen**) unless God willed"

This presents us with a better understanding of the rendering of 'Deen' in that:

- (1) It does not necessarily have to be of a religious nature and
- (2) It can consist of any set of principles, law and in effect describe any '**system**' practiced by a community or people. This can be of a religious nature, but is not restricted to it.

This is further confirmed in the following verse where even Pharaoh's 'system', 'law' or 'beliefs' are also expressed as 'Deen'.

040.026

"Pharaoh said: "Leave me to slay Moses; and let him call on his Lord! What I fear is less he should **change your religion / system (Arabic: Deen)**, or less he should cause mischief to appear in the land!"

However, God has commended the same 'system' of law or practice to the new Muslims and through them to mankind that he commended to all the Prophets and their followers before them. This 'system' is called 'Islam'.

042.013

"The same religion / system (**Arabic: Deen**) has He established for you as that which He enjoined on **Noah** and that which We have sent by inspiration to **thee** and that which We enjoined on **Abraham, Moses, and Jesus**: Namely, that ye should remain steadfast in religion, and make no divisions in it: to those who worship other things than God, hard is the (way) to which you call them. God chooses to Himself those whom He pleases, and guides to Himself those who turn (to Him)"

It was this system (called Islam) that God commended and was given to the Prophet to preach.

003:083

"Do they seek for other than the '**Deen**' of God? while all creatures in the heavens and on earth have, willing or unwilling, bowed to His Will, and to Him shall they all be brought back.

It is also this system that was being reinstated by the advent of Prophet Muhammad's ^(pbuh) ministry and was intended to expose other (false) 'deen' (systems / religions).

009.033

"It is He Who has sent His messenger with guidance and the religion of truth, to proclaim it over all religion (**Arabic: - dini**) / systems, even though the Pagans / Idolaters (**Arabic: Mushrikeen**) may detest it"

Many Muslims **incorrectly** make use of the above verse to imply that Islam has come to be proclaimed and conquered over Christianity and Judaism, even though the verse clearly refers to 'idolaters'. Not only is the context misunderstood completely but a true understanding of the term 'Deen' from a Quran's perspective is never appreciated.

This verse clearly informs the reader that proclamation **is over any 'system' which is false**. This should be obvious given the clear mention of 'idolaters' by way of an example. Today there are practices **even amongst Muslims** that clearly fall foul of the system of true Islam instituted by scripture in that they seek assistance and help through other entities besides God - rather than through God directly.

In this way, these individuals are no less 'idolatrous' than those being targeted by the above verse.

006.161

"Say: "Verily, my Lord has guided me to a way that is straight, a **deen** of right, the path (trodden) by Abraham the true in Faith, and he **was not from the idolatrous (Arabic: Mushrikeen)** ."

Similarly, there are indeed those from the followers of previous scriptures that have also created their own system (Deen) even though they were given the correct 'Deen'.

003.024

"This because they say: "The Fire shall not touch us but for a few numbered days": For their forgeries deceive them as to their own religion (Arabic: Deen)"

Here it is clear that if one corrupts the beliefs or doctrines of Islam, they have deceived themselves into following another form of religion - **another system**. This is as true for those that call themselves Muslims as it is true for the followers of earlier revelations or any other man-made system.

Therefore to interpret 'religion' through the narrow lens as Hinduism / Buddhism / Christianity or Judaism is not a Quranic perspective. **Any system**, such as communism, monarchy, dictatorships, different democracies, military rule all can fall within the ambit of 'Deen' from a Quranic perspective. These systems are not necessarily God's systems though they may contain certain similarities and areas of overlap which are fully consistent with God's systems evident to us through all His scriptures.

From the Quran's point of view, there is no compulsion in any system. One is free to choose whatever 'system' or 'law' they want to practice. However the guidance for the correct system has been made clear and its adherence can only be a matter of **complete choice**.

002.256

"Let there be no compulsion in **deen**: Truth stands out clear from Error: whoever rejects evil and believes in God has grasped the most trustworthy hand-hold, that never breaks. And God hears and knows all things"

Furthermore, if one rejects God's 'Deen' (system/religion) revealed through all God's messengers when the matter has been made absolutely clear (and there is no reason left to deny it), then they do so at their own peril. The ultimate judge will be God to whom everyone will return to answer.

UNDERSTANDING THE TERM 'PERFECTION OF DEEN'

The discussions above should aid us to better understand the passage where God mentions that he has 'perfected Deen' (Arabic: **Akmaltu lakum dinakum**)

005:003

"...This day have I perfected your religion / system (Arabic: **deen**) for you, completed My favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion / system (Arabic: **deen**)..."

Islam was a religion preached by all Prophets. The Arabs during Muhammad's^(pbuh) ministry no doubt also had a system that they already observed and practiced. It is to be expected that certain parts of any system may have overlaps with Islam. In this way, the system of the ancient Arabs would have also been no different.

However, by 'perfecting' the system of the Arabs and removing alien doctrines, blasphemous practices and those ways incongruent with Islam, their Lord purified **their system** and perfected it by bringing it back to the 'system' he had enjoined on all believers before them (i.e. Islam).

In this way, Islam was not perfected per se (as Islam need not be perfected), but the existing practices of the Arabs were perfected and brought back into the folds of Islam.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The Arabic word 'Deen' is better described as a 'system' and does not necessarily have to be religious in nature or indeed, belief orientated. As we noted with the example of Joseph, the Egyptian King's law was also described as 'Deen'. We also noted the example of the 12 months and the sacredness of 4 of them also being described as the right 'Deen'.

The system instituted for mankind by God was 'Islam' and predates Prophet Muhammad's^(pbuh) ministry and finds its initiation from Adam^(pbuh) through great patriarchs such as Prophet Abraham, Moses and Jesus.^(pbuh) God sends His messengers to revert people back to this system especially when they have been led / gone astray or have lacked true guidance.

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