



# BEARING TRUE WITNESS

DR. LAURENCE B. BROWN



# Bearing True Witness

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## Introduction

One of the first lessons I learned as a new author was to narrow the subject of my books, and define the audience for which they were written. Hence, the dream of one book grew into the reality of two, with a third planned to complete the trilogy.

This present book is the second in the series.

The first book in this series was written to guide those seeking the religion of truth. This first book, entitled *The First and Final Commandment* (Amana publications), argues the continuity of revelation from Judaism to Christianity, and then to Islam.

This present book - the second in the trilogy - provides guidance in the practical aspects of the Islamic religion, and is intended for converts and for those Muslims who seek to clarify their religion.

The third book in the series is in the planning stage, as of the date of this writing, but is intended to address the many disingenuous criticisms and blatant slanders leveled against Muslims and the Islamic religion. Topics such as polygamy, slavery, racism, the female headscarf, oppression of women, terrorism, "fundamentalism," idolatry and others are to be discussed with similar methodology to that employed in *The First and Final Commandment*.

The order of this series of books, then, is to present the Islamic religion as the final revelation and fulfillment of predictions of the Jewish and Christian scriptures in the first book, to suggest the manner in which the Islamic religion should be practically applied in the second, and to provide the confirmed Muslim with defense against the most common slanders against Islam in the third.

Regarding the present work, Muslims frequently observe that converts to the Islamic religion progress through several stages of ideological, spiritual, and psychological growth before achieving a semblance of religious maturity. The period of maturation varies from one individual to another, as does the end result. Some Muslims have shown remarkable religious maturity as children. Others experience dramatic reversal of ideology late in life. The renunciation of extreme Sufism by the famous eleventh century (CE) Imam Al-Ghazali (full name: Abu Haamid Muhammad Al-Ghazali) in later life, and the refutation of his errors in aqeeda by the tenth century (CE) Al-Ash'aree (full name: Abu Al-Hasan 'Ali ibn Ismaa'eel al-Ash'aree, to whom the Ash'aree aqeeda is attributed), also late in his days, serve as prominent examples. In more recent history, Malcolm X's transition from the racist and ideologically condemned political cult known as the Nation of Islam to orthodox (Sunni) Islam is perhaps the best known example.

In the beginning, Muslim converts frequently embark upon widely divergent ideological paths on the grayscale that spans the gap between the clear purity of correctness and the murky darkness of deviation. Although many eventually settle upon the path of Islamic correctness, a large number also become confirmed upon degrees of deviancy, sometimes of such a mild degree as to warrant naught but advice, occasionally of such magnitude as to warrant punishment according to the Shari'a (Islamic law), and all too often of such severity as to invalidate a person's shahada (testimony of faith) entirely, meaning that the person in question, whether knowingly or not, invalidates their claim to being Muslim and leaves the religion of Islam.

For the individual, the importance of correctness of religious path relates to salvation. For the community, the importance relates to the errors of the deviants misrepresenting Islam.

The author, being a Western convert to the Islamic religion, has lived the heedless hedonism that accompanies absence of religion, the awakening of spiritual awareness in the heart of the seeker, the

soulful search for truth, the cautious sifting of religions for ingredients of value and consistency, the serenity of embrace of truth when found, and times both pleasant and unpleasant following and at all points in the process. Having lived and worked as a Muslim in the Western countries of America and England, and subsequently in the Holy City of Medina Al-Munawara has conferred a depth of experience that may be of interest to those who seek a similar path.

Nonetheless, what follows is not a book of memoirs, but rather of analysis. The fact is that the presented issues have been analyzed by Islamic scholars since the time of revelation, and the correct path for each issue has been defined since the time of the last messenger, Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) ibn Abdullah The paucity of information available in the English language, however, results in many Western converts being ill- informed and, as consequence, easily misled.

The information that follows is the author's best attempt at rectifying that unfortunate situation.

## 1) The Commitment

The choice having been made, a person enters Islam and becomes Muslim with the shahada, or testimony of faith. This testimony (transliterated from Arabic) reads, "Ash-hadu an la ilaha illallah (u), wa ash-hadu anna Muhammad an Rasulallah" and is translated, "I testify that there is no god (also translated, 'there is no object worthy of worship') but Allah and I testify that Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) is the Messenger of Allah."

The shahada is most traditionally stated in public, for in general, converts should let their conversion be known. However, should the situation necessitate it, the shahada may be stated with none other than The Creator for witness.

The shahada not only affirms divine unity and the Prophethood of Muhammad ibn Abdullah (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) but also commits the faithful to all that is enjoined by the religion, and to abstain from all that is forbidden. Hence, although the statement says nothing about prohibition against fornication, adultery, alcohol, etc., acceptance of these prohibitions is inextricably coupled with the shahada. For to accept Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) as a Prophet, and for that matter, as the final Prophet, mandates acceptance of the message and laws that were revealed through him. Anything less is hypocrisy.

The first duty of a convert, then, is to fully understand the meaning of the shahada, and begin to live it. Scholars teach that the shahada is not valid without seven elements: knowledge, sincerity, honesty, love of the shahada, certainty, abstention from anything that negates the shahada, and application (or, in other words, to live the testimony of faith) Many excellent books have been written on this subject, and there is little or no point in duplicating previous works, although a brief outline is perhaps in order. To begin with, the commitment of greatest and most obvious importance when stating the shahada is the recognition of monotheism (i.e., the oneness of Allah, which is captured in the Arabic language by the term tawheed). This point cannot be stressed too strongly. Islam is the religion of tawheed. Any compromise to Islamic monotheism, any compromise to the supremacy and absolute Oneness of Allah constitutes shirk. Shirk exists in varying degrees, from major shirk, which takes a person out of Islam, to minor shirk, which ranks as a major sin, to *riyaa*, or hidden shirk. Examples of major shirk are to worship other than Allah or to join partners in worship with Allah. Examples of minor shirk include swearing an oath by other than Allah or trusting to 'good luck' charms. Lastly, examples of hidden shirk are to beautify a person's prayer when aware that someone else is watching, or to give more in charity than a person would otherwise when aware that the donation is being observed. Given the critical importance of these partner subjects of tawheed and shirk, further study in books devoted to these subjects is strongly recommended. (Such books are readily available online through a variety of Islamic bookstores).

Subsidiary to tawheed is declaration of Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) as the final Prophet and messenger of Islam - an acknowledgement of particular importance due to the fact that so many messianic pretenders have advanced false claims of Prophet (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) hood over the years, misguiding masses down diverse paths of deviancy in the process. Elijah Poole Muhammad, the founder of the Nation of Islam, is but one such example. Others of his misguided and misguiding breed include Mizra Ghulam Ahmad, the founder of the Ahmadiyyah (also known as the Qadianis), Bab Mirza Ali Muhammad and Mirza Husain Ali (the founders of the Baha'i) and a plethora of other colorful and peculiar, but influential, messianic pretenders to have surfaced over the past 1,400 years. Acknowledgement of Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) as the final Prophet of Allah closes the door of the mind to consideration of the claims of all such messianic pretenders. Furthermore, the completion of the chain of Prophethood through the person of Muhammad ibn Abdullah (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) is consistent with predictions of previous scripture (for fuller explanation, the reader is referred to *The First and Final Commandment*, the first book in this series).

Finally, implicit in the declaration of the shahada is acceptance of the fundamentals of Islamic faith (known as 'pillars/ for without these pillars of faith and practice, a person's commitment to the religion collapses). Any mainstream Islamic bookstore catalogs several books which define these pillars of Islamic faith and practice. From small pamphlets to extensive tomes, available books range from the superficial to the scholastic. In brief, the essential articles of faith are six: belief in Allah, His angels, the revealed scriptures, the messengers, the Hereafter, and Divine decree. The required duties of worship are five: declaration of faith upon entry into the religion (i.e., shahada), prayer five times daily (at prescribed intervals, and in accordance with the rules of prayer and purification), annual fasting of the month of Ramadan, annual payment of the poor-due, and pilgrimage to Mecca during the period of Haj, once in a lifetime, if physically and financially able.

So that's it! Just say the shahada, adopt the beliefs and practices, and you're on your way. Easy, right? Weeeeeell, yes, but no. If there is one point of overbearing importance that needs to be conveyed to new Muslims, it is this: Islam is a religion of structure. Every tenet, every teaching, every belief and every valid element of the Islamic religion has a basis in revealed reality. When a Muslim tells another something in the Islamic religion, he or she needs to be able to support that teaching with Islamic evidence. The gold standard (and for that matter, the only accepted standard) of Islamic legitimization is to be found in the interpretation of Islamic evidences by those of comprehensive knowledge (i.e., Muslim scholars). And what are the sources of Islamic evidences? Two - the revealed word of Allah (i.e., the Holy Qur'an), and the Sunnah (literally 'the way' of the Prophet Muhammad ibn Abdullah (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him), meaning his teachings and example, as conveyed through his words, actions, appearance and implied consents, as preserved in the Islamic traditions known as hadith). So in the end, every valid teaching has a foundation in the Islamic evidences, and like it or not, that evidence must be clear, present, and substantiated in order for any specific teaching to be considered acceptable.

So when learning from another Muslim, whether beloved or not, respected or dis-, credentialed or un-, the critical question for each and every teacher regarding each and every teaching is simply, "Where did you get that?" If from the individual's mind, watch out! For it was by this slippery path of caprice and opinion that previous masses were led astray. Other pathways to error include:

1. Mysticism. Now, let's dwell on this issue for a moment. Piety and righteousness is expected to lead to a certain level of enhanced insight and understanding of things religious. But while there is nothing wrong with seeking such enlightenment, believers go astray when they try too hard and, in the process, leave the rules of guidance dictated by The Creator for rules defined by a human being such as, for example, a mystic. And this is the most critical indication of deviation into mysticism - the embracing of teachings and practices that are not founded upon valid sources of Islamic law, which is to say the Qur'an, Sunnah, and the interpretation thereof by respected Sunni scholars. When un-founded teachings are encountered in combination with spiritual leaders who brandish self-aggrandizing claims of enhanced spiritual insight, by which they justify their bizarre and unfounded beliefs and/or practices, the situation should be obvious. Too often, however, it is not, for many of the misguiding deviants quote Qur'an and Sunnah to support their astray beliefs. The fact that these deviants misquote or misinterpret Qur'an and draw upon inauthentic hadith in support of their position frequently goes unnoticed by those lacking the intellectual tools by which to differentiate correctly interpreted, authentic sources from manipulated and/or unauthentic sources. Please see chapter 5, entitled 'Sufism,' for further discussion of this subject. Still more pathways to error include:

2. Philosophy (for the philosophers don't agree, so at most only one group can be right. And while on the subject, look at what happened to the Greeks!)

3. Rationalism (for not everything in religion 'makes sense' to everybody, and the inclination to discard or modify religious standards simply because a person can't 'make sense' of them leads to deviancy and, not

infrequently, disbelief. Typically, attempts to rationalize deviant viewpoints are the result of people seeking to modify the religion to match their desires, with attempts to 'modernize' or 'adapt' Islam being classic examples.)

4. Over-intellectualization (Muslims are expected to think and reason, not only in order to arrive at belief in the first place, but also in order to practice and apply the religion correctly. However, intellectualization has practical limits, meaning that there are some things people simply have to accept, believe, and do - things like, for example, the commands of Allah. Should people refuse to accept, validate, or fulfill a command of Allah, simply because they can't understand the reason for it, they fall into disobedience and error.)

5. False justification (such as through misquoting or misinterpreting Qur'anic verses, or employing weak or fabricated hadith in order to support a deviant position)

6. Passing judgment on an issue despite lacking scholastic qualification.

However, if guidance is taken from respected and qualified scholars who derive their teachings from the Holy Qur'an and authentic hadith, then a person can rest at ease.

Lacking substantiation by qualified scholars, in accordance with foundational evidences from Qur'an and Sunnah, no people should consider themselves safe. When the map of history is reviewed, mankind is found to have strayed whenever the halter of human intellect was torn from the hand of supportive evidences and turned loose in the field of enticing explanations. The search of the alchemists for the 'philosopher's stone' (the mythical formula by which base metals could be transmuted to gold), for the fountain of immortality, for the pots of gold and dreams conceived in every legend that ever launched a ship or expedition on a venture of futility are easy examples. Yet no baseless legends have ever led to the frivolous sacrifice of more wealth, energy, lives and souls than those of false religion.

The First and Final Commandment betrays the weak, nonexistent, or frankly fabricated foundation of many of the myths of modern Judaic and Christian theology. Orthodox (Sunni) Islam refuses to accept such hypocrisy within its creed, and maintains the purity of its teachings through requiring scholars to derive the fiqh (Islamic laws) from the stable and respected foundational sources of the Islamic religion, and then by requiring the laity to follow the valid decisions of qualified scholars.

Unfortunately, many new converts conceive the supremely optimistic, and sadly naive, assumption that all 'scholars' know what they are talking about, and that all Muslims are upon the same path. Nothing could be further from the truth. A large variety of sects identify with the label of Islam, all the while ranging in ideological assay anywhere from minor innovation to outright blasphemy. Some heretical sects cling to the sharply defined borders of Islam, whereas others are so far out of the envelope of Islam as to warrant a separate metaphysical mailing code.

Hence, the need for labels.

In general, Muslims prefer to be known as nothing more than, well, Muslims, for the simple reason that Allah Most High refers to the believers as Muslims in the Holy Qur'an. For those who revere the supremacy of Allah, no label created in the mind of man can compete with that chosen by the Creator Himself. However, labels have become necessary in order to distinguish between differing groups. The two largest subdivisions in the Islamic world are the Sunnis and the Shi'ites. Sunni Muslims adhere to the sunnah (way) of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) as conveyed through the Islamic traditions (hadith), whereas the Shi'ites adhere to the teachings of their religious leaders (Imams), whether validated by the Qur'an and Sunnah or not. As typically occurs whenever



people give precedence to charismatic leaders over revealed truth, a few peculiar individuals with even more bizarre ideology crept into the chain of authority at various points in history, established their deviancy in the canon of the religion, and distracted the sectarian beliefs, divergent step by divergent step, from the truth of the period of origins. Destructive deviant trends, similar to those that developed in the hearts and minds of the Shi'ites, have effectively cleaved a long list of other sects from the main body of Sunni Muslims.

Nonetheless, Sunni Islam accounts for approximately 95% of all Muslims worldwide, and for good reason. To begin with, the methodology makes sense. Anybody who accepts Islam affirms the supremacy and oneness of Allah, which of necessity negates any concept of partners or co-sharers in divinity. As per the translation of the meaning of the Qur'an (hereafter TMQ), (The version of the translation of the meaning of the Qur'an (TMQ) quoted in this book, unless otherwise noted, is The Qur'an, Arabic Text with Corresponding English Meanings, by Saheeh International)

﴿فَلَا تَجْعَلُوا لِلّٰهِ أَنْدَادًا وَأَنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ﴾

*"So do not attribute to Allah equals while you know (that there is nothing similar to Him)" [TMQ 2:22]*

and

﴿قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ ۝ اللَّهُ الصَّمَدُ ۝ لَمْ يَكِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ ۝  
وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ﴾

*"Say, 'He is Allah, (who is) one, Allah, the Eternal Refuge. He neither begets nor is born, Nor is there to Him any equivalent.'" (TMQ 112:1-4).*

Hence, there is only one supreme and final authority, and that is Allah, and His choice of the Holy Qur'an as the final revelation and of Muhammad ibn Abdullah (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) as the final messenger is to be respected. Furthermore, over and again, Allah instructs mankind in the Holy Qur'an to follow the example of the final Prophet and to obey Allah and His messenger, Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him). Once is enough, but the frequent repetition of this teaching by Allah Most High, in His revelation, should dismiss any discussion of this point.

Given the primacy of the example of Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) in the religion of Islam, the dedication and rigor with which previous generations preserved the library of hadith records is legendary. For this reason, there is simply no person in history about whom so much detail is documented and confirmed. Unlike the fuzzy profiles of all previous Prophet, the life, character, and teachings of Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) can be known in exquisite detail, and it is this detail to which Sunni Muslims adhere.

In contrast, Shi'ite Muslims are just one group of a long list of deviant sects that have chosen to disregard the Sunnah of Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him), to one degree or another, in favor of the teachings of their sectarian leaders. Similar to the Christians who discarded the orthodox teachings of Christ Jesus in favor of the more permissive, though contrary, theology of Paul, deviant sects of Islam assign priority to human teachings contrary to those based upon Qur'an, Sunnah, and the interpretation

thereof by qualified scholars.

Unfortunately (and predictably, as well), many deviants misquote or misinterpret the Qur'an and hadith in order to support their religious misdirection. And unless people question what they are told, some of the evidence that is cited may appear convincing for, as William Shakespeare stated, "The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose." (Shakespeare, William. *The Merchant of Venice*. I.iii)

New converts, who may not know the difference between the orthodox and the deviant, between the pseudo scholar of deviancy and the valid scholar of truth, must be particularly careful to research and confirm what they are told. More importantly, the faithful will pray for Allah to shelter their hearts, minds, bodies and souls from deviation, and to establish and maintain them upon the straight path of His design. And that is, after all, the prayer of Al- Fatiha, the first surah of the Holy Qur'an, and a prayer of such significance and importance that Allah Most High requires recitation of this surah in each rakat of every prayer. So true Muslims should recite this prayer with sincerity and conviction.

Concerning the above discussion, the following books are particularly helpful in navigating the deviations of the Shi'a (Shi'ites), as well as certain other errant sects:

1. *The Mirage in Iran* - Dr. Abu Ameenah Bilal Philips' translation of Dr. Ahmad al-Afghani's *Sarah fee Iraan*, and
2. *The Devil's Deception* - Dr. Abu Ameenah Bilal Philips' translation of Ibn al-Jawzee's *Talbees Iblees*.

### **1.a.) The Saved Sect**

One oft-cited hadith concludes with the teaching that by the end of time Islam would be divided into 73 sects, 72 of which would be in the fire. When asked which would be the saved sect, Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) replied to the effect, "Those who follow what I am upon today, and my companions." Tirmidhi (2641)

Some Muslims suggest that the above hadith has a weakness in its chain of narrators, others point out that the sheer number of transmitters render the hadith sound. Either way, the fact is that if the Islamic religion is not already divided into 73 sects, it is well on its way. Several sects of Shi'ites, a growing number of extreme Sufis, the Ansar cult, the Nation of Islam, the Ahmadiyyah (also known as Qadianees), the Koran'ites, and many others present varying profiles of deviancy from the orthodoxy of Sunni Islam. Furthermore, the concept of the saved sect consisting of those who adhere to what the Prophet (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) and his companions were upon seems a no-brainer to the confirmed believer.

There are, however, those who propose revision of the Islamic religion on the basis of perceived need to modernize Islam in consideration of the social and political changes of the past 1,400 years. Now, Muslims have historically been some of the most progressive people in the world. The industrial revolution of Europe was largely attributed to knowledge and innovations imported from the Muslim world, at a time when the aristocracy of Europe routinely sent their children to study in the universities of Muslim Spain. Muslims excelled in language and linguistics, mechanical, optical and theoretical physics, organic and inorganic chemistry, mathematics, agriculture, medicine, geography, and astronomy, to name a few of the sciences and arenas of intellect. Many of the technological advances that paved the way for a better world were invented by Muslims, and the university itself originates from the Muslim design of the higher educational institution (For further information, please see the first book in this series, *The First and Final Commandment*, chapter 3.C.8, and *Islam and Science*, by Shabir Ahmed, Anas Abdul Muntaqim, and Abdul- Sattar Siddiq; published by the Islamic Cultural Workshop, P.O. Box 1932,

Walnut, CA 91789; (909) 399-4708)

So Muslims are not shy to address the issues of their existence and change with the times in matters that do not conflict with religious principles. However, Allah Most High conveyed the teaching through His final Prophet, Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him), that He would not accept any change or innovation in religion. As per the hadith of Aa'ishah, Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) was recorded as having taught,

"Whoever innovates anything into this affair of ours [i.e., Islam] that does not belong to it, will have it rejected."( Bukhari (2550), Muslim (1718), Sunan Abu Dawud (4606), Ahmad (26075, 26372))

So whereas innovation in matters of non-religious practicality may be praiseworthy, there is no room for innovation in religion itself, for all religious innovations lead to the Hellfire. Remembering that mankind was not created but to serve and worship Allah (see TMQ 51:56; "And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me."), sense can be made of this formula, for the idea is not to make each and every aspect of life easier and more fun, but rather to improve the practicalities of life to facilitate the one duty for which mankind was created - to serve and worship Allah.

Hence, making life easier in terms of worldly existence is commendable, for it improves the human condition and frees the individual, both physically and mentally, for worship. Physically, improved circumstances make it easier to perform acts of worship, whereas mentally, better conditions give an individual more to be thankful to Allah for. On the other hand, attempting to make religion easier by way of compromising religious duties is blameworthy, for in doing so the individual cheats Allah of the duties for which he or she was created in the first place. Hence, a telephone is better than a carrier pigeon, but whereas four prayers a day is easier than five, it is most definitely not better, for any innovation that conflicts with the Islamic Shari'a (law) deviates from the religion, and rather than making the practice of the religion easier, compromises or destroys it.

Which brings us to a general guiding principle the new Muslim would do well to remember, and that is that everything of worship (meaning everything for which the worshipper expects reward from Allah Most High) is forbidden except that which is prescribed, whereas everything of worldly matters is permitted except that which has been forbidden. This principle is agreed upon by the scholars, and all Muslims should cement it in their memories for the reason that it simplifies the religion and facilitates the decision-making process. Supportive evidence for this principle is so extensive as to be beyond listing in a work such as this, however it should be mentioned that Allah Most High conveyed, in one of the last ayah (plural of ayat) to be revealed, "This day I have perfected for you your religion and completed My favor upon you and have approved for you Islam as religion" (TMQ 5:3). Taking this ayat into consideration along with Allah's oft-repeated mandate to "Obey Allah and His messenger (i.e., Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) )" a Muslim should respect the hadith that relate Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) as having taught,

1. "He who innovates something in this matter (i.e., religion) of ours that is not of it will have it rejected."(Bukhari (as a chapter heading entitled: If a civil servant or a judge rules something indifferent to the rule of the messenger, then his rule is rejected) and Muslim (1718))
2. "What I have forbidden to you, avoid, and what I have ordered you [to do], do as much of it as you can."(Bukhari (6858) and Muslim (130))
3. "Allah, the Exalted, prescribed religious duties, so do not neglect them; He has set boundaries, so do not over-step them; He has prohibited some things, so do not violate them; about some things He was silent - out of compassion for you, not forgetfulness- so seek not after them."(Meaning not to delve into

those issues upon which Allah, out of His Wisdom and Compassion, withheld ruling, for the answer might bring more distress than benefit. In this regard Allah revealed in the Holy Qur'an, "O you who have believed, do not ask about things which, if they are shown to you, will distress you. But if you ask about them while the Qur'an is being revealed, they will be shown to you." (TMQ 5:101). The revelation and religion being complete and perfected, the prescribed elements of religion are known, permitting no addition, and the forbidden elements of worldly existence are likewise known, making permissible all which has not been forbidden. Discussion and picky investigation into that which Allah chose not to pass ruling upon should be abstained from) Daraqutni (42,104)

In addition, Allah Most High conveyed,

﴿وَمَا آتَاكُمُ الرَّسُولُ فَخُذُوهُ وَمَا نَهَاكُمْ عَنْهُ فَانْتَهُوا وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ شَدِيدُ الْعِقَابِ﴾

*"And whatever the Messenger (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) has given you, take; and what he has forbidden you, refrain from. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is severe in penalty." (TMQ 59:7)*

﴿الَّذِينَ يَتَّبِعُونَ الرَّسُولَ النَّبِيَّ الْأُمِّيَّ الَّذِي يَجِدُونَهُ مَكْنُوبًا عِنْدَهُمْ فِي التَّوْرَةِ وَالْإِنْجِيلِ يَأْمُرُهُمْ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَاهُمْ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَيُحِلُّ لَهُمُ الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَيُحَرِّمُ عَلَيْهِمُ الْخَبَائِثَ﴾

*"Those who follow the messenger [i.e., Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) ], the unlettered Prophet (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) whom they find written [i.e., mentioned] in what they have of the Torah and the Gospel, who enjoins upon them what is right and forbids them what is wrong and makes lawful for them the good things and prohibits from them the evil..." (TMQ 7:157)*

﴿هُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مَا فِي الْأَرْضِ جَمِيعًا ثُمَّ أَسْتَوَىٰ إِلَى السَّمَاءِ فَسَوَّاهُنَّ سَبْعَ سَمَوَاتٍ وَهُوَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ﴾

*"It is He who created for you all of that which is on the earth." (TMQ 2:29 - which implies the permissibility of all that which is not forbidden of worldly matters.)*

﴿قُلْ مَنْ حَرَّمَ زِينَةَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي أَخْرَجَ لِعِبَادِهِ وَالطَّيِّبَاتِ مِنَ الرِّزْقِ قُلْ هِيَ لِلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا خَالِصَةٌ يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ كَذَلِكَ نَفَصِّلُ الْآيَاتِ لِقَوْمٍ يَعْلَمُونَ﴾

*"Say, 'Who has forbidden the adornment of [i.e., from] Allah which He has produced for His servants and the good [lawful] things of provision?' (TMQ 7:32 - which indicates the error in forbidding that which Allah Most High has not forbidden of worldly matters.)"*

So this general principle of everything of worship being forbidden except that which is prescribed, and everything of worldly matters being permitted except that which has been forbidden, is not only well supported, but of potent impact. As it relates to the subject under discussion, those who seek an easier path in terms of physical existence and worldly matters are encouraged to do so, for an authentic hadith relates that "The Prophet (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) was never given a choice between two things except that he chose the easier one as long as it was not a sin." (Bukhari (3367), Muslim (2327), Muwatta Imam Malik (1603)) However, those who seek innovation in matters of worship are to be censured and/ or condemned. Imam Malik commented,

"He who innovates something for the ummah today which the pious predecessors were not upon, then he has proclaimed that the Prophet (i.e., Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him)) had betrayed the ummah, because Allah the Almighty has said, Today I have completed your religion/ That which was not part of the religion at that time (i.e., of Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) and of his companions) is not part of the religion today." (Al-Ih'kam, by Ibn Hazim)

The point is that while the possibilities for improvement of the human condition in worldly terms are vast, there is a bare minimum in terms of beliefs and practices which, if transgressed, compromises a person's claim to the religion. The minimum requirements of Islamic faith are clearly defined, one example of which is to be found in the following hadith:

A man from Najd with unkempt hair came to Allah's Messenger (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) and we heard his loud voice but could not understand what he was saying, till he came near (and then we came to know) that he was asking about Islam. Allah's Messenger (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) said, "You have to perform five Salat (prayers) in a day and night (24 hours)." The man asked, "Are there any other (more) Salat (prayers) upon me?" Allah's Messenger (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) replied, "No, but if you want to perform the Nawafil (i.e., supererogatory, or nonobligatory) Salat (you can)." Allah's Messenger (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) further said to him: "You have to observe Saum [fasts (according to Islamic teachings)] during the month of Ramadan." The man asked, "Are there any other (more) fasting upon me?"

Allah's Messenger (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) replied, "No, but if you want to observe the Nawafil fasts (you can)." Then Allah's Messenger (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) further said to him, "You have to pay the Zakat." The man asked, "Is there any thing other than the Zakat for me to pay?" Allah's Messenger (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) replied, "No, unless you want to give alms of your own." And then that man retreated saying, "By Allah! I will neither do less nor more than this." Allah's Messenger (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) said, "If he is true to his word, then he will be successful (i.e., he will be granted Paradise)" Bukhari (42) and Muslim (11)

This hadith effectively sums up the minimum limits of Islamic practice, while at the same time concluding that satisfying these minimum limits leads to the reward of Paradise.

This formula does, of course, make sense, for mankind lives such formulas every day in a thousand ways. For example, the body requires a minimum amount of oxygen to survive, and a minimum core body temperature. Maintain those minimums, and a person survives. Transgress those minimums by the smallest degree, and death results. Similarly, a car requires a minimum amount of gas to get from one point to another. Even one drop less than the bare minimum means the car stops short - albeit by only a drop's worth of distance. But short nonetheless. Sure, a person could say, "Heck, just park the car and

walk it." But there are some things a person simply cannot walk off. Failure is one of them. One point less than an 'A' on the exam is no longer an 'A.' One gram less than an ounce is no longer an ounce. One step behind the winner is second place. One second too long under-water is drowning. And one drop less than the required minimum means drawing up short.

Maintain a higher oxygenation and body temperature than the required minimum, and a person will not only feel better, but be at less risk of disaster. Keep more gas in the car than required, and a person will have a greater reserve, just in case. A person can live the bare minimums - life on the edge, so to speak - but this is risky, uncomfortable and, under normal circumstances, unnecessarily foolish. Far better to live well within the critical limits. So too, with religion. People who live the bare minimums of faith and practice teeter on the fence of their faith, every day risking the consequences of falling to the wrong side. On the other hand, those who perfect their faith, practice, and worship live within the expanded safety zones encountered at the higher levels of religiosity.

So while living life on the edge has become trendy in the arenas of extreme sports and high finance, where a person can achieve fame or fortune at the risk of personal injury or bankruptcy, living religion on the edge risks a person's salvation for...well, for what, exactly? A few more minutes saved from prayer, a few more mouthfuls saved from fasting, a few more dollars saved from charity? A small price for salvation, a person would think, and definitely worth sacrificing for the benefit of expanded safety and comfort zones. And it is not as if a person need compromise all other elements of worldly existence.

On the contrary, Muslims live remarkably clean, honest, wholesome and satisfying lives. And in tribute to the success of the Islamic standard, the fields of politics, personal conduct, family and social structure, economics, civil and criminal law, and many other disciplines of human existence in the Islamic world have enjoyed some of the greatest duration and success due to the sound religious principles upon which they were founded. The Islamic religion itself is practiced today as it was in the time of the Prophet, Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him), making Islam the only Abrahamic religion practiced today in the purity of the original. If ever there was a success record that bears witness to the truth, that is it. Furthermore, Allah conveyed the promise that there will always be a group of people upon correctness for authentic hadith relates Muhammad m as having taught, "There will always be a group of my ummah (i.e., nation) openly on the truth until the Day of Judgment." Bukhari (3441), Muslim (156), Abu Dawud (4252), Tirmidhi (2229)

Let's try to be amongst them.