

Islam Doesn't Need No Add-On

A Wake-Up Call to Muslims on the Battlefield of Ideologies



Preliminary remark: This white paper was composed during the same time period in which the so-called “Epstein Files” were released. They once again brought painfully to my attention how urgently we must engage with basic questions of standards, truth, and moral authority.

It is precisely when supposedly “objective” standards prove to be fragile and expose their dark and ugly abysses that it becomes clear how essential it is for us as Muslims to know our foundation and to be firmly rooted in it – rather than succumbing to the illusion that the dominant worldview around us is even remotely superior. And above all, so that we may raise a generation of young Muslims who do not blindly follow every trend, but who have learned to question, to examine, and to remain steadfast, even when it’s uncomfortable.

A brother captured this moment with bitter irony:

“The religions of the Book have their revelations, the socialists have the Communist Manifesto, and with the Epstein Files it seems the secular-atheist West has finally found scriptures that adequately reflect its own worldview – happy for you!”

It is my sincere hope that, over the course of this white paper, it becomes crystal clear why this subject now is more important than ever.

Overview

Currently, there is a trend circulating on social media in which people all around the world are sharing their memories from 2016. While most of it appears to be rather superficial and trivial in nature - think of things like Snapchat's famous dog filter, the bizarre “Mannequin Challenge,” or the almost state-of-emergency-like Pokémon Go phase - there is more to this wave of personal moments than just another seemingly pointless trend. In fact, beneath the surface lies something quite familiar: that deep human urge to look back every few years and reflect on where you are today and how much has changed.

For us as Muslims, this kind of reflection is especially important – not out of nostalgia or for the sake of having fun, but to take an honest look at ourselves and call us to account. For we as a community have also undergone significant changes over the past ten years. Without revisiting every single detail and walking down memory lane ourselves, generally speaking: there have been heated debates, public statements, strong opinions, and a great deal of passion invested on all sides. Much of it was important and necessary, no doubt about that. However, at the same time, it also brought uncertainty, and in some cases even real confusion – especially where anti-Islamic mentalities quietly entered our spaces without being questioned too much.

And yet, it would not be fair to highlight only one side of the coin. In recent years - especially with the genocide in Gaza escalating in 2023 - many brothers and sisters began to ask deeper questions: about their identity, their own standards, and what it truly means to be Muslim in a world where fellow Muslim brothers and sister are being massacred in the name of certain political movements. A shift began to take place and Muslims all over the world turned back to their religion, while at the same time welcoming masses of new brothers and sisters into Islam, Alhamdulillah!

All the more surprising, then, was a recent conversation which - without my participating in any trend - took me straight back in time to earlier debates. A young sister in her early twenties casually mentioned that she considers herself a feminist, “but of course in accordance with Islam.” Alarm bells immediately went off for me. Even though she said it half-jokingly, it quickly became clear that she

was in all seriousness – especially when I tried, in the heat of the moment and certainly not perfect, to explain what ***exactly*** was problematic about that very statement, and she would keep responding with, “Yes, I know, BUT ...” or “Well, THAT’S not what I mean.”

I left that conversation deep in thought: Are we not way past this? I'm referring to this kind of desperate attempt to impose a different label on Islam - one notably invented by colonial powers - or to define ourselves by something other than simply being a Muslim. Apparently, we weren't. And that led me to the next question: What is there still left to clarify?

This personal encounter became the catalyst for this whitepaper. Not with the aim of dissecting and refuting every single ideology one by one – no. It is about something far more fundamental: understanding *what* Islam actually is (yes, really!) and the demands it places on our thinking, our actions, and our identity as Muslims.

Essentially, it is about the fundamental difference between a comprehensive worldview on the one hand - one that provides a complete and coherent framework for a person's way of being and way of life - and, on the other hand, the array of arbitrary, man-made ideas that are being imposed on it from the outside as “additions” or “improvements.”

This whitepaper may not seek to go back ten years, but perhaps ten steps, taking especially our younger brothers and sisters on a journey back to the very foundation of their faith – a foundation that, through various external influences, may have been shaken or partially buried. The hope is that, by the end, it becomes crystal clear why Islam does not require any “add-ons,” and why it is so crucial to identify simply as a Muslim, no more and no less than that.

Mental Mess

I still remember an incident from 2020 in a WhatsApp group of a Muslim Students' Association in Germany. A sister shared that, due to her studies, she was considering moving out of her parents' home and was asking about the Islamic ruling on the matter, as well as about others' experiences. One response stood out in particular. In essence, another sister wrote: "Why are you even worrying about what Islam says? Just do as you wish."

At the time, I had to read her reply several times in order for me to really grasp that it was coming from a fellow Muslim sister – not because she was being deliberately provocative, but precisely because she said it with such astonishing casualness, in this WhatsApp group of a Muslim (!!?) student association.

Although this incident lies several years back, it still reflects a greater shift that is already visible in statements like the earlier mention of "being a feminist in accordance with Islam." What may sound like a casual self-description at first begins to show its true tendency in practice: a mindset in which Islam is no longer seen as the primary standard, let alone a standard "worth considering" at all.

This shift rarely happens consciously, let alone maliciously, which is exactly what makes it so problematic and dangerous. One may still view themselves as a practicing Muslim at large, without realising that Islam is slowly being pushed to the margins of one's mind. And if you're now thinking, "That might happen to others, but surely not me," then you may be underestimating who - or rather, what - you are really dealing with, in which case you should read this whitepaper until the very end.

Because at this point, it is no longer about individual statements, but about the specific framework that shapes the way we think in the first place. It is about standards that are adopted without any awareness of their origins, let alone any sense that this in and of itself might be even problematic. Especially today, many younger brothers and sisters find themselves moving back and forth between their own religion and different ways of thinking, often through platforms like TikTok and Instagram, without realising - or perhaps without wanting to realise - that these rest on assumptions that are fundamentally opposed to Islam.

In order to understand this dynamic and, admittedly, this mental mess, we first need to clarify a few key terms.

Understanding Key Terms

In his well-known book *No Doubt*, Sheikh Fahad Tasleem begins with a striking statement: **Islam is NOT a religion.**

All right, I know what you're probably thinking. Sounds provocative, maybe even confusing. *So what is it, then?*

Tasleem writes:

“What we understand when we hear the word ‘religion’ today is a consequence of a particular European historical event [...] Worldview is a better and ‘tighter’ approximation of the meaning of the word ‘dīn’ (as compared to ‘religion’) and since Islam is a *dīn*, grasping worldview will allow us to more clearly understand Islam.”¹

And that's exactly what we want to do now.

¹ Fahad Tasleem, *No Doubt: 10 Effective Strategies On How To Deal With Your & Other People's Doubts*. A detailed explanation of the difference between “religion” and “worldview” would go beyond the scope of this paper. For the purposes of this white paper, it suffices to note that Islam is not simply what is generally understood today as “religion.” Those who wish to delve deeper are welcome to download the book for free at <https://www.sapienceinstitute.org/no-doubt/>.

The Lens Through Which We See the World

A worldview (also called an outlook or perspective on life) is the basic framework through which a person understands, interprets, and evaluates reality. It answers - consciously or unconsciously - the big questions in life: Where do I come from? Where am I going? Why am I here? What's right, what's wrong - and who sets the standard?

These questions may sound very abstract at first. As a Muslim, you might be reading this and think: *Well, I already do know the answers anyway.* But that's the point: Do we merely **know** the answers, or have we truly *internalised them*?

Because even if we know the answers in theory, they inevitably play out in our everyday life, shaping every single one of our decisions. Sometimes it may be something small and almost unnoticed, like instinctively avoiding the alcohol section in the supermarket, if we register it at all. Other times it may be more demanding, like choosing not to go out clubbing with friends on a Friday night, even when the peer pressure is real. Such decisions, no matter how small, are by far not trivial. They reveal how we actually answer questions about morality, freedom, justice, identity, and responsibility. For us as Muslims, this means: if you truly believe that you were created by Allah, that you belong to Him, and that you will be held accountable before Him, then you strive to align your life with His standards - even or especially when it's uncomfortable, when you need to sacrifice something, or when no one's watching.

What's important to understand here is that, when it comes to worldviews, ***no one*** is neutral. And that really means *no one*. Every single person - be it your neighbour, classmate, teacher, fellow student, professor, employer, or even your postman or the baker next door - looks at the world through a particular "lens," whether they realise it or not. Even the idea that you simply decide "independently" or "for yourself" already rests on very specific philosophical assumptions about what the human being is and what kind of authority or autonomy he holds over his life.

In that sense, Islam is not simply “a religion” in the modern sense, where it is placed alongside other personal belief systems, all of which are subordinated to a seemingly “objective” social framework (spoiler alert: in reality, another worldview). Rather, Islam itself is a comprehensive worldview with its own claim to truth and authority, one that determines the standards by which human beings are meant to think and act.

However, where different worldviews meet, competition inevitably arises – a contest revolving around the question who has the right and authority to define what counts as “right,” “normal,” or legitimate. And this is where ideologies enter the picture.

When Ideas Become Standards

Young Muslims today grow up in an environment that instills in them very specific ideas about how you should live, what you should look to for guidance, and what is considered desirable. These ideas may either align with their religion or contradict it, but either way, they quietly begin to shape the framework within which people even begin to consider what is “only natural,” “completely obvious,” or “perfectly logical.”

From an early age on, they are exposed to this kind of “normal”: first in kindergarten, then at school, later at university, and eventually in the workplace. The media plays a very crucial role here – films, series, video games, and above all social media, all of which shape people’s thoughts, feelings and sentiments. It really doesn’t matter where you’re at or what you do – certain values, assumptions, and ideas about what is worth pursuing are always being conveyed. Like pieces of a puzzle, they gradually form a picture that dictates how life works and what truly matters in it.

The real problem, however, usually does not lie in questions where Islam takes a clear stance – that is, in matters where a practicing young Muslim already knows that something goes against their own religion. While tensions can and do certainly arise here, and in the worst case even lead to doubts, they do have a certain “advantage”: the conflict is out in the open.

One can clearly see the difference – Islam says A, while something else says B. The lines are already drawn, and that is where you can address the issue.

It becomes far more problematic, however, when certain messages sound familiar – precisely because they seem to echo Islamic values. They can feel especially appealing, as they draw on concepts, concerns, or moral intuitions that also exist within Islam and resonate deeply with the *fitrah*, yet ultimately stem from an entirely different worldview. The result is a kind of mental tangle, where ideas are mixed together, terms are thrown into the same basket, and any real distinctions gradually disappear.

The reason for this is largely structural. Many Muslims in the West do not encounter Islam as a coherent worldview taught in a systematic way. Instead, they often learn it in fragments - scattered and disconnected - reduced to what, as mentioned earlier, is commonly understood today under the liberal notion of “religion”: a loose collection of rituals, customs, rules and traditions that everyone is free to practice in private and within the comfort of their own home. Between these two approaches, however, lies an enormous difference – they are worlds apart, quite literally.

Someone who learns a worldview from the ground up comes to understand its foundation, its internal coherence, its logic, and the standards it sets. But when religion is taught merely as a set of isolated rules, that very foundation is missing. While earlier models of learning Islam, for example in Sunday school at the mosque, was not really presented as a worldview either, it was at least more structured and way more demanding. In our day and age of TikTok, reels, and shorts, this has now turned into a real fragmentation, making any profound and clear approach to Islam increasingly difficult.

It is precisely through this dynamic that foreign standards are adopted without noticing the entire chain (or baggage) of ideas that comes attached to them.

And this is where we need to start talking about ideologies.

Ideologies, as the name may already suggest, are systems of ideas that seek to set the standards in certain areas of life. They shape how people are expected to think and judge about issues such as politics, society, gender roles, self-determination, or animal rights.

Precisely because ideologies usually focus on specific areas of life, many people view them merely as individual opinions, loose attitudes, or isolated movements within a supposedly “neutral” social framework. In reality, however, they rest on deeper underlying assumptions, and therefore on a particular worldview. As concrete expressions, or even “outgrowths,” of that worldview, ideologies simply make visible what has long been quietly assumed and accepted in the background.

In today’s social context, this means, for example, that the human being is seen as the final authority (Humanism), that freedom and autonomy are treated as the highest goods (Liberalism), that morality is judged by how much happiness or utility it brings (Utilitarianism), and that “good” ultimately becomes whatever is subjectively experienced as “liberating” or “autonomous” (Individualism and Feminism).

Perhaps you can already sense how quickly things become really confusing. What exactly is a worldview – and what counts as ideology?² And this brings us to another important point: A worldview may give rise to certain ideologies, but once those ideologies become socially influential and take hold of society at large, they begin to shape language, thought, and moral intuitions in return – reinforcing the very same worldview from which they originally originated from. Through this constant interplay, they strengthen and sustain one another, creating something like a “chicken-and-egg” problem and, more importantly, producing the very notion of a “neutral” or “objective” framework. Ideas that grew out of a very particular view of the world and of the human being later appear as evidence confirming that same view. The underlying assumptions remain invisible and therefore seem unquestionable. But none of this is neutral even in the slightest. It is simply so deeply embedded that it is no longer recognised as fundamental ideological assumptions at all.

So we can summarise it like this: ideologies are not complete worldviews, but they are expressions of a worldview – its lived practice, so to speak. Islam, on the other hand, is itself a comprehensive worldview, with its own foundation, its own standards, and its own ultimate direction.

² To put it simply: liberalism is the worldview, everything else is just its ideologies.

Now, when an ideology emerges from a different worldview, the two foundations do not simply coexist side by side, but they inevitably stand **in competition** with one another.

And this is where the mistake behind many modern attempts at “reconciliation” lies. As soon as the question is framed as to whether Islam can be “reconciled” with an ideology such as feminism, the focus shifts to isolated points of overlap – those elements that feel familiar because they seem to echo Islamic values, as mentioned earlier. People then pick and choose certain positions, attitudes, or goals without recognising that two fundamentally different foundations are at play here – foundations that inevitably lead in different directions. It is like standing at a fork in the road and comparing not the roads themselves, but only the signposts. At first they may seem similar. But the further you go, the more obvious it becomes that the path leads somewhere entirely different from where you actually intended to go – and that “all roads lead to Rome (or Islam)” isn’t quite it really.

When young Muslims are confronted with prevailing ideas about justice, freedom, and identity, a particular mindset can quickly take hold – one that often hints at a certain sense of inferiority: “But we have that in Islam too!” Or even worse: the assumption that “true Islam” *must* also endorse the same values – and if it doesn’t, then it should somehow be “adjusted” or supplemented to make it fit.

In doing so, one completely misunderstands the nature of ideologies. The well-known author and speaker Hamza Tzortzis once captured this point very well: “Ideologies are like an ocean. The ocean is either clear and gives you clarity, or it's infected with piranhas and jellyfish and so on. So if you're going to jump into a sea infested with these kinds of parasites or nasty fish or whatever the case may be, you're going to get stung and you're going to drown. You're going to get wet. Ideologies are like that. Worldviews are like that.”

So, in order to honestly assess whether an idea or attitude is still rooted in Islamic principles or has already strayed from them, we must not be misled by appealing slogans. What’s needed here is a closer look beneath the surface...

***Usūl* and *furūʿ*: Why Similarities Can Be Deceptive**

In the classical Islamic scholarly tradition, there is a well-established model for tracing back the roots of an idea: the distinction between *usūl* (foundations) and *furūʿ* (specific rulings).

The *usūl* form the foundation. They concern the most fundamental assumptions about what the human being is, to whom he belongs, where truth comes from, and who ultimately holds authority. In other words, when we speak about the *usūl*, we are operating on the level of a worldview. From these foundations, then, emerge the *furūʿ*: the concrete attitudes, rules, and positions that are shaping everyday life.

Two very different foundations can therefore produce *furūʿ* that look strikingly similar, for example in matters such as justice, compassion, or social commitment. Yet these similarities do not change the fact that they still arise from entirely different foundations – foundations that, in reality, could hardly be any more different.³

You can think of it like a tree: the *usūl* are the trunk and the *furūʿ* are the branches. If you focus only on the branches, the trunk gets overlooked, which is why the impression of “compatibility” arises, even though the differences are, quite literally, fundamental in nature.

In practice, however, it often becomes clear that even when young Muslims recognise these differences, they attach little, if any, importance to them. For many, the origin of an idea seems secondary; what matters is simply whether it “more or less” aligns with Islam.

This, too, is no coincidence. As mentioned in the previous section, the environment we grow up in shapes the very framework within which we think. In our context, this often translates into a certain convenience - sometimes even indifference - combined with a pragmatic approach that asks above all whether something works and brings about benefit, not where it comes from (does it sound familiar at this point?)

³ At this point, it may be worth noting that such overlaps are only possible because Islam does not claim a “monopoly on truth” in this sense. In other words, Islam does not deny that truth can be found in other schools of thought and traditions. However, it claims for itself the sole purity, coherence, and preservation of truth.

Hashtag #utilitarianism). This tendency is further reinforced by a sense of Western superiority complex, where it is quietly assumed that one's own standards are self-evident and universally valid.⁴

The problem this creates for us as Muslims is that we no longer stop to examine and distinguish why we consider certain values to be right in the first place, i. e. whether they truly stem from Islam or simply from the society we live in. In this way - as we've touched on more than once - concepts, narratives, and moral ideals are constantly adopted and/or blurred together, simply because they sound familiar and we've grown used to them, not because we have consciously chosen - or submitted to - the foundation, the underlying worldview, from which they arise.

But standards are not a "buffet" from which you can simply pick and choose whatever values or principles you like from different sources. As we have seen, every idea carries with it a whole understanding of the world and of the human being, that, in the long term and inevitably, shapes our thinking, our actions, and ultimately our very identity, whether we like it or not.

The decisive question, therefore, is not whether certain positions happen to resemble one another, but which *usūl* we are quietly accepting and absorbing here when we adopt certain terms or values.

⁴ This attitude stems from a widespread Eurocentric worldview in which one's own norms, values, and categories are not perceived as one perspective, but rather as the "neutral," "objective," and "self-evident" foundation. Here, Western standards do not appear as ONE worldview amongst many others, but as "pure reason," "common sense," or simply "the way the world is" – which is utterly ridiculous, considering that China and India alone, under non-postcolonial circumstances, could not be any more different from the Western world and together make up over one-third of humanity as a whole.

This is precisely what makes it exhausting (and for many, seemingly unnecessary) to even examine fundamental questions of morality, freedom, or justice, or to trace them back to their ideological foundations. For us as Muslims, however, this is no small matter, for without this re-examination, it remains unclear whether our own values actually stem from revelation or whether foreign - or even false and forbidden - standards have crept in unnoticed, especially since we as Muslims should reclaim the discourse on these questions anyway.

Why Are You Muslim?

Now that we have clarified some key terms and hopefully shed a bit of light on the issue, this is no longer just about theory. It is about you.

Imagine someone comes up to you and asks straight away: “Why are you Muslim?” Would you know what to say? The real question is not whether you know what you have been *taught* to say, but rather: **what do you truly believe?**

Many of us grew up in Muslim households and learned certain “basics” of Islam, such as “no pork” or “relationships outside of marriage are haram.” And then puberty hit. From that point onwards, we often found ourselves standing at the same crossroads time and time again: Islam – or X?⁵ Am I truly convinced? Or did I just inherit this religion and now find myself giving in to external influences (of the predominant worldview)?

At this point, it is worth clarifying one thing: Islam is not something you merely inherit from your family and that’s about it. Rather, Islam presents itself as truth to be embraced, but not blindly. How could it even demand blind faith when the Qur’an itself talks about prophets like Ibrahim (peace be upon him), who consciously questioned the ways of his forefathers? Throughout the Qur’an, Allah addresses people who think, examine, and reflect – and who then make a conscious decision. And yes, this is directed at you, too.

My dear brother or sister – Allah calls upon you to examine His message, to recognize its truth, and then to actively affirm it. Just like back then, in the very beginning, when we, all of humankind, stood before Him – gathered as souls, still unshaped and without masks, without distractions, before false ideologies and expectations clouded our hearts. And when He asked us: {{Am I not your Lord?}} and we - without bodies, but with souls - testified, {{Yes, we testify (it)}}. (7:172)

Ask yourself: To whom are you giving that “yes” today? Who truly sets the standards for the choices you make? Is it society - you yourself included - or is it Allah, who knows you and every aspect of your life better than anyone else?

⁵ Here, “X” refers to the various influences that converge in a person’s mind and heart, competing for attention regarding what guides and drives their decisions and what they prioritize: their personal environment, societal expectations, ideologically shaped values – and, last but not least, their own desires.

Unfortunately, this question leads us to an uncomfortable truth: in our ideologically charged age, Islam is increasingly reduced to mere spirituality. This should hardly come as a surprise, considering the kinds of messages we are constantly exposed to everyday: “Be free and take control of your own life!” (liberalism), “Do what makes you happy!” (hedonism), “As long as it benefits you!” (utilitarianism), “Religion is a private matter!” (secularism), or “Only science leads to truth!” (scientism). In such a climate, religion may not be necessarily abolished, but it is certainly neutralised: as long as it merely inspires and comforts, but does not judge, restrict, or place any real demands, it is all fine.

The only “problem” here is this: the Qur’an does not describe itself merely as a source of inspiration or comfort. It also describes itself as **“the Decisive Authority”** (in other translations, “the Criterion” or “the Standard”) (25:1) – that which distinguishes truth from falsehood, judges human actions, and calls people to account.

To put it bluntly: Islam is not there simply to make you feel good. It calls you to submit – to the will of the One who created you, and who therefore possesses the absolute and unquestionable right to determine the boundaries and conditions of your very existence.

If Islam calls for submission, then it does so not only on an emotional level, but also on the level of authority. Allah, the Master on the Day of Judgement, says: **“And so We have revealed it as an authority in Arabic.”** (13:37) This is powerful. An authority is non-negotiable and demands respect. It is the final word when opinions differ and standards collide. Elsewhere, Allah describes it as **“a mighty Book. It cannot be proven false from any angle.”** (41:41–42) No worldview, no ideology, no zeitgeist can hold a candle to it.

And yet, many of us treat the Qur’an as though it has little to say about “real life”, except perhaps as a *quote of the day*. But Allah makes it unmistakably clear:

“Should you disagree on anything, then refer it to Allah and His Messenger, if you truly believe in Allah and the Last Day.” (4:59)

What is remarkable here is not only *what* Allah says, but *how* He says it. Referring matters back to Allah and His Messenger is directly tied to faith itself. In other

words, the question of what you should follow in times of disagreement is by no means a minor issue, but rather touches on the very essence of iman itself!

And there is something else that is crucial: referring to revelation is not limited in any way. Allah does not say, “Should you disagree on religious matters,” but simply: should you disagree on anything — *anything at all!* In light of this, the wording of the Qur’an establishes a fundamental standard for humanity as a whole, and all the more so for you as an individual: in the midst of this confusion of competing worldviews and value systems, revelation is meant to be the point of reference – especially in those areas where one feels most certain within one’s own environment. This is exactly why Islam is not something meant only for specific situations in life, but rather a comprehensive, universal compass that concerns the human being as a whole: their thinking, their actions, and their priorities.

Yet instead of being recognised as the standard to which everything is referred back, Islam itself is often turned into the object of scrutiny. Its teachings and rulings are measured against external standards such as social trends, moral “common sense,” or personal preferences. People no longer ask: What does Islam have to say about this?, but rather, they ask: Does what Islam says align with what I already believe to be true due to societal influences?

Does that sound like true submission to you? Like what “Islam” literally means?

Consider also the following words of Allah:

“But no! By your Lord, they will never be ‘true’ believers until they accept you ‘O Prophet’ as the judge in their disputes, and find no resistance within themselves against your decision and submit wholeheartedly.” (4:65)

And:

“It is not for a believing man or woman—when Allah and His Messenger decree a matter—to have any other choice in that matter.¹ Indeed, whoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger has clearly gone ‘far’ astray.” (33:36)

These verses should literally bring us to our knees and fill us with awe! If we acknowledge Allah as our Creator, the Qur'an as His definitive and unquestionable revelation, and Muhammed ﷺ as His final Prophet and Messenger, then we have already established who is in charge of our lives. Yet in these verses, Allah describes true iman as a state in which a person, after recognising this reality, also submits inwardly.

Don't get me wrong: This doesn't mean that we as Muslims are never allowed to ask questions or that we never struggle with Islamic rules and regulations. This inner struggle is only human and part of the journey. But the point is: When it comes to matters of truth, guidance, and justice, there is no second judge besides Allah. So whoever says, "Islam, fair enough, but in the end I still decide what I personally feel comfortable with and approve of," has not yet clarified the question of authority.⁶

In fact, we find a beautiful incident in the sira that speaks directly to this inner struggle. On one occasion, when the following verse was revealed, the companions of the Prophet ﷺ became deeply concerned:

"Whether you reveal what is in your hearts or conceal it, Allah will call you to account for it." (2:284)

They wondered: How are we supposed to handle THAT? How can we be held to account for something that we do not fully have control over (our innermost thoughts)? Troubled and uncertain, they went to the Prophet ﷺ, hoping he would bring them some clarity. Yet, contrary to what one might expect, he did not begin with a long explanation of the verse. Instead, he first taught them something far more fundamental: an attitude.

"Do you intend to say what the people of two books (Jews and Christians) said before you: 'We hear and disobey'? You should rather say: 'We hear and we obey, (we seek) Thy forgiveness, our Lord! and unto Thee is the return.'"

Only when they truly adopted this attitude did Allah reveal the relief:

⁶ Here, I want to stress and highlight once more: we all make mistakes, we all sin. But there is a difference between acknowledging that something is wrong and rejecting it at least somewhere in your heart - even if, on the other hand, your heart feels drawn to it - because you know who "the Boss" is, and justifying it inwardly, downplaying it, relativizing it, and ultimately resigning yourself to placing your own standards above those of Allah.

“Allah does not require of any soul more than what it can afford.” (2:286).

SubhanAllah – this incident in and of itself is truly a profound lesson in submission, for it shows us something very clearly: It is not understanding - YOUR understanding - that comes first, but rather the attitude, that is, the recognition and acknowledgement of authority. Islam teaches the human being to accept Allah as the Ultimate Authority and Standard before one falls into the fatal mistake of elevating oneself - through some ideology - to the position of judge and measure.

And once again, accepting Allah’s standard does not mean switching off your intellect – quite the opposite. Scholars such as Ibn Taymiyyah wrote entire volumes on how to deal with apparent tensions between revelation and human reason. Yet without opening that discussion here, one simple clarification serves our purposes: reason is a tool on the path to knowledge, but it is not the judge over revelation itself!

So if you answer this one question honestly - why you are Muslim and to whom you grant ultimate authority - many things begin to fall into place: morality, freedom, justice, identity, responsibility. Life may not necessarily become easier, but it becomes way more clearer – clear in what you live for, and by whose standards. And do not forget this: such submission is not a loss; it is a gift. Allah Himself describes His guidance in the following terms:

“O humanity! Indeed, there has come to you a warning from your Lord, a cure for what is in the hearts, a guide, and a mercy for the believers.” (10:57)

In short: Submitting to Allah means surrendering to the best guidance a person could ever possibly get and thereby finally be free - truly free! - from all the confusion and arbitrariness of this deceptive world.

And Finally: A Tool to Take With You

If we bring everything that has been said together, what remains at the end is not complex theory, but a very simple and very practical question: What do I base my decisions on – *truly*?

My dear brother or sister, we must understand this: the ideas, values, and life mottos surrounding us are not neutral. They never were. They are taught, modeled, and constantly reinforced by a global, multi-billion-dollar industry that spreads its narratives (or propaganda) around the clock through institutions such as the media, education, and popular culture, thereby directly influencing our minds and hearts. These structures have evolved over time and date back to colonial times.

And so it happens that we begin to sideline our own Islam and view outside values as superior – not because they are better grounded, but simply because they dominate the spaces around us. Secular, feminist, hedonistic, and scientific assumptions - the list goes on! - come to be seen as the “neutral,” “rational,” or “objective” baseline against which everything else is measured, not even just Islam. What most people fail to realise here is that these supposedly neutral starting points are themselves rooted in particular worldviews and ideologies.

This is precisely where the power of the concept of a worldview becomes evident. It reveals that not only do we ourselves look at the world through a particular “lens,” but so does the person we are talking to - more often than not realizing it. If you, however, are aware of your own lens, you gain a certain advantage over that kind of ignorance and blindness – not in the sense of arrogance or superiority, but in the sense of inner clarity, confidence, and empathy.

As Muslims, we *should* become aware of this lens. We should learn to recognise the underlying assumptions behind a statement, the view of the human being it presupposes, and the meaning it ascribes to life. And we should clearly call them out by name. Not to sound “clever” or “smart” in any way, but to show our counterpart that he - just like we and everyone else - operates according to a specific worldview, which makes it easier to challenge it and reclaim the discussion around many of these questions. Because, as mentioned before, unlike

most people, we as Muslims have - at least ideally - consciously chosen the lens through which we see the world.

For this reason, we would like to leave you with a simple tool you can use whenever you come across something that seems good, logical, appealing, or simply natural – whether it appears in the form of an opinion, a trend, a film, a life motto, or a moral stance. Pause for a moment and consider three things:

Source: Where does this idea originally come from? From which way of thinking, which view of the human being, which understanding of the purpose of life?

Standard: Who gets to decide here what is right, good, or desirable? Allah or human beings themselves?

Outcome: Where will this idea lead me in the long run? Does it make it easier for me to take Allah as the Ultimate Authority, or does it gradually train me to relativize His standards?

Let's take an example.

Statements like: “Family is everything,” “Traveling is my life,” or “I live for sports.”

At first glance, you might be wondering: What could possibly be wrong with that? These are perfectly normal sentences. In fact, I would even go so far as to say that many Muslims use them without giving it much thought. But again, that's the point.

Expressions like these are more than just figures of speech. Language shapes the way we think, and when something is described in this way, it is - at least from a linguistic perspective - given an absolute status. Then we are no longer talking about something that is simply important to us, but about something that drives us – that which guides our every decision, sets our priorities, and determines what we are willing to sacrifice other things for.

Quite apart from the fact that this hierarchy already clashes with Islam where Allah and His Messenger ﷺ come first, there is an even subtler assumption hidden beneath it: the idea that life has no objective purpose. How so, you might ask? Well, welcome to 20th-century existentialism, which essentially argues: There is no God, and therefore there is no objective meaning to life. Meaning arises only from

whatever makes you feel fulfilled or happy and thus, is purely subjective. Your purpose becomes whatever gets you out of bed in the morning, whatever drives you, whatever gives your life a sense of significance. Or, in the words of the existentialist philosopher Albert Camus: “The meaning of life is whatever keeps you from killing yourself.” Sounds promising, doesn’t it?

Another example: “My body, my choice.”

What is often presented as a natural demand for autonomy and self-determination actually assumes something very specific: that the human being is the absolute owner over himself – not entrusted by God, not accountable before Him, but the final authority. The body is no longer seen as a trust, but as autonomous property, and Allah disappears entirely from the picture. And the ideology behind it? You may have guessed it already: feminism, with a sprinkle of humanism and individualism (and many more!).

Over time, this kind of analysis can even become pretty fun and enjoyable. Because with this kind of lens, there’s simply no way you can “unsee” it. As a result, you stop being easily fooled and begin to examine things more carefully – like a detective uncovering the wolf in sheep’s clothing. Or think of it like the game “Guess Who?”, but the “Ideology Edition.”

And once again: the point is not whether you personally agree with such statements exactly as they are meant. I know that some readers might still be thinking: “This is exaggerated. You’re reading way too much into it.” But that is the entire problem this white paper has been trying to highlight all along.

As we have already seen, ideas do not need to be consciously adopted as convictions in order to influence us. It is enough that we become accustomed to their language, imagery, and logic, so that standards shift and, at some point, it is no longer clear what actually comes from Islam and what doesn’t. This is exactly how kneejerk reactions like the following arise: “Islam has granted women rights; feminism fights for women’s rights – Ah! You see! They go hand in hand!” What rarely gets asked is the crucial question: Which rights? Based on what foundation? With which limits? And accountable to whom?

That is why it is more important than ever to remember why you are Muslim and what that actually means – before you end up in a place where you never intended

to go. Especially in this day and age we are living in, with the rise of AI, the confusion caused by the jinn, and the fitnah of the Dajjal that still lies ahead of us, this clarity is not a luxury, but absolutely essential (I very much hope you aren't wearing a scientific lens and had to pause at this mention).⁷ For this is precisely where it becomes dangerous - without being rooted in a firm foundation, and thus easily unsettled and influenced - to piece together one's identity from fragments of different worldviews, as if one could simply mix and match them.

Only by accepting Islam as a comprehensive worldview, one can truly practice it and become a Muslim: someone who submits to Allah and rejects and renounces everything else that is not Allah.

Therefore: remain vigilant. Stay rooted. And have the courage to be different – even when the majority around you does not understand it.

“O believers! Enter into Islam wholeheartedly and do not follow Satan's footsteps. Surely he is your sworn enemy.” (2:208)

⁷ If you did have to pause here because it sounds more like “fantasy” or a “fairy tale” to you, then try applying the tool to this very scientific lens, which is the idea that only what you can see truly exists, and that science alone is the path to truth, not something “irrational” like religion. A small tip: start with the question of what actually exists. Does God exist? → Check. Then move on to the “source”: Where does knowledge come from?

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