"IF THE BOOK IS READ WITH THE SERIOUSNESS AND ATTENTION IT MERITS, IT HAS THE POTENTIAL TO HAVE AS PROFOUND AND FAR-REACHING AN IMPACT ON RELIGION, SOCIETY, GOVERNMENT AND HUMAN RELATIONS AS CHARLES DARWIN’S ORIGIN OF SPECIES EVENTUALLY CAME TO HAVE ON SCIENTIFIC AND SOCIAL THOUGHT NEARLY A CENTURY AND A HALF EARLIER."

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DRIVING ISLAM HOME TO THE WORLD -- ONE CONCEPT AT A TIME!
Continuity and Change in Islam

Dr. Pasha

Boundaries Define Things and Give Them Character

One of the beautiful things about being a Muslim is knowing that Islam is Islam, and everything else is, well, everything else.

At least with regard to most things. At least in a big, broad, general sort of a way.

The Qur’an says it all in its own miraculous words with breathtaking simplicity, elegance and clarity.

Here is the Qur’an: Qad tabayyanar rushdu minal ghayyi.

Here is my paraphrase: “Truth has now become distinct from falsehood.”

Therefore, the Qur’an goes on to declare, coercion has lost its validity in human affairs, particularly in matters of belief and faith.

A Perfect Revolution for Basic Human Freedoms

Before Islam, human beings and fundamental freedoms were a contradiction in terms. After Islam, there was a perfect revolution in human thought, belief, behavior and culture and these freedoms became a household word.

Force as a means of addressing issues and achieving objectives, then, became obsolete and useless. This is my paraphrase and extrapolation, naturally. As for the Qur’an, here is its own miraculous rendering of that concept in four words, one of them a preposition: Laa Ikraaha fi Addeen.

Call it a revolution in four – or is it three? – words. Or simply call it a miracle. What you cannot doubt is that it is a complete revolution in human affairs: for human freedom and dignity and, truly speaking, for peace on earth.

Islam’s Gift of Fundamental Human Rights and Freedoms

Thus were ushered into human lore and culture – under the aegis of Islam and by a clear directive from the maker and master of this world – the following revolutionary rights and freedoms, all of them tightly intertwined with one another, and practically every one of them unknown and unavailable to the broad masses of humanity before Islam:

a. **Freedom to Read.** Islam started out with a generalized and universal command to all of humanity that said: “Read,” which meant not only that reading from then on was a basic human right for all human beings, but also that reading should henceforth become a fundamental human activity in their daily lives.

Further, this made it clear to anyone who could see that from that point on “The Pen,” and not the sword, was to be the main arbiter of human affairs. That is partly why the Qur’an has a
whole chapter called “The Pen,” but not once throughout its entire text of 114 chapters and over 6000 words does it even once use the word “The Sword”.

b. **Freedom to Write.** If the word Qur’an means “To Read,” the other expression that the Qur’an frequently uses for itself - *Kitab* - means “To Write” or “A Written Book” or “Something Written.”

This again meant that from then on writing, just like reading, was going to be a basic human right available to all human beings.

It also meant that all human beings from then on must make writing a fundamental aspect of their daily activities and use it as a means of organizing their own personal lives and advancing human knowledge, culture and civilization.

c. **Freedom to Believe.** People should be free to believe whatever they wanted to believe, and no one should force anyone to believe one thing or another.

d. **Freedom of Conscience.** Everyone should be free to use their conscience as their own personal guide in negotiating life’s challenges and opportunities, and no one else should force, coerce or brainwash anyone or exercise personal, psychological, social, cultural, religious, political, economic or any other form of tyranny or domination over anyone’s mind.

e. **Freedom of Expression:** People should be free to speak their mind without fear of reprisals.

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**Ability to Speak and Express Oneself:**  
**Essence of Human Life on Earth**

The Qur’an makes it clear that the power of speech – “Expression,” as the Qur’an puts it, with original Arabic term being “Bayaan” – was a miraculous gift to human beings from God Almighty, and no one in any way should truncate or curtail or take away from any human being the right to speak and express themselves.

In fact, much more meets the eye when you look at the text of the Qur’an closely - and when the Qur’an opens up to you and reveals to you some of the gems of meaning and implication contained in its unique divine phraseology. You then see that the Faculty of Expression goes to the very essence of human creation and existence on earth.

Listen to the Qur’an say it in its own words:

> *Arrahmaan!
> Allamal Qur’an!
> Khalqal Insaan!
> Allamahul Bayaan!*

Here is my paraphrase:

> Loving, Merciful One!  
> Taught the Reading – Qur’an!  
> Created the Human!
Taught him Expression!

These are some of the most fundamental freedoms that Islam came into this world to grant and guarantee every human being. Roll these five freedoms into one and you have the basic framework of Islam as it applies to human life in general. Together, these three guarantees constitute the core of a perfect revolution for peace on earth.

Islam: A Foundation for Peace on Earth

That is what Islam really is: a most solid foundation for peace on earth. Fundamental human rights and freedoms constitute the core of this foundation.

Islam came into this world to guarantee these rights and freedoms to all human beings – regardless of any consideration of race, religions, wealth, property ownership, gender or social status.

Freedom of belief, conscience and expression, as well as the right to read and write, guaranteed to all? Men as well as women; the rich as well as the poor; the free as well as those held in bondage by other human beings?

Can you imagine a sweeping statement like that – coming from any source – smack in the beginning of the 7th Century?

But that is what true revolutions are made of. And those are the kind of improbable things associated with Islam, the Qur’an and the life the Prophet, Sallallahu Alaihi wa Sallam, that I call miracles – true and lasting miracles that you can see with your own eyes.

Islam, thus, showed up in this world, 1400 years ago, as the originator and guarantor of these five basic freedoms for human beings of all races, genders, classes and creeds. Thus, Islam declared liberty to be a defining characteristic of human life in this world.

Islam, thus, made freedom a fundamental foundation of peace on earth. That means take away people’s rights and freedoms, and you will be sowing the seeds of discord, trouble and turmoil in the world.

God’s Boundaries Save Lives

It is also comforting to know that Islam comes with certain essential boundaries clearly drawn. Once again, no one can say it better than the Qur’an itself.

Qur’an: Tilka hudoodullahi fa-laa taqrabooha.

Paraphrase: “Those are Allah’s boundaries, so don’t go near them.”

In life, boundedness is often a blessing. It is what defines and delimits things and gives them their character and shape. It is what makes life on earth possible. It is also what distinguishes the so-called higher forms and stages of life from the amoeba and the larvae and the blob.

Where boundaries are indistinct or porous, result is chaos and confusion, which is the opposite of Hidaayat or guidance, or Rushd as the Qur’an called it in the earlier passage that I cited above, to provide which God sent down Islam from heaven to earth.

Thus, in a sense, Hidaayat – or Rushd – is the knowledge of where the boundaries are with regard to
everything. One of Islam’s major contributions to human life on earth is to provide that knowledge to human beings with regard to things that matter most in life.

Often, these are things the details and inner workings of which they are not able to figure out by themselves.

That is why in Islam many things come with their own boundary definitions attached to them. For example:

Qur’an: Kuloo washraboo wa laa tusrifoo.

Paraphrase: “Eat and drink but do not cross the boundary into profligacy and wastefulness. Do not overindulge. Do not waste.”

Moderation, Thy Name Is Islam: How Islam Nips Totalitarian Tendencies in the Bud

No system on earth has more iron-clad guarantees of moderation and reasonableness built right into its core than does Islam.

Nor does a system provide its adherents stronger incentives, guarantees, opportunities and mechanisms for the exercise of liberty and freedom of choice in their affairs.

The flexibility in the above example – Eat, drink but do not be wasteful! – clearly reflects the need to give individuals the freedom to make their own personal determination as to what behavior is or is not wasteful, and where exactly those lines are located that should not be crossed.

It is an attempt by Islam – and the Qur’an – to nip in the bud totalitarian and authoritarian tendencies in individuals, groups, societies and cultures that often seek all kinds of excuses to control and truncate individual human rights, dignities, choices, freedoms - and lives.

Imagine edicts from heaven that might say: “Thou shalt not spend more than $10 on food per day!”

Or “Thou shalt eat only two loaves of bread a week!”

Or “Thou shalt only travel by donkey cart!”

If the Qur’an had shown up with statements like that, it would be no different from any other book in this world. The Qur’an, then, would have betrayed itself as a document of human roots and authorship and thus of limited use and validity.

In that case, its claim of being a direct divine revelation of universal and timeless validity and applicability will no longer be credible.

Islam Is Not Guesswork: It Is Direct Divine Revelation

At the same time, Islam is not guesswork to be reinvented by each generation to fit its own special wishes, preferences and proclivities or to suit the whims and fancies of specific coteries of various élites-de-jour.

Nor does Islam allow itself to be modified or reinterpreted to fit the requirements of a particular political, social or cultural climate, even though Islam is a perpetually living and dynamic system that continually meets and accommodates the challenges of change and growth in every age and
Thus, Islam is a set of firmly documented teachings, concepts and practices – documented in a book: *fi kitaab*.

And that *kitaab* is in our hands today, the same in every way that it was in the hands of the *Companions*, May Allah bless them, of the Prophet, *Sallallahu Alaihi wa Sallam*, who received it directly from him in *Seventh Century* Arabia, who in turn received it from the angel Gabriel, peace and blessings be on him, who in turn was given it by God Almighty himself.

The same angel Gabriel that had brought divine revelations to all the other prophets and messengers of God Almighty, may God bless them all, before Prophet Muhammad, *Sallallahu Alaihi wa Sallam*.

Islam, thus, is not a record of humanity’s cumulative wisdom. Nor is it the fruit of combined authorship on the part of specialists and experts over the ages. But rather it is divine wisdom in God’s own words.

That is why from the time the Qur’an first began its revelation 1400 years ago to this day, no one has been able to surpass or match the Qur’an in either its diction or its content and meaning, even though the Qur’an repeatedly challenges those who question its authenticity or divine origin to do so.

**Islam:**

**A System Rooted in Original Divine Text**

Islam thus is raw transmission of a body of divine texts and teachings directly from the Prophet, *Sallallahu Alaihi wa Sallam*, to the rest of humanity in every age and place.

It is this divinely revealed book, in its most authentic and original form, that the world has in its hands today, namely, the Qur’an.

Except that God in his infinite love and mercy not only sent a book to provide guidance to humanity, but he also sent along with that book a man to teach, explain, illustrate and model that book. That man – the Prophet, *Sallallahu Alaihi wa Sallam* – then set about doing precisely that: to train individuals and groups, and to build and establish a complete society, culture and civilization based on the teachings and principles of that book.

Ever since that time, people called Muslims have read that book every day; they have read the sayings and words of the Prophet, *Sallallahu Alaihi wa Sallam*, verbatim on a daily basis; they have tried their best to follow his example in their daily lives; and they have observed the core and fundamentals of Islamic teachings and principles at broader levels as best as they could.

In general, Muslims did not try to change Islam to fit their own ideas and desires. Instead, they tried to build, inform and guide their own thinking and behavior in line with Islam. Islam thus provided them the general mold and framework in which they tried to cast their philosophies, ideologies, thinking, behavior, lives, personalities, societies, cultures and civilizations.

And they had good reason for doing that: they had a very good basis both in the theory and practice of Islam.

**Islamic “Reformation”: Colonialism in a New Garb**
Islam, owing to its being a direct divine revelation, is immutable and fixed in its core parameters. At the same time, by the very token of its being a direct divine revelation, Islam is also dynamic and resilient as no humanly devised system is or can be.

This is one of the greatest miracles of Islam – a living miracle in every age and place. It is as solid and immutable as it can be. And yet, at the same time, it is permeable and accommodating to a degree that baffles the mind and defies imagination.

That is why all talk of an Islamic Reformation along the lines of the Protestant Reformation that occurred in Christianity is either well-intentioned but naïve babble or malicious and arrogant nonsense and political propaganda – or perhaps both.

Often, it is little more than old Colonialism, Imperialism, Racism and other Western ideologies of military conquest, social and political control and economic and cultural domination in a new garb.

It is a crude and opportunistic attempt by many Western propagandists and axe-grinders to demoralize Muslims and demonize Islam and to plunder Muslim wealth and resources. It is a platform to deny the world of Islam all freedoms, rights and liberties, including political and cultural freedoms.

**Protestant Reformation:**
A Partial Islamization of Christianity

If those who, either on their own or for mercenary reasons, call for a Christian-type Islamic Reformation had any true sense of history, they would know that Protestant Reformation was in reality an attempt at the Islamization of Christianity that had crystallized under the impact and inspiration of Islam.

While Christianity resisted a full and wholehearted embrace of Islam, it could not withstand the pressure to mimic and emulate Islamic teachings at least in part. That is partly how, after the Reformation, the total control of the Pope over the lives of the Christians, as we see it today among Catholics, was replaced with the primacy of the Bible as the putative word of God.

Thus came about the Reformation of the Christian religion under the impetus and in the direction of Islamic teachings.

**Another Miracle:**
Islam Is Dynamic and Resilient

As I said earlier, Islam, paradoxically, both resists and fosters change because, unlike man-made ideologies and philosophies, Islam is perfectly equipped, and very uniquely suited, to meet the challenge of changing human needs and situations everywhere and forever.

In fact, this was, and continues to be, one of the living miracles of Islam. It was, and remains, standing proof that Islam is a gift from God Almighty and not a human brainchild.

For, no human system of any kind can possibly withstand or deal effectively with changing times and circumstances indefinitely, as Islam has been able to do for the past 14 centuries.

It is a contradiction in terms to utter the words permanence and change in the same breath with regard to any single aspect of human life on earth, except Islam, which personifies that very contradiction in every phase and aspect of its teachings and makes it a reality.
Only a divine system can do that. No human system can either accommodate or anticipate all change without fundamentally changing itself and losing its soul and character in the process.

That is what real miracles are made of.

**A World Made in the Image of Islam**

Let me go a step further and clearly state what many people seem to be either incapable of seeing or saying: Today’s world is in many ways a world made in the image of Islam.

Let me say that again, but somewhat differently. If you live in this world, chances are Islam played a role in your make-up and in what you do, and in the make-up of your parents and grandparents.

That is because as time went by, and as all kinds of *man-made* rules, doctrines and teachings failed to satisfy rapidly changing and growing human needs, the world began incrementally embracing the teachings, models and methods of Islam.

But it did so without actually acknowledging this fact and without giving any credit to Islam or Muslims.

Islam was perfectly placed to provide this kind of leadership to the world, because Islamic teachings, being totally divine in their origin and nature, contained the natural scope and flexibility to meet the strains and demands of changing times.

This allowed Islam to do what other religious systems – or other human systems of any other kind – were neither equipped nor capable of doing.

As a result, in spite of all the variations and deviations that attacked it along the way, Islam remained basically intact, authentic, uniform, unadulterated and perfectly recognizable and predictable through the ages.

Islam thus provided the world an inevitable and often the only point of reference by which to manage and organize its life on earth.

What is more, as time went on, the world gradually changed to fit the teachings, contours and specifications of Islam and not the other way around.

**Islam’s Constancy in the Face of Change**

Islam, thus, remained constant in its core teachings in the face of all the winds of change that were sweeping the world. And Islam continued to provide direction and impetus to that change wherever and however it could.

Islam of course could do it because of the exhaustive first-hand documentation that was – and is to this day - available to it in the form of the Qur’an and the Hadith. Qur’an, of course, being the book of summary divine teachings directly from God, and Hadith being the record of the detailed implementation of the Qur’an in the life of the Prophet, *Sallallahu Alaihi wa Sallam*, and thousands of his noble *Companions*.

And both of these primary sources of Islam thereafter remained at the disposal of the Muslims – and at the disposal of the world – in the form of the unbroken and continuous day-to-day practice of Islam, on a global scale, by generation after generation of Muslims, since the time of the Prophet, *Sallallahu Alaihi wa Sallam* to the present day.
Thus, Islam remained a living, vibrant and visible presence for all these 1400 years for the entire world to see and emulate.

World Adopts Islamic Teachings and Practices, But Gives Islam or Muslims No Credit

And that is precisely what the world did.

It saw Islam both in theory and practice, liked what it saw and proceeded to adopt its teachings and practices as it needed them. But often it did so in bits and parts and without giving Islam or Muslims any credit.

In part, the failure of the world to embrace Islam fully and completely, and its inability or unwillingness to openly acknowledge its debt to Islam and Muslims, was due to several reasons. Among them were political rivalries that often marred Muslim-non-Muslim relations in many parts of the world. Among them were personal jealousies of leaders and their lust for wealth and power.

Among these reasons was also the failure of Muslim leadership to work as a unified structure to present Islam to the world as a solution to its problems. In other words, the Muslims in those days did no better job of acting as the designated agents and representatives of the Prophet, Sallallahu Alaihi wa Sallam, to present Islam to the world and invite the world to Islam in a coherent and concerted manner, than they are doing today.

Nor was the Muslim leadership smart enough – or really cared – about claiming any credit on behalf of Islam or for Muslims for all the benefits that the world was deriving from the presence of Islam in its midst or along its borders. Times were often good for the Muslims and Muslims generally sat back and lived their lives by default in the lap of whatever scraps of luxury and tranquility were available to them.

Recalling the Handwashing Discovery by ASM in Mid-1990s

Taharat – cleanliness and hygiene – are among the most central teachings of Islam. And yet they are also among Islam’s most elementary teachings.

The Qur’an teaches them.

The Hadith teaches them.

And the Muslims in every age and place – such as they were or continue to be – have practiced them without a moment’s interruption in their history.

At the top of the list of these unbroken practices for all these 1400 years has been the practice of Handwashing.

The world knew it. And it saw it everywhere, everyday. The world knew that the Muslims – whatever else you may say about them – were absolutely and unquestionably the preeminent and indefatigable Handwashing people of the world.

And yet, the American Society of Microbiology (ASM) seems to have completely ignored this more-than-obvious fact when, in the mid-1990s, it began its research project on Handwashing and launched its campaign to teach school children the virtues of Handwashing.

Did the ASM know about it? I don’t know, but it should have.
Did the ASM give Islam and Muslims any credit for it? I don't know, but it should have. Did Muslims claim any credit for it for Islam and for themselves? Not to my knowledge, but they should have. They should do it at least now. And they should do it after clear and open acknowledgment of where they heard it first and who told them about it: I mean about this business of making the ASM acknowledge its debt to Islam and Muslims.

Islam Is a “Path,” Not a Desert Expanse or a Jungle Bush

What people need to understand is that Islam is a well-defined path. It is a Siraat, a road, not an uncharted desert expanse, a trackless tundra, an open prairie or a jungle bush. Qur’an teaches us – in Surah Al-Fatihah – to ask God every day and several times a day to show us the way, the path and a straight path on top of that. In fact, a Muslim must make that prayer to God Almighty no less than 17 times a day.

Ihdinas siraatal mustaqeem.

Paraphrase: “Show us the straight path.”

Path Means Boundedness and Directionality

And we all know path means lines. It means distinct demarcations. And it means clear direction and well-defined boundaries and milestones.

That means Islam does not, cannot and will not, permit drinking on weekends or debauching on holidays just because the youth in Europe, America or elsewhere may be clamoring to do that. What Islam will do instead is work with them diligently to explain to them, to cajole and advise them and to plead with them that these things are contrary to divine teachings. Islam will focus its attention and energies in pleading with these young people to change their ways and enter the blissful fold of Islam without encumbrances of addiction to sex, alcohol or drugs on their shoulders.

King Henry VIII of England Starts a New Religion to Marry a New Wife

King Henry VIII of England wanted to marry a new wife. His solution: start a new religion. That is how the Anglican Church or the Church of England came about. And that is how English monarchs came to be the “Defenders of the Faith.”

I think. All ye historians! Check that out and let me know.

The fact is, often Christianity caved in to pressure from some of its adherents and tried to accommodate their wayward ways by changing its own ways and teachings. Thus, from being a guide, leader and teacher to its flock, it became at times a pawn and a hostage in the hands of those who did not want to mend their ways to fit divine directives but wanted the divine law to change to fit their demands.

King Henry VIII of England had a roving eye and over a life full of marital marauding and adventures he had collected an impressive array of wives. And now he wanted to marry yet another wife.
But in order to make that happen, he needed help and cooperation from the Pope in Rome. And he wanted the Pope to make the necessary religious changes to accommodate the wishes of the English monarch.

When the Pope refused, King Henry broke from Catholic religion in Rome and appointed himself the head of a new church that came to be called the *Church of England*, thus, in a sense, starting a new religion of his own.

All of this to be able to marry a new wife, something the Pope in Rome would not sanction.

There Is No Such Thing as “Halaal” Beer in Islam

Islam cannot afford the luxury of caving in to pressure from its professed adherents.

Islam is not a mammoth organization that is constantly worried about survival and therefore must retain its worldly viability at all costs. Islam is not a membership structure, whose existence is threatened every time the membership volume flags.

To the contrary, Islam is a do-it-yourself *Deen*. That means it is a simple message of personal hope, practice and piety that any man or woman can practice and preach in the privacy of their own hearts as well as in the public glare of the mosque and the market.

Islam, therefore, does not dilute or compromise its teachings to retain or attract membership. It lays out what is right and wrong in fairly clear terms and allows people to make up their own minds.

That is why in Islam there is no such thing as “Halaal” beer or “Halaal” pork. As a result, the Islamic spirit is not served by Muslims, or anyone else, trying to market or consume non-alcoholic substitutes for beer by calling them “Halaal” beer.

Alcohol carries with it a simple count of *Haraam* or forbidden. Those who imbibe it commit a single sin. But inventing or selling or drinking alcohol substitutes that are made to pass for the forbidden spirits is much worse.

It undermines the basic validity of Islamic teachings. And it opens the door to the charge of fraud and pre-Christian Philistinism. It is a throwback to the suspect ways of the Pharisees and the Money Lenders that corrupted the Temple in Jerusalem during the time of Jesus, May God bless him.

Islam Rolls with the Punches and Rises up Strong Every Time

As a result, whenever pressure builds on Islam from those who would either disregard or tamper with its teachings, Islam rises up fresh and strong every time. Rather than change its ways, it stands tall and proud as a beacon of hope for the lost and as a point of return for the wayward.

That means Islam would continue to frown on women roaming outside the privacy of their homes in T-shirts: regardless of the waist and bust sizes of those women; regardless of whether or not those T-shirts are wet; and regardless of whether the wearers of those form-fitting, contour-enhancing T-shirts live in Cairo or Karachi or in Australia, London or Hawaii.

And regardless of whether this happens in the year 2000 or 4000, if the world lasts that long. And regardless of how unattractive or objectionable it makes Islam in the eyes of however many people in this world.

Nevertheless, will some of those who profess Islam continue to engage in these dubious practices?
Yes, they would. Without a doubt.

But most of them will not want to change Islam. And most of them would know that what they are doing is wrong and most of them would leave it at that. And Islam would march on with or without them the way it always had – firm and immutable in the core of its teachings.

**Will Some Muslims Misbehave? Surely They Will!**

Will some people claiming to be Muslim drink, engage in fornication or adultery, gamble and backbite or miss *Fajr Salaat*? Yes, they most surely will.

Will some women from Muslim households go out on streets or go to the beach wearing T-shirts? They are quite likely to.

But will any of these forbidden or questionable practices find legitimacy in Islam or alter the norms of Islamic belief or behavior?

Today, tomorrow or at anytime in future?

Absolutely not!

That means Islam would not brook *Zuhr or Asr Salat* (prayers?) being reduced from the mandatory four units to one *Rak’at* or unit.

Nor would Islam allow the *Salat* (prayers?) to be read or performed in any language other than in original Arabic.

Nor would Islam allow the fast of the month of Ramadan to be cut down in length from dawn to lunch time.

It never did in the past, and it never could in future.

Thus, regardless of who follows or does not follow Islam, the Islamic teachings themselves will continue strong, firm and unaltered, as humanity’s most cherished and needed possession on earth.

That is why they have God Almighty’s eternal protection behind them.

**God Almighty’s Commitment to Protect Islam**

Islam is God’s gift to humanity and he has undertaken to protect and preserve it for all time so that humanity will have some place to turn to when it really has its back to the wall.

Islam is the special arrangement that God has put in place to be the guardian of true faith and practice on earth for all of humanity for all time to come. It is the standard against which all other human ideas and teachings are compared and validated.

And that is the story of the *straight path* of Islam in a nutshell: Islam came into this world to protect all other divine “*religions,*” as their adherents call them. As a result, what Islam seeks to do is to change the world while itself remaining pure and unchanging in its core beliefs, norms and practices.

This is one of the great miracles of Islam. For, no system of human invention can conceivably pass this test.
It is added *proof*, if I may use that expression, that Islam is indeed a divine and not a human system and that it came directly from God Almighty.

END

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