

# A Path of Compassion and Peace: An Invitation to Islam for Buddhist Friends

## Introduction

In the spirit of friendship and mutual respect, we extend a warm invitation to our Buddhist friends to explore the teachings of Islam. Buddhism and Islam may differ in theology – for instance, Islam centers on faith in one personal God, whereas classical Buddhism does not affirm a creator deity <sup>1</sup> – yet both traditions share a deep commitment to compassion, inner peace, and ethical living. His Holiness the Dalai Lama once noted that when Muslims worship a compassionate and merciful God, they are “*offering complete submission to the ideal of universal compassion*,” paralleling the Buddha’s instruction to live in a compassionate, ethical way <sup>1</sup>. Building on this common ground, we will look at how core Islamic teachings, as expressed in the Quran, resonate with key Buddhist spiritual ideals like compassion, mindfulness, non-attachment to material things, the quest for inner peace, and the journey toward enlightenment. Throughout, the tone is one of **welcome and dialogue**, acknowledging the wisdom of the Buddhist path while introducing the Quran’s message as a complementary source of insight and guidance. We invite you to see Islam not as a rival viewpoint, but as another path illuminated by the light of compassion and truth.

## Compassion and Mercy: A Shared Value

Compassion lies at the heart of both Buddhism and Islam. In Buddhism, **karuṇā** (compassion) and **mettā** (loving-kindness) toward all beings are paramount virtues. Similarly, the Quran teaches that compassion (*rahmah*) is a core attribute of God and a quality that believers are urged to embody. In fact, one scholar observes that “*compassion in Islam, after the concepts of unity of God (tawḥīd) and risālah (the messengership of Muhammad), is as central to Islam as it is to Buddhism*.” <sup>2</sup> The very first chapter of the Quran opens by describing God as “**the Compassionate, the Merciful**,” and Muslims begin nearly every act by invoking “**In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful**.” The Prophet Muhammad – much like an ideal Bodhisattva in Mahayana Buddhism – is celebrated as a vessel of mercy: “*We have not sent you [O Muhammad] except as a mercy for the worlds*” (Quran 21:107) <sup>3</sup>. This Quranic title, “**mercy to all the worlds**,” reflects the Prophet’s deep compassion not only for people but for all creatures <sup>4</sup>. He taught kindness to orphans, widows, neighbors, even animals, and emphasized gentleness and forgiveness in human relations. Muslims and Buddhists thus share a devotion to relieving suffering and extending love to all beings. Both the Buddhist Bodhisattva and the devout Muslim strive to alleviate the pain of others – one out of enlightened compassion, the other seeking God’s pleasure – and the outcome is a kinder, more caring world <sup>5</sup> <sup>6</sup>. In this way, the **teachings of compassion** in our two traditions speak the same language of the heart.

## Mindfulness and God-Consciousness

Buddhist practice emphasizes **mindfulness (sati)** – a calm, continuous awareness of one’s mind, body, and surroundings. By observing each thought and feeling without attachment, Buddhists cultivate insight and compassion. Islam has a parallel in the concept of **God-consciousness (taqwā)** and constant

**remembrance of God (dhikr)**, which imbue the mind with awareness of a higher presence. The Quran often praises those *“who remember God standing, sitting, and lying on their sides”* (Quran 3:191) <sup>7</sup>. Such people remain alert to the moral weight of every intention and action, much as a meditator stays attentive to each breath and thought. The Prophet Muhammad described the pinnacle of faith (iḥsān) as *“to worship Allah as if you see Him, for if you do not see Him, He certainly sees you.”* <sup>8</sup> This saying encourages a state of inner mindfulness of God at all times. The fruit of this practice is described in the Islamic tradition as a *sakīnah* – a tranquil calmness of the heart born of constant awareness of the Divine <sup>9</sup>. A Buddhist might notice that this spiritual vigilance serves a similar purpose to meditation: it frees the mind from negligence and egocentric distractions and inclines it toward compassion, patience, and wisdom <sup>10</sup>. In Islam the focus of mindfulness is centered on Ultimate Reality conceived as God, while in Buddhism it is often centered on impermanence and the nature of mind – yet both disciplines yield a mind that is **more peaceful, present, and ethically attuned**. In daily life, a Muslim at prayer and a monk in meditation both engage in training the mind to dwell in the present, **transcending worldly attachments** and fostering inner serenity <sup>11</sup>. Thus, mindfulness and God-consciousness serve as bridges between our traditions, teaching us to live each moment with awareness and compassion.

## Detachment from Materialism: Understanding Impermanence

Another meeting point of Islam and Buddhism is the recognition that excessive attachment to worldly things leads to suffering. Buddhism’s insight of **anicca** – the impermanence of all conditioned phenomena – underpins the practice of non-attachment. The Buddha likened human life and its pleasures to a dew drop or a flash of lightning: beautiful, yet fleeting. The Quran offers remarkably similar wisdom about the transient nature of this world. It vividly admonishes: *“Know that the life of this world is only play and amusement, show, and mutual boasting among you, and rivalry in wealth and children. It is like vegetation after rain: its growth delights the tillers; then it withers, turns yellow, and becomes [dry] stubble.”* <sup>12</sup> In other words, worldly success and pleasures bloom briefly like flowers after a rain, only to wither away in time. The verse concludes by calling this worldly life *“a deceiving enjoyment”*, an illusion that distracts from what is eternal <sup>13</sup> <sup>14</sup>. Such Quranic imagery mirrors the Buddhist reflection that all worldly phenomena are impermanent – **momentary and unsatisfactory** as lasting sources of joy <sup>15</sup>. Both traditions encourage us to see through the glamour of material things. Where Buddhism counsels non-attachment as the path to liberation from the cycle of suffering, Islam teaches **detachment from the dunya (worldly life)** in favor of seeking the ākhirah (Hereafter) <sup>16</sup>. *“The life of this world is nothing but play and amusement,”* the Quran reminds, *“but the home of the Hereafter is best for those who are righteous”* <sup>17</sup>. By realizing the limits of wealth, status, and sensory pleasures, a practitioner of either faith is less tempted by greed or ego. Instead, one’s heart can focus on what truly matters – whether it be Nirvana, the unbinding from all craving, or closeness to God, the Eternal. In practice, a Buddhist and a Muslim can stand together on an autumn day watching leaves fall, both reflecting that *“all conditioned things are impermanent.”* <sup>18</sup> This shared understanding nurtures a gentle **renunciation of excess and materialism**, freeing us to pursue higher spiritual goals.

## Inner Peace and Enlightenment: Seeking the Transcendent

Both Islam and Buddhism ultimately aim to deliver the human being from suffering into a state of inner peace and fulfillment. In Buddhism, the highest goal is **Nirvana**, often described as the extinguishing of the fires of greed, hatred, and delusion – a state of profound peace, wisdom, and freedom. In Islam, the ultimate goal is nearness to God and entry into Paradise, often associated with a state of tranquility in the soul. The Quran beautifully speaks of the **“soul at peace”** (*nafs al-muṭma’innah*) at the moment of ultimate

return: *“O soul at peace, return to your Lord, well-pleased and pleasing [to Him]. Enter among My servants; enter My Paradise.”* (Quran 89:27–30). This *tranquil soul* is the one purified of selfish passions and filled with trust in God. Both traditions recognize that true peace is attained by conquering inner vices and attachments. Indeed, as one comparative scholar notes, *“the purified state of nirvana and the Qur’anic ideal of the tranquil soul both represent the peace that comes when desire and aversion have been overcome.”* <sup>19</sup> In everyday terms, this means that by overcoming anger with love, greed with contentment, and restlessness with reflection, the heart finds lasting peace. The Quran promises that *“in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest”* (13:28) <sup>20</sup>. Turning inward through prayer and remembrance calms the mind and fills the believer with a light of reassurance, much like a Buddhist finds calm through mindful meditation and insight.

On the concept of **enlightenment**, there is also an interesting parallel. Enlightenment in Buddhism is often symbolized by light – the Buddha is frequently depicted as discovering the “light” of truth under the Bodhi tree, dispelling the darkness of ignorance. Likewise, the Quran uses the metaphor of light for divine guidance and truth. *“Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth,”* says the Quran; *“Light upon light! Allah guides to His light whom He wills.”* <sup>21</sup>. In another verse, *“Allah is the ally of those who believe. He brings them out of darkness into the light.”* (Quran 2:257) <sup>22</sup>. In Islamic understanding, this “light” is not an impersonal force but the guidance and wisdom that God bestows, illuminating the heart and leading a person from confusion to clarity. A Buddhist seeker might see in this the echo of awakening: just as wisdom dispels the darkness of ignorance, God’s guidance dispels misguidance and leads to spiritual awakening. Both paths describe a transformative journey from darkness to light – from delusion to truth. While Buddhism focuses on awakening to the **Four Noble Truths** and the reality of *śūnyatā* (emptiness), Islam invites one to awaken to the **Truth of One God** and His revelation. The destination is described differently, but the inner transformation – a shift from selfishness to selflessness, from chaos to **inner calm**, from ignorance to understanding – is strikingly similar <sup>6</sup> <sup>23</sup>. Ultimately, both traditions assure us that if we earnestly seek the truth and purify our hearts, we will find enlightenment: a radiant inner peace and the joy of knowing the deepest reality – be it called Nirvana or the pleasure of the Most Merciful.

## One God, One Ultimate Reality (Tawhid)

One significant distinction – and invitation – Islam offers to a Buddhist friend is the belief in **One God**, known in Arabic as *Tawḥīd* (absolute oneness of the Divine). Where Buddhism, especially in its original form, refrains from talk of a creator God and focuses on a more abstract Ultimate Truth, Islam unabashedly proclaims a single, personal God who is the source of all existence and goodness. Muslims believe that this one God is not one being among many, but the **ground of all being**, the Eternal and Compassionate Reality embracing the universe. The purity of this monotheistic vision is captured in a short chapter of the Quran that many Muslims know by heart: *“Say, He is Allah, the One. Allah, the Eternal, Absolute. He begets not, nor was He begotten. And there is none comparable to Him.”* <sup>24</sup>. This concise declaration (Quran 112:1–4) asserts that the ultimate truth is a singular, incomparable One – not a void, not a multitude of gods, but a **loving Creator** beyond imagining.

For a Buddhist reader, this idea may initially seem foreign, since the Buddha taught that speculation about God was not necessary for liberation, and some forms of Buddhism are functionally atheistic. Yet, interestingly, the Islamic conception of God shares attributes with the **ultimate reality** in other traditions. For example, the Buddha-nature or **Dharmakāya** in Mahayana thought is sometimes described in terms of infinite compassion and wisdom pervading all things – qualities that Islam boldly personifies in Allah. The Quran tells us that God is *“Most Compassionate and Most Merciful”* <sup>25</sup>, *“All-Hearing, All-Knowing,”* and *“Closer to a person than their jugular vein.”* Far from being an distant deity, the God of Islam is intimately near,

caring, and responsive. Many Buddhist practitioners already believe in unseen benevolent forces or revere figures like Avalokiteśvara (GuānYīn), the bodhisattva of compassion who hears the cries of the world. In Islam, all mercy and help flow from the One God, who has 99 beautiful names such as **Ar-Raḥmān** (The Universally Merciful) and **Al-Ḥaqq** (The Truth). Embracing *tawhid* means to see all reality as unified by the will of a single Loving Absolute. It encourages a profound trust: since there is one eternal refuge, one true source of help, the heart can let go of its fears and attachments and find security in God alone. This is not unlike taking refuge in the Dharma – except that in Islam, the refuge is not an impersonal law but a **Living, Compassionate Guide**. For those raised in a Buddhist context, considering the idea of One God can be a gentle exploration: instead of many gods or none, could the ultimate truth be an infinitely wise **One** who knows and loves us? Islam invites all people, including Buddhists, to ponder this possibility. It is an invitation without compulsion (the Quran emphasizes “*There is no compulsion in religion*” – Quran 2:256), offered in the spirit of sharing what we as Muslims cherish most. We believe that recognizing the One God (*La ilaha illa-Allah*, “there is no god but God”) brings the heart to its fullest peace – uniting one’s being with the very Ground of Compassion that Buddhists also revere, albeit under different terms.

## Muhammad: The Messenger of Compassionate Guidance

In introducing Islam, we also warmly present **Prophet Muhammad** (peace be upon him) – not as an object of worship (Muslims do not worship Muhammad, but rather follow him) – but as the messenger through whom God’s guidance was brought to humanity in its final form. For a Buddhist, an apt comparison might be seeing Muhammad as a fully enlightened teacher or guide (albeit with the crucial difference that Muslims view him as receiving direct revelation from God). Just as the Buddha sought to help people overcome suffering through insight and right action, the Prophet Muhammad’s mission was to guide people from darkness into light by God’s permission <sup>22</sup>. The Quran describes him as “**an excellent exemplar**” (Quran 33:21) and as “*a mercy to all the worlds*” <sup>3</sup>. His life story showcases a profound mercy and patience: he endured persecution without retaliation, forgave his enemies in victory, freed slaves, cared for the poor and weak, and lived simply despite being offered wealth and kingship. One famous report of his sayings has him state: “*Show mercy to those on earth, and the One above the heavens will show mercy to you.*” In fact, mercy and kindness were so central to Muhammad’s character that his wife ‘Aishah, when asked about his conduct, replied “*His character was the Quran*” – meaning he personified the Quranic virtues of mercy, honesty, and humility.

Muslims hold that the Prophet Muhammad was the **last in a long line of messengers** that includes figures like Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus – as well as, possibly, enlightened sages known to other cultures. (The Quran says God sent messengers to every nation <sup>26</sup>, though it does not mention the Buddha by name; some Muslims respectfully speculate that the Buddha may have been one of the many unnamed prophets of God.) What is important is that Muhammad’s role in Islam is to *deliver God’s message*, not to claim divinity. In this sense, one might think of him as a *Dharmācarya* (teacher of the path) who perfectly transmits the divine Dharma, or truth. Through him, the Quran was revealed as guidance. Following his example (Sunnah) in showing compassion, honesty, and self-discipline is a way Muslims seek to grow spiritually. We invite our Buddhist friends to learn about Muhammad’s life and words, for you may find in them a familiar ethical compass. You will meet a man who preached the **oneness of God and the equality of all humans**, who urged care for one’s parents and neighbors, who said “*Remove a harmful object from the road – it is an act of charity,*” and “*He is not a true believer who eats his fill while his neighbor goes hungry.*” Such teachings echo the Buddhism of loving-kindness and ethical mindfulness. In getting to know the Prophet Muhammad, you are not asked to abandon your reverence for the Buddha or your own tradition’s sages; rather, we believe you may discover another wise and compassionate teacher – one whom we Muslims

revere as the **Final Messenger of the Divine**, carrying a universal message of compassion and moral awakening for all humanity.

## The Quran: Divine Guidance and Light

At the heart of Islam lies **the Quran**, the holy scripture that Muslims believe is the literal word of God (Allah) revealed to Prophet Muhammad. We invite you to view the Quran as a **treasury of spiritual guidance** that can stand alongside the treasured sutras of Buddhism in offering wisdom for life's journey. The Quran speaks often in a universal voice, addressing "O mankind" and appealing to our shared human conscience. It does not assume a Muslim audience only; it calls all people to reflect on signs within and around them. Many Buddhist readers, in fact, find parts of the Quran strikingly resonant with their own values – such as its emphasis on compassion, honesty, patience, and humility. The Quran presents itself as *"guidance and mercy for those who do good"* and *"a guidance for those who reflect"* <sup>27</sup>. It describes itself as *"the Book, about which there is no doubt, a guidance for the God-conscious"* (Quran 2:2) <sup>28</sup>. Muslims believe the Quran was revealed in Arabic, but it has been translated into Chinese and many languages, so you can directly access its meanings. You will find chapters that tell the stories of previous prophets and sages (some of which overlap with stories you may know from other traditions), passages that urge the doing of good to others, and verses that prompt deep contemplation of nature, existence, and the human self.

One of the beautiful aspects of the Quran is its **poetic depth** and the comfort it provides to the soul. Many Muslims describe the experience of reciting the Quran as one of serenity and clarity – akin to the feeling a Buddhist may get from chanting sutras or mantras. The Quran guides believers to pray regularly, to be truthful, to forgive others, to stand up for justice, and to remain humble. It offers solace in times of grief and encourages gratitude in times of joy. As a Buddhist reader, you might appreciate how often the Quran appeals to reason and observation: it invites us to ponder the stars, the mountains, the cycle of life and death – and to see in them signs of deeper truth <sup>29</sup>. In a sense, it engages a form of **contemplation on the nature of reality** that is not unlike Buddhist analytical meditations, though ultimately the Quran leads the seeker to the recognition of God's presence and purpose behind all that is. It also frankly acknowledges human struggles: our tendency to anger, greed, forgetfulness, and despair – and offers counsel on how to overcome these through faith and remembrance of God. For example, where a Buddhist text might speak of conquering anger with love, the Quran similarly advises *"repel evil with what is better so your enemy becomes like a close friend"* (41:34). Where Buddhism teaches compassion for all living beings, the Quran declares *"whoever saves a single life, it is as if he has saved all humankind"* (5:32) <sup>30</sup>. Such ethical gems make the Quran a mirror in which Buddhists can recognize their own ideals reflected, even as they also encounter new insights rooted in the divine perspective the Quran offers.

We encourage you, dear friends, to approach the Quran with an open heart and a reflective mind. You might start with passages that speak of God's love and mercy, or those that describe the natural world as signs (much like Buddhist sutras describe the lotus or the river as metaphors for truth). The Quran's message, in essence, is one of **hope and guidance**: that we are not alone in this vast universe, that a Compassionate One has provided a path for us to follow, and that by following it we find peace in this life and ultimate happiness in the next. For a Buddhist who cherishes compassion, mindfulness, and wisdom, the Quran can be seen as a *dharma talk* from the Divine – full of reminders to purify one's heart, serve others selflessly, and seek the ultimate truth. It does not ask you to erase your identity or heritage; rather, it invites you to **expand your spiritual journey** with new perspectives and perhaps see the Buddha's ethical teachings affirmed by a voice from Arabia, one that Muslims believe is the voice of the Creator of us all.

## Conclusion: Walking Together Toward Truth

In closing, we extend this invitation with humility and affection. We have great respect for the Buddhist tradition, which has brought so much wisdom and peace into the world. We believe that Islam offers a complementary perspective – rooted in **divine revelation** – that can enrich the spiritual life of anyone, including a Buddhist seeker. Both our paths value compassion over cruelty, mindfulness over heedlessness, generosity over greed, and peace over conflict. We both understand the need to tame the ego, to live ethically, and to seek a happiness that material things cannot provide. In Islam, we ground these values in the awareness of a loving God and His guidance; in Buddhism, you may ground them in the insight of enlightenment and the laws of karma and dharma. Different as these foundations are, they support **very similar fruits** in practice: kindness, integrity, inner calm, and a heart that reaches beyond itself.

Our hope is that you, as a Chinese Buddhist or a Buddhist from any culture, will feel the respect we have for your heritage. We do not speak to you in order to win a debate or prove one path better than the other – rather, we speak as people who have found beauty and truth in Islam and wish to share it, just as one might share a light with a friend in a dark place. The Quran tells Muslims to speak to others in ways that are gracious and wise, and that *“God does not forbid you from being kind and just with those who have not fought you because of religion”* (60:8). In fact, many Muslims see echoes of our Prophet’s teachings in the gentle, ethical lives of Buddhist monks and lay practitioners. We feel that in many ways, we are already walking together on a road of goodness.

**This article is a gentle invitation** to continue that journey together – to explore where the Quran’s message of one God, compassion, and mindfulness might resonate with the truths you hold dear. You might find that learning about Islam deepens your appreciation of your own tradition’s insights (sometimes seeing one’s beliefs through another lens brings them into clearer focus). You might also discover new inspirations: the idea of a personal God who knows you and hears your prayers, or the example of a Prophet who forgave even his worst enemies, or the powerful poetry of the Quran’s description of the inner self. Whatever you find, we trust that sincere seeking never goes to waste. As the Quran says, *“Whoever seeks goodness will find it”*, and as the Buddha said, *“If you light a lamp for others, it will also brighten your own path.”*

Thank you for listening with an open mind. In a world that often emphasizes differences, we chose to emphasize the **shared light** between Islam and Buddhism. May your path be filled with peace (*salam*), compassion, and the ever-growing light of wisdom. And may we continue to learn from one another as fellow travelers toward the ultimate truth.

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**Sources:** The ideas and quotes in this article were drawn from both Islamic and Buddhist teachings, including translations of the Holy Quran and insights from interfaith dialogues. Quranic verses on compassion <sup>2</sup> <sup>3</sup>, mindfulness <sup>7</sup>, detachment <sup>12</sup>, and inner peace <sup>20</sup> were used to show Islamic perspectives, while Buddhist parallels were highlighted for comparison <sup>31</sup> <sup>32</sup> <sup>33</sup>. Statements from respected voices (like the Dalai Lama) acknowledging common ground between the two faiths were also included <sup>1</sup>. We encourage readers to refer to the Quran and authentic teachings of the Buddha for further reflection, and to approach both with the respect and curiosity that true understanding requires. May this shared exploration be a step toward greater harmony and insight for all. <sup>31</sup> <sup>12</sup> <sup>22</sup> <sup>2</sup>

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