EXPOUNDING THE CONCEPT OF RELIGION IN ISLAM AS UNDERSTOOD BY SYED MUHAMMAD NAQUIB AL-ATTAS

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Religion is one of the key features concerning human life in its entirety, and various scholars generally acknowledge that the human nature as such needs religion. The word that denotes the term "religion" in the Qur'an is dīn. However, in actual fact, the concept of dīn is different from what has been understood and defined to be religion either by the West or others. Hence, we maintain that to understand the total meaning of religion (dīn), its signification must be deduced from the Holy Qur'an, the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and the Arabic language to which the terms belongs.[1]

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[1]   This article is a modest attempt to discuss the meaning of the concept of religion (*dīn*) as understood and espoused by Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas in his book *Islam: The Concept of Religion and the Foundation of ethics and Morality,* first edition (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1992); latest edition (Kuala Lumpur: Ta'dib International, 2018). A more elaborated version of this treatise is found in the first chapter of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas's work *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam: An Exposition of the Fundamental Elements of the Worldview of Islam*, first edition, (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1995), and the latest version (Kuala Lumpur: Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, 2014). This monograph was formerly a speech presented on 5 April 1976 at the International Islamic Conference held by the Islamic Council of Europe in the Hall of the Royal Commonwealth Society, London. Al-Attas's major works have been translated into Korean, Japanese, Russian, Albanian, Arabic, Malay, Indonesian, Turkish, and other languages. As one would find out later, his works treat their subjects independently but are interrelated. Each is part of a whole; each is a block in the enitre structure of his study, deep understanding, comprehension, and presentation of Islam as a religion. The author of this article is a student of al-Attas and when the draft was being prepared for submission for the

First, we should clarify that it is an undeniable fact that one of the root causes of the problems that beset the mind of the modern Muslims is the corruption of language, the infusion of alien concepts, which are responsible for distorting the original meaning of Islamic basic vocabularies that Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas refers to as Islamic language. These basic vocabularies are commonly shared by Muslim people around the world. Moreover, these basic vocabularies are based in the Qur'an and the Prophetic tradition (i.e., the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH). Al-Attas consistently argues that when the original meaning of these basic vocabularies is tampered with, it brings confusion to the Muslim worldview. He further suggests that to free our individual minds from confusion, we must establish a strong foundation in understanding the Islamic language as it shapes the worldview of its followers. Therefore, he persists in stressing that whenever Muslims speak of Islam, they must refer it to the '*dīn*,' not religion as perceived by the West and others.

There are 88 different places in the Holy Qur'an that mention the word *dīn* and its derivatives in various forms. The most important verses pertaining to al-Attas' discussion are the verses below, which will be referred to in this article:

1. 2:132, "*wa waṣṣā bihā ibrāhīmu banīhi wa yaʿqūbu yā baniyya inna'l-Lāha ʿṣtafā lakumu 'd-dīn falā tamūtunna illā wa antum muslimūn*" meaning "And this was the legacy that Abraham left to his sons, and so did Jacob; "Oh my sons! God hath chosen the Religion for you; then die not except as Muslims, i.e. those who have correctly and truly submitted,"

2. 3:19, "*inna'l-dīn ʿinda'l-Lāh al-Islām…*" meaning "The Religion before God is Islam (submission to His Will),"

3. 3:85, "*wa man yabtaghi ghayr al-Islām dīnan falan yuqbala minhu wa huwa fi'l-ākhirati mina'l-khāsirīn,*" meaning "If anyone desires a religion other than Islam (submission to God), never will it be accepted of him; and in the Hereafter he will be in the ranks of those who have lost (all spiritual good)"; and

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purpose of publication the author consulted al-Attas for clarification and endorsement of the draft.

4. as for the term *dīn*, its primary notion is derived by al-Attas from the Quranic exposition of the covenant (*al-mīthāq*), a starting point of the dominant elements in all other Islamic concepts such as freedom and responsibility, justice, knowledge, virtue, brotherhood (*ukhuwwah*), and the role and character of individual Muslim and the Community. The verse reads: "*wa idh akhadha rabbuka min banī* ādama *min ẓuhūrihim dhurriyyatahum wa ashhadahum ʿalā anfusihim alastu birrabikum qālū balā shahidnā*" meaning "When thy Lord drew forth from the Children of Adam – from their loins – their descendants, and made them testify concerning themselves, (saying): 'Am I not your Lord (who cherishes and sustains you)?' – They said: 'Yea! We do testify!'"

The religion (*dīn*) of Islam has several connotations, which convey a single unity of coherent meaning, describing the true picture of Islam. Al-Attas repeatedly emphasises that the word *dīn*, and all its construct forms, occurs many times everywhere in the Qur'an. Moreover, in many cases, he says, *dīn* is used in its verbal noun form. By paying great attention to the studies done by great Muslim scholars in the past about all the verses in the Holy Qur'an in which the term '*dīn*' has been used, students of Islam can grasp its basic and important meaning.

The term *dīn* is derived from the Arabic root *D-Y-N* and, as we mentioned earlier, connotes several conceptually interrelated meanings and in a single unity of harmonious meaning the religion of Islam. Concerning this, we can quote what al-Attas writes:

"*D-Y-N* has many primary significations which although seemingly contrary to one another are yet all conceptually interconnected, so that the ultimate meaning derived from them all presents itself as a clarified unity of the whole. By 'the whole' I mean that which is described as the Religion of Islam, which contains within itself all relevant possibilities of meaning inherent in the concept of *Dīn*."[2]

According to al-Attas, the primary significations of the term *dīn* can be reduced to four: 1. Indebtedness; 2. Submissiveness; 3. Judicious power; and 4. Natural inclination or tendency. He further attempts

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[2]   Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam,* 1995, 41; for more meanings and concepts derived from the root, see Ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-Arab* (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 2005), 13:166–171.

to explain them briefly and place them in relevant contexts, drawing forth the coherent ultimate meaning which is intended, that denotes the faiths, beliefs, practices, and teachings adhered to by the Muslims individually or collectively as a Community (*Ummah*) and manifesting itself altogether as an objective whole as the Religion called Islam.

Al-Attas further explains that the word '*dana*,' which conveys the meaning of being *indebted*, can further illustrate the concept of religion (*dīn*).[3] Commercial enterprises generally include a debtor and a creditor. In this context, in a state of indebtedness one will find oneself subject to certain principles governing the "*debt*." These principles require one to adhere to fixed laws and ordinances and put one under certain obligations (*dayn*), which naturally involves judgement: *daynūnah*, and conviction: *idānah*. The laws that governed the relation between the debtor and the creditor can only be realised in well-organised societies, towns and cities, denoted by *mudun* or *madā'in*, or *madīnah*[4] in its singular form. Here, the judge, ruler, or governor assumed the responsibility of making the society a well-organised one. These organised societies that are depicted before human mind's through these connected terms later indicate a kind of civilisation. Hereby it can be understood that the word religion (*dīn*) is conceptually connected with the verb *maddana*, which means to build or to found cities, to civilise, to refine or to humanise. The very notion of law, the order, the justice, the authority, and social cultural refinement inherent in all these significations derived from the concept of *dīn* must surely presuppose the existence of a mode or manner of acting consistent with what is reflected in the law, the order, the justice, the authority, and social-cultural refinement. It becomes increasingly clear that the concept of *dīn* in its most basic form indeed reflects in true testimony the *natural tendency or inclination* of man to form societies, obey laws, and seek just government.

Each of these primary significations in the context of human world affairs demonstrate their mutual actual and conceptual connections; the connection and relationship between the Creator and the created;

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[3] Ibid., 42–45.
[4] For more details on these three interrelated terms see Ibn Manzur's *Lisan al-Arab*, 13: 166, col. 2.

the Master and the slave; and the delineated notions of human relation-ships with each other.[5]

Now briefly the concept of *indebtedness* in its religious and spiritual context should be explained.[6] If man ponders seriously about the very inception of his creation, he will then realise that he owes his life to someone. This indebtedness is owed to God, who created man and thus provides for the maintenance of his existence. Again, man, in his very existence, is indebted to Allah. This is based on the fact that He who brings him to existence also maintains him in his existence. In the name of the Almighty Allah, the Holy Qur'an[7] says:

"Man We did create from a quintessence of clay; Then We placed him as a drop of sperm in a place of rest, firmly fixed; Then We made the sperm into a clot of congealed blood; Then of the clot We made a lump; Then We made out of that lump bones and clothed the bones with flesh; Then We developed out of it another creature. So, blessed be God, the Best to create!"[8]

In addition, it is an erroneous view that man is indebted to his par-ents for bringing him to this earth since both his parents are also in-debted to the same God. Thus, man indeed possesses nothing, not even his very own self. He is from the very beginning of creation in a state of utter loss when Allah the Almighty affirms in the Qur'an:

"Verily man is in loss (*khusr*)."[9]

With man's recognition of his real position in relation to God, he will realise that his very self, his soul, has already acknowledged God as his Lord, and thus made covenant with Him (God). Since man owns absolutely nothing for which to "repay" his debt, he is therefore obliged to enslave himself to God. Normally, a *slave* has to obey and respect the commands of his *master*. He has "no right" to transgress against the commands of his master. Similarly, an *'abd* (Arabic: servant or slave) repays his debt if he is consciously and willingly submitting to the com-

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[5]   Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam,* 43.
[6]   Ibid.
[7]   The quoted passages are taken from the English translation by Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of Holy Qur'an* (London: The Islamic Foundation, 2016).
[8]   The Holy Qur'an, *Al-Mu'minun*: 12–14.
[9]   The Holy Qur'an, *Al-Asr*: 2.

mands, prohibitions, and ordinances of God and thus lives with the dictates of His law. The word "repay" here means "returning himself to Him Who owns him absolutely." The "returning," therefore, is what is also referred as *ibādah* which is indeed a "return to the inherent nature" since the obligation to serve God is a normal process which is guided by his natural tendency. This natural tendency to serve and worship God is denoted by the term *fitrah*.[10] With the "return to inherent nature," it fundamentally refers to the spiritual elements of man and not his physical aspects of being. The concept of "return" is expressed in the Qur'an by the term *raj*:

"By the heaven that hath rain"[11]

The word *raj* is interpreted as rain, which signifies something that returns repeatedly from the skies by which He brings forth the living plants from earth that is dead. The Holy Qur'an refers to this as follows:

"… In the rain which God sends down from the skies, and the life which He gives therewith to an earth that is dead."[12]

Similarly, the religion of Islam "is like rain which gives life to man who is otherwise dead like the earth," asserts al-Attas. If we base our reason on the above statement, we can argue that *raj* or rain returns after it has fulfilled its purpose of being that is to bring benefit to the earth by bringing life to it. Metaphorically, in order that man can "repay" his debt he has to "return" himself to God to whom he is indebted. His return must be like the returning rain. Then, in addition, the very self of man (i.e., his soul) has already acknowledged God as his Lord in the world of soul before the existence of man. The Qur'an affirms the followings:

"When the Lord drew forth from the Children of Adam – from their loins – their descendents, and made them testify concerning themselves (saying): 'Am I not your Lord?' – they said: 'Yea! We do testify!'"[13]

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[10]   The Holy Qur'an, *Al-Rum*: 30.
[11]   The Holy Qur'an, *Al-Tariq*: 11.
[12]   The Holy Qur'an, *Al-Baqarah*: 164.
[13]   The Holy Qur'an, *Al-Araf*: 152.

Here in the Qur'an, Allah addresses Himself not only as Allah but also as *Rabb*, another name of Allah that carries the meaning of the relationship between "the King and the slave"; the Governor and the governed; the Sustainer and the sustained. These definitions of that relationship establish Allah's All-Embracing Authority and Sovereignty. Man, therefore, is bound in a covenant (in Arabic: *al-mīthāq; al-'ahd*) that determines his purpose, attitude, and action with respect to the self in his relation to God. Then, the concept of *submission* is possibly common to all religions, just as belief and faith is the core of all religions. What makes Islam differ from other religions is the form and nature of its *submission*, not the belief in one God.[14]

Concerning submission, the term for real submission is *aslama* as Allah says:

"Who can be better in religion (*dīn*) than one who submits (*aslama*) his face (i.e., his whole self) to God".[15]

Submission is not simply any submission. Al-Attas classifies *submission* into two categories: willing or *real* submission and unwilling submission. Willing submission refers to sincere, conscious and total submission to God's will. In addition, it refers to a continuous act lived throughout the entire span of one's ethical life and also the kind that operates not only within the realm of the heart but also manifesting itself outwardly in the action of the body as works performed in obedience to God's law. Unwilling submission refers to a kind of submission that is momentary or erratic, or not in the form that is revealed and commanded by God. As mentioned earlier, the fundamental core of true religion is not the belief, but rather the kind of submission. To elaborate this, it is the example of *iblis* (satan) who became a *kafir* (infidel) for not submitting to the command of God. Unwilling submission therefore is a manifestation of arrogance, disobedience, and rebellion against God's law. The religion (*dīn)* of real submission referred to none other than Islam in which is enacted total submission (*istislām*) to God alone, whence it is the best and only religion (*dīn*) accepted by Allah:

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[14]   Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam*, pp. 52–55.
[15]   The Holy Qur'an, *Al-Nisa*: 125.

"If anyone desires a religion (*dīn*) other than Islam, never it will be accepted of him ..."[16]

"Verily, the Religion (*al-dīn*) in the sight of God is Islam"[17]

The term *dīn* denotes also religions other than Islam because Qur'anically man cannot escape being in the state of living a *dīn*, since all submit (*aslama*) to God's will. This is based on the Qur'anic verse:

"Do they seek for other than the religion (*dīn*) of God? While all creatures in the heavens and on earth have, willing or unwilling submitted (*aslama*) to His will, and to Him shall they all be returned"[18]

The notion on how to submit willingly or consciously is perhaps a matter of great debate for other religions. Every religion has its own patterns or means of submission. Historical facts affirmed that the bases of their system or forms of submission, which naturally changes from generation to generation, would always lead their followers to the path of an "unwilling" type of submission. One of the obvious reasons lies on the fact that people perceive their religion as a mere tradition since its form of submission is generally based upon their own cultural tradition, which has no basis from the concept of *millah*. The concept of *millah* refers to "the manner of institution of belief or faith, the manner of expression of the law, the manner of religious attitude and ethical and moral conduct, the manner in which submission to God is enacted in our life." The religion of Islam, on the contrary, has its own system or forms of submission based upon the *millah* of the Prophet Ibrahim and of other Prophets after him which all together are considered to be the form of the right religion (*dīn al-qayyim*). The perfect crystallisation of the *milal* of the Prophets reflect the behaviour of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Based on the above discussions, the concept of *'dīn'* reflects the idea of a kingdom –a cosmopolis. This kingdom is called the kingdom of God, which embodies a comprehensive and all embracing order that governs the social and political affairs of man. The social order includes all aspects of man; his physical, material, spiritual existence

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16   The Holy Qur'an, *Ali Imran*: 85.
17   The Holy Qur'an, *Ali Imran*: 19.
18   The Holy Qur'an, *Ali Imran*: 83.

that does justice to the individual either as a physical being or as spirit and society; thus, a Muslim is at once himself and his community. In Islamic social order, Allah is the "King of the Kingdom" on earth whose Will, Law, Ordinances, Commands, and Prohibitions "hold absolute sway."[19]

With regard to the meanings of "judicial power" and "natural tendency or inclination," al-Attas treats both as one correlated issue. Significantly, he elaborates that Man is God the Almighty's vicegerent (*khalifah*) on the earth which is given the trust *(amānah)* of government to rule according to Allah's Will in that socio-political rule. Realising that the *amānah* refers to the self-responsibility to do justice to itself, the rule of one's self by itself is far more fundamental than socio-political rule. Islam is a social-order in which every individual based on their given capacity and power must fulfil and realise their responsibility. They have to strive to achieve the ideal for themselves in the way *(ihsān* or perfection in virtue)* manifested by the Revealed Law or *Sharī'ah*, obeyed by all members in the community. Consequently, every Muslim is a *khalīfah* of Allah on the earth as well as *'abd* of Allah, man is striving by himself to perfect his *'ibādah* (service and devotion) in the manner approved by Allah. Since man is answerable to Allah alone, he must direct his true and real loyalty (*tā'ah)* to Allah.[20]

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[19]   Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam*, 55–56. For details on the exegesis of the Holy Qur'an by various classical Muslim scholars of the past on the term "*millah,*" please refer to https://vb.tafsir.net/, accessed July 28, 2020.

[20]   Here the reader can realise the relationship between the meanings of "judicial power" and "natural inclination or tendency" that were parts the four meanings of religion (*dīn*). In various parts of al-Attas's works this issue can be further realised. Al-Attas thinks it is extremely important to discern both the intimate and profoundly significant connection between the concept of *dīn* and that of *madīnah* which derives from it, and the role of the Believers individually in relation to the former and collectively in relation to the latter. As he further asserts that considerable relevance must be seen in the significance of the change of name of the town once known as Yathrib to *al-Madīnah: The City*. The first Community of the Believers was formed there at the time, and that marked the New Era in the history of mankind. It must be seen that the fact that al-Madīnah was so called and named because it was there that true *dīn* became realised for mankind. There the Believers enslaved themselves under the authority and jurisdiction of the Prophet, their *dayyān*; there the realisation of the debt to God took definite form, and the approved manner and method of its payment began to unfold. The City of the Prophet was where the true *dīn* was enacted under his authority and jurisdiction, where the City for the Community became naturaly inclined to the epitome of the socio-political order of Islam; and for the

According to al-Attas, commerce, trade, and such activity together with its implications are intrinsic to the concept of *dīn*. The Qur'an itself inexorably portrays the worldly life "in the apt metaphors of commercial enterprise." Among the things involved in the trade (*al-tijārah*) in *dīn,* is man himself. He is the subject as well as object of his trade. His loss and gain is dependant upon his own sense of responsibility and exercise of freedom. The object selling (*bay'ah*) and bartering (*ishtarā*) is he himself; and the prosperity (*rabiha al-tijārah*) or loss (*mā rabiha al-tijārah*) depends on his own inclination towards the exercise of his will and deeds.[21] As the man so engaged in *tijārah,* he indeed realised the utter seriousness of it. Allah says in the Qur'an:

> "Verily, God has purchased of the believers their selves."[22]

The concept of *dīn* portrays the man of Islam (i.e., the Muslim) as a city dweller, a cosmopolitan, living a civilised life in accordance to clearly defined foundations of social order and codes of conduct, to whom obedience to Divine Law, endeavour towards realising true justice and striving after right knowledge are cardinal virtues. As Islam is the epitome of the Divine Cosmic order, the Muslim is also an epitome of the cosmos. A Muslim is a *microcosmic* representation – *'alam sagir'* – of the *macrocosmos* – *'alam al-kabir.'* As Muslims regard Islam as *a kingdom*, a social order, so the Muslim is a *kingdom in miniature,* as we know that man is indeed, both soul and body, in which soul governs body as God governs the Universe. And man also has two distinct souls which are: the higher, rational soul known as *al-nafs al-nātiqah*; and the lower soul, the animal or carnal soul known as *al-nafs al-haywaniyyah.* Man's rational soul acts and should act as King, and his carnal or animal soul must submit to it. The effective power and rule as well as the total

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individual Believer it became the symbol of the Believer's body and physical being in which the rational soul, in emulation of the Prophet, exercises authority and just government. For further illustrations, *see* al-Attas's *Islam and Secularism*, 2nd Impression (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1993), 54–63, 64–70, 71–79, 82–83.

[21]   Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam.,* 57

[22]   The Holy Qur'an, *Al-Tawbah*: 111. When God proclaimed His Lordship to Adam's progeny, it is the rational soul of man that He addressed. Thus, when God and man made covenant, it was the rational soul that accepted this covenant.

submission of the man's animal soul to man's rational soul is indeed interpreted as *dīn*.[23]

Realising that the word man (*insan*) is derived from *nasiya* (*forget*), he is subject to forgetfulness that causes his disobedience, inclination to injustice (*zulm*), and ignorance (*jahl*). But God has given to man three faculties:

a) Power and means to attain the truth,
b) Indication of the right and the wrong related to the causes of man's action,
c) Intelligence.

With such equipment, man is appointed as *khalīfah*, and consequently, the *amānah* as *khalīfah* is placed upon him beside the responsibility to rule with social and political justice, and the most fundamental is ruling, governing, and maintaining of man by his rational soul.[24]

Since man is a physical being, a kingdom on a *miniature or microcosmic* scale of the *macrocosmos*, only in this stage is he said to attain freedom, which is a state of tranquillity known as *al-nafs al-mutma'innah*. The relation of man and his God is maintained and improved through his *'ibādah*; therefore, only those who are true, sincere and consistent in their *'ibādah* will truly know God. Furthermore, without consistent *'ibādah* man will never achieve Knowledge of God (*ma'rifah*), and *'ibādah* also will never become proper without proper knowledge. Therefore, *'ibādah* and knowledge are inseparable.[25]

Such, according to al-Attas, is the fundamental core of the religion of Islam, and this can be concluded in this direct quotation:[26]

"It is implicit in our exposition that Islam is both belief and faith (*imān*)[27] as well as submission in service *(islām)*; it is both assent of the heart (*qalb*) and

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[23] For further explanation concerning *al-nafs al-haywaniyyah* and *al-nafs al-natiqah*, see Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam*, 58, 149. See also Ibn Sina, *Kitab al-Najat* (Beirut: Dar al-Afaq al-Jadidah, 1985), 197–200, 202–203. See also Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 68–69.
[24] Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam*, 144–145.
[25] Ibid., 60, 108.
[26] Ibid., 61–62.
[27] The word '*iman*,' generally translated as faith and belief, is derived from *amana* (ordinarily rendered, "he believed") which means "when used transitively, 'he granted him peace and security,' and when used intransitively, 'he came into peace and security.'" See, Maulana Muham-

mind (*'aql*) confirmed by the tongue (*lisān*) as well as deed and work (*'amal*); it is the harmonious relationship established between both the soul and the body; it is obedience and loyalty (*tā'ah*) both to God as well as to the Holy Prophet; it is accepting wholeheartedly the truth of the Testimony (*kalimah shahādah*) that there is no God but Allah, and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah - Islam is the unity of all these, together with what they entail, in belief and in practice, in the person of the Muslims as well as in the community as a whole. There can be no separation, nor division, nor dichotomy between the harmoniously integrated parts of the unity thus established…"

This is the meaning of *dīn* and Islam. However, we should bear in mind that the meaning of *dīn* and Islam bind up other Islamic elements likewise, in the sphere of social and political life of individual Muslims and the Ummah as a whole. The covenant serves as the focal and dominant element in the concept of freedom, responsibility, justice, knowledge, virtue, brotherhood, and so on. The notion of *dīn* incorporates all aspects (society, personal piety, politics, civilisation, environment), incorporates environmental consciousness, the harmony of man and nature, notions of justice, accountability, the whole cosmos within the concept of *dīn*.

Al-Attas further illustrates that the word "justice" is indeed one of the basic concepts in Islam, which has been misunderstood by other religions and philosophies. Generally, justice is defined as a harmonious condition or a state of affairs whereby everything is in its proper place. Concerning man, justice means basically a condition and situation whereby he is in his right and proper place. Thus, justice (*'adl*) and injustice (*zulm*) begin with the self. Therefore, justice is also applicable to man's self alone. Hence, this concept of justice corresponds to the idea of "reward" and "punishment," for every man in reality must think and act for his own salvation, for every human being is responsible for his own action since every man bears his own burden of responsibility. This point is more approachable to our mind if the idea of man's covenant to his God can be truly and logically apprehended. For the fact that man's soul has already made a covenant with God, which clearly implies that any wrong and evil acts, or the act of disobedience and

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mad Ali, *The Religion of Islam: A Comprehensive Discussion of the Sources, Principles and Practices of Islam* (New Delhi: S. Chand & Company Limited, 1936), 119.

denial of God, would mean a violation of his own contract, which is thus being unjust to his own soul. Therefore, in Islam, any acts of suicide, are considered a major sin not because of the depravity it gives to the state, but it is forbidden because of its injustice to the self. So, the central focus of justice in Islam is with one individual self and not the relational affair of two different individuals or parties, and the failure to do justice to oneself will result in the failure of justice to be performed outside one's individual self; i.e., to others. On the Day of Judgement, it is that man or rather that man's self who will suffer. How much more if he breaks the Law of God or His Covenant on which the viability of all his actions depend entirely. It is no wonder then that accordingly on that Day, the dead (the body with all its parts since each part will be testifying against itself because it has wronged the soul) will be resurrected and reunited with its soul in order to answer for the things it has done. Because it has wronged the soul. Because man placed himself in the wrong place.[28]

In the beginning of Miskawayh's discourse on justice, he observes that justice is one of the forms of man's activities which clearly demonstrates the genuine signification of happiness. The concept of happiness is ultimately a matter of individual self for no collective happiness is concerned more than individual happiness. By emphasising individual happiness, it is indeed essential to clarify that happiness refers not to the physical entity in man, the bodily pleasure or a state of mind, but to certainty of the ultimate truth, which renders our action in absolute compliance with it. Likewise, justice is a matter of one individual self since true and real justice is only performed by one who is in a state of being just to one's self.[29]

Furthermore, to do justice implies *knowledge* of the right and proper place for a thing or a being to be; of right as against wrong; of the mean or limit; of spiritual gain as against loss; of truth as against falsity and falsehood. Because of this, Muslims find that knowledge occupies a most important position in the religion of Islam. However, even in the

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[28]   Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam*, 64–65.
[29]   Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Miskawayh, *The Refinement of Character*, trans. Constantine K. Zubayk (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1968), 95.

case of knowledge, man has to do justice to it, which is to know its limit of usefulness and not to exceed or fall short of it; to know its various orders of priority in relation to its usefulness to one's self; and so on. In further explanations, knowledge is of two kinds: that which is given by God to man, and that which is acquired by man by means of his own effort of rational enquiry based upon experience and observation. The first kind of knowledge pertains to self or soul, and such knowledge gives insight into knowledge of God, and for that reason is the highest knowledge. Thus it follows that knowledge of the prerequisites becomes necessary, and this includes knowledge of the essentials of Islam (*arkan al-islam* and *arkan al-iman*), their meanings and purpose and correct understanding and implementation in every day life and practice. In addition, every Muslim must have knowledge of these. The second kind of knowledge is acquired, as we have mentioned above, through reason, experience, and observation; it is discursive and deductive and it refers to objects of pragmatic value.[30]

Based on the above detailed explanation, it can be concluded that, according to the understanding and exposition of al-Attas, the concept of religion in Islam is very different from what is oft perceived. In Islam, the concept of religion (*dīn*) and its significance are indeed reflected from the term *dīn* itself, from its root *D-Y-N,* where many other conceptions emerged. Apart from the religious aspect, al-Attas tries to form a systematic meaning of the term *dīn* by ultimately relating it to the *civilisation and social refinement.* He further attempts to present the significations of *dīn* in what al-Attas terms the "human secular context" and the "religious context." As those conceptions really portray a true and complete concept of religion and if we translated them into reality, they will manifest as a complete system or way of life in the religion of Islam.

We may conclude with a thought that a further comparative study between Al-Attas's approach to the religion of Islam as well as the western and the eastern approaches to the concept of religion as exposed in various literatures and beliefs would be highly welcome and encourag-

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30   Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam*, 68.

ing – as an effort toward the advancement of the mutual understanding between Christian and Muslim religious scholars.

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