

Making things easy - *Taysir* – the need of our time

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There is no doubt that Islam defines certain boundaries, and these are all well known, stealing, killing, adultery, alcohol and pork. However, people bring numerous additional restrictions into the religion by extension and these, when bundled together can change the character of the religion to an austere code which makes it difficult for people to enjoy life and sometimes even live it!

This complicated version of Islam also puts people off from embracing it. People then start believing that Islam is difficult and enduring this hardship is a mark of sincerity to God. But is this really how Islam was meant to be?

The religion is simple and easy

The intention of our religion is to inspire people to love God and care for their fellow human – not to make life difficult and impractical.

In fact, Allah makes it clear in the Qur'an that our religion is simple, the same simple religion of our beloved nomad-Prophet, Ibrahim (AS), which is inherently free of difficulties, complexities and hardships. By reflecting on the life of a nomad, it should become crystal clear how simple and uncomplicated the essence of our religion is. Ibrahim (AS) did not excel by imposing complex laws and rituals upon himself, but in the immense love, devotion and connection he had with his unseen friend, the Creator:

“He has chosen you and has imposed no difficulties on you in religion; it is the way of your father Abraham.” (Quran, surah Hajj 22:78)

Indeed, one of the purposes of revelation is to manifest God's desire to make things better for us, to make life easier. The religion is for our betterment, not to impose undue rigours and hardships.

“...Allah intends for you ease and does not intend for you hardship...” (2:185)

“...Allah does not intend to make difficulty for you...” (5:6)

The Prophet came with a way that was meant to actually *ease* religious restrictions:

"Those who follow the messenger, the unlettered Prophet, whom they find mentioned in their own (scriptures),- in the law and the Gospel;- for he commands them what is just and forbids them what is evil; he allows them as lawful what is good (and pure) and prohibits them from what is bad (and impure); **He releases**

them from their heavy burdens and from the yokes that are upon them." (Qur'an 7:157)

Rule-hunting is a distraction from what Islam is really about

Sometimes, by seeing the purpose of Islam as being dos and donts, we are tempted to judge people on the basis of how strictly they follow rules. This is even though Allah is more interested in our hearts and our good deeds than superficial things, as the Prophet (S) taught us:

"Allah does not look at your outward appearance and your goods. He looks only at your hearts and your deeds." (Muslim, Birr, 33; Ibn Majah, Zuhd, 9; Ahmad b. Hanbal, 2/285, 539)

It is unfortunate that many less-educated Muslims restrict Islam to an extensive body of dos and donts which they proceed to judge others against.

Yet Islam is primarily a simple, spiritual code, showing people how to answer the call of their innate nature (fitrah), thereby connecting to their Creator and serving their fellow man. This was the uncluttered path of all prophets.

Islam's main prohibitions are clear and largely obvious because most people agree on them, e.g. lying, cheating, adultery, stealing, killing, exploitation, chasing people out of their homes, being unfair.

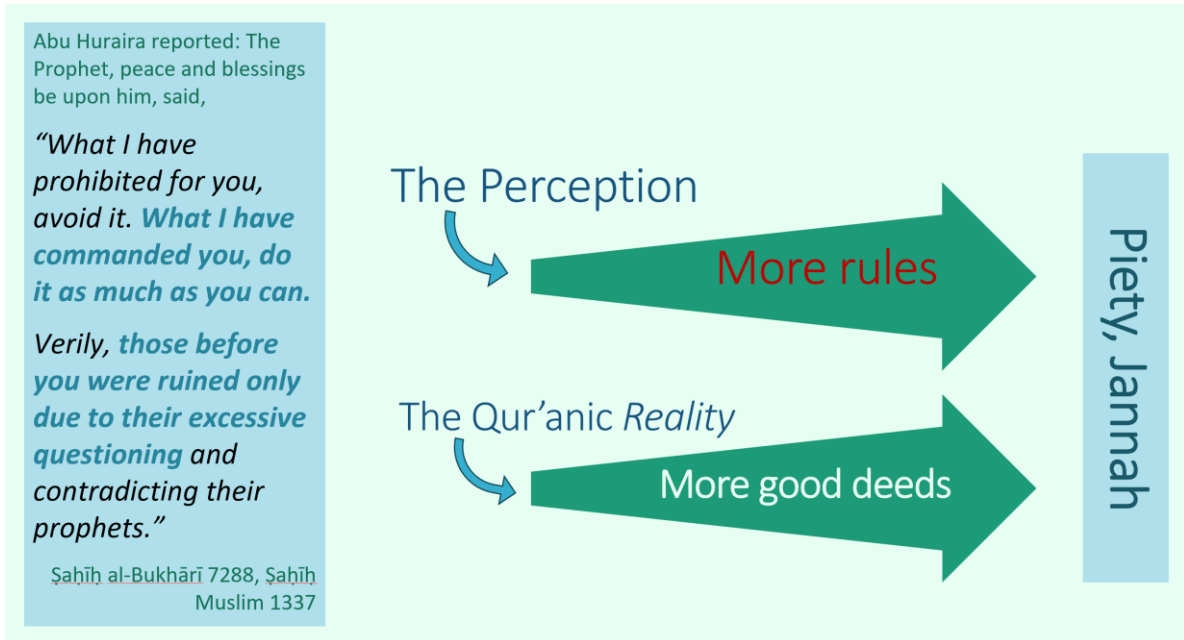
What marks people out in God's eyes is their relationship with Him and how well they behave (e.g. controlling anger, forgiving people) and care for His creatures.

Consider all these teachings about service to God's creatures specified by the Qur'an (and associated with immense rewards):

- Stand up for justice (16:90, 42:39)
- Make a change by encouraging the common good and preventing wrongs (31:17)
- Encourage kindness and compassion (16:90, 93:17)
- Be kind/generous to orphans (2:83, 2:177, 93:15, 4:36)
- Be kind /generous to the needy (2:83, 2:177, 93:16, 4:36 , 70:24-25)
- Do good to family, neighbours, friends and travellers (2:83, 2:177, 4:36)
- Spend freely out of love of God, whether in prosperity or adversity (are not miserly, but not excessive), and regularly (2:3, 2:83, 2:177, 3:134, 4:37, 16:90, 23:4, 42:38)
- Free the enslaved (2:177, 93:13)
- Be kind to those in your charge (4:36)

E.g. call to mind the Prophet (S) teaching us about the forgiveness of a prostitute simply because she showed mercy to a thirsty dog.

So jihad, striving in our religion is not about enduring hardship through any rigours the faith puts on you, rather it's about doing your utmost to strive against the weakness of the self, and striving to uphold justice and truth and care for the oppressed and needy.



The above hadith makes it clear that rule-hunting through excessive questioning about prohibitions leads to God’s displeasure and ruin.

The dangers of straying towards hardship

Sometimes a desire to be safe in practising the religion can lead us to impose restrictions which were not actually intended by God. The result is that a misplaced zeal can lead us to rendering prohibited what is actually permitted, and that is as great a crime, as permitting what is prohibited.

“Say: do you see what Allah has sent down for sustenance? Yet you have made some part of it halal and some part haram.” (Qur’an 10:59)

“O believers! Do not forbid the good things which Allah has made lawful for you, and do not transgress. Indeed, Allah does not like transgressors.” (Qur’an 5:87)

This also applies to trying to over-engineer prohibitions by delving/ engineering interpretations of ambiguous texts that might lead to a prohibition. Instead, the Prophet (S) instructed us to not delve into a matter when it isn’t clearly prohibited:

‘The halal is that which Allah has made lawful in His Book and the haram is that which He has forbidden, and that concerning which He is silent He has permitted as a favour to you.’ (al-Tirmidhi and Ibn Majah)

The same goes for trying to make obligations (fard) when they have not been stated:

On the authority of 'Ali (RA): "When the following was revealed: **"And Hajj (pilgrimage to Makkah) to the House (Kabah) is a duty that mankind owes to Allah, for whoever can bear the way."** [3:97] They asked: **'O Messenger of Allah, is Hajj**

every year?' He remained silent. They asked: 'Is it every year?' He said: 'No. If I had said yes, it would have become obligatory.' Then the following was revealed: **"O you who believe! Ask not about things which, if made plain to you, may cause you trouble."** [5:101] (Ibn Majah 2884)

Many other western Muslims are looking for lenient legal opinions exactly because out-of-context rulings make it difficult to live an active and genuine life in society and might force Muslims to either be true to an isolationist fiqh and cut away from society (which is clearly not what Allah wants from us) or be active in the real world and feel constantly guilty that they are breaking God's law all the time.

This is exactly what Imam Ibn al Qayyim was referring to when he warned against the simplistic, blind following of old, out-of-context opinions, even when they make life impractical:

*"Legal interpretation should change with the change in time, place, conditions, intention and customs... **ignorance of this fact has resulted in grievous injustice to the shari'ah, and has caused many difficulties, hardships and sheer impossibilities, although it is known that the noble shari'ah, which serves the highest interests of mankind, would not sanction such results.**"* (From I'lam al muwaqqi'een)

Choosing interpretations that will lead to isolation are against the way of the prophets: the Prophet (S) has taught us to engage in society, despite its harms. How else can we impress people with our values? Ibn 'Umar reported: The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said,

"The believer who mixes with people and is patient with their harm has a greater reward than the believer who does not mix with people, nor is patient with their harm." (Sunan Ibn Mājah 4032, Sahih (authentic) according to Al-Albani)

In our context, the most important reason for making people aware of lenient opinions is that harsh and impractical, out-of-touch rulings are creating dissonance in our young people or worse still, leading them to conclude that Islam is incompatible with their contemporary lives and values. As a result, young Muslims are leaving Islam in large numbers, even if they don't always express their lack of faith openly, out of fear.

If only they had known that Islam is not as difficult as some people were making out...

The easy way is the sunnah way

We often forget that in Islam, it is better to choose the easier of two valid options – in fact this is the sunnah. 'Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) states that,

“The Prophet (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) never chose between two things, one difficult and the other easy, except he chose the easier one as long as there was no sin in it.” (Sahih Muslim no. 6047)

According to another report, the Prophet (S) advised: **“The best of your religion is that which is easiest, the best of your religion is that which is easiest.”**

(Musnad Ahmed (3/479). It was classed as hasan by the commentators.)

The following incident shows how concerned the Prophet (S) was that we do not make the religion unduly arduous:

Mihjan ibn al-Adra' said: I came with the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), and when we were at the door of the mosque, we saw a man who was praying. He said: **“Do you think he is sincere?”** I said: **“O Prophet of Allah, this is so and so, he is one of the best of the people of Medina, or one of those who pray the most of the people of Medina.”** He said: **“Do not let him hear you lest you be doomed” – two or three times – “you are an ummah for whom I want ease.”**

Musnad Ahmed (5/32) - classed as hasan by the commentators on the Musnad)

Learned scholars make things easy

The reality, which we do a great job of keeping secret, is that God's law and heritage of shari'ah is expansive and lenient and true faqihs (scholars that deeply understand context and the religion) are liberal in providing *rukhsahs* – concessions for context and finding practical ways for people to live their lives without breaking a commandment.

There are five leading maxims agreed by all the madhabs and are derived from multiple Islamic teachings to help scholars and judges 'sense check' their judgements. One of these maxims states: **Hardship begets easing** (*Al mushaqqatu tajlibu at-taysir*).

Shaykh Abdullah bin Bayyah was asked what to do when confronted with different scholarly opinions. In his reply, he focussed on finding an opinion that helps people, not simply following the obvious majority opinion:

"What is obligatory is to investigate the correct opinion in every issue, and to investigate the opinion that actualizes benefits for the Muslims and protects them from harm as long as [that opinion] is not free of evidence [from the sources of Islamic Law]. This type of investigation requires insight, knowledge and a deep understanding..."

<http://binbayyah.net/english/what-is-the-ideal-position-for-a-muslim-to-take-when-confronted-with-different-scholarly-opinions/>

Imam Al-Shatibi states,

'Concessions were, without any doubt, legislated by Islamic Law.

The concessions related to joining prayers [for those who meet the requirements], breaking the fast [for the one who meets the requirements], or using what is forbidden due to necessity, are clearly legislated for the removal of hardship and difficulties in the absolute sense.

Therefore, if the intent of Islamic Law was to make things difficult or overly burdensome, there would have never been such concessions nor removal of difficulties!

al-Muwafaqat vol. 2 pg. 121-122

Won't always seeking easy opinions dilute the religion?

Some people argue that if you follow the easiest opinion in everything, eventually there will be nothing left of the religion. In reality, all that will be left, is what the religion is actually meant to be – the true sunnah of the Prophet – simple, easy, practical!

As we have established, piety and Allah's pleasure is actually based upon how much *good* we do, how much *help* we offer people, how much we *worship* Allah and *love* and *adore* Him; piety is *not* based on how many strictures we can impose on ourselves – that was a misunderstanding taken on by previous religions.

Imam al-Shatibi states,

“Through the details [of law] one [will find] the intent [is clear for] the removal of hardships and burdens. Thus we [the scholars of fiqh] must judge, in the universal sense, utilizing the removal of hardships and difficulties in every area based on our survey of the law.”

Imam al-Shawkani, an independent 18th century mujtahid wrote: ‘Taking the difficult opinion is not something desired. On the contrary, taking the easier opinion [is what agrees] with the objectives of Shariah.’

(Sunnat al-fatwa wa fiqh al-Aqaliyat of Dr. Bin Bayyah)

Picking rulings because they are harder is actually therefore, *against* the sunnah.

Undue rigour in rules will simply exhaust people and we often see that – young people who were very zealous in their early years, later go the opposite way:

Abu Huraira reported that the Prophet (PBUH) said,

“Verily, the religion is easy and no one burdens himself in religion but that it overwhelms him. Follow the right course, seek closeness to Allah, give glad tidings, and seek help for worship in the morning and evening and a part of the night.”

(Sahih Bukhari, no.39)

The Prophet (S) warned, **“Ruined, were the extremists (mutanati’oon).”** (Sahih Muslim, Book 34, Number 6450]

Imam Nawawi states that in the context of the narration, it refers to “those who delve too deeply, are extreme, and go beyond bounds in their speech and actions.” [Sharh Sahih Muslim]

Ibn Atheer stated: “ (Motanati'oon) in the above hadith are those who probe into matters and insist on hardship in what they say.” [An-nihayah Fi Ghreeb Al-Hadith Wa Al-Atharr]

A number of leading contemporary scholars have therefore highlighted the importance of taysir, e.g. Shaykhs Yusuf al Qaradawi, Abdullah bin Bayyah (Hamza Yusuf’s teacher), Imam Suhaib Webb and Shaykh Yasir Qadhi.

Taysir mirrors God’s mercy

Seeking out difficulties is not only against the sunnah, but also ignores the boundless mercy that God Himself reminds us about. God does not expect perfection from us, in fact our admission of imperfection is more pleasing to Him. He simply wants us to avoid the heinous sins and then just do our best.

“If you avoid the most heinous of prohibited conduct We shall conceal all your sins and admit you to a great honour.” (Quran 4:31)

Professor Hashim Kamali explains this verse:

“Thus it is noted in the relevant commentaries on this verse that avoidance of the major sins acts as a concealer on minor ones, an indication that God will forget the latter. Al-Qaradawi has consequently drawn the conclusion that it is enough in our time to comply with the principal teachings of Islam and avoid the major sins, in order to gain the good pleasure of God.”

(Kamali, Shari’ah Law, p.292)