

A Brief on the True Meaning of Universality of the Qur'an

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Prologue

This is an abridged version of a detailed article that I have written on the same subject titled The True Meaning of Universality of the Qur'an. The purpose of this article is to provide reasons and evidences from the Qur'an to understand what the universality of the Qur'an means. Those interested to read the detailed and expanded reasoning are invited to download and read the original article [here](#).

Throughout this article I am referring to universality of the Qur'an and in doing so I have invented two terms to refer to two different concepts. These are as follows:

'General Universality of the Qur'an' refers to the following understanding:

The Qur'an was sent for the Arabs (Ummi'in) in Arabia and whoever who have joined them, or may join them in future, to become part of their religious community (Muslims). While primarily aimed for this particular purpose, the Book also naturally contains a message that is universal and relevant to every human being. This is the message of Monotheism (tauwheed), being mindful about the hereafter and doing righteous things. This is a message that is in common between almost all religions that exist on the face of earth.

'Specific Universality of the Qur'an' refers to the following understanding:

The Qur'an was sent for the entire mankind and every human being is bound to follow it by becoming a Muslim and following the shari'ah of Islam.

In this article the General Universality of the Qur'an is not the subject of study, although it is referred to. In my understanding there is no doubt or questions about the General Universality of the Qur'an. This article studies the Specific Universality of the Qur'an and argues, with the use of the Qur'an, that the concept of Specific Universality of the Qur'an is in conflict with the Qur'an.

Finally, a point on writing: To make the writing and reading smoother, in this article I refer to the Arabian Peninsula as 'Arabia', and to Arabs in the Arabian Peninsula as 'the Arabs'.

1. Reasoning on the Basis of the Qur'an

Evidences and reasoning on the basis of the Qur'an to verify and revise the traditional scenario based on Specific Universality of the Qur'an can be broadly categorised into two groups:

- 1.1. Evidences related to the style of the Qur'an and its content
- 1.2. Verses of the Qur'an that determine which scenario is correct

1.1. Evidences related to the style of the Qur'an and its content

These evidences can be briefly listed as follows:

- The complex language and style of the Qur'an
- Overall, very specific addressees of the Qur'an
- Addressing mostly the local issues and local people, with no or very little references to any global issues at the time or in the future, and no guiding references to people or nations other than its primary addressees.
- The shari'ah being very much on the basis of the socio cultural norms of the time and the location, with absolutely no attention to the conditions elsewhere
- No mentions of what to do beyond Arabia or any instructions about this
- Very specific and local theme, that is, warning to do itmam al-hujjah (completing the reasoning) for the Quraysh, polytheists and the people of the book in Arabia, and the consequences of these groups ignoring this warning

The above characteristics do not seem to be suitable for the scenario that is based on the Specific Universality of the Qur'an.

1.2. Verses of the Qur'an that determine which scenario is correct

There are four groups of verses that together and even separately determine whether the Specific Universality of the Qur'an is a Qur'anic concept or if it is in fact against the very premise of the Qur'an. As far as I can see, none of these verses need much analysis to understand what they actually mean. These groups of verses are presented in turn:

1.2.1. Verses that limit the scope of the prophetic mission by explaining the reason that the Qur'an was revealed

If one asks, according to the Qur'an, for what function the Qur'an was revealed, the answer can easily be taken from the Qur'an:

وَ كَذَلِكَ أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ قُرْآنًا عَرَبِيًّا لِنُنذِرَ أُمَّ الْقُرَىٰ وَمَنْ حَوْلَهَا وَ نُنذِرَ يَوْمَ الْجَمْعِ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ فَرِيقٌ فِي الْجَنَّةِ وَ فَرِيقٌ فِي السَّعِيرِ

And thus have We revealed to you an Arabic Quran, so that you warn the Mother City (Mecca) and those around it, and that you may give warning of the day of gathering together wherein is no doubt. A party shall be in the garden and a party in the Burning Fire (42:7)

وَ هَذَا كِتَابٌ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ مُبَارَكٌ مُصَدِّقُ الَّذِي بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَ لِنُنذِرَ أُمَّ الْقُرَىٰ وَمَنْ حَوْلَهَا وَ الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْآخِرَةِ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِهِ وَ هُمْ عَلَىٰ صَلَاتِهِمْ يُحَافِظُونَ

And this is a Book We have revealed, with blessings, confirming what came before it and so that you warn those who live in the mother city and around it. Those who believe in the Hereafter, it is they who will believe in it and it is they who protect their prayers (6:92)

Based on the above two verses the scope of the mission of the prophet (pbuh) was not an unlimited one. It was in fact limited and the limit was Arabia (Mecca and surrounding). Based on the above verses the purpose of revealing the Qur'an was to warn people in the limits of Arabia. In the light of the above verses, the meaning of verses like the following also becomes clear:

وَإِنَّهُ لَذِكْرٌ لَّكَ وَلِقَوْمِكَ وَسَوْفَ تُسْأَلُونَ

And this is a reminder for you and your people and soon you will be questioned (43:44)

The Qur'an has even answered the question that why its mission was limited to Arabia and the Arabs in that location in particular:

... لِنُنذِرَ قَوْمًا مَا آتَاهُمْ مِنْ نَذِيرٍ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ

... (this is) to warn people who did not have a warner before you (28:46)

لِنُنذِرَ قَوْمًا مَا أُنذِرَ آبَاؤُهُمْ فَهُمْ غَافِلُونَ

(this revelation from the Mighty and Merciful) is for people whose forefathers were not warned and were ignorant (36:6)

أَمْ يَقُولُونَ افْتَرَاهُ بَلْ هُوَ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّكَ لِنُنذِرَ قَوْمًا مَا آتَاهُمْ مِنْ نَذِيرٍ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَهْتَدُونَ

Or do they say: He has forged it? Rather it is the truth from your Lord so that you warn a people to whom no warner has come before you, that they may be guided (32:3)

وَهَذَا كِتَابٌ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ مُبَارَكٌ فَاتَّبِعُوهُ وَاتَّقُوا لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ أَنْ تَقُولُوا إِنَّمَا أَنْزَلَ الْكِتَابُ عَلَي طَائِفَتَيْنِ مِنْ قَبْلِنَا وَإِنْ كُنَّا عَنْ دِرَاسَتِهِمْ لَغَافِلِينَ أَوْ تَقُولُوا لَوْ أَنَّا أُنزِلَ عَلَيْنَا الْكِتَابُ لَكُنَّا أَهْدَى مِنْهُمْ فَقَدْ جَاءَكُمْ بَيِّنَةٌ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ وَهُدًى وَرَحْمَةٌ ...

And this is a Book We have revealed, blessed; therefore follow it and guard (against evil) that mercy may be shown to you. Lest you say that the Book was only revealed to two parties before us and We were truly unaware of what they read. Or lest you should say: If the Book had been revealed to us, we would certainly have been better guided than they So indeed there has come to you clear proof from your Lord, and guidance and mercy ... (6:155-157)

Based on the above the answer is very straightforward: Because the Arabs did not have a warner before and they could argue that why there was revelations for the two communities of Jews and Christians in the past but not for them. At this point, a curious rational mind will ask another question: but why God did not send the prophet (pbuh) for all human beings? Answer to this question is given in the next section.

1.2.2. Verses that associate diversity of nations with the need to have separate guides for each nation

The Almighty has made it clear in the following verses that in between the two choices of 'sending a guide for all nations' and 'sending a guide for each nation', He has gone for the second:

إِنَّمَا أَنْتَ مُنذِرٌ وَ لِكُلِّ قَوْمٍ هَادٍ

You are only a warner and for every people (nations) there is a guide (13:7)

إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ بِالْحَقِّ بَشِيرًا وَ نَذِيرًا وَ إِنَّ مِنْ أُمَّةٍ إِلَّا خَلَا فِيهَا نَذِيرٌ

We have sent you truthfully as a bearer of good news and a warner and there is no community to whom a warner was not sent (35:24)

وَ لِكُلِّ أُمَّةٍ رَسُولٌ فَإِذَا جَاءَ رَسُولُهُمْ قُضِيَ بَيْنَهُمْ بِالْقِسْطِ وَ هُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ

And for every community there is a messenger, so when their messenger comes they will be judged with fairness and they will not be wronged (10:47)

وَ لَقَدْ بَعَثْنَا فِي كُلِّ أُمَّةٍ رَسُولًا

And verily we raised a messenger for every community (16:36)

Still, a question may be asked, that why God would not send one guide for all nations and would send local guides for each nation. The following verses provide a very in-depth and enlightening answer to the above question that paves the way for the rest of this article:

إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ قُرْآنًا عَرَبِيًّا لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ

We have sent the Qur'an in Arabic so that you may show understanding (12:2)

فَإِنَّمَا يَسَّرْنَاهُ بِلِسَانِكَ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَذَكَّرُونَ

We have facilitated (its understanding) by (sending it in) your language so that they may be reminded (44:58)

فَإِنَّمَا يَسَّرْنَاهُ بِلِسَانِكَ لِتُبَشِّرَ بِهِ الْمُتَّقِينَ وَ تُنذِرَ بِهِ قَوْمًا لُدًّا

So we have facilitated (its understanding) by (sending it in) your language to give good news with it to the pious and warn with it stubborn people (19:97)

وَ مَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ رَسُولٍ إِلَّا بِلِسَانِ قَوْمِهِ لِيُبَيِّنَ لَهُمْ

And we have not sent a messenger but in the language of his people so that he may deliver to them (the message) clearly (14:4)

وَ لَوْ جَعَلْنَاهُ قُرْآنًا أَعْجَمِيًّا لَقَالُوا لَوْلَا فُصِّلَتْ آيَاتُهُ أَلَّا نَعْرِبِي

And if we had made this Qur'an in non-Arabic language (they) would say why its verses are not clear, a non-Arabic (book) and Arab (addressees?) (41:44)

وَلَوْ نَزَّلْنَاهُ عَلَىٰ بَعْضِ الْأَعْجَمِينَ فَقَرَأَهُ عَلَيْهِمْ مَا كَانُوا بِهِ مُؤْمِنِينَ

And if we had revealed this to some non-Arabs and it was read (in non-Arabic language) to them (i.e. Arabs), they would not believe in it (26:198-9)

The above verses have made the logic of local guidance of the Almighty clear. The logic is 'language'. God sends guidance with the language that is known and clear for those who are supposed to be guided. The word 'language' here in fact refers to much deeper issues, that is, the element of cultural and social familiarity. In other words, even a non-Arab who could speak perfect classic Arabic at the time would have not fulfilled the requirements to be a chosen prophet for the Arabs. This is clear from the following verses:

كَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا فِيكُمْ رَسُولًا مِّنكُمْ يَتْلُوا عَلَيْكُمْ آيَاتِنَا وَيُزَكِّيكُمْ وَيُعَلِّمُكُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَيُعَلِّمُكُم مَّا لَمْ تَكُونُوا تَعْلَمُونَ 2:151

Just as we sent a messenger from among yourselves to read Our verses to you and (in this way) purify you by teaching you the book and the wisdom and teaching you what you did not know
(2:151, also repeated with very similar wording in 3:164)

لَقَدْ جَاءَكُمْ رَسُولٌ مِّنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ عَزِيزٌ عَلَيْهِ مَا عَنِتُّمْ حَرِيصٌ عَلَيْكُمْ بِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ رَءُوفٌ رَّحِيمٌ

Certainly a Messenger has come to you from among yourselves; grievous to him is your distress, extremely caring about you; to the believers compassionate, merciful (9:128)

A curious mind may now develop a question. Such diversity surely results in differences of the paths in a God aware life. Is this going to be a problem or has the Qur'an already appreciated and approved such differences? The next section provides answer to the above question:

1.2.3. Verses that inform about accepting the diversity of paths towards God

In response to the arrogant critics of some of the religious rituals and laws that were brought by the prophet (pbuh) the following verse was revealed:

لِكُلِّ أُمَّةٍ جَعَلْنَا مَنَسَكًا هُمْ نَاسِكُوهُ فَلَا يُنَازِعُكَ فِي الْأَمْرِ وَادْعُ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ إِنَّكَ لَعَلَىٰ هُدًى مُّسْتَقِيمٍ

For every community we established a path (ritual) that they follow so they should not argue with you about this matter and invite to your Lord you are verily on the straight path (22:67)

The verse points out that every community of God have their own ritual. Similar verse was revealed among the directives to change the qiblah:

وَلِكُلِّ وِجْهَةٍ هُوَ مُوَلِّئُهَا فَاسْتَبِقُوا الْخَيْرَاتِ أَيْنَ مَا تَكُونُوا يَأْتِ بِكُمْ اللَّهُ جَمِيعاً إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

And for every direction (of worship) there are people (associated with it) so compete with each other in goodness, wherever you are, God will gather you all, God has power over everything (2:148)

The religious path that was brought by the prophet (pbuh) therefore is one of the possible religious paths that suited the Arabs. Other nations with a shari'ah needed to follow their own rules:

وَكَيْفَ يُحَكِّمُوكَ وَ عِنْدَهُمُ التَّوْرَةُ فِيهَا حُكْمُ اللَّهِ ثُمَّ يَتَوَلَّوْنَ مِنْ بَعْدِ ذَلِكَ وَ مَا أُولَئِكَ بِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ

And how do they ask for you to make a ruling among them while they have Torah in which there is God's ruling, then they turned back after this and they are not (really) believers (5:43)

وَأَلْيَحْكُمْ أَهْلَ الْإِنجِيلِ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ فِيهِ وَمَنْ لَمْ يَحْكَمْ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ

And the followers of Injil should rule based on what God has sent in It and whoever does not rule based on what God has sent (to them) then verily they are transgressors (5:47)

The ultimate message of the Qur'an in appreciation and in fact informing about the diversity of paths towards God is in the following verse:

... لِكُلِّ جَعَلْنَا مِنْكُمْ شِرْعَةً وَمِنْهَاجًا وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَجَعَلَكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَلَكِنْ لِيَبْلُوَكُمْ فِي مَا آتَيْنَاكُمْ فَاسْتَبِقُوا الْخَيْرَاتِ إِلَى اللَّهِ مَرْجِعُكُمْ جَمِيعاً فَيُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ فِيهِ تَخْتَلِفُونَ

... for each from among you (communities chosen by God) we established a law and a path and if God wanted He would surely made you all as one community however He wanted to put you in challenge with regard to what He gave you (separately) so compete with each other in goodness, your return, all, is to God so He will inform you of that in which you differed (5:48)

It should be noted that the above verse comes after the earlier two quoted verses in the same chapter, and in the last or one of the last revealed chapters of the Qur'an (Ma'idah). The above verse is very clear about the co-existence of different forms of shari'ah as a legitimate concept before the Almighty.

It is due to this subjective, conditional shari'ah (as compared to the objective, unconditional core concepts of religion) that the Qur'an does not include it when it comes to giving a universally applicable criteria for success in the hereafter:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَالصَّالِحِينَ وَالنَّصَارَىٰ مَنْ ءَامَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا فَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ

Those who believe (in prophet Muhammad – pbuh) and the Jews and the Sabians and Christians, any of them who (truly) believe in God and the hereafter and does righteous deeds then there will not be any fear or any grief for them (5:69, also repeated with very similar words in 2:62)

It is then in the light of the above verses on diversity of paths towards the Almighty that verses like the following start to show their depth of meaning:

وَيَوْمَ نَبْعَثُ فِي كُلِّ أُمَّةٍ شَهِيدًا عَلَيْهِمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِهِمْ وَ جِئْنَا بِكَ شَهِيدًا عَلَى هَؤُلَاءِ

And the day when we raise from every community a witness on them from their own and will bring you as a witness to these (16:89)

A curious mind may ask at this point that if the issue was not to technically convert to Islam by leave their own shari'ah, then what the expectation of the Qur'an and the prophet (pbuh) was from the people of the book in Arabia at the time. The answer is discussed in the next section.

1.2.4. Verses that gave glad tidings to the righteous among the people of the book despite them not being Muslims

The Qur'an has criticised the people of the Book in Arabia in a number of places. The Book however also contains praise and promise of heaven for those people of the book in Arabia at the time who were among the righteous. The interesting point is, when the Qur'an praises these groups, It still refers to them as people of the book and in no verse there is even an implicit indication that they have or they will convert to become Muslims or that this is expected from them or at least preferred.

لَيْسُوا سَوَاءً مِّنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ أُمَّةٌ قَائِمَةٌ يَتْلُونَ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ ءَانَاءَ اللَّيْلِ وَهُمْ يَسْجُدُونَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَيَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَيُسْرِعُونَ فِي الْخَيْرَاتِ وَأُولَئِكَ مِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ

They are not the same, from among the People of the Book there are people who are upright (in in the path of God), stand up (for worship) read verses of God during the night while in prostration, (they) believe in God and the hereafter and advise to rightness and warn against evil and hasten in goodness and they are from among the righteous (3:113, 114)

وَإِنَّ مِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ لَمَنْ يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَ مَا أَنْزَلَ إِلَيْكُمْ وَ مَا أَنْزَلَ إِلَيْكُمْ خَاشِعِينَ لِلَّهِ لَا يَشْتَرُونَ بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ ثَمَنًا قَلِيلًا أُولَئِكَ لَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ سَرِيعُ الْحِسَابِ

And from among the People of the Book there are those who believe in God and what is sent to you and what is sent to them, being humble for God, (they) do not seel God's verses for cheap price. They have their reward with their Lord. God is quick in reckoning (3:199)

كُنْتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَ تَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَ تُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَ لَوْ آمَنَ أَهْلُ الْكِتَابِ لَكَانَ خَيْرًا لَهُمْ مِنْهُمُ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَ أَكْثَرُهُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ

You are the best community that is rising for people, (you) advise to rightness and warn against evil and believe in God, and if the People of the Book believe this will be better for them, from among them there are believers but most of them are transgresses (3:110)

Paying a close attention to verse 5:82 makes this even clearer:

لَتَجِدَنَّ أَشَدَّ النَّاسِ عَدَاوَةً لِلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا الْيَهُودَ وَالَّذِينَ أَشْرَكُوا وَلَتَجِدَنَّ أَقْرَبَهُم مَّوَدَّةً لِلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّا نَصْرَىٰ ذَٰلِكَ بِأَن مِّنْهُمْ قَسْبِيبِينَ وَرُءُوبًا وَأَنَّهُمْ لَا يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ وَإِذَا سَمِعُوا مَا أُنزِلَ إِلَى الرَّسُولِ تَرَىٰ أَعْيُنُهُمْ تَفِيضُ مِنَ الدَّمْعِ مِمَّا عَرَفُوا مِنَ الْحَقِّ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا ءَامَنَّا فَاكْتُبْنَا مَعَ الشَّاهِدِينَ وَمَا لَنَا لَا نُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَمَا جَاءَنَا مِنَ الْحَقِّ وَنَطْمَعُ أَنْ يُدْخِلَنَا رَبَّنَا مَعَ الْقَوْمِ الصَّالِحِينَ فَأُنَبِّئُهُم بِمَا قَالُوا جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا وَذَٰلِكَ جَزَاءُ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

You will surely find that, of all people, the most hostile to those who believe are the Jews (in Arabia) and those who ascribe partners to God (in Arabia), and you will surely find that, of all people, those who say, "We are Nasara" are nearest in having affection towards believers. This is because there are priests and monks among them, and because they are not arrogant. And when they hear what has been sent to the messenger you see their eyes overflow with tears, due to what they recognize of the truth (in what they hear). They say: "O our Lord, we believe so write us from among the witnesses. And how could we fail to believe in God and in what from the truth that has come unto us, and we desire that our Lord enter us among the righteous?" And for what they say God will reward them with gardens through which running waters flow, therein to abide and such is the reward of the righteous (5:82-85)

If it is possible for a group of Christians at the time of the prophet (pbuh) to remain Christians while knowing the truth about the prophet (pbuh) and then go to heaven in the hereafter, then why this may not be the case for the righteous Christians and in fact righteous among any religious groups at our time?

It is important to understand what the Qur'an actually meant when the Book invited people of the book in Arabia to believe in the prophet (pbuh). All that they were asked to do was to support the prophet (pbuh) or to at least stop all the enmity and also to take the opportunity to correct their wrong beliefs and practices accordingly.

It is appropriate to end this section with a quote from Imam Hamiduddin Farahi who seems to express the same or very similar view as above in his book Tafsir al-Nidham al-Qur'an:

So fighting became obligatory no for defence but 1. to free Ka'bah, then 2. to bring the Abrahamic religion (hanifiyya) of Abraham to the generation of Ishmael (pbuh), as for other than the generation of Ishmael (pbuh), 3. for establishing justice and removing anarchy (mischief) from the land. So there is no compulsion in religion for the People of the Book, and for anyone who is not from among the generation of Ishmael, and they should pay tax (jaziya). As for the generation of Ishmael (pbuh) they are convinced by clear reasoning by a man from among them, and is from their own heart and language and they do not see the respected prophet (pbuh) as a stranger that God has sent for preaching ... (Tafsir Nidham al-Qur'an, 54-5)

2. The Generally Universal guidance of the Qur'an

This again needs a separate writing but here different dimensions of the general guidance of the Qur'an is summarised as follows:

- The Qur'an, as the most authentic revealed divine guide, remains as the criteria for truth and false not only for Muslims but also any other person who appreciates the truth of the Qur'an.
- In particular the Qur'an provides an opportunity for the followers of the other Abrahamic religions to correct some of their false beliefs or practices and to understand their own divine books better. Whether this opportunity will be taken and by who and in what way can be different in every case and is beyond this article.
- Behind every specific directive of the Qur'an, whether it is a religious rule or addressing of a local issue, there is the faultless, indefinite wisdom of the Almighty. This wisdom should be used as a torch for Muslims and can be used similarly by any seeker of the truth.
- The Qur'an is very powerful in reminding its reader about God and hereafter. Even the verses that address the most specific local issues in the Qur'an have this feature. The Book therefore continues to be a reminder of the Almighty and the hereafter for any Muslim and anyone who appreciates it.

In fact the appreciation of specific, local dimension of the Qur'an makes its general, universal dimension even more accessible and relevant to people. With the assumption that all human beings are bound to convert to Islam and follow the shari'ah of Islam we are making the Qur'an a sectarian book that is only good for followers of a certain religious path. However once we appreciate that the shari'ah is only for Muslims and that the Qur'an has a generic message behind its specific local agenda, then we are opening the door of the Qur'an to every human being who believes in God.

3. Verses Used in the Traditional Understanding

So far I have presented and discussed more than 30 explicit verses of the Qur'an that individually and together make the base and the direct evidence for the scenario that I illustrated above (General Universality of the Qur'an) and against the traditionally held scenario of the Specific Universality of the Qur'an. Throughout my discussions and studies of this particular subject I have seen three verses that are often brought up to justify the traditional understanding. These are 25:1, 6:19 and 2:143 (and 22:78 that is very similar to 2:143). Since this is the abridged version of the original article, here I only write my interpretation of these three verses with no more than one brief statement to explain. A more detailed discussion of these verses can be found in the original article:

تَبَارَكَ الَّذِي نَزَّلَ الْفُرْقَانَ عَلَى عَبْدِهِ لِيَكُونَ لِلْعَالَمِينَ نَذِيرًا

Blessed I the One who sent the differentiator (furqan) to his servant so that he become warner for all (in Arabia) (25:1)

The word 'Alamin while literally means the whole world, can also mean a limited number of people or a specific group (as pointed out by credible scholars of the Qur'an like Imam Razi, Tabari and Zamakhshari).

... وَ أَوْحِيَ إِلَيَّ هَذَا الْقُرْآنُ لِأُنذِرَكُمْ بِهِ وَمَنْ بَلَغَ أَ إِنَّكُمْ لَتَشْتَهُدُونَ أَنَّ مَعَ اللَّهِ إِلَهَةً أُخْرَى ...

... and the Qur'an was revealed to me so that I warn you (Quraysh) and whoever (in Arabia) to whom it may reach ... (6:19)

As the experts of the Arabic have written, *iblagh* means 'reaching in its ultimate and complete level' (Al-Tahqiq fi kalamat al-Qur'an al-Karim, 1:360)

وَكَذَلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا لِتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى النَّاسِ وَيَكُونَ الرَّسُولُ عَلَيْكُمْ شَهِيدًا ...

And in this way we have made you (the companions of the prophet) an intermediate community so that you may be witnesses (to the truth) upon (the rest of) people (in Arabia) and the Messenger be witness upon you ... (2:143)

Verse 16:89 makes it clear that a witness is only from the same community.

I would like to also point out that even if for the sake of discussion I agree that these three verses are referring to a universal scope for the Qur'an, this still does not prove that Islam is supposed to be the religion for every human being and that everyone is expected to convert to Islam and follow the shari'ah.

4. Summary and Conclusion

There is only one truth and all true religions adhere to the same truth. They all promote a life submitted to that truth, that is God. This is that islam (with lower case) that in most places the Qur'an refers to. This truth however has different illustrations to suit different nations and cultures. Therefore every nation has its own version of islam. The version that was given to the people in Arabia and all who joined them later is conventionally called Islam (with capital case).

Based on the above understanding, to a Muslim, followers of the other Godly religions and ideologies are also followers of the path of islam and there is no need for them to convert to Islam. However the Qur'an remains as the criteria for right and wrong for anyone who believes in it (Muslim or non-Muslim). The preaching responsibility of a Muslim therefore is only limited to trying to correct any such ungodly beliefs and practices among Muslims or non-Muslims where the opportunity comes and in a peaceful manner.

In this way, the Qur'an becomes even more relevant and universal. The obsession with converting people to Islam, which basically means them following the shari'ah of Islam, can cloud one's mind against realising the real universal function of the Qur'an. Once it is appreciated that God's religion is not bound by any particular shari'ah, suddenly the real message of the Qur'an becomes available to any human being, Muslim or non-Muslim. That message is none but the message of monotheism (Tauwhid) and its practical implication, that is being aware of the effect of this life on the hereafter and doing righteous deeds.

We are all like mountain climbers who start from the bottom of the mountain. At the start we do not see any other path to the top but the one that we have taken. However our viewpoint becomes wider as we get higher up in the mountain. We then gradually start to see and appreciate many other paths that people, as convinced as us, are taking towards the top of the mountain. I am proud to follow a Book that tells me from

the very start, while I am still at the very bottom of the mountain, that there are indeed many paths to the top.

In this version of the article I tried to share this understanding with the readers in a very brief way and without going into much detail. I invite those interested in more detailed discussion to download and read the original article [here](#).