

Mankind's Greatest
Question?

WHERE DID I COME FROM?

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mnapublic@yahoo.com

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Introduction

Where did I come from, and where am I going? is the question on every child's lips at some stage. What is the relationship between man, life and the universe? What is the link between life and what was before life, and what is after life? These are all the most natural of questions which man wants an answer to, and indeed needs an answer to, to form a basis for all actions. Without an answer, we are simply running with a limited view of life, i.e. what is here and now with no regard to the past and future. Such a view of life is comparable to applying for a job without asking the interviewer what the history of the company is, who they will be working for, why the previous person left, what the job is, how the job is likely to develop, what the prospects for promotion are and so on. To simply ask for the job without any reference to the past and the future and how they are related is superficial and naive.

Should a person be drugged and wake up in a darkened room, he will naturally ask; who put me here? why am I here? and what will happen next? (or what is outside the room?). Questions of what happens after death evoke in many an uneasy feeling, a feeling that many shy away from if they do not have a convincing answer. If we look upon existence before our birth as unknown, one might say is doesn't concern us, but we all return to a situation of seeming uncertainty after death. The truth of the matter is that we want and need answers, and we want answers with absolute clarity and certainty.

A comprehensive answer to the question of man, life and the universe and their interrelationships through enlightened thought will provide the solution to all problems. This greater problem will act as a base or point of reference to any matter or problem relating to man and life. This is so because all problems are either partial problems related to the main problem or an outcome of the main problem. Armed with an answer to this most basic question mankind individually and collectively is in a position to progress, freed up from the constant worry of finding a correct reference point for any problem.

We are looking for the basis or creed of the ideology (way of life) for our lives. The basis or comprehensive answer must agree with reality and be categorically proven as correct; otherwise any answer stemming from the basis could be false.

Mankind's Greatest Question

Before solving the question we should set some ground rules.

Firstly; any answer should be comprehensive. We must have the answer to the whole question of man, life and the universe. Without this any related questions or problems stemming from life, may be left unanswered.

Any answer must agree with the reality and be a verifiable fact, to meet this criteria, the answer must agree with man's nature and satisfy our mind or intellect.

To answer a question rationally requires that we limit ourselves to what we can perceive and sense. We cannot rationally assess something which is hypothetical or beyond our capacity to perceive it.

With these criteria in mind, we can proceed to challenge ourselves in this most important of questions. A challenge which can solve this issue with 100% certainty, or else we remain in the dark, and with the constant inefficiency and worry that doubt brings.

A Starting Point

To solve the question of man, life and the universe let us start by observing what we know in certainty about these three. All of the previous information we have of these three, tells us that they have certain similarities and unchanging rules. Man, life and the universe are limited, indeed all that we can perceive is limited. What we mean by limited is that it all has a starting point and an end point, and is not unlimited and infinite.

We can see that man is born and dies, and man cannot grow beyond a certain size in height and weight. All of life is similarly limited, and the earth, moon and stars likewise have a starting and end point. The life of a star or galaxy may be a very long period of time, but they are definitely limited in that they all have a starting and ending. The universe is a very large place but it is a finite space, and is not unlimited. No scientist has been able to bring a definite evidence that suggests the universe has no limits. So to suggest that it is infinite means we are going beyond the bounds of what we can rationally assess. Such a thought requires us to challenge ourselves to find any example in our world of perception that is unlimited, no matter how hard we search we

cannot find such an example. All we can perceive is limited, finite. A second attribute of man, life and the universe is that all of these are needy and dependent. Needy in that to exist, they must have assistance from something else, they are not self sustaining. Man needs food and water to survive. Plants and animals similarly are dependant on a water cycle, which in turn is dependant upon the sun, which is dependant upon the relationship with the galaxies, and burning mass. Nothing that we can perceive can survive independent of other things, there is nothing in our perception that is self-subsistent. So things exist but do not have the power of existence.

The fact that is inextricably interwoven with these facts of being limited, finite, dependent, and needy is that ultimately there has to be a Creator or initiator for it all. The sum of all finite and dependant things is something that is finite and dependant, dependant on what? Dependant upon something to start, and sustain life, and something to plan and develop the complex interrelationship between all living things. We see things that exist without any difficulty or question, but nothing exists of its own nature as independent and in complete control of its own creation, or able to sustain itself. There can only be one solution to the question of Creation, that an unlimited Creator has accounted for all we see and perceive. Anything that is finite must have a dynamic force to create it, otherwise it cannot come into existence. All limited things depend upon something for their sustenance. There can be no doubt over these points, challenge yourself to bring any example, all limited and dependant things are created.

A second way of looking at this argument shows that if we contemplate about all we perceive as being limited and dependant we can only explain it in two ways; either

- All we perceive depends for its existence on something else, which in turn depends on still another thing, ad infinitum;

- All we perceive derives its existence from something else that exists by its own nature and that is accordingly eternal, unlimited.

The first alternative is false because it does not provide an explanation of how anything came into existence to begin with, it simply puts off giving a reason. It does not provide a reason why finite and limited things exist, or from whence they came, it is therefore illogical, incomplete and without an answer for us. Therefore we deduce that all limited and dependant things depend upon something that exists by its own nature. The arguments start when a description or perception of the Creator is desired.

Attributes of the Creator

When we contemplate upon the Creator, we deduce that it can only be either of three things; Created by something else, Creator and created at one and the same time, or eternal self-subsisting. To be created means that it is limited and therefore part of the creation and therefore not the ultimate Creator. It is absurd that something can be creating itself and exist at the same time. Therefore the Creator can only be eternal and not dependant on anything in any time or space. This attribute of eternity, or of infinity cannot be fully perceived by us, man is limited and cannot perceive everything. If we hear a knock at the door, we have a strong feeling that there is someone behind the door, but we do not know who, we can only speculate. To speculate upon the essence or description of the Creator is not necessary, and can only be unproductive. We are concerned to prove the existence of a Creator, rather than speculate upon that Creators detailed description which is in any event beyond us.

The desire for greater understanding of something so important in our lives is only natural. To gain greater understanding of something we cannot perceive, and we cannot perceive something that is infinite and totally independent, requires that we seek only verifiable data from that Creator. To speculate about the Creator can only lead to misery and error as the unknown cannot be deduced by our limited minds.

Further, we have not yet addressed the comprehensive question; of what is man, life, and the universe, what was before the life and what was after it, and what is the relationship between them all. The answer to this comprehensive question will act as the basis, or creed for all sub problems relating to life, and act as the reference for all the complex systems of life that man implements; social systems, economic, political, foreign policy, judicial, etc. In short this will explain mans very purpose in life, and give us direction for true progress. So far we have examined the existence of a Creator, what is the relationship with the Creator? and interrelationships with man, life, and what is after creation?

Islam's Answer to the Question

Islam has answered this question, by stating that man, life and the universe are all created by a one and only Creator (God in English, Allah in Arabic) and that before the life of the world was God, God is beyond this life and the universe, and is eternal, and self-subsistent. After this life there will be an ending and day of reckoning or judgement, in which man will return to his Creator, to be followed by an everlasting existence in paradise or hell. Islam has made the intellectual acceptance of this view a prerequisite for entering it. We therefore should examine closely, intellectually, these points in order to assess them, and decide upon their correctness or otherwise.

Before we continue we complete the Islamic basis or creed (Aqeedah in Arabic) upon which all problems and further questions in life will be referred. The creed of Islam is that there is only one God that created man, angels and jinn, Muhammad (may Gods peace be upon him) is the last in the chain of Prophets sent from God to guide mankind, the Qur'an is the word of God sent as guidance for all of mankind, that after this life man will be resurrected to face judgement concerning his actions, that after judgement follows paradise or hellfire. The Muslim (who submits to the will of God) should be intellectually convinced of these points as irrefutable facts, if this is the case the Muslim will guide all actions and refer all problems great and small to this basis or creed. Islam as an ideology or complete way of life (Deen in Arabic) has this basis as given by God, and all of life's systems emanate and are directed from this basis.

We recall the ground rules that we need to apply to our assessment of this or any other creed or comprehensive solution. The solution should be:

- *Comprehensive and answer the whole question leaving nothing unanswered.*
- *Agreeable with reality, and with man's nature and satisfy the mind intellectually.*
- *Assessed based upon our limits of perception, and not what we cannot sense.*

An issue as important as the basis of our lives and how we lead them should not be accepted without the most strenuous of examinations based upon these criteria which can satisfy our minds and lead our hearts to contentment.

The Existence of God

Questions of the nature of God, and the existence of Hell, Paradise, or Angels, cause us some difficulty, because we cannot perceive them, one of the criteria listed above. Is it possible to prove their existence despite our non-perception of them? Let us start with the existence of God. As outlined earlier the existence of God can be proven by contemplating upon all known things, and deducing that they are all limited and dependant. The sum of all limited and dependant things is limited or finite and all finite things have a beginning and end. All finite things must have been created, as an external force is required to move something into a state of existence. All dependant things are not self-sustaining, they therefore require a force to sustain them, they do not exist of their own accord. The force we have identified, through rational proof, we have called God or Allah. This proof has come through examining all within our perception therefore meets our limit of perception criteria. The fact that God is infinite and self-subsistent, and we cannot perceive Gods nature or description is not of concern in proving Gods existence. And to spend time trying to perceive what we cannot is counter productive and will not lead to 'peace of mind'.

We have intellectually brought a convincing argument for the existence of God. We must also examine if this agrees with mans nature. Man has certain instincts and organic needs, the satisfaction of which he constantly strives for. The organic needs are for food and drink, without which man will die. Instincts can be categorised as three: Survival or self-preservation, Procreation or sexual, and Religiousness. We can see clearly certain manifestations or traits in man reflecting his desire to satisfy these instincts. Thus man acquires goods and nice objects, likes to own property, wants a job and income, can be greedy, and may save for the future, in attempting to satisfy his instinct for survival. Similarly compassion, affection, love, marriage, and sexual tendencies are expressions of the procreational instinct in man. The desire to worship, sanctify, revere or approach something of greater power or influence are part of man's instinct of religiousness.

In a highly material and secular world many would deny the instinct of religiousness in man. The facts disagree with this opinion. Even in the most avowed of atheist societies, such as Communist Russia, where the creed of Communism denies the existence of a Creator we find busts and statues of men prominently displayed in order to satisfy man's desire to look up to

something greater than him. Man has gone in some societies from the worship of the Creator to the worship of men like Lenin or Marx. In the West the situation is no different with man often worshipping or revering politicians, influential businessmen, celebrities, Royalty, or even sports personalities. Such a situation of human worship is not ultimately satisfying as all men are equally limited and dependant and man cannot affect mans ultimate destiny. We see politicians and philosophers making mistakes, businessmen at times failing, and no sportsman could alter his destiny.

If man is to satisfy his instinct for religion he should only revere that which has control over him, and to which he will ultimately return. To worship or sanctify the relationship with God means man has a particular focus in life, that of acknowledging his shortcomings, and seeking guidance for all matters in life from the only source with absolute knowledge and understanding. To worship only the Creator, the one with absolute knowledge and control can be the only truly satisfying form of worship, in full agreement with man's instinct for religion. Worship, or looking up to other men or material things like money is intellectually weak and doesn't satisfy our instincts.

Whilst man may believe in the existence of God through use of his instinctive emotions, this can be unreliable and dangerous as emotions change and can add errors to one's beliefs and actions. In history we see many examples of men going far astray in believing fantasies or superstitions, or attributing human qualities to God, talking of a son of God, God incarnate etc. all of which is false and can lead easily to disbelief. For this reason it is obligatory for the Muslim to believe in the existence of God not solely through instinctive emotion, but with use of the mind. The believer must be intellectually convinced of the existence of God or else emotions of belief could be adversely changed. Concepts which people are convinced of will not change unless a stronger intellectual argument is brought, so use of the mind is required for a lasting understanding and belief.

"Behold! in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alteration of night and day, these are indeed signs for men of understanding" (Qur'an 3:190)

The Qur'an includes hundreds of verses directing man to look and contemplate deeply upon the universe and creation, to look at its interrelationships, and attributes which guide one to belief in the Creator, through use of the mind and ration.

"Lo in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the difference of night and day, and the ships which run upon the sea with that which is of use to

men, and the water which Allah sends down from the sky, thereby reviving the earth after its death, and dispersing all kinds of beasts therein, and (in) the ordinance of the winds, and the clouds obedient between heaven and earth: are signs (of Allah's sovereignty) for people who have sense." (Qur'an 2:164)

The existence of God we have covered using intellectual and instinctive arguments and by utilizing all evidences within our perception. From this position we need to question the rest of the creed (Aqeedah) and challenge the correctness of its articles. We start by examining the question of divine guidance. What has God given us, what is the mechanism for man to solve his problems?

The Need for Messengers and Prophets

Mankind is driven to satisfy his organic needs and his instincts, and without any form of criterion for right and wrong surely he will go astray. The annals of history are full of man's oppression of man. Greed, selfishness, killing, monopoly, and vice are manifestations of man fulfilling his survival instinct. If man is prepared to go as far as killing others in satisfaction of his needs, then surely man is in need of control over his actions. Without a criterion for action the striving for satisfaction of mans needs will lead him to constant conflict with others. One man's freedom is another's slavery. God has not left man to his own devices, man has never been free to undertake his life in whichever way he feels best. It is wholly consistent with our perception of man as being limited, dependant and imperfect, that for man to bring his own way, his own system, would be false, due to man's limited understanding of life. Man is always subject to bias, disparity, differences, contradictions and the influence of his current environment, hardly a basis for complete impartiality and absolute truth. Any man made system will suffer from these same bias, disparity, differences, contradictions and influence. The example of modern day politicians and their links with the business community serves as a reminder of how the supposedly impartial nature of the political function can be abused.

The religiousness instinct within man serves as a reminder to us of how mankind can be diverted from his true goal in life. History shows us many instances of man worshipping the Sun, Stars, Fire, Stone idols, and more recently books, writers, leaders and material things. Faced with this strong instinct of dependence/sanctification man strives to satisfy this need, but without a system or clear guidance in this matter purely intuitive or instinctive acts of worship have led man astray. Man must use his mind to establish the source of the correct form of sanctification/worship. It is not possible for a limited being to comprehend an unlimited being, therefore the Creator has given mankind communication through a channel that is clear for him. God has sent Prophets and Messengers (Prophets with the divine law) to mankind to give guidance in all of our affairs. The Prophets were each given miracles which proved to mankind the authenticity of their Prophethood.

So we see that Musa (Moses) was given the power of magic, when his staff was thrown down and turned to a snake devouring the staffs of the magicians. Or similarly Isa (Jesus) was given the ability to cure the sick. The miracle given to

Muhammad (pbuh) was the Qur'an, the word of God. As only the Messengers of God are given the Divine Law of God (Ahkam Shar'iyah) then Muhammad must definitely be the Prophet and Messenger of God. To prove this point comprehensively we must examine critically the Qur'an.

The Qur'an the Word of God

If the Qur'an is the word of God, and a miracle proving the Prophet-hood of Muhammad (pbuh) we must look carefully at this book and establish without doubt its authenticity. It is well known that the pagan Arabs of the time of Muhammad (pbuh) were great poets and writers of the Arabic language. It was common at the time for them to go into the dessert to study Arabic and write poetry and prose with which to entertain each other. They held the Arabic language with all its fluidity and depth of expression in great esteem. When the revelation started to come to Muhammad in his fortieth year it was the style of language which set the revelation apart from anything that had been before or indeed since.

The unshakable proof of the authenticity of the Qur'an as the word of God is in its style of language. From the first verse:

"Read: In the name of thy Lord who createth, Createth man from a clot. Read: and thy Lord is the Most Bounteous, Who teaches by the pen, Teaches man that which he knew not" (96:1-5)

through to ;

"This day I have perfected your Deen (way in life) for you and completed My favour unto you, and have chosen for you as Deen Al-Islam." (5:3)

The Qur'an remains completely at the height of eloquence, rhetoric, and coherent expression. It acts as one complete piece, with the style the same as if it is one sentence, with perfect arrangements and strong plain text. The expressions brought were not known to the Arabs at the time or before that time, and matters cannot be expressed that have not been previously felt. One of the disbelieving Arab poets of the time Walid ibn Al Mughirah said after hearing the Qur'an:

"By God: None of you is more conversant than I with poetry, melodious hymns, and songs, and by God never did I hear anything similar to which he says. It is so sweet, and so graceful that it remains at the summit with nothing to surpass it."

The Qur'an is in a literary style that no human can approach or match. Its style the Arabs cannot match, and it is this challenge which God has set forth within the Qur'an.

"Say: verily though mankind and the Jinn should assemble to produce the like of this Qur'an, they could not produce the like thereof though they were helpers one of another"[17:88]

"And if ye are in doubt concerning that which we reveal unto our apostle (Muhammad), then produce a Surah of the like thereof, and call your witnesses beside Allah if you are truthful"[2:23]

"Or they say: He has invented it? Say: then bring a Surah like unto it and call (for help) on all ye can besides Allah if you are truthful"[10:38]

It is this challenge to all that doubt that has remained unanswered in over 1400 years since this revelation. Not one scholar of the Arabic language either Muslim or Non-Muslim has been able to write even one small chapter or paragraph in the same style of Arabic to that of the Qur'an. The Arabs are either able to imitate the style of the Qur'an or not, if they could then the book is clearly the work of men like them. If not then there are only two other possible sources Muhammad, or God.

Muhammad (pbuh) was of Arabic blood and tongue but never claimed to be the author of the Qur'an. In fact he was never challenged as its author, it can be seen clearly from Hadith Mutawatir (definitely confirmed sayings of Muhammad - narrated word for word) of which there are many hundreds that the style of language in Muhammad's speech and the Qur'an are very different. And no matter how hard one tries, one's style of speech cannot be completely altered consistently, and certainly not over a period of 23 years in which the Qur'an was revealed. The only accusation ever leveled at Muhammad (pbuh) was that he received it from a Christian youth called Jaber. As a response to this allegation God revealed:

"We know indeed that they say, 'It is a man that teaches him.' The tongue of him they wickedly point to is notably foreign, while this is Arabic, pure and clear."[16:103]

Since it is the style of the Arabic language that is the miracle of the Qur'an, how can the non-Arab speaker confirm this fact? Just as the foreign student studies Shakespeare from the English language scholar, so too should the

English speakers refer to the scholars of Arabic for the true confirmation of the height of eloquence and style of the Qur'an. The language serves as a constant reminder over the ages, and also the consistent style has ensured that nothing could be added to the Qur'an. Indeed God has promised that the book would be protected, and there are copies of the most ancient manuscript which are letter for letter the same as all copies today.

"Lo! We, even We, reveal the reminder, and lo! We verily are its Guardian"[15:9]

"If it had been from other than Allah thy would have found much incongruity"[4:82]

As the Qur'an is the word of God, sent to mankind as a guide for all affairs, and as it is protected and completely consistent throughout, then anything the book refers to can be taken as a complete truth. The existence of paradise and hellfire cannot be derived from rational evidence as we cannot as yet perceive them, to believe in them comes in a traditional way, however belief in them is based upon a rationally derived belief which proves the divine source of the Qur'an. This is referred to as use of transformative evidence. Therefore all that the Qur'an definitely refers to can be taken as truth without any hesitation.

"And we have not sent thee (O Muhammad) save as a bringer of good tidings and a warner unto all mankind, but most of mankind know not"[34:28]

The Qur'an and the Sunnah (path and direction of the Prophet) act as the source of Shariah (divine law) in Islam, as rationally confirmed sources of God's law mankind is obliged to follow them in all details. This basis is the creed or doctrine upon which all actions in life should be referred.

Life and Progress

For mankind to progress in life means a comprehensive way of life must be adopted. All of the great civilisations adopted an ideology against which all of life's affairs were referred and problems solved. Mankind today is in no different a position. We must think deeply of our situation and not accept any way of life blindly. The facts are that the two dominant ideologies existent in the world today, Capitalism and Communism, have been accepted without any searching examination of the basis upon which they are built. Does twentieth century man think of what the concepts of freedom and democracy really mean. Is mankind 'free' in all actions?

There must be a controlling influence, but where does the control exercised by a democracy lead us? The control by an elected minority backed by a faceless elite? A rapidly declining environment, massive increases in crime, the breakdown of the family unit and a selfish drive for profit and individualism are all manifestations of man-made systems. Secular systems are open for abuse, and even a sincere leadership cannot hope to guide mankind with mankind's limited knowledge and understanding of life.

Part of our problem today is that man does not think of his situation, and what little thought brought forward to solve any problem is based upon a consensus view. It is a fundamental error to believe that a majority view or view of the lowest common denominator is correct all the time. We see that the average view or majority view may bear no resemblance to the truth at all. In a society where domination of an unthinking public is very easy, through such forces as the media, then control of the consensus view can be almost complete. The results are devastating, as we see with our environment. Man must return to using his intellect, and not settle for anything less than the truth.

Any examination of the options open to mankind should not leave out the last of the monotheistic faiths, a faith in which a code of conduct for all of mankind is clearly set out without bias and uncertainty. Islam is based totally upon the existence of one Creator, that has created us, the rest of life and the universe. The proof of that Creator is before our eyes if only we spend time to contemplate upon all that we can perceive.

It was narrated by Abu Anas and Abu Dardah that the Prophet Muhammad (saw) said: *"An hour in contemplation is worth more than spending a whole night in prayer."*

Many things exist, but we perceive of nothing that exists of its own accord, all are limited and dependant. Limited, finite things must be created. All dependant things depend upon an external force for their sustenance and existence. Our instincts tell us that we need to look up to something greater than ourselves for guidance, an instinct man has been satisfying for as long as history records. Belief in God is instinctive and rational.

Mankind comes to faith in God because he needs an answer to the most important question of where did he come from and why is he here. The true faith in God is intellectually based, emotions play a part, but it is only through intellectually and rationally proven facts that man will become convinced of a thought, and then act accordingly. The intellectual acceptance that there is only one God and that Muhammad is his Messenger is a condition for entering Islam.

There are numerous references to mankind's responsibility in life given in the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet (pbuh).

"Allah has not created man and jinn except as a worship unto him"[51:56]

Man's role of trustee of the earth is also referred to clearly in the Qur'an.

"I am about to place a trustee in the earth" [2:30]

All of ones life should be in accordance with the direction given to us by our Creator. This is what worship in its widest sense means. We are not free to undertake anything we wish in life, we are subject to the laws and controls given to us to regulate our affairs. All societies need systems to ensure harmony and progress; Islam has given us the basis or creed from which all systems emanate. Man's systems for social law, government and ruling, economy, and justice are all given from this basis from our Creator. To ignore these facts is to ignore our responsibility in life. To lead a life apart from that given by our Creator is to invite misery and oppression as individuals and as a nation of believers.

Mankind is only truly freed up for progress by living in accordance with his God given instincts, and within a system given by our Creator. To accept otherwise is to invoke the wrath of our Creator and to live in a constant round

of inefficiency, as man chases yet another man made system, the systems of insecurity and doubt.