Islam

A Worldwide Encyclopedia

Volume 2: F–I

Cenap Çakmak, Editor

ABC-CLIO™

An Imprint of ABC-CLIO, LLC
Santa Barbara, California • Denver, Colorado

Waldman, Marilyn Robinson. "The Development of the Concept of Kufr in the Quran." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 88(3) (1968): 442–455.

Infinity

Islam seeks to explain infinity with reference to the relationship between time, life on Earth, and the afterlife. Infinity is attributed to Allah; his might, wisdom, and knowledge are infinite. But the Quran states that he cannot be fully experienced or comprehended: "Vision perceives Him not, but He perceives [all] vision; and He is the Subtle, the Acquainted" (6:103). For this reason, Muslim scholars generally agree that there is no start or end for the attributes of Allah. Allah's attributes are infinite; they were not created or did not exist at a certain time. All attributes (life, knowledge, and might) belong to Allah infinitely and definitely. For this reason, they cannot be compared to the attributes of individuals even if they seem to have similar meanings. Without a full comprehension of the attributes of Allah, the concept of infinity cannot be properly understood.

A working conception and understanding of infinity, even if not fully comprehended, helps believers maintain a balance between life on Earth and life after death. The Quran defines the worldly life as "diversion" and "amusement" (29:64), "only temporary enjoyment" (40:39), and "adornment" (57:20). On the contrary, life after death is depicted as the start of an infinite period when absolute peace and happiness are promised. Almost all belief systems, but particularly the monotheist religions, offer a depiction of afterlife, but the narrative in Islam and the Quran is extensive and detailed.

A review of the Quran shows that a huge number of verses are dedicated to a proper depiction of the afterlife with reference to more than 100 terms and expressions. The Quran repeats the same idea of infinite life after death in different contexts and expressions to place emphasis on the concept of infinity, consolidate the idea of responsibility, and bridge the psychological gap between the world and the afterlife. Belief in afterlife is extremely important in the maintenance of justice in Islam. Without belief in afterlife, justice cannot be attained or sustained. A person who is persecuted or subjected to an unjust punishment in the worldly life will feel relieved only if he or she believes in the afterlife and the justice there. For this reason, the Quran depicts afterlife with frequent references to justice and accountability.

The concept of infinity therefore contributes to a better understanding of Allah and his attributes in Islamic scholarship. No explanation can make full sense unless it refers to his infiniteness. In addition, Islam places emphasis on infinity when

it discusses the concept of afterlife and its relevance to worldly life. Without a sense of infinity, in other words, the premises of Islam on social, political, and economic affairs in the world will not work properly. For infinite happiness and contentment in the afterlife, a Muslim is expected to comply with Islamic precepts in the temporary life.

Murat Ustaoğlu and Cenap Çakmak

See also: Afterlife; Eternity; Faith; *Fiqh* (Jurisprudence); *Qiyama* (Day of Judgment)

Further Reading

Appert, John. *Understanding Infinity: Our Infinite God and His Works.* Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2010.

Topper, David R. *Idolatry and Infinity: Of Art, Math, and God.* Boca Raton, FL: Brown Walker, 2014.

Inspiration (*Ilham*)

Ilham, or knowledge communicated to the heart through enlightenment, means "to cause to swallow or gulp down" and refers to inspiration in Islamic scholarship, particularly in Islamic Sufi mysticism. Because it is not recognized as a conventional source of knowledge, *ilham* is mostly relevant to the Sufi doctrine; for this reason, its frequent usage is in connection with the doctrine of Islamic saints (*awliya,* or friends of Allah).

According to a widely recognized Sufi argument, Allah reveals himself in two ways. First, he makes himself known to the people individually by knowledge he maintains in their minds. Second, people also become aware of Allah through messages he reveals to the prophets he assigns to deliver his wishes and commands. The Sufi doctrine argues that the individual revelation is *ilham* and that the general revelation (the second type) is *wahy.* Only prophets receive *wahy,* but Sufi mystics are of the opinion that saints are the main recipients of the knowledge cast in the form of inspiration.

Such a distinction suggests that knowledge revealed to the prophets is public and thus needs to be delivered to the general audience, whereas knowledge revealed to the saints is private and therefore needs to be kept confidential. The saints are referred to as exclusive recipients in the Sufi tradition because their hearts are purified and prepared for that. Knowledge revealed to the saints, on the other hand, differs from intellectual knowledge because the first cannot be gained