



Introduction

God grants wisdom to whom He pleases,
And the recipient of wisdom gains an overflowing bounty,
But only people of understanding
Will secure the meanings of the Message
(Inspired by Surah 2: 269).

A Hebrew woman of King Solomon's day may have been flattered to have been told, "Your hair looks like a flock of goats" (inspired by Song of Solomon 4: 1), but say that to a modern American woman, and you're liable to get smacked up side the head!

The Muslim term *ijtihad* describes, by a general definition, the practice of studying Scriptures, seeking various meanings, and applying those meanings to today's lifestyle and situations. Most Americans today have never appreciated the beauty of a flock of goats descending rocky cliffs, but through *ijtihad* we can interpret the meaning of Solomon's verse: "Your hair graces your face as beautifully as a flock of goats graces the hillsides." Now doesn't that sound like a better hair-day?

Apparently, it is in accordance with God's will that the Scriptures are often vague, open to interpretation, and contain hidden meanings. It is the duty of every believer to seek God and to ponder His Word in search of the deepest, purest meanings. As an act of charity, we must then share the bounty of our individual journeys of *ijtihad*.

The beauty of God's Word is in its fluidity –its ability to remain as constant as the level surface of still waters, while at the same time adapting to societal and personal diversities just as water fills the various

depressions beneath the water's surface. God's Word is as true today as it was in the times in which it was given, and it speaks to today's societies and individuals just as it did to those who first heard the Revelations, but people and cultures vary and change with time, and the meanings and applications of God's Word must remain flexible to meet contemporary needs. People were not created to suit the Scriptures, but rather the Scriptures were created for the sake of each individual person, for various social and faith communities, and for the universal community. As our world becomes more complex, more diverse, and more communicable, we must evaluate and apply the Scriptures in a way that propels us into a spiritual renaissance that gives new meaning and purpose to the global family. Through ijtiḥād, we can find solutions to personal, community, and world conflicts, problems, and challenges. We can stop the insanity of a world governed by greed, corruption, immorality, lawlessness, and brutality. We can find the answers for today in the Books of yesterday. We must turn to God's eternal Word for guidance in our temporality so we may be deserving of the Everlasting.

During our home school Qur'an and Bible study, my then-young daughter interrupted her reading to say, "Mama, I know you wrote these books yourself, because everything in here is about me." If such love is so apparent even to a child, then obviously the recorded words of Our Heavenly Guardian should not be altered, but must remain mysterious so that each person in each generation can seek and find the personalized message –God's love letter– designed within the written Word. Elusive and beautiful echoes of God's Truth beckon from the printed pages as a continuous, living blessing that cannot be confined to ink and paper. If you delve with purity of mind and gentleness of spirit, God will write His message onto your soul with the fresh ink of His enduring grace. Ijtiḥād must begin with sincere submission to God and a commitment to following His commandments. By allowing the Spirit of God to fill your inner being with light, you become a clean page onto which God can renew His Word.

A second step towards ijtiḥād is delving into research concerning the subject of any verse in question. You may plunge into physics, chemistry, biomathematics, or a variety of other sciences, or history, geography, or new developments in archaeology. Next you must turn your attention to the views and interpretations established by the Jewish sages and rabbis,

Islamic *mufasssireen* (interpreters of Qur'an), and Christian theologians. Apply constructive criticism in order to refine and reform the established views if possible. If, after having done these things, the traditional meanings and applications are found to be insufficient for the contemporary society or for yourself personally, the act of *ijtihad* may be necessary in order to apply new, enlightened meanings to Scriptures of old.

The Spirit of Wisdom is the attribute of God that links Him to Humanity. Each person is endowed with a spark of the Spirit of Wisdom so we might seek and find God. It is up to each individual, however, to allow God's breath to fan that spark into a flame of enlightenment, or to turn away from God and allow the spark to dim until the soul is left to wander in darkness.

Happy is the person who finds Wisdom and attains understanding. The Spirit of Wisdom is more valuable than silver, gold, and rubies. Her¹ way is pleasant and her path is peaceful (inspired by Proverbs 3: 13-14, 17).

Leave ignorance behind, and live in the light of knowledge (inspired by Proverbs 9: 6).

...God has bestowed the Book [of Scriptures] and Wisdom and taught you things you never knew. Great is God's grace! (inspired by Surah 4: 113).

¹ Jewish sages used feminine pronouns in reference to the Spirit of Wisdom. God encompasses all the beautiful attributes of women as well as men, and *He*, *She*, and *We* in reference to God should be considered all-encompassing pronouns.



CHAPTER 5

Travel Notes: Who are God's Chosen People?

The Jews are God's people.
He made them His children
And revealed His glory to them.
He made a covenant with them
And gave them the Mosaic Law.

They have the true faith and have received God's promises.

They are descended from the famous Hebrew ancestors.

Messiah [in his earthly appearance] is a Jew.

May God who rules over all people be praised forever!

(Inspired by Romans 9: 4-5).

Scientists have found in the DNA code a common factor that carries the potential for every race (that now exists) and which shows that all Humanity (as it now exists) is descended from the same original two parents (which believers have come to know as Adam and Eve). Archaeologists believe that civilization began in Africa (Iraq/Iran) and that western continents became populated when travelers crossed ice sheets or a now-submerged land bar spanning the ocean between Siberia and Alaska, and then traveled further south in small boats.

The Genesis account explains how Humanity yielded to the potential for sin until all of Humanity was corrupt except Noah and his family. The Lord God said to Noah, "You are the only man in the world who does what is right" (inspired by Genesis 7: 1). Theoretically, after the Great

Deluge, Noah's three surviving sons (Shem, Ham, and Japheth) and their wives repopulated the earth (Genesis 10: 32) with the three primary races and their divisions.

Shem's son, Arpachshad, was the direct ancestor of Abram who became known as Abraham. The Lord God promised Abraham, "I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. Through you, I will bring blessing upon all people" (inspired by Genesis 12: 3). This promise became fulfilled through Abraham's two sons: Ishmael whose descendant begot Muhammed who brought the knowledge of the One True God to a pagan culture, and Isaac whose descendant begot Israel whose descendant begot David from whose lineage is expected the Messiah who is to bring God's peace and justice to the world.⁸⁸

Isaac begot Jacob, whose name became Israel (Genesis 32: 28), who was the father of Joseph who was sold into slavery by his jealous brothers. Joseph was taken to Egypt where, through a dramatic emerging of events, he was reunited with his family from which grew the Hebrew nation we call Israel.

In the course of time, Joseph and his brothers and their children died, but their children's children prospered and the Israelite population became great in Egypt.

Later, there reigned a new Egyptian king who did not know the wonderful story of Joseph. He said to the Egyptians, "These Israelites are so numerous and mighty that they are a threat to us. In a time of war, they might join our enemies and take control of our country. We must find some way to keep down their population."

So the Egyptians made slaves of the Israelites and subdued them with hard labor (inspired by Exodus 1: 6-10).

Through the miraculous deeds of Moses who led the Israelites from bondage, God revealed Himself and His power to the Israelites. The Qur'an reminds, "O Children of Israel, remember how I bestowed My favor upon you when I chose you above all others" (inspired by Surah 2: 47).

Moses warned:

⁸⁸ In Chapter 8, I will show that Jesus, believed by many to be the Messiah, is simultaneously from the House of David and from the House of Imran.

When the Lord God spoke to you from fire on Mount Sinai, you did not see any form, so for your own good do not commit the sin of making any form [for the sake of worship]. Do not create idols in human form or in the forms of animals, birds, reptiles, or fish. Do not be tempted to worship the sun, moon, planets, or stars. The Lord God allows other people to worship these things [because, for the time being, they only know Him through His creation], but you are the people He rescued from the blazing furnace of Egypt. He brought you out of bondage to make you His own Children as you are today.

The Lord God will disperse you among other nations where few of you will survive. You will serve false gods of wood and stone –gods that cannot see, hear, eat, or smell. In those times, you will look for the Lord God, and if you search for Him with sincerity of heart, you will find Him. When you are in difficult times and terrible things happen to you, you will finally turn to the Lord God in obedience. God is merciful. He will not abandon you or destroy you, and He will not forget the covenant made with your ancestors. Because He loved your ancestors, God chose you, and by His great power He Himself brought you out of Egypt (inspired by Deuteronomy 4: 15-20, 27-31, 37).

God refers to Israel as His servant and has charged Israel with the responsibility of being light for the world. Personifying Israel:

The Lord God says, “This is My servant whom I strengthen –the one I have chosen and with whom I am pleased. I have filled him with My Spirit, and he will bring justice to every nation.”

[Speaking to His servant, God says,] “I, the Sovereign Lord, have called you and empowered you to guarantee justice for the world. Through you, I will make a universal covenant and bring light to all people. You will open the eyes of the blind and release the prisoners of sin” (inspired by Isaiah 42: 1, 7-8).

These verses have an important secondary meaning as they also refer to the Messiah, the promised servant who is expected to bring God's justice and peace to the entire world. The Messianic Age is the great hope of the Jews, and its concept of justice and peace should be the hope of all those who truly love God and seek His will.

As light for the whole world, religious Jews believe they should live such righteous lives that they will witness truth on God's behalf. Jews believe that we can usher in the coming of Messiah by sincere repentance and performing deeds of charity and righteousness, but that, if the world proves itself unworthy, it must suffer until no one is left for whom there is hope. According to the sages, "Great is repentance because it brings the redemption near" (Joma 86, Talmud); "If you are worthy, I [God] will hasten (the Messianic Age); if you are not worthy, it will be in its time" (Sanhedrin 98, Talmud).⁸⁹

By their own admission, Jews are a "stiff-necked people" stubbornly rebelling against God despite His preference for them. "The Children of Israel did not listen and obey, but stubbornly followed their own evil desires" (inspired by Jeremiah 11: 8).

Concerning Levi, one of the descendants of the priesthood, God said:

My covenant with (Levi) was one of life and peace. He taught truth and walked in righteousness. He turned many from sin. The words of a religious leader should impart knowledge and wise instruction because he is God's messenger. But the religious leaders turned from the Straight Way and caused others to stray. They violated the covenant I had made (inspired by Malachi 2: 5-8).

But God already had a plan!

⁸⁹ One may wonder, if all time (past, present, future) exists simultaneously, how can anything we do change what already is in the time-space continuum? Here we may insert the theory of alternative realities, which are either actualized or collapsed according to the choices we make and the direction the world of struggle compels upon us (ie, natural disasters). If we accept this theory, then we cannot say that we are bound to an inescapable destiny for which God judges us unfairly. The unauthenticated alternatives may be restored on the Day of Resurrection, and those who inherit Earth may be able to take advantage of second chances.

The Lord God declared, “I am going to make a new covenant with the Jews. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I led them out of Egypt. They broke that covenant! In this covenant, I will put My teaching within their souls. Then they will truly be My children. They won’t have to teach one another because everyone, influential or not, will obey Me” (inspired by Jeremiah 31: 31-34).

God does not inspire sin, but He allows people to follow their own evil inclinations, and He often uses their sins to fashion His will. It was part of God’s plan to use Israel’s disobedience in order to bring all people back to Him. Messianic prophecy promises:

It is not enough for Israel alone to be restored. My servant will be a light for the non-Jews so that salvation will be available to everyone (inspired by Isaiah 49: 6).

Although Jesus came only as a messenger, Christians and Muslims believe that he will return with the power and authority promised for Messiah. According to the New Testament, however, the apparent sacrifice that he made (as the suffering, albeit victorious, servant) has already brought non-Jews into the family of chosen children.

Jesus brought peace by making Jews and non-Jews one people. With the sacrifice of his body, he demolished the separation. Because of Jesus, Jews and non-Jews can worship in one accord. Jesus holds the faith community together and helps it develop into a sacred union dedicated to the Lord God. With the peace that binds us, we must preserve the unity that the spirit of Jesus gives (inspired by Ephesians 2: 14, 18, 21-22).

Not all Abraham’s descendants are the children of God. It is not heritage that makes a person a child of God; instead, it is the covenant that brings a person into God’s family (inspired by Romans 9: 7-8).

God's Spirit joins Himself to our spirits to make us His children (inspired by Romans 8: 16).

Your spirits and thoughts must be made completely new, and you must acknowledge your new self, which is created to reflect the character of God and reveal a life that is righteous and holy (inspired by Ephesians 4: 23-24).

After Jesus' Gospel invited all people to join God's chosen people, it was time for God to fulfill the promise made to Abraham concerning Ishmael who was not one of the Judaic ancestors. God had said to Abraham:

I have heard your request about Ishmael, so I will bless him and give him many children and many descendants. He will be the father of twelve princes from whom will come a great nation. I will keep My promise to you and to your descendants in future generations as an everlasting covenant. I will be your God and the God of your descendants. You and your descendants must all agree to circumcise every male among you. Each one must be circumcised as a physical sign of the everlasting covenant. On that same day, Abraham obeyed God and circumcised his son Ishmael and all other males in the household (inspired by Genesis 17: 20, 7, 10, 14, 23).

God revealed the universal Scriptures of the Qur'an because "God had overlooked the times when people did not know Him, but now He commands everyone everywhere to turn away from sin" (inspired by Acts 17: 30). Although Christianity was thriving, by Muhammed's time, Roman Catholicism had become corrupt with pagan and political influences and needed the direction provided by the Qur'an. Now, however, the descendants of Abraham are in conflict, and this conflict must end in order to usher in peace among all faiths, and all believers should pray for peace between Palestine and Israel.

Jewish author Edward Miller writes:

At the end of his life, Abraham finally found peace, a peace described in the Torah as full and complete, a profound peace, a peace which gave meaning to all the pain he had experienced. For in the last moments of his life, Isaac and Ishmael together comforted their dying father. Abraham saw his two sons joined by his bedside. As Isaac and Ishmael stood side by side, reconciled brothers in unity of purpose to God and love of their father, Abraham saw the peace he had yearned for his entire life, and he saw more.

As Abraham saw the reconciliation of his sons, he also saw future peace between their descendants. As Isaac and Ishmael stood together over him, so too, one day would their children stand together. Abraham saw that the terrible but inevitable conflict between the descendants of his two sons, like the conflict between his two sons, was destined to conclude in true and eternal peace.

....

The holy perfection of Heaven is achieved through God's unification of opposing forces. Opposing forces will be reconciled on earth also, with God's help, in Jerusalem, the place where God planted a piece of heaven out of which flowed the physical universe and from which God's forgiveness and peace will flow to all mankind, starting with forgiveness and peace between the children of Abraham.⁹⁰

Among the words revealed to Muhammed:

Did He not find you as an orphan and give you shelter and sustenance? Also, He found you wandering, and He provided guidance; and He found you destitute, and He made you independent. Therefore, do not treat the orphans harshly or turn away the petitioner. Proclaim the bounty of your Lord (inspired by Surah 93: 6-11).

⁹⁰ Ibid (n 36), Miller, p 203.

These verses are not directed only to Muhammed, but for all of us who were spiritually orphaned and lost, and then adopted into the fellowship of God's chosen people. Now that we can claim our inheritance along with the Jews, we must not judge others who are living outside God's family, but we must minister to their searching hearts and witness to them about the wonders of God so they too might enter into the covenant community.

Shortly after understanding the universal message of the Qur'an, I had this dream:

A community decided to give a reception party for their friend whom everyone loved.

One group said, "We'll plan the party and decorate with sunny yellow balloons."

"No," another group said, "We want to decorate with vivid red balloons."

A third group said, "Don't be ridiculous. The balloons should be royal blue."

As the groups argued, their beloved friend decided not to come to the reception until the community realized how beautiful the party would be with a variety of yellow, red, and blue balloons.

I was also given the meaning of the dream:

Those wanting yellow balloons represent the Jews; those wanting red, Christians; and those wanting blue, Muslims. The friend is Messiah, and the party represents his coming.

Many Jews believe that the spirit of Messiah walks among his people today as he waits for the right time to appear physically. Perhaps the right time will be when Jews, Christians, and Muslims strive to honor God together as one covenant community celebrating the threads that bind us together while respecting the unique strands that make us different. Surely that would be pleasing to God.

As we ride this beautiful planet together, may the consonant threads –honesty, truth, justice, kindness, and generosity– of the world’s religions of light⁹¹ create a pure spirit of goodwill. In addition to the three Abrahamic faiths, there are other major, world religions that have had and continue to have great impact on world history and civilization and current events. From the Sanskrit Vedas of the Hindus to the teachings of Buddha, all these religions share beams of light that guide toward peace. May the whole world follow the light! Peace on Earth will encircle Humanity when we discover that we each have been given a spark of God’s wisdom and that we must help one another to fuel that spark until we are all aglow with the light that will prevent Humanity from being swallowed by unrelenting darkness. All those who follow God’s will are God’s chosen people, and we must all work together to establish God’s will throughout the world.

⁹¹ Sometimes called “the living religions,” all world religions (except satanic cults) seek spiritual light.