

(Note: Wherever the word “you” or “your” is singular and refers to one human being, it is printed with an italic *y*, as in: you. Wherever such a word refers to God, the letter *y* is printed in capital, as in: You.)

For Fast 5 – August 16

Topic: Belief — fundamental beliefs of Islam

Chapter 2:

- 2 This Book, in which there is no doubt, is a guide to those who keep their duty,¹
- 3 who believe in the Unseen² and keep up prayer and spend (on good works) out of what We have given them,³
- 4 and who believe in what has been revealed to you (O Prophet) and what was revealed before you,⁴ and of the Hereafter⁵ they are sure.
- 5 These are on a right course from their Lord and these it is that are successful.

Notes:

1 The application of the word “book” (*kitāb*) to the Holy Quran occurs in very early revelations, and shows clearly that the Quran was from the first meant to be a *complete book* that existed not only in the memory of people but also in writing. The Quran is here described as affording guidance to those who keep their duty, because the sense of keeping his duty is innate in man. No guidance would benefit those who have no regard for their duty.

2 The Unseen here stands for Allah, a belief in Whose existence is the cardinal principle of religion.

3 In Islam prayer assumed a regularity and a form. However, it is not the mere observance of the form that the Quran requires, but the keeping of it in a right state, i.e. being true to the spirit of the prayer. Spending out of what one has been given stands for *charity* in its broadest sense, or the doing of good to all creatures. This verse lays down the two prime duties which are necessary for spiritual advancement: prayer to God and service to humanity.

4 Islam requires faith in all the prophets of the world and the recognition of truth in all religions. The words *what was revealed before you (O Prophet)* include revelations to all the nations of the world, for we are elsewhere told that “there is not a people but a warner has gone among them” (35:24). A Muslim is therefore one who believes in all the prophets of God, sent to any nation, whether their names are mentioned in the Holy Quran or not.

5 A life after death, according to Islam, implies a state of existence which begins with death, but a complete manifestation of which takes place later, when the fruits of the actions done in this life take their final shape. A belief in God and a belief in the Hereafter, being respectively the first and the last of the fundamental principles of Islam as mentioned here, often stand for a belief in all the fundamental principles of Islam, as in 2:8, 2:62, etc.

Note that *beliefs* (in God, revelation, life after death) are here spoken of together with *actions* (prayer and charity in the broadest sense). Belief is meaningless without developing a relationship with God through *prayer*, and doing good to others by *spending out of what one has been given*. ‘Spending’ does not mean spending money only, but using all the powers and skills one has for the benefit of others.

Chapter 2:

177 It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards the East and the West,¹ but righteous is the one who believes in Allah, and the Last Day, and the angels and the Book and the prophets,² and gives away wealth out of love for Him³ to the near of kin and the orphans and the needy and the traveller and to those who ask and to set slaves free⁴ and keeps up prayer and gives the due charity; and the performers of their promise when they make a promise,⁵ and the patient in distress and affliction and in the time of conflict. These are they who are truthful; and these are they who keep their duty.

Notes:

1 The essence of religion is faith in God and benevolence towards people. The turning of the face to the East and the West refers to the outward act of facing a certain direction when saying prayers. This, though necessary, should not be taken as the real object of prayer, which is in fact meant to enable one to hold communion with the Divine Being and to imbue oneself with Divine morals as explained further on.

2 The Book stands for Divine Revelation in general or the scriptures of all the prophets.

3 The list of beliefs here is followed by the actions that are necessary in order to be righteous. The very first action mentioned (giving of wealth for various objects) is said to be out of *love for God*. The love of Allah is here, as in many other places in the Quran, stated to be the true incentive to all deeds of righteousness.

4 The basis was thus laid down for the abolition of slavery.

5 The performance of promise on the part of individuals as well as of nations is one of the first essentials of the welfare of humanity, and hence the stress laid upon it by the Quran. Faithlessness to treaties and pledges on the part of nations has wrought the greatest havoc on humanity. Just as no society can prosper until its individual members are true to their mutual agreements and promises to each other, so humanity at large can never have peace unless the nations are true to their agreements.