

# ISLAM AND CONFUCIANISM: RITUAL, PRAYER AND FASTING

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## ABSTRACT

Islam advocates that all mankind is originated from the same father Adam (peace be upon him), who worshipped only one God, and whose religion was *tawhid* (the unity of God), the core of the Islamic faith. In ancient books of Chinese civilization, we find a similar record. Plenty of evidences therein shows striking resemblances between Islamic and Confucian teachings, which would further confirm the claim of Islam, that mankind was originally one race, had one faith: *al-tawhid*, and worshipped the same God. This article is an investigation into some of these parallels between Islam and Confucian teachings.

**Keywords:** Islam, Confucianism, ritual, prayer, fasting

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In Islamic teaching, all humans, regardless of race and color, were born from the same father Adam (peace be upon him), who worshipped only one God, and whose belief was *tawhid* (the unity of God), the core of the Islamic faith. This God is unique; none is similar onto Him. He is formless, originally exists. He has no beginning no end. He is ever existent. With the passage of time (of thousands and thousands of years) and the spread of human races worldwide and the formation of new races, men gradually forgot this primordial belief: *al-tawhid*; and started worshipping different objects other than One God. For reminding men of their origin and primordial belief, God gradually sent his messengers. Those messengers were sent, choosing among them, to every race of people, with the same belief: *al-tawhid*, and with a form of law (like *al-Shari'a* of Islam) befitting their specific time and place. At last, before the dawn of Islam, as many as one hundred twenty-four thousand and more messengers (or prophets) were sent to mankind. Amongst those prophets, only some names are clearly recorded, but the great majority of names are not clearly recorded. Amongst these numbers are surely some who were sent by God to the Chinese race, a race whose population comprises nearly one-fourth of the world population today.

### Mankind was one single race:

In the Quran, the first fountain source of the Islamic civilization, it states:

Mankind was one single nation, and Allah sent messengers with glad tidings and warnings; and with them He sent the book in truth, to judge between people in matters wherein they differed; but the people of the book, after the clear signs came to them, did not differ among themselves, except through selfish contumacy. (2: 213)

Chinese history began from *Sanhuang Wudi* 三皇五帝 (three kings and five emperors). Three kings were Fuxi 伏羲, Shennong 神农 and Huangdi 黄帝 while five emperors were Shaohao 少昊, Zhuanxu 颛顼, Gaoxin 高辛 (also Diku 帝喾), Tangyao 唐尧 and Yushun 虞舜. The three kings had their books called *Sanfeng* 三坟 (Three Clay Tablets), while the Five emperors had their books called *Wudian* 五典 (Five Codes). Followed by the dynasties of Xia 夏 (2070 BC~1600 BC), Shang 商 (1600 BC~1046 BC) and Zhou 周 (1046 BC~256 BC), who also had their books. Although the teachings of those books were little different from that of *Sanfen* and *Wudian*, yet they were explanations and commentaries on *Sanfen* and *Wudian*; still more they were only books in which the origin of the nation and the decrees of the heaven was recorded.

For this reason, later dynasties revered them, treating them as great teachings.<sup>1</sup>

Here a few points must be highlighted: 1. Fuxi 伏羲 was the earliest (or first) king of Chinese people; a similar name Yafus was recorded in the classics of Jewish and Christian and Islamic civilizations. 2. Fuxi already had a book, which was carved onto clay tablets. 3. The people at that time already learnt how to write and knew how to record things. 4. The scholars in later dynasties, e.g., Xia, Shang and Zhou already started giving their own opinions on the historical data.

### God sent messengers to every nation:

And there never was a people without a warner having lived among them (in the past). (35: 24)

### A group of people in those nations changed the word of God:

A party of them heard the word of Allah; and perverted it knowingly after they understood it. (2: 75)

They change the words from their places, and forget a good part of the message that was sent them.” (5: 13 & 41)

God is the most generous and most merciful, who accepts prayers of the believers who pray to Him and worship Him in their own ways.

Those who believe in the Quran, and those who follow the Jewish scripture, and the Christian and the Sabians, and who believe in Allah and the last day, and work righteousness, shall have their reward with their Lord, on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve. (2: 62)

Those who believe in the Quran, those who follow the Jewish scripture, and the Christian and the Sabians, Majians and Polytheists-Allah will judge between them on the day of judgement: for Allah is witness of all things. (22: 17)

<sup>1</sup> See *Shangshu* (the Book of History), its prelude, wherein it states: 伏羲神农黄帝之书, 谓之三坟, 言大道也。少昊颛顼高辛唐虞之书, 谓之五典, 言常道也。至于夏商周之书, 虽设教不伦, 雅诰奥义, 其归一揆。是故历代宝之, 以为大训。(孔氏尚书·尚书序)

**God:**

In Islam God is named Allah; while in classical Chinese, there were several words referring to god, such as “tian” (天), “di” (帝), “dao” (道), “yi” (一), “shangtian” (上天), “tiandi” (天帝) etc. “Say: He is Allah, the One and Only.” (112: 1) “And there is none like unto Him.” (112: 4)

The ancient Chinese also believed in one god and acted on the volition of that god. Plenty of testimonies are found in the oldest Chinese history book *Shangshu* 尚书 (the Book of History). For instance:

The people of Youhu violated the laws of five emperors and abandoned the rules of three kings. Therefore, I, on the order of the heaven (tian), am going to punish them. I have no choice but honestly obey heaven, to inflict punishment on them.<sup>2</sup> (*Shangshu*, Xiashu: Ganshi)

These words were articulated by the second king (Qi 启) of the Xia Dynasty (2070 BC~1600 BC), the oldest dynasty established by the Chinese. King Qi acted by the name (or on the order) of the heaven. In sharp contrast, the Quran mentions many cases of people like ‘Ad, Iram, Thamūd, Pharaoh (89: 6-10) who possessed an ancient civilization, which succumbed when they persistently broke Allah’s law.<sup>3</sup>

The people of Xia dynasty committed grave sins, the heaven (*tian*) ordered us to vanish them.<sup>4</sup> “Xia people committed sins, I fear God (*shangdi*), I have to punish them.<sup>5</sup> (*Shangshu*, Shangshu, Tangshi)

These words were articulated by Tang 汤, the founder of Shang Dynasty (1600 BC~1046 BC), the second dynasty in Chinese history. At the end of Xia Dynasty, its king Jie 桀 became tyrant, so the people of Tang 汤 rose, on the order of the heaven, against him and overturned his dynasty. The same moral is found in the Quran wherein it states: “How many were populations We utterly destroyed because of their iniquities, setting up in their place other people?” (21: 11)

2 有扈氏威侮五行，殆弃三正。天用剿绝其命，今予惟恭行天之罚。（尚书·夏书·甘誓）

3 *The Holy Quran, Text, Translation and Commentary*, Abdullah Yūsuf Ali, new revised edition (Maryland: Amana Corporation, 1989), 1645.

4 有夏多罪，天命击之。（尚书·商书·汤誓）

5 予畏上帝，不敢不正。（尚书·商书·汤誓）

A poetry of Zhou states: ‘Fear the power of God, by which God protects you; if you do not, who else will protect you?’<sup>6</sup> (*Zuo zhuan*, 15<sup>th</sup> year of Wengong) While in the Quran it is stated: “And for those who fear Allah, He ever prepares a way out, and He provides for him from sources he never imagines. (65: 2-3)

“I fear the power of God, day and night, by which God protect me.”<sup>7</sup> (*Shi*, Zhousong: wojiang) While in the Quran it is stated: “And for those who fear Allah, He will make their path easy.” (65: 4) “And if anyone fears Allah, He will remove his ills from him, and will enlarge His reward.” (65: 5)

**Confucius believed in One God (yi 一):**

Confucius (551~479 BC), a great scholar, educator, and philosopher in ancient China, has played a pivotal role in the foundation of not only Confucianism but the whole Chinese civilization. It is said that he recollected, revised and edited *the Five Classics* (*Shijing*, *Shangshu*, *Lijing*, *Yijing* and *Chunqiu*), which were almost forgotten by the people then, due to long period of chaotic socio-political situation in China. Confucius said: “At fifty of my age, I know my mission ordained to me by the heaven.”<sup>8</sup> (*Analects*: Weizheng)

Confucius said to (his disciple) Ci: “Ci, do you think that I got knowledge through massive reading?”

Ci answered: “yes, is it not so?”

Confucius said: “no, my knowledge is instilled into me by One God.”<sup>9</sup> (*Analects*: Weilinggong)

Islam came to this world, not bringing a new faith to mankind, but to revive the oldest and primordial belief of mankind: *al-tawhid*.

**Ritual:**

Rituals are two types, one in a broad sense and the other in a narrow sense. Rituals in the narrow sense indicate the prayers like *al-Salat* in the case of Islam and *daogao* 祷告 in the case of Chinese culture. The rituals in a broad sense include the rites or decorum practiced in political institutions, social customs and religious ceremonies. For instance, in Islam, when

6 周颂曰：畏天之威，于时保之；不畏于天，将何能保。（左传·文公十五年）

7 我其夙夜，畏天之威，于时保之。（诗·周颂·我将）

8 子曰：（吾）五十而知天命。（论语·为政）

9 子曰：赐也，女以予为多学而识之者与？对曰：然，非与？曰：非也。予一以贯之。

a Muslim visits a friend, he must say 'al-salam alaykum' (peace be upon you) in a loud voice, if his 'salam' is answered by the friend, then he can enter the house; if not, he must not enter.

The very same rite was observed by the ancient Chinese. In *Liji* it is stated: "When paying a visit to others, try always to avoid being rude. Before entering the main room, remember to say 'hello' in a loud voice. When you see two pair of shoes in front of the door and hear voice from inside room, you may enter; otherwise, you had better halt."<sup>10</sup> "When attaining to the age of six, children are to be taught about numbers and names of things. At the age of seven, boys and girls are not to be seated together or eat together."<sup>11</sup>

In Islam, if people do not know and worship God, then they live a life like animals; while in Confucianism, "If we human beings lived without rites and decorum, even though we can speak, wouldn't it mean that we have heart similar to that of bird or beast?"<sup>12</sup> The prophet of Islam said: "I am sent for completing beautiful morals." (Narrated by Muslim) while in Confucianism: "The prophet (sage) rose, and enlightened people by formulating the rules of rites and decorum with a view to regulating people's conduct and making them realise that they are different from birds and beast."<sup>13</sup>

In Islam, when a kid is able to eat by him/herself, he/she must use the right hand. While in Confucianism, "When a child enables to eat by him/herself, he/she must be taught to use his/her right hand to eat. When they are able to speak, the boy should say 'wei' while the girl should say 'yu'."<sup>14</sup>

In Islam, as Wang Dai-yu said: "One prayer is converged to the rituals of seven heavens; of the prayers are 12 obligations, resembling 12 zodiacal signs; and the heavenly principles (*tianli*) are also twelve, resembling 12 months of a year. If the two are combined, it becomes 24 solar periods, if divided it becomes 12 hours for a day and a night each."<sup>15</sup> While in Confucianism, "Rites observe the law of heaven, and earth, follow the cycling of the four seasons, conform to the changes of the *yin* and *yang*, and comply with human feelings."<sup>16</sup>

Such sayings and other similar quotations can be added on, to the end, only one point is proven: as Islam claims: human beings had the same root.

10 将适舍, 求毋固。将上堂, 声必扬。户外有二履, 闻言则入, 闻不言则不入。(礼记·曲礼上)

11 六年, 教之于数与方名, 七年, 男女不同席, 不共食。(礼记: Neize)

12 今人而无礼, 虽能言, 不亦禽兽之心乎?(礼记·曲礼上)

13 是故圣人作, 为礼以教人; 使人以有礼, 知自别于禽兽。(礼记·曲礼上)

14 子能食食, 教以右手; 能言, 男唯女俞。(礼记: Neize)

15 Wang Dai-yu, *Zhengjiaozhenquan*; see my translation of this work, *Real Comprehension of the True Religion*, p. 146; (forthcoming in print).

16 凡礼之大体·体天地·法四时·则阴阳·顺人情, 故谓之礼。(礼记: Neize)

## Prayer:

Islam and Confucianism both emphasize the rituals in various relations. Islam made 'praying five times a day' as compulsive obligation on every Muslim, man and female. In the Quran it is stated: "Set up prayers, for such prayers are enjoyed on believers at stated time." (4: 103) While in Confucianism, rituals (rites) must be observed during praying to god. "In dedicating obligations to deities and spiritual piety and solemnity cannot be manifested without rites and decorum."<sup>17</sup>

The performance of this rituals is recorded in three books, *Zhouli* 周礼 (the Rites of Zhou), *Yili* 仪礼 (the Rites and Decorum) and *Liji* 礼记 (the Book of Rites). Unfortunately, most of these rituals are not practiced by the modern Chinese, so we do not know the exact performance of those rites.

## Fasting:

As we shall see, fasting as a tool to restrain oneself from indulging in unethical deeds, is advocated and encouraged by almost all major religions of the world. Here we shall discuss the fasting in Islam and Chinese religions, especially of Confucianism.

Fasting in Islam is *al-sawm* or *al-siyam* in Arabic. It is fasting in the month of Ramadan of the Islamic calendar. In this month (may it be 29 days or thirty days) of the Islamic calendar, all Muslims in this world must fast. They will abstain from food, drink, sexual intercourse and other vices. The time for this abstinence is roughly from dawn to sunset, (for Malaysian Muslims roughly from 5:30 am to 7: 30 pm, the exact calculation depends on the season to which Ramadan falls.) One should keep in mind that a day in the Islamic calendar begins from the night. During this time, every Muslim must strictly observe those rules. Offenders will not get rewards and blessings from God. In Islamic teaching, all ghosts and demons whose actions are restricted by God in this month. Thus, Ramadan is a blessing month for all Muslims. For those who are ill or on a trip during Ramadan or certain days of it, fasting can be excused, but after they recovered from illness or returned from the trip, the missed days must be made up. These are brief requirements for *al-sawm* in Islam. More detailed requirements are discussed by many Muslim *ulama'* in many specialized works, such as *Ihya' Ulum al-Din* (The Revival of Religious Knowledge) by Imam al-Ghazali. But we are not in the position to discuss that here.

In Islamic teaching, fasting is prescribed by God to all nations of this world.<sup>18</sup> In the

17 祷祠祭祀, 供给鬼神, 非礼不诚不莊。(礼记·曲礼上)

18 See Imam al-Ghazzali, *Mukashifat al-Qulub*, (Beirüt: Dār al-Ma'rifat, 2000), 457.

Quran it is stated: “Ye who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you, as it was prescribed to those before you, that you may learn self-restraint.” (2: 183) Fasting in Chinese is “*zhaijie* 斋戒”, which virtually implies two meaning fasting (*zhai*) and stop doing bad things (*jie*). Wang Bi 王弼 (226-249), a philosopher and canonist, who lived during the Three Kingdom period (220-280) of Chinese history, said in his *Annotation to the Book of Change* (Zhouyizhu 周易注): “Cleansing heart is *zhai* (fasting) while stopping doing the bad things is *jie*.”<sup>19</sup>

Zheng Xuan 郑玄 (127-200), a great Confucian scholar, who lived at the end of Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220), said in his *Commentary on the Book of Rites* (Lijing Zhushu 礼记注疏) that: “The outer fasting implies ‘no sexual intercourse, no music, no condolences and visiting the sick.’”<sup>20</sup>

Zhu Sheng 朱升 (1299-1377), an educationist and militarist, who lived in the early Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), who composed, by imperial edict, “*Zhaijie Wen*” 斋戒文 (Treatise on Fasting), in which he laid down the rules for the act of fasting, saying: “*Zhai* is for cleansing inner sins while *jie* is for giving up all bad habit. The person who fast must bathe and change clothes, stay in a separate room. He will not drink, not eat stench food, not visit the sick, not present condolences, not listen to music, and not answer to subpoena. Those are the things that must be given up (*jie*). And yet the person who fast must be sincere and cautious; if he thinks something must think the god whom he is worshipping; considering that God is above him, or at his left or right; focusing fully on this all time without a moment of laxity. This is the way of fasting.”<sup>21</sup>

Chinese lived in imperial time often fast before they offer their sacrifices to god or ancestors. This fasting was made as a rule in *the Book of Rites* (Liji 礼记), one of *the Five Classics*, wherein it states: “Fast and then pray to god and spirit.”<sup>22</sup> Before one worships god, he must fast first. This fasting has two types: inner fasting (*zhizhai* 致斋) and outer fasting (*sanzhai* 散斋). The former last for three days while the latter for ten days. During the inner fasting, the man who fast should cleanse his dwelling, control his loud laughing and talking, rectify his

thinking, give up his leisure and regulate his habit. Doing these for three days, the effect of the fast will be seen.”<sup>23</sup>

Mencius said: “Even an evil man if he fasts and cleanses himself, he may offer sacrifices to god.”<sup>24</sup>

Yanhui said (to Confucius): “I have no better ways. May I ask you for advice?” Confucius said that: “You must fast and then I’ll tell you. Do you think it will be easy to attain worldly aims? If you do, the bright heaven will disapprove.” Again Yanhui said: “My family is poor. For several months I have neither drunk any wine nor tasted any meat. Can this be considered as fasting?” Confucius said: “This is the fasting before the sacrificial rites, not the fasting of the heart.” Yanhui said: “May I ask what the fasting of the heart is?” Confucius said: “You must concentrate your attention. Do not listen with your ears, but with your heart; do not comprehend with your heart, but with your vital energy. Your ear can hear and your heart can only comprehend. But the vital energy is the emptiness that is responsive to anything. The mighty *dao* can only gather in the emptiness, and that emptiness is the fasting of the heart.”<sup>25</sup>

Fasting is also a requirement for Buddhists. However, at the beginning stage of Sakyamuni’s<sup>26</sup> propagation of Buddhism, there was no rule prohibiting meat but prohibiting alcohol and stench food (such as onion, garlic, ginger etc.). Therefore, when Buddhism was initially spread to China, there was freedom for monks in consuming meat or vegetarian meal.

Fasting is also a requirement for Daoist monks. It is a daily practice for Daoist monks to keep their body and heart clean and calm, as to quest *dao* all the time and at any place. Zhang Yu-chu 张宇初 (1359-1410), a Daoist scholar and leader, who lived at the beginning of Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) said in his *Daomen Shijie* 道门十规 (Ten Rules of Daoist School), that “Those who dedicate to fast, must cleanse his body and heart, rectify his mind, focus on silent reading, considering it as one is speaking to god, and meeting with him.”<sup>27</sup>

In Islam, our *ulamâ’* (Muslim scholars) also emphasize *khushu’* (attentiveness) in their

19 Wang Bi, “Xici shang” (Commentary, part I), in *Zhouyi Zhu* (the Annotated Book of Change) <http://m.sbk8.com/gudai/yijingshuji/zhouyizhu/123349.html>. for digital book (accessed 10/11/2019).

20 Zheng Xuan, (1568) *Liji Zhushu* (Commentary on the Book of Rites), in *Shisanjing Zhushu* (Commentaries on Thirteen Classics), lithographic edition, re-blocked in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of Longqing reign (1567-1672); vol. 47, folio 2.

21 Zhang Ting-yu et al, (1980), *Mingshi* (Ming History), vol. 5, juan (section) 47, Li I (Rituals I); Beijing: Zhonghua Book Store, pp. 1239-1240.

22 “Quli 曲礼上” (Minute Rules of Decorum), in *The Book of Rites* (Liji). See [https://so.gushiwen.org/guwen/bookv\\_3137.aspx](https://so.gushiwen.org/guwen/bookv_3137.aspx), for digital book (accessed 10/11/2019).

23 “Jiyi 祭义” (the Significance of Sacrifices) in *The Book of Rites* (Liji). See [https://so.gushiwen.org/guwen/bookv\\_3160.aspx](https://so.gushiwen.org/guwen/bookv_3160.aspx), for digital book (accessed 11/11/2019).

24 Mencius, (1993), trans. into English by Zhao Zhen-tao et al., a Chinese-English Bilingual Edition, (Jinan: Shandong Friendship Press), p. 296-297.

25 Zhuangzi, (1999), trans. into English by Wang Rong-pei, Changsha: Hunan People’s Publishing House, 55.

26 The founder of Buddhism. Sakyamuni is a reverend name, of which “Sakya” implies the name of Gautama’s tribe, while “muni” denotes sage or achiever of meditation; the combined word “Sakyamuni” implies “the sage (prophet) of Sakya tribe”. His original name was Gautama Siddhattha.

27 See <https://baike.baidu.com/item/daomenshigui/道门十规>, for digital book (accessed 12/11/2019).

prayer (*al-salat*). Pray to God as if you see Him, even though you do not see Him, but He virtually sees you.

Recite what is sent of the book by inspiration to you; and establish regular prayer: for prayer restrains from shameful and unjust deeds; and remembrance of Allah is the greatest (thing in life) without a doubt. And Allah knows the deed that you do. (29: 45)

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