

The Quran's ethic of ease is a **self-correction** against the inherent tilt toward extremism to which human beings become especially susceptible in affairs of the heart – which include, not only matters spiritual (the notions of religious fanaticism or eccentric mysticism that have been disproportionately advertised in our time), but the intellectual & the imaginative dimensions of human perception, as well. For, particularly in the modern era, humanity has shown an **unabated tendency to elevate** even mundane ideas to the level of essentialist ideology, and to **magnify the most narrowly construed conceptions to the point of obsession**. Extremism is a human proclivity that grows out of our innate disposition, the overriding need of our hearts, to worship.

Islam adjusts this human propensity by fusing devotion & compassion into a mutually imperative sense of worship, identical in their fundamental purpose & function; namely, to draw man near to God. United together by the principal of ease, it is this that serves to center the spiritual focus between “self” & “other.” In this way, it thoroughly informs the believing attitude: One is to be unwaveringly clear & convicted in their belief in & worship of God, as well as highly motivated & resolute in striving with oneself & one's wealth for social equity in the service of God, but each of these activities is to be circumscribed within the revealed margins of an “ease” that recognizes the due rights that the human condition itself imposes on each one of us & the concentric liabilities in which God has enrolled us.

We have souls that pull us heavenward, but earth-drawn bodies of clay & need. Yet we fail if we satisfy our earthly selves by means of others, while depriving them of the spiritual means we have. We share a general responsibility for our fellows in humanity, but a primary accountability for our own souls, our near & far kin, our community, and so on, in that order. Yet one sins, as the Prophet (p) has taught us, if his stomach is full, while he knows that his neighbour's is empty.

It comes as no surprise, therefore, that as a practical method of cementing Islam's “personal-faith-in-public service” paradigm in the personalities of his followers, the Prophet (p) used the ethic of ease in his sage advice: “Persist in doing good deeds that are within your reach.” Nor was he content with the good intentions of his community in so central a concern.

They were to take care to attain its objective, which was to remove the hardships of creed and canon that human beings had put as obstacles to faith in God. They were not to complicate what God had made straightforward and simple. He said: “You have been raised up for the purpose of easing the way to faith for people, not to make their lives difficult.”

Implicit in these admonitions is that Muslims were not to do what others had done with faith; namely, to use it as a means of cordoning off for themselves power by segmenting human fellowship and inventing rites and obligations that enthroned some over others in “artificial knowledge” hierarchies that sapped the wealth, intellectual ingenuity & moral vitality of the community.

Be of **good cheer**: Every established mental condition is an acquired habit, and it becomes such by continuous repetition of thought. Despondency & cheerfulness, anger & calmness, covetousness & generosity – indeed, all states of mind – **are habits built up by choice**, until they become automatic. A thought constantly repeated at last becomes a fixed habit of the mind, and from such habits **proceeds one's life**.

Prayer is an easy act of worship except, of course, for those who do **not** truly submit to their Lord; they will find it toilsome. It's worth remembering: **The essence of religion is comprised of ease**.

So you thought **ease** was lying on a bed of goose-feathers & watching Spongebob Squarepants, while eating popcorn & sitting amidst a pile of Superman & Batman comic books. Then playing NFS on your PS4. Then more mindless TV & Internet chat. **That's called wasting time**.

Narrow-mindedness or hard-heartedness has no place in human relations. May your soul breathe contented, far, far away from hyper-restriction & harsh obligation. **Easy does it!**

The Prophet (p) explicitly warned:
“Indeed the essence of religion is comprised of ease. And none struggles against it by way of bringing to it extremism, but that it defeats them. Therefore, keep fast to its centre, trying always to approximate it. And be of good cheer. And seek God's help.”

Religion, like people, have vital spirits running all through them, even as life's blood courses through our own veins. From its creed, to its rites, to its worldly vision & way of life, Islam is suffused with an essential spirit that we characterize as an ethic of ease, as opposed to one of difficulty & recondite complexity. This same life force everywhere pulses through the revealed verses of Surat al-Baqarah. Again & again, the Quran's longest & most summative Chapter shows us, sometimes tells us outright, that the nature of genuine religiousness seamlessly matches the nature of upright man, and man in community:

It is not stringent.



The Quran's ethic of ease, in essence, runs counter to that of faith by force, cruelty in human transaction & incivility in human communication.

Religion **cannot** endure the imposition of the relentlessly rigid outlook, nor the invariably **extreme** practice. It has a natural affinity for the enjoyment of the wholesome things that God has created for humanity & created humanity for. And its native temperament is modesty & moderation, just as its natural dwelling place is the environment of latitude & lenity, **where a soul may breathe contented, far, far away from hyper-restriction & harsh obligation.**

Moreover, it is to be universally applied by the believers with both friend and foe, for it rests upon the divine bedrock of God's will to leniency (tayseer) for humankind and His repudiation of their distress on His account. Cast for all time in the meaning of God's own words – **"God intends for you ease & does not intend for you hardship"** – the echoes of al-Baqarah's categorical statement on the divine intentionality of ease for His upright, symmetrical creation reverberates throughout the Quran as one of the prime ethical assumptions of human life. "God does **not** wish to place any strain upon you. Rather, He intends to purify you and to perfect His blessings upon you, so that you may give thanks." (5:6) For delicate is the human disposition, as its Creator knows very well. Thus "alleviation" of the earthly human load characterizes the obligations that Islam's religious rulings enjoin upon this mere creature of clay. "God desires to lighten the burden for you. **For man is created weak.**" (4:28)

The objective of religion, then, is to equip the human being to traverse the hills and dales of worldly temptation & personal trial gracefully in the pleasure of his Lord, with the express purpose of testing his faith.

God has charged all human beings with reflection on His Final Revelation, the Holy Writ of the Quran, which He has given them precisely to preserve their inalienable right of ease as opposed to duress and tyranny. The Quran's purpose is to fire humanity's endowed imaginative genius to harness the free-

flowing energy of its Heavenly guidance and transform it into the luminous social structures that will ameliorate the conditions of earthly life. Hence, with a multi-layered wisdom has He filled it and with a many-splendoured beauty has He formed it, so that people would not tire or bore but on the contrary find joy and ease, in the fulfillment of their master mission, their highest task; namely the transmutation of all mundane life into God-conscious service by memorializing revelation in their enterprise by day and their endeavour by night. "And truly We have made the Quran easy for remembrance. So is there any to remember?" (54:17)

None are to find themselves counted out of Revelation's luminescent mercy. Whether by encouraging word or firm admonition, every human being has a divinely ordained right to hear its address from those to whom the Quran has been bestowed with facility. Indeed, this universal entitlement fixes the communal mission of the latter among the global human family. "Thus We have indeed made this Quran easy in your tongue for you to give glad tidings with it to the God-fearing, and to warn therewith a contentious people." (19:97) And since the children of Adam are, indeed, a single brotherhood in the eyes of their sole Creator, then whoever God has provided with sustenance and ability must especially cherish God's essential ethic of ease, not only for him, or herself, but also for the impoverished one. Not by means of bread (if this is not within reach), then by way of a fervent desire to do something if one could, were God ever to grant one such a measure of His mercy.

This is symbolized in the bond of a charitable word that, at a minimum, a person is required to express to the downtrodden one to promote their human dignity & to bring relief to their troubled mind. "Yet if you must turn away from those who are needy, while you yourself seek mercy from your Lord & hope ardently for provision from which you can give, then **at least say to them a tender word.**" (17:28). Yet this divinely ordained human interchange that clasps help to hope in the promise of God is **not** the mere institution of a social balm or superficial protocol. In it, both the benevolent & the bereft are truly to take to heart. For "as to one who gives charity & fears God & confirms his faith in God's ultimate reward, We shall then ease him into ease." (92:5-7). And as to the believer

beset by crushing need, he is reminded of God's unflinching pledge to the steadfastly pious, that "whoever fears God, He shall make for him from where he has never conceived. And whoever relies on God, then He Himself becomes sufficient for him." (65:2-3) In this manner, both are reminded that God alone is the consolation of every man & woman in their hour of affliction. "And whoever fears God, He shall make for them a way out of every difficulty." (65:2) With this realization the **seed of benevolent ease implants itself in the character of the believer.**

Just as God has fixed ease into the precepts of the Quran, those who would uphold their real meaning are to make ease the rule between them in their interaction. The Prophet (p) draws this connection when he states: "I have been sent with the Message of upright faith & **tolerant spirit.**" Compassion in action evinces the faith of the heart to which the Muslim lays claim. As with every moral value in Islam, its practice begins with oneself & continues successively outward.

Those who observed firsthand the conduct of the Prophet (p) noted: "Never was he faced with a choice between two things without choosing the easier, so long as it was not an ungodly act. And were it ungodly, then he was, indeed, the furthest of people from it." This habit of the Prophet (p) tells us at least two things: First, there is **no** inherent religious excellence in the difficult over the easy merely for the fact that a particular worthy end might be attained by one route that is more arduous than another. Indeed, in the light of the Prophet's own practice, the simpler way is likely more desirable.

Second, the precedence of ease over difficulty has nothing to do with validating our impious wants, even if they come easy over the execution of more demanding obligations or preferable acts of devotion. Nor does it legitimate the performance of one good act or obligation in the place of another unrelated act or requirement. One **cannot** say, for example, "I have meditated on the melody of a spiritually meaningful song in preference to the night prayer."

Ease is **not** to be mistaken for the spiritual lassitude & moral confusion that has characterized much of the Muslim community.

God intends for you

Ease



does not intend for you

Hardship

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