Shariah is an integral part of Islam. It is often defined as a hyped term. Most people who speak passionately against Shariah do not, in reality, understand it and often reduce it to merely a penal code. This introduction describes the universal principles of Shariah and its holistic approach. It further highlights misconceptions about Shariah in order to address the concerns currently surrounding this topic.

Shariah is the practical guidance Muslims live by. It is rooted in the divine teachings of Islam and relates to all aspects of life. Its collective aim is to facilitate benefit for humanity in this life and the hereafter.

Mercy and compassion are the essence of Shariah, which is designed to protect all members of society and to improve the condition of humanity. It is reported that the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said, “Shower mercy to one another, so that the one who is in the Heavens (God) will shower mercy to you.”

The newest buzzword these days is ‘Shariah.’ As several states scramble to use legislation to outlaw Shariah, a hyped fear and persistent confusion surrounds this loaded term. Most people who speak passionately against Shariah do not, in reality, understand it and often reduce it to merely a penal code. This introduction describes the universal principles of Shariah and its holistic approach. It further highlights misconceptions about Shariah in order to address the concerns currently surrounding this topic.

Shariah is an integral part of Islam. It is often defined as ‘Islamic law,’ causing one to assume that it consists mostly of criminal rulings and penalties. However, Shariah encompasses much more than the conventional understanding of law. While Shariah provides the legal framework for the foundation and functioning of a society, it also dictates moral, ethical, social and political codes of conduct for Muslims at an individual and collective level.

In the same spirit, the essence of Shariah is also characterized by mercy and compassion. The very purpose of Shariah is to facilitate the individual and the community to establish a relationship with God and one another. Its rules and regulations are designed to benefit and protect all members of the society. God declares in the Quran, “O you who believe! Stand firmly for justice, as witnesses to Allah, even as against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin. (4:135) According to Ibn al-Qayyim (d. 1350), one of the great scholars of Islam, “The Shariah in its entirety is justice, mercy and benefit. So any issue that leads from justice to injustice, or mercy to its opposite, or benefit to harm, then it is not from the Shariah, even if someone thought that it is.”

Shariah is an Arabic word that literally means a “straight road leading to an uninterrupted source of water.” Figuratively, it refers to a clear, straight path, as mentioned in the following Quranic verse: “Then We put you, [O Muhammad], on a straight way assuming the matter of [religion], so follow it and do not follow the inclinations of those who do not know” (45:18). Hence, Shariah is the practical guidance Muslims live by. It is rooted in the divine teachings of Islam and relates to all aspects of life. Its collective aim is to facilitate justice and benefit for humanity in this life and the hereafter.

In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

God’s mandate for mercy is symbolic of the overall monogram of Islam. The Quran states, “O mankind! There hath come to you a direction from your Lord and a healing for the (sinner) in your hearts, and for those who believe, a guidance and a Mercy” (10:57)

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Shariah is derived from the scholarly study of Islamic texts. These texts include the final revelation from God (Quran) and the recorded teachings of Prophet Muhammad (Sunnah, which are timeless and of common culture. Many people think Shariah forces Muslims in America to give up their American identity. In reality, this is not true. Shariah truthfully demands that Muslims live by the law of the land. This command is binding so long as they are not forced to commit an irreligious act or prevented from fulfilling their religious duties. Thankfully, this is not the case in the U.S. Because the Constitution protects freedom of religion.

In fact, the U.S. Constitution and Shariah have much in common. The Constitution begins with, “We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish justice, ensure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution of the United States of America.” This preamble of purpose and intent of the Constitution is identical to the first principle of Shariah. Unfortunately, many people conflate the terms Shariah and Islam. Do not force Muslims to conform to the American Constitution. In fact, this is not true. Shariah truthfully demands that Muslims live by the law of the land. This command is binding so long as they are not forced to commit an irreligious act or prevented from fulfilling their religious duties. Thankfully, this is not the case in the U.S. Because the Constitution protects freedom of religion.