Mercy and compassion are the essence of the Islamic legal system, Shariah, whose rules and regulations are designed to protect all members of society and to improve the condition of humanity. It is reported that the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said, “Show mercy to those on earth, so that He who is in the Heavens (God) will show mercy to you.”

For instance, fasting during Ramadan is obligatory. Yet, “God wants ease for you, not hardship.” God states in the Quran, “If a soul has a difficulty, Allah will make that difficulty easy for them. Allah loves the doers of good.” (Quran 10:57)

After securing these necessities, Shariah supplements them by removing hardships. God states in the Quran, “…whoever pardons and makes reconciliation – his reward is from Allah. Indeed, He does not like wrongdoers.” (Quran 4:124)

Shariah is an integral part of Islam. It is often defined as ‘Islamic law,’ causing one to assume that it consists mostly of 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 details moral, ethical, social, and political codes of conduct for Muslims at an individual and collective level.

Islam is a faith that every prophet sent by God preached to his people, culminating in the message brought by the final prophet, Muhammad ﷺ. Prophet Muhammad ﷺ called people towards the belief in one God and encouraged them to be just and compassionate to one another. In Islam’s holy book, the Quran (also spelled ‘Koran’), God explains that he sent Muhammad ﷺ as a source of mercy for humanity: “And We have not sent you, [O Muhammad], except as a mercy to the worlds.” (Quran 21:107)

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

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

“O mankind! There hath come to you a direction from your Lord and a healing for the (diseases) in your hearts, and for those who believe, a guidance and a Mercy.” (Quran 10:57)

The noblest bazaard this days is ‘Shariah.’ As several states scramble to pass 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 a mere 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. Its guiding principles are characterized by mercy. 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 out firmly for justice, as witnesses to Allah, even as against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin…” (Quran 4:135)

Shariah is an Arabic word that literally means a ‘fast 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 concerning the matter [of religion], so follow it and do not follow the inclinations of those who do not know.” (Quran 45:18)

Hence, Shariah is the practical guidance Muslims live by. Shariah is derived from the scholarly study of Islamic texts. These texts include a study of the Quran and the recorded teachings of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ (Sunnah). However, scholars derive specific rulings from the revealed texts by using human effort and interpretation, taking into account the surrounding context.

Shariah allows flexibility in order to maintain its applicability and relevance in the light of changing social, cultural, and historical circumstances, while remaining faithful to the guiding principles of Shariah and its core objectives.

OBJECTIVES OF SHARIAH

To fulfill its intrinsic goal of achieving benefit and justice, Shariah sets forth certain timeless principles, which deal with the necessary, supplementary, and voluntary realms of human lived experience.

Firstly, Shariah preserves basic human rights in order to maintain harmony in society. This necessary protection applies to all members of society, irrespective of their race, religion, or ethnicity. These rights are classified as...
Sharia ensures freedom of religion, affirms the sanctity of life, validates the importance of family, guarantees the security of assets, and upholds the power of reasoning. As with any liberties, certain provisions in Shariah open avenues for advancement whereas some are designed to keep people from stepping over the rights of others. In his essay titled “The Objectives of Shariah,” Dr. Mohammad Hashim Kamali, former professor of law at the International Islamic University of Malaysia, explains that Shariah encourages work and trade so that the necessary, supplementary, and voluntary principles within Shariah all seek to promote its primary objective: to achieve benefit. In its broadest sense, benefit encompasses this life and the afterlife, the individual as well as the society, the present and the future. Human intellect requires the comprehensive knowledge and guiding wisdom of God to achieve this benefit in its entirety. Indeed, God has ordained Shariah for the benefit of His creatures and it exemplifies His Mercy. Shariah is more than ‘Islamic law’ because it is not limited to legal issues. While it covers areas of contracts, family law, and international relations, it also includes a social system that encourages the just and generous treatment of neighbors, the preservation of the environment, and caring for the poor and oppressed, along with personal acts of worship such as prayer, fasting, and charity. In fact, Shariah contains a detailed code of conduct. Here are some examples from the Quran (final revelation of God) and Sunnah (teachings of Prophet Muhammad). Shariah ensures freedom of religion, affirms the sanctity of life, validates the importance of family, guarantees the security of assets, and upholds the power of reasoning.

Quran

“And speak good words to all people.” (Quran 2:83)

“The servants of the Lord of Mercy are those who walk humbly on the earth, and who, when the foolish address them, reply, ‘Peace.’” (Quran 25:63)

“God loves those who seek to purify themselves.” (Quran 9:108)

“…whoever pardons and makes reconciliation – his reward is [due] from Allah. Indeed, He does not like wrongdoers.” (Quran 42:40)

“…those who are patient and do righteous deeds; those will have forgiveness and great reward.” (Quran 11:11)

Note: The superscript “p” next to Prophet Muhammad represents the invocation Muslims say with his name: May God’s peace and blessings be upon him.

Sunnah

“The believer does not defame, abuse, disparage, nor vilify.”

“You do not believe until you love for your brother (in faith and in humanity) what you love for yourself.”

“The world is green and delightful and God has put you in charge of it and is watching how you behave.”

“Show mercy to those on earth so that He Who is in Heaven (God) will show mercy on you.”

The primary theme in all of these examples is the individual and collective effort to achieve benefit in material, moral, and spiritual spheres of life.