

عَلَيْهِ السَّلَام

The Message of the Prophet ﷺ: The Proofs of Prophethood Series

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In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Grantor of Mercy

The moral and intellectual greatness of the message brought by the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ—namely the Qur'an and Sunnah (his prophetic example)—testifies to its truth. As Plato famously argued in his triad of transcendental values, truth, beauty, and goodness are inseparable. In that sense, appreciating the inherent purity and beauty of the Islamic lifestyle not only attracts us to its message, but also confirms the legitimacy of its final prophet as a messenger from the Divine. The message can also vouch for the prophethood of Muhammad ﷺ by way of its alignment with the message of other prophets on fundamental creedal points. The Old Testament argues that the teachings of a prophet are what reveal his true identity,¹ and also warns that even if someone is able to predict the future, they are still a false prophet if they call to worshipping other gods.

A person can also marvel at the sheer volume of what has been documented of Muhammad's ﷺ brief ministry from 610-632 CE. The Qur'an and Sunnah cannot be compared with the Bible, for instance, since the latter does not solely contain the teachings of Moses but rather is an aggregated historical canon whose development spanned centuries. Considering the quality of its substance and breadth of its scope, what the Prophet ﷺ taught continues to distinguish itself as a message of exceptional depth and value. It defined people's relationships with their Maker, with those around them, even with animals and inanimate objects, and provided timeless wisdom about everything related to their individual and collective well-being.

From there, one may be drawn to consider its internal consistency; the harmony of such a comprehensive corpus that informs theology, spiritual enlightenment, individual virtue, interpersonal behavior, civil laws, and foreign policies with such intricacy that led many throughout history to find it miraculous. They saw this facet of the final message as beyond human sophistication, and more reasonably a balancing act that could only be attributable to God's perfect nature.

¹ See: Deuteronomy 13:1-18.

Finally, the profundity of the message becomes further evident when contrasted with other religious doctrines that waned in the face of criticism or simply with the passage of time. In our technological age which has facilitated the globalization of ideas and fact-checking, far more people leave Christianity than Islam in Europe and North America. Islam's growth despite its many detractors, on the other hand, continues to demonstrate its inherent veracity as well as its universality across time and place, being viable for people of very different educational, economic, and cultural backgrounds. The laws of Islam as well as its religious doctrines also continue to endure, while no society has been able to devise a comparable ever-relevant system that offers equilibrium and holistic well-being to people of all walks of life.

This paper will showcase ten highlights of this message, focusing on those more easily appreciated by people in the twenty-first century. These dimensions should help us appreciate the message of the Final Prophet ﷺ in its totality, as they form a cumulative case in defense of his prophethood.

Pure Monotheism

Say [O Muhammad], “This is my way; I invite to Allah with insight, I and those who follow me. And exalted is Allah; and I am not of those who associate others with Him.”²

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ never asked people to worship him. He did not even allow people to display excessive reverence to him, would always make a sharp distinction between the Divine and his own human nature, and would stop people from standing for him when he entered a room. He ﷺ objected to people implicitly equating him and Allah in their statements,³ and warned on his deathbed about the actions of past people who had turned the graves of their prophets into shrines.⁴ There was no greater keystone of his message than protecting the purest

² The Qur'an 12:108, Saheeh International Translation.

³ ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Abdul-Raḥmān al-Dārimī, *Sunan al-Dārimī* (Riyadh: Dār al-Mughnī, 2000), 3:1769 #2741

⁴ al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 2:102 #1390.

understanding of monotheism in people's hearts and removing any barrier between individuals and their direct and personal connection with God.

Leo Tolstoy (d. 1910) hailed from an aristocratic Russian family and is described by some as one of the greatest novelists of all time. Many have reported his great respect for Islam, despite being a Christian, because he thought it contained valuable elements that he wanted to make accessible to a wider audience. He included the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in a series of books entitled *The Most Remarkable Thinkers of All Times and Peoples*. In this series, Tolstoy writes about Islam,

The essence of this faith came down to the fact that there is no deity worthy of worship except the One True Almighty God, that He is merciful and just, and will judge each person individually, according to his or her faith and the balance of his or her good and bad actions which means peace for the righteous, and damnation for evildoers... He wants people to love Him as well as each other. The love for God is expressed in a prayer, compassion for others, assistance and forgiveness.⁵

If humanity's greatest existential need is to identify the one true God and develop a meaningful relationship with Him, then only the purest belief about God and His uniqueness will attract them. When demographics analysts at Pew Research Center investigated why Islam is projected to be the fastest growing religion in the world,⁶ they found that “preferring the beliefs/finding more meaning in Islam” and “studying Islam/reading its religious texts” are in fact the two primary motivators for converting to Islam.⁷ This should not be surprising. When humans see themselves as purposeful creatures, it should follow for them that there is none better than the One who fashioned and designed them to inform them of their purpose. It also follows for these people that a supremely wise, supremely merciful being would have communicated that purpose to them, and hence the undying

⁵ Piotr Stawinski, “Leo Tolstoy and Islam: Some Remarks on the Theme,” *The Quarterly Journal of Philosophical Meditations* 2, no. 5 (Spring 2010): 18.

⁶ “The Changing Global Religious Landscape,” *Pew Research Center*, April 5th, 2017.

⁷ Besheer Mohamed and Elizabeth Podrebarac Sciupac, “The Share of Americans who Leave Islam is Offset by Those who Become Muslim,” *Pew Research Center*, January 26th, 2018.

appeal of the “divine revelation” model of religion, or that of “heavenly inspired messengers” as discussed earlier. From this juncture in the ancient quest to know God, we are left with either limited philosophies that fall short of answering people’s most pressing questions on what makes life meaningful, or the search is narrowed to the “Abrahamic faiths” which agree on the oneness of God in theory but diverge thereafter. Ultimately, it is the unique emphasis of Islam on the Oneness of God and His glory that separates it from traditional Judaism which posits God as tribalist with partiality for a single bloodline, and mainstream Christianity which posits God as reductionist who accepts claims to faith in place of righteous works. As Charles Le Gai Eaton (d. 2010), the British diplomat and Islamic scholar, wrote on this point,

In the Muslim view, Judaism ‘nationalized’ monotheism, claiming it for one people alone, while in Christianity the person of Jesus as it were eclipsed the Godhead, just as the sun is eclipsed by the moon; or again: Judaism stabilized this monotheism, giving it a home and an army, but at the same time confiscated it; Christianity universalized the truth, but diluted it. Islam closed the circle and restored the purity of the faith of Abraham, giving to Moses and Jesus positions of pre-eminence in its universe and seizing upon the quintessential nature of monotheism, single-minded worship of the One, and upon the reflection of the Divine Unity in personal and social equilibrium--a balance between all contrary forces and between the different levels of human experience. Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328) maintained that Islam combined the Mosaic Law of Justice with the Christian Law of Grace, taking a middle way between the severity of Judaism and the mercy of Jesus; and he said that while Moses had proclaimed God's Majesty and Jesus His Goodness, Muhammad proclaimed His Perfection. In the same context, it is said that Jesus revealed what Moses had kept hidden, the secrets of the Divine Mercy and the richness of Divine Love, and that Islam finally brought everything into perspective in the light of total Truth.⁸

⁸ Charles L. G. Eaton, *Islam and the Destiny of Man* (Albany: George Allen & Unwin, 1985), 44.

Though God is described in the Qur'an similarly to how He is described in the Bible in many respects, the differences are significant and consequential. For instance, there is no mystery surrounding God's oneness and identity in the Qur'an, as opposed to the obscurity of the trinitarian doctrine, with its convoluted nature reflected today in the fundamental disagreements between Christian denominations over the person and nature of God. Likewise, there is no exception to God's omnipotence anywhere in the Qur'an, while the Old Testament depicts God, for instance, as losing a wrestling bout with Jacob (as).⁹

Only in Islam does one find a distinct focus on God who is absolute in His Oneness and perfection, transcendent in His power and justice, glorified above resembling His creation or deserting them without direction, and equally compassionate to humanity at large, addressing them all with the same message.

Faith in Destiny

*No disaster strikes upon the earth or among yourselves except that it is in a register before We bring it into being. Indeed that, for Allah, is easy—in order that you not despair over what has eluded you and not exult [in pride] over what He has given you. And Allah does not like every self-deluded and boastful person.*¹⁰

When asked to define the fundamental belief of Islam, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said,

Faith is to believe in Allah, His angels, His scriptures, His messengers, the Last Day, and to believe in destiny, the good of it and the evil of it [all being from Allah].¹¹

Belief that everything is and will always be in God's hands, and that God has constructed this life with ups and downs for a wisdom only He fully knows and our finite minds cannot, are two powerful resources that make life endurable and enjoyable. The Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ teachings on destiny do not just stand

⁹ See: Genesis 32:22-30.

¹⁰ The Qur'an 57:22-23, Saheeh International Translation.

¹¹ Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 1:36 #8.

in contrast to the atheistic worldview that misperceives reality as random and undirected, existing solely in the grip of a merciless, relentless set of physical laws which serve no purpose and offer no reassurances. They also negate the deistic notion that God does not intervene in the world, a notion that many theists have internalized. This notion deprives people of the armor of confidence in God overseeing every atom of this universe. The Prophet ﷺ taught that donning this armor was a requirement of valid faith, by saying in one of numerous traditions about this essential truth,

Were you to donate for God’s cause an amount of gold that was equivalent to Mount Uḥud, God would not accept it from you until you believed in the Divine decree—whereby you are certain that whatever reached you would never have missed you, and that whatever missed you was never going to reach you. And were you to die believing otherwise, you would enter the Hellfire.¹²

Herbert Benson, MD, a cofounder of the Benson-Henry Institute for Mind Body Medicine, concludes near the end of his medical exploration of belief and healing, “The data I have presented is that affirmative beliefs and hopes are very therapeutic, and that faith in God, in particular, has many positive effects on health.”¹³ Similarly, Bryan Walsh, in *The Science of Happiness*, writes that “Study after study has found that religious people tend to be less depressed and less anxious than nonbelievers, better able to handle the vicissitudes of life than nonbelievers... It’s as if a sense of spirituality and an active, social religious practice were an effective vaccine against the virus of unhappiness.”¹⁴ Another large, global study by Pew Research Center found that people actively involved in religious life tend to be happier.¹⁵ It may be claimed that these teachings of Islam on faith and deference to God are shared by other faith traditions as well. While true, this commonality can be argued as a proof for Muhammad’s prophethood

¹² Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, 4:225 #4699.

¹³ Herbert Benson and Marg Stark, *Timeless Healing: The Power and Biology of Belief* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 211.

¹⁴ Bryan Walsh, “Does Spirituality Make You Happy?” in *The Science of Happiness: New Discoveries for a More Joyful Life*, Special Time Edition (New York: Time Inc. Books, 2016), 80.

¹⁵ Conrad Hackett, Alan Cooperman, et al., “Religion’s Relationship to Happiness, Civic Engagement, and Health Around the World,” *Pew Research Center*, January 31st, 2019.

ﷺ, not against it, since he brought a message that agrees in some respects with other scriptures that he had no knowledge of. Furthermore, the Prophet ﷺ placed distinctive emphasis on this particular topic in a way that sets it apart from the remnants of prior scriptures, in an environment replete with superstitious dogmas about fate and bad omens.

The Prophet ﷺ also taught his followers that faith in destiny coexists with human agency as an ontological reality, though not a reality that denies God's omnipotence. God granting humanity real agency is a manifestation of His perfect equity, in that it is necessary for human accountability: we are only accountable for what we freely choose to do. In teaching this doctrine, he ﷺ carved a unique and powerful place in the classic free-will versus determinism debate, a place called Islam (submission). By submitting to God's creative will, one can relinquish the demoralizing burden of carrying what one cannot control in God's created universe, and by submitting to His prescriptive will, one can finally set down the burden of trying to live up to the constantly changing standards of a godless society. As Charles Taylor recognizes in his seminal work, *A Secular Age*, it is "the call to submit to God in Islam which empowers humans in a way unavailable in any other fashion."¹⁶

Without the belief that God is ultimately in control, inner peace will remain out of reach. A person would be forever haunted by the prospect of dueling cosmic forces. This would in turn destroy the integrity of a person's spirituality, because even if they worshiped God, they would still worry about other adversarial forces in the universe. But with conviction that it is ultimately God who brings events into existence, even if I may have just enough of a will to be accountable for what I can influence, contentment with life and the sweetness of faith become attainable. As the Prophet ﷺ said in an authentic tradition, "He has tasted faith—the one who is pleased with Allah as their Lord, Islam as their religion, and Muhammad as their messenger."¹⁷

¹⁶ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 818.

¹⁷ Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 1:62 #34.

Some may wonder how the therapeutic value of Muhammad's ﷺ teachings can constitute a logical proof for his prophethood, when healing and happiness are merely aesthetic factors, philosophically speaking. But we cannot restrict proofs to those that can be rationalized and fail to recognize the importance of the lived experiences shared by those who imbibe these teachings. These beliefs taught by the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ afforded his followers wonderful resilience in the face of poverty, fear, and other challenges that humans everywhere encounter. This resilience and peace of mind therefore constitute yet another aspect of Islam's beauty that demonstrates its harmony with human nature.

The *Ṣalāh* (Ritual Prayer)

*Indeed, mankind was created anxious: frantic when harm touches him and withholding when good touches him – except those who pray, those who consistently devote themselves to the prayer.*¹⁸

Ṣalāh is the second pillar of Islam after the testimony of faith. Linguistically, it means a connection (*ṣilah*), and it represents a chance for people to pull themselves out of the grind of this life to reinforce their relationship with their Creator, to water the tree of their faith and to moisten their hearts, which would otherwise dry out and crack in the desert of the pursuit of worldly pleasures. For the soul, the *ṣalāh* serves the function of turning to the shade of a tree in the middle of work on a hot day. It is a chance to revive our spirituality, a reminder of our origin, our Creator, and the reason for our existence. If it is done properly and with devotion, it can be the greatest deterrent to wrongdoing and aggression.¹⁹ Human beings have primordially practiced ritual, and in that sense, the ritual of prayer constitutes the central affirming act of human life. Its absence renders people a caricature of themselves, like a body trying to live with its heart ripped out. However, while pagans attempt to connect with the Divine through theatrical forms, and hedonists kneel for a lifetime at the crude shrine of self-indulgence, monotheists with access

¹⁸ The Qur'an 70:19-23, author's translation.

¹⁹ Hatem al-Haj and Ibn Qudāmah, *'Umdat al-Fiqh Explained: A Commentary on Ibn Qudāmah's 'The Reliable Manual of Fiqh'* (Riyadh: International Islamic Publishing House, 2019), 1:129.

to confirmed prophetic teachings enjoy the real pathways disclosed by God to authentically connect with Him.

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ taught Muslims that God enjoined them to pray five times each day in a structured format and at specific periods of time. An outsider may find this to be a cumbersome or intrusive task, but so many Muslims—upon experiencing this prayer—voluntarily choose to supplement these daily five with even more. The magnetic force of this unique devotional act should indicate its meaningfulness. Prayer is the most evident fruit of conviction, and in its depths lay its most fertile seeds. This very observation about the Muslim prayer was once expressed by the late Pope John Paul II (d. 2005), who despite his theological differences with Islam, said,

The religiosity of Muslims deserves respect. It is impossible not to admire, for example, their fidelity to prayer. The image of believers in Allah who, without caring about time or place, fall to their knees and immerse themselves in prayer remains a model for all those who invoke the true God, in particular for those Christians who, having deserted their magnificent cathedrals, pray only a little or not at all.²⁰

The greatest benefit of *ṣalāh* is therefore the opportunity to connect with God in this life, a connection that nurtures the soul to endure in fulfilling its purpose in life and ensures its salvation in the hereafter. However, the worldly benefits of prayer are undeniable as well.

Physiologically, the Islamic ritual prayer helps stabilize our biological clocks which our genetic metabolism depends on. We all know how traveling between time-zones causes jetlag that can render us quite dysfunctional but may not realize that the lights we keep on at night in our rooms, or on our electronics, also work against our natural nightly release of melatonin which allows the body a rejuvenating stretch of sleep. But when the first *ṣalāh* must be offered at dawn before sunrise, and the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ discouraged needless

²⁰ Pope John Paul II and Vittorio Messori, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 93.

socialization after the evening prayer,²¹ the course is reversed. To better appreciate this prophetic teaching, it may help to realize that a lack of sleep does not translate into mere lethargy or underperformance the next day, but also disrupts the expression of genes in our body that may be linked to tissue inflammation and the ability to fight disease and stress, which could eventually play a role in the development of obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and a host of neurodegenerative disorders.²²

Psychologically, research suggests the meditative aspect of prayer enhances focus and self-control, and offsets the negative effects of daily stressful experiences.²³ In the Islamic *ṣalāh* in particular, there is an exceptional nexus between the tranquil measured motions required by the Prophet ﷺ for a valid *ṣalāh*, and the mental labor involved in recalling the elaborate segments of the Qur'an a Muslim recites in every *ṣalāh*.

Emotionally, the *ṣalāh* has notable benefits as well. The Qur'an encourages Muslims to worship together and at times links prayer to escaping the suffocating grip of sadness and social estrangement. Allah says, "*We certainly know that your chest is constrained by what they say. So glorify the praises of your Lord and be of those who prostrate.*"²⁴ Scientific research now illustrates how therapeutic an active religious fellowship can be for a person's emotional health, through the common purpose and social support it affords.²⁵ With regards to how vulnerable solitary living leaves individuals and society, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said in the context of the daily prayer, "Adhere to the congregation, for the wolf eats none other than the stray sheep."²⁶ The regularity of this communal ritual reduces the deep sense of alienation people naturally feel when physically separated. Another unique facet of the Muslim style of prayer is that the Prophet ﷺ encouraged believers to "close the gaps"²⁷ between them when setting their ranks for *ṣalāh*, and

²¹ al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 1:118 #568.

²² Peter Russell, "Lack of Sleep Disrupts Genes," *WebMD*, March 1st, 2013.

²³ Clay Routledge, "Five Scientifically Supported Benefits of Prayer," *Psychology Today*, June 23rd, 2014.

²⁴ The Qur'an 15:97-98, author's translation.

²⁵ Raphael Bonelli et al., "Religious and Spiritual Factors in Depression: Review and Integration of the Research," *Depression Research and Treatment* (2012).

²⁶ Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, 1:150 #547.

²⁷ Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, 1:178 #666.

to shake hands.²⁸ We now know that welcome physical contact results in oxytocin being released by the body,²⁹ a neurotransmitter informally dubbed the “bonding hormone” due to its association with empathy, trust, and relationship-building. With the atomization of modern life, where friends are often countries apart, our social fabric has withered to the extent that Britain is now the “loneliest capital in Europe,” according to government records.³⁰ Moreover, the World Health Organization has projected that, by 2030, cardiovascular disease and major depressive disorder will be the world’s most debilitating medical conditions.³¹ Considering this frightening upsurge in social isolation, depression, substance abuse,³² and rising suicide rates,³³ the Muslim daily prayer can be a welcome antidote. Allah says, “*And they used to be invited to prostration while they were [still] sound.*”³⁴

Ṣiyām (Devotional Fasting)

*O you who have believed, fasting has been prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may become more mindful of Allah.*³⁵

Fasting is another pillar of Islam, practiced by over a billion Muslims worldwide during the lunar month of Ramadan and periodically at other times of the year. From dawn until sunset, a Muslim abstains from food, drink, and conjugal relations out of devotion to his or her Creator. This restriction of the carnal appetites feeds one’s spirituality, reinforces the religious conscience, and cultivates sincerity with God—for only God is always watchful of you. It also teaches self-restraint in other spheres of life, and thus the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ informed us, “Whoever does

²⁸ al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, 4:371 #2727.

²⁹ “Can You Kiss and Hug Your Way to Better Health? Research Says Yes.” *PennMedicine*, January 8th, 2018.

³⁰ Gillian Orr, “Britain has been voted the loneliest capital of Europe,” *The Independent*, July 3rd, 2014.

³¹ Secretariat of the World Health Organization, “Global burden of mental disorders and the need for a comprehensive, coordinated response from health and social sectors at the country level,” *World Health Organization*, December 1st, 2011.

³² “Drug Overdose Deaths,” *Center for Disease Control and Prevention*, last updated March 3rd, 2021.

³³ Sabrina Tavernise, “U.S. Suicide Rate Surges to a 30-Year High,” *The New York Times*, April 22nd, 2016.

³⁴ The Qur’an 68:43, Saheeh International Translation.

³⁵ The Qur’an 2:183, author’s translation.

not give up foul speech while fasting, [know that] Allah has no need for this person to give up food and drink.”³⁶ Of course, fasting also allows a Muslim to experience hunger and discomfort, generating empathy for the underprivileged and downtrodden. For that reason, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ would outdo himself in generosity during Ramadan,³⁷ and obligated his followers with a mandatory charity (*Ṣadaqat al-Fiṭr*) at the month’s end.

As for the health benefits gained by fasting, both the physical and psychological are quite evident. In one 2003 study at the National Institute of Aging in Baltimore, it was found that caloric restriction extended lifespan and reduced the incidence of age-related diseases.³⁸ Similarly, Clive McCay of Cornell University found that laboratory rats kept on a severely reduced-calorie diet lived almost twice as long as expected, so long as they had the proper nutrients.³⁹ And in the famous “Canto and Owen Experiment,” anti-aging researcher Richard Weindruch, from the University of Wisconsin’s School of Medicine and Public Health, published a major paper showcasing two rhesus monkeys of similar ages with very different diets.⁴⁰ His research yielded a clear message: “caloric restriction” and “fasting” reverse and slow the cellular decline associated with aging. As for the positive effects of fasting on mental health, one psychology study has tracked how, while a healthy woman fasting an eighteen-hour day may report increased irritability, she may also experience an increased sense of achievement, reward, pride, and control.⁴¹ Therefore, it can be argued that the mild agitation experienced by a healthy person in their fast (the Qur’an exempts the ill from fasting) is just the challenge a person

³⁶ al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 3:26 #1903.

³⁷ Ibn ‘Abbās (rA) said, “The Prophet ﷺ was the most generous of all people, and he used to become [even] more generous in Ramadan when Gabriel met him. Gabriel used to meet him every night during Ramadan to revise the Qur’an with him. Allah’s Messenger ﷺ was more generous than the fast wind.” (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 3:26 #1902).

³⁸ Joseph W. Kemnitz, “Calorie Restriction and Aging in Nonhuman Primates,” *ILAR Journal* 52, no. 1 (2011): 66-77.

³⁹ Roger B. McDonald and Jon J. Ramsey, “Honoring Clive McCay and 75 Years of Calorie Restriction Research,” *The Journal of Nutrition* 140, no. 7 (July 2010): 1205-10.

⁴⁰ David Tenenbaum, “Monkey Caloric Restriction Study Shows Big Benefit; Contradicts Earlier Study,” *University of Wisconsin-Madison News*, April 1st, 2014.

⁴¹ Ellen Watkins and Lucy Serpell, “The Psychological Effects of Short-Term Fasting in Healthy Women,” *Frontiers in Nutrition*, v. 3 (2016).

may need to develop frustration tolerance and a sense of accomplishment that fuels our happiness as purposeful beings.

It is interesting how the overall health benefits derived from intermittent fasting have only recently begun to mount,⁴² while just a short time before the latest science had recommended three meals a day with snacks in between as the dietary ideal to stabilize one's metabolism and brain's glucose supply. Such theories continue to lose credibility with intermittent fasting's surging popularity and newfound benefits,⁴³ though it has been a consistent practice among the followers of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ for fourteen centuries now and counting. Not only do Muslims fast daily from dawn to sundown for the month of Ramadan as an obligation and pillar of their faith but they have also been encouraged by the Prophet ﷺ to observe this fast twice a week at other times of the year, or thrice a month at least.

Prohibiting Extramarital Relations

*Tell [O Muhammad] the believing men to lower their gaze and guard their chastity. That is purer for them. Certainly, Allah is fully aware of whatever they do. And also tell the believing women to lower their gaze and guard their chastity...*⁴⁴

The call to chastity in this Qur'anic chapter entitled *al-Nūr* (the Light) not only prohibited fornication and adultery but outlined a code of conduct to preempt the slippery slope leading to them. Civilizations that do not respect such codes often spiral downward to points of no return. Their licentiousness destroys their sensibilities, and they soon discover that fornication is an evil path—not just an evil end—that needs to be preempted. As Allah said, “*And do not approach unlawful sexual intercourse. Indeed, it is ever an immorality and is evil as a way.*”

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⁴² Rafael de Cabo and Mark P. Mattson, “Effects of Intermittent Fasting on Health, Aging, and Disease,” *New England Journal of Medicine*, v. 382 no. 3 (2020): 298.

⁴³ Kris Gunnars, “11 Myths About Fasting and Meal Frequency,” *Healthline*, July 22nd, 2019.

⁴⁴ The Qur'an 24:30-31, author's translation.

⁴⁵ The Qur'an 17:32, Saheeh International Translation.

It may begin with extramarital relations, then making sexual orientation the central part of one's identity, followed by the acceptance of all forms of sexual expression, even pedophilia, bestiality, and necrophilia. From that vantage point, a newfound appreciation surfaces for how this verse begins: “Do not *approach* fornication,” as if it were a wild blaze that will engulf those who even come close to it. Despite how common sexual freedoms have become, you will still find experts from across the ideological spectrum acknowledging the roles of abstinence and marital fidelity in preventing sexually transmitted diseases.

Another way Islam mitigates this threat is by emphasizing the family system. Fornication is not just an invitation to bodily disease but represents a selfish mentality that has no care for the families it destroys, the children that are born deprived of love and care, the millions of late-term abortions, the prison systems that we pay for collectively, and the like.⁴⁶ Islam installs safeguards against all this, chastity and social responsibility among them. Fornication even affects the elderly who die alone and dejected, for those whose parents are not married or unknown to the child will naturally be further severed from their grandparents. As a result, the elderly find themselves abandoned in their vulnerable old age—a time that usually requires the presence of the extended family to shoulder the load together. The Prophet ﷺ highlighted these dangers on many occasions; for example, telling the young man who struggled with lust, “Would you accept fornication for your mother, your sister, your daughter...?”⁴⁷

Prohibiting Interest-Based Lending

O you who have believed, fear Allah and give up what remains [due to you] of interest, if you should be believers. And if you do not, then be informed of

⁴⁶ See: Mohammad Elshinawy, and Tahir Khwaja, “Gender Uniqueness in Islam and the Significance of Fatherhood,” *Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research*, September 24th, 2020.

⁴⁷ Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad Aḥmad*, 36:545 #22211; authenticated by al-Arnā’ūṭ in the comments and paraphrased here.

*a war [against you] from Allah and His Messenger. But if you repent, you may have your principal—[thus] you do no wrong, nor are you wronged.*⁴⁸

Jābir ibn ‘Abdillāh (rA) reports that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ cursed the consumer of interest, its payer, its documenter, its two witnesses, and said, “They are all equal [in sin].”⁴⁹ Past and present, people have downplayed the danger of an interest-bearing transaction, especially when effected by mutual consent. However, the wisdom of the Divine transcends our short-sightedness and deems engaging in interest-based transactions an enormity. Nowadays, we observe firsthand how interest-based systems have destroyed nations beyond repair, with the debacle of the Nigerian and Jamaican economies being just two tragic examples⁵⁰ of what happens when such an enormous part of a nation’s annual budget is apportioned to debt repayment. The villainous nature of dispensing loans for interest is clear; it appears to be an avenue for quick funds, but it often buries people and countries further in debt. It places the bulk of the risk on the debtor and little risk on the creditor who “*invests*” by lending. It also disparages productivity and labor, as Aristotle argued,⁵¹ since money is what begets money here, not effort or craftsmanship. As a result, the rich steadily get richer while the poor steadily get poorer—to points of unthinkable devastation, which then become catalysts for financial meltdowns and uprisings by the underclass which have historically devoured many nations, as Plato once warned. Hence, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ outlawed profiting in the worldly sense from loans by saying, “Profit is contingent upon liability (the possibility of loss).”⁵²

In addition to lenders being prohibited from charging interest on loans, borrowers are also prohibited from such loans. This prevents borrowers from living beyond their means, which mitigates their being exploited by lenders, and the ecological damage caused by consumerism. When you add to the perils of usury those of excessive speculation (*gharar*), which the Prophet ﷺ forbade as well,⁵³ you have

⁴⁸ The Qur’an 2:278-279, Saheeh International Translation.

⁴⁹ Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 3:1219 #1598.

⁵⁰ See film documentary: Stefanie Black, “Life and Debt [Motion Picture],” (USA: New Yorker Films, 2001).

⁵¹ Aristotle, R.F. Stalley, and Ernest Barker, *Politics: Oxford World’s Classics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), bk. 1, chap. 10, p. 29.

⁵² al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, 2:572 #1285: authenticated by al-Tirmidhī in the comments.

⁵³ Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 3:1153 #1513.

all the ingredients of an economic crisis. The 2008 financial meltdown was a relatively recent example of this. For this reason, a global trend is emerging in Europe and elsewhere that recognizes that Islamic financial regulations offer a refreshing alternative and remedy for economic woes.⁵⁴ Highlighting a primary objective behind these regulations, Allah says about money in the Qur'an, "...so that it will not become a perpetual circulation [solely] among the rich from among you."⁵⁵ Another component of this remedy is the lessening of wealth concentration through the Zakat system. Zakat is one of Islam's five foundational pillars; an obligatory charity due on significant amounts of capital, whereby 2.5% must be redistributed annually, primarily among the poor but also to other noble causes. Of course, with the Zakat system funneling this wealth directly to those in need, the oft-cited concern of governments being overfed by taxing the rich's wealth vanishes. Also, unlike governmental taxation, the Zakat system emphasizes one's personal accountability before God; the One who cannot be deceived the way government auditors often are by creative evaders who move their assets outside of the country.

Prohibiting Alcohol Consumption

*O believers! Intoxicants, gambling, idols, and divination arrows are all abominations from Satan's handiwork. So shun them so you may be successful.*⁵⁶

Islam's straightforward, categorical rejection of alcohol consumption may be one of the easiest facets of the Prophet's ﷺ message to appreciate. On one hand, that fact that it was contrary to the prevailing norms at his time among pagans, Jews, and Christians argues against the notion that his ministry was an accumulation of teachings absorbed from his surrounding environment. But in addition to its being revolutionary and original, it was incredibly wise in its framing. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ informed people that "whatever will intoxicate in large amounts,

⁵⁴ Ismail Ozsoy, "An Islamic Suggestion of Solution to the Financial Crises," *Procedia Economics and Finance* 38 (2016): 174-184.

⁵⁵ The Qur'an 59:7, author's translation.

⁵⁶ The Qur'an 5:90, author's translation.

then even small amounts of it are unlawful.”⁵⁷ Sensible people should notice how superior this advice is to current recommendations to “drink responsibly” which rely on the decision-making of those whose ability to make responsible decisions is impaired.

Some modern societies have acknowledged this failed logic and attempted to maneuver around it by requiring that a “designated driver” abstain from drinking altogether to safely transport the drinkers to their homes. To illustrate the inadequacy of these measures, realize that the Harvard Alcohol Project normalized the “designated driver” concept by 1991 using massive networks that spanned government advocacy groups, Hollywood, professional sports leagues, major corporations, and even had public service announcements prepared by the brewing and distilling companies themselves. When the dust cleared, it turned out that this campaign was focused on the wrong target. Three decades later, a 50% decline in motor vehicle crashes caused by alcohol-impairment has still not been achieved.⁵⁸ Over 10,000 people in the United States were killed in 2016 by alcohol-impaired driving crashes, 28% of all traffic deaths.⁵⁹ With nonverbal peer-pressure being a reality even for adults, along with the bother of identifying who will voluntarily remain sober while socializing with those actively drinking, this wishful thinking never had the potential to fully combat the problem. If we turn to the guidance of the Prophet ﷺ on this issue, he taught that it was not enough to prohibit people from embarking on the slippery slope of “light drinking” through a zero-tolerance policy on alcohol consumption. He ﷺ added that insulating non-drinkers from its magnetic force is only possible through prohibiting them from sitting at a table where wine is circulated.⁶⁰ But above all, he ﷺ taught that spiritual and moral refinement were the true bedrock upon which temperance and reform are built, and a person is liberated from this vice. His wife, ‘Āishah (rAh), said,

The first revelations of the Qur’an were none other than chapters from the *mufaṣṣal* (shorter chapters), which contain mention of Paradise and Hellfire.

⁵⁷ Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, 3:327 #3681.

⁵⁸ Editorial Staff, “Using a Designated Driver,” *American Addiction Centers*, December 12th, 2019.

⁵⁹ “Traffic Safety Facts: 2016 Data.” *National Highway Traffic Safety Administration*, January 2018.

⁶⁰ al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, 4:410 #2801.

Then, once the people became inclined to Islam, the lawful and unlawful were revealed. If the first thing to be revealed was “Do not drink wine,” they would have said, “We will never give up wine.” And if “Do not fornicate” was revealed first, they would have said, “We will never give up fornication.”⁶¹

Similarly, Alcoholics Anonymous, a world-renowned rehabilitation program with millions of beneficiaries to date, requires believing in a higher power as part of their program due to its efficacy in helping people recover from addiction.

Aside from traffic deaths, the health risks associated with alcohol consumption are vast, involving virtually every system and organ in the human body. The most severe examples of its toxicity involve brain damage and liver failure.⁶² Consuming alcohol while pregnant is another epidemic, due to alcohol being so toxic to a developing fetus. Fetal alcohol syndrome remains the leading cause of preventable intellectual disability in the United States along with a variety of other clinical manifestations.⁶³ In addition to alcohol’s direct toxicity, the detrimental consequences of the impairments it causes are found in the established correlation between alcohol consumption and reductions in workplace productivity, along with increases in HIV transmission, lethal accidents, violence, and abuse.⁶⁴ Alluding to the aggressions triggered by intoxicants, Allah cautions humanity in the Qur’an,

*Satan only wants to stir between you animosity and hatred through intoxicants and gambling, and to avert you from the remembrance of Allah and from prayer. So will you not desist?*⁶⁵

It is therefore no wonder that the Centers for Disease Control estimate that 95,000 deaths occur every year in the United States alone due to excessive alcohol

⁶¹ al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 6:185 #4993.

⁶² “Global Status Report on Alcohol and Health 2014.” *World Health Organization* (WHO), 2014.

⁶³ Leo Sher, Isack Kandel, and Joav Merrick. *Alcohol-related Cognitive Disorders: Research and Clinical Perspectives* (New York: Nova Science, 2009), 5.

⁶⁴ Howard B. Moss HB, “The Impact of Alcohol on Society: A Brief Overview.” *Social Work in Public Health*, 28:3-4 (2013), 175-177.

⁶⁵ The Qur’an 5:91, Saheeh International Translation.

consumption.⁶⁶ *The Lancet* recently published a study evaluating the burden of disease linked to alcohol, spanning 195 countries from 1990-2016. In attempting to determine the amount of alcohol consumption that would minimize its harmful effects while still reaping its minor benefits, they concluded that “zero alcohol” was the only nonthreatening amount.⁶⁷ In other words, the harm associated with alcohol consumption was so great that in no amount was the benefit greater than its harm. Countless medical studies reinforce the timeless message of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, as outlined in the Qur’an, “*They ask you [O Muhammad] about wine and gambling. Say, ‘In them is great sin, and yet some benefit for people. But their sin is greater than their benefit.’*”⁶⁸

Much like today, the Prophet’s ﷺ contemporaries would boast before Islam of how becoming drunk rendered them fearless, and consequently people of valor in battle and generosity in philanthropy. The Qur’an came to overturn this myopic thinking, by juxtaposing these advantages with the inevitable greater harms that cannot be separated from them—such as unnecessary violence and wasting of vital finances. Muhammad’s ﷺ message made Islam’s unique firm stance on alcohol scriptural and ever-relevant, not to be contravened by fluctuating politics or supposed benefits. Perhaps this plays a role in why minority communities, who are often disproportionately harmed by alcohol consumption, are converting to Islam in droves today.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Marissa B. Esser, et al. “Deaths and Years of Potential Life Lost From Excessive Alcohol Use: United States, 2011–2015,” *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*. 69(30) (2020): 981-987.

⁶⁷ GBD 2016 Alcohol Collaborators, “Alcohol use and burden for 195 countries and territories, 1990-2016: A Systematic Analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2016,” *The Lancet*, 22; 392(10152) (September 2018):1015-1035.

⁶⁸ The Qur’an 2:219, Saheeh International Translation.

⁶⁹ The Aborigines of Australia, for instance, often cite this reason as their greatest impetus for choosing Islam in such large numbers nowadays. See the documentary film: “Aborigines Choosing Islam [Motion Picture],” *Australian Broadcasting Corporation*, aired on November 14th, 2010.

Healthy Eating and Personal Hygiene

*O children of Adam, take your adornment at every place of prostration, and eat and drink, but be not excessive. Indeed, He likes not those who commit excess.*⁷⁰

These divine instructions were not left unqualified. Rather, nuanced detail was provided by the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ regarding food, drink, and dress. For instance, the Qur'an forbids Muslims from eating pork unless a dire necessity compels them,⁷¹ a prohibition which is also biblical.⁷² Muslims were also discouraged (not forbidden) by the Prophet ﷺ from eating beef to avoid medical complications. In one hadith, "I prescribe for you cows' milk, for they eat from all the herbs, and it contains a cure for every disease." In another related report, "And stay away from cow meat, for it is a cause of disease."⁷³ The harms of excessive beef are common knowledge of late.

Not only was the kind of food addressed, but the amount as well. The Prophet ﷺ said,

No human being fills any vessel worse than his stomach. It is sufficient for the son of Adam [to eat] a few mouthfuls, to erect his spine (i.e., sustain him). But if he must [eat more], then let one third be for food, one third for drink, and one third for air.⁷⁴

Taking it a brilliant step further, Muslims were given by their Prophet ﷺ a roadmap to eating less, transitioning them from the abstract to practical applications of this guidance. Anas ibn Mālik (rA) reports that the Prophet ﷺ forbade them from drinking while standing, and [Anas added] that eating while

⁷⁰ The Qur'an 7:31, Saheeh International Translation.

⁷¹ The Qur'an 2:173, 5:3, 6:145, & 16:115.

⁷² "Also the swine is unclean for you, because it has cloven hooves, yet does not chew the cud; you shall not eat their flesh or touch their dead carcasses." (Deuteronomy: 14:8, New King James Version)

⁷³ Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ wa Ziyādatih* (Damascus: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1969), 2:749-750 #4059-4061.

⁷⁴ Ibn Mājah, *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, 2:1111 #3349; authenticated by al-Albānī in the comments.

standing was even worse.⁷⁵ This advice on eating and drinking mindfully is a proven key to avoiding the dangers of overeating and obesity.⁷⁶

As for personal hygiene, the following words are attributed to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ :

Ten practices are from the *fiṭrah* (natural inclinations): trimming the mustache, letting the beard grow, brushing the teeth, rinsing the nose, clipping the nails, washing the finger joints, plucking armpit hair, shaving pubic hair, and washing oneself with water after using the lavatory.

A sub-narrator said, “And I forgot the tenth, unless it was rinsing the mouth.”⁷⁷

When people reflect on the wisdom of such teachings, see the effects of their application, and consider the laws of Islam from the perspective of their higher objectives, they are often stirred both intellectually and spiritually. These ten practices above, for instance, do not just testify to the Final Prophet ﷺ being centuries ahead of the most progressive civilizations of his time in hygiene, but they also indicate how kind the Most Affectionate, Lord of Might, is to His creation.

George Bernard Shaw (d. 1950), an influential Irish playwright and critic, writes,

...the formulators of the superseded native religion, like Mahomet, had been enlightened enough to introduce as religious duties such sanitary measures as ablution and the most careful and reverent treatment of everything cast off by the human body, even to nail clippings and hairs; and our missionaries thoughtlessly discredited this godly doctrine without supplying its place, which was promptly taken by laziness and neglect.⁷⁸

Until Christendom’s encounter with the Muslim world during the Crusades of the eleventh century, bathing was not yet customary amongst Europeans. Plagues

⁷⁵ Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 3:1600 #2024.

⁷⁶ Melinda Beck, “Putting an End to Mindless Munching,” *The Wall Street Journal*, May 13th, 2008.

⁷⁷ Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 1:223 #261.

⁷⁸ Bernard Shaw, *The Doctor’s Dilemma: Preface on Doctors* (New York: Brentano’s, 1911), LXXXIV.

would regularly visit their unsanitary dwellings, and they would wear grime-covered clothing until it fell off their bodies. By that time, Muslims had been washing for prayers, bathing after sexual intercourse, and for ritual devotions, and even washing their deceased—for four hundred years. As James Harpur writes about the Crusades,

Back in Europe washing was not considered a priority, indeed it was often despised as a mark of effeminacy. But the Crusaders soon began to discover the therapeutic pleasures of the public bath—similar to a modern Turkish bath—that was a normal part of Muslim life.⁷⁹

Islam even discouraged the consumption of raw onions, and promoted rinsing the mouth regularly and brushing the teeth frequently. As the Prophet ﷺ said, “The toothbrush is a purification for the mouth, and a means of pleasing the Lord.”⁸⁰ Islam’s final Prophet, Muhammad ﷺ, taught that these are means of nearness to God, and of not offending people and angels who are bothered by bad odors. With today’s advances in medical technology, most of us understand just how useful brushing one’s teeth and diluting the sugar in one’s mouth—for instance—can be in preventing rotting teeth and the agony that ensues from gum infection.

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ instructed Muslims to begin their *wuḍū’* (ritual ablution), or pre-prayer wash, by thoroughly rinsing their hands. It is estimated that only 19% of people across the world wash their hands after using the toilet, and the numbers on preventable diseases attributable to poor hand hygiene are more alarming in the Americas today than in the Muslim-majority Eastern Mediterranean regions.⁸¹ Despite the amount of scientific evidence documenting the health and even life-saving benefits of this basic cleanliness practice,⁸² we find that in today’s modern world, where sanitary precautions in general have

⁷⁹ James Harpur, *The Crusades, the Two Hundred Years War: The Clash between the Cross and the Crescent in the Middle East, 1096-1291* (New York: Rosen Publishing, 2008), 44.

⁸⁰ Aḥmad ibn Shu‘ayb al-Nasā’ī, *Sunan al-Nasā’ī* (Aleppo: Maktab al-Maṭbū‘āt al-Islāmīyah, 1986), 1:10 #5; authenticated by al-Albānī in the comments.

⁸¹ A. Prüss-Ustün et al., “Burden of Disease from Inadequate Water, Sanitation and Hygiene in Low and Middle-Income Settings: A Retrospective Analysis of Data from 145 Countries,” *eScholarship*, University of California, 2014.

⁸² “Show Me the Science - Why Wash Your Hands?” *Center for Disease Control and Prevention*, last updated September 10th, 2020.

contributed to overall healthier populations, people are still not as hygienically motivated in this regard as Muslims have been for nearly 1,500 years.

Another component of the ritual *wuḍū'* involves rinsing the nose. Researchers are beginning to discover just how valuable this simple practice can be to our health. One study concluded that “nasal irrigation has enormous potential in improving quality of life in a cost-efficient manner for millions of patients.”⁸³ Rhinologists refer to it as “nasal irrigation” because sending small amounts of water *all the way through* is the proper way to treat and prevent sinusitis, among other things. This is precisely what the Prophet ﷺ prescribed in his statement, “And be thorough in irrigating the nose, unless you are fasting.”⁸⁴ In other words, the water should almost reach the throat in this nasal rinsing, hence carefulness during fasting is warranted.

The Islamic message also reinforced the notion that ritual washing is not just about outer cleanliness. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ taught that before performing the *ṣalāh* to connect with God, this sacred engagement should begin with the *wuḍū'*, even if we may be externally unsoiled. This seems to symbolize the inseparability of the physical and metaphysical realms, and that just as water originates from the heavens to cleanse our physical bodies from dirt and unpleasant odors, it too allows us to reconnect with heaven through rinsing our spirits from that which has polluted them. In the context of ritual purification, Allah concludes the discussion with an allusion to this profound dual function, saying, “*Allah loves those who are constantly repentant and loves those who purify themselves.*”⁸⁵ The Prophet ﷺ also linked the purification of the exterior and interior, helping us remember that during the ritual washing of our bodies, we are also cleansing our souls and subconscious minds from the iniquities that regularly pollute them. He ﷺ said,

No person among you brings near his ablution water, then rinses his mouth and irrigates then clears his nose, except that the sins of his face and mouth and nostrils fall therefrom. And then, he does not wash his face as Allah has

⁸³ Lance T. Tomooka, Claire Murphy, and Terence M. Davidson, “Clinical Study and Literature Review of Nasal Irrigation,” *The Laryngoscope* 110, no. 7 (2000): 1193.

⁸⁴ al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, 2:147 #788; authenticated by al-Tirmidhī in the comments.

⁸⁵ The Qur'an 2:222, Saheeh International Translation.

instructed him, except that his face's sins fall from the tips of his beard along with the water. And then, he does not wash his arms to the elbows, except that his arms' sins fall from his fingertips along with the water. And then, he does not pass his [wet hands] over his head, except that the sins of his head are washed away through the ends of his hair along with the water. And then, he does not wash his feet to the ankles, except that his feet's sins are washed away from his toes along with the water. Then, he does not rise to prayer, wherein he praises Allah, glorifies Him, proclaims His greatness as He deserves, and pours his heart out to Allah, except that he emerges from that prayer as sin-free as the day his mother gave birth to him.⁸⁶

Science and Medicine

In the first passages ever revealed to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, Allah said,

Read [O Prophet] in the name of your Lord who created. [He] created humans from a clinging substance. Read, and your Lord is the Most Generous. Who taught by the pen. [He] taught mankind what they knew not.

87

What may be the most overlooked teaching of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, and yet one of the greatest debts owed to him, is the fact that he taught the world the importance of knowledge. Liberating them from centuries of superstition, he taught his followers the necessity of investing their lives in pursuing education. Historians recognize that it was on his cue that literacy rates soared past those of contemporaneous societies, even though in the Arabia of his birth, illiteracy was the norm. In a very short span of time, the major Muslim cities such as Mecca, Madinah, Baghdad, and Cordoba (Muslim Spain) became the hubs of knowledge and scholarship. It suffices to consider that the caliphal library in Medieval Cordoba, one of its seventy libraries then, reportedly had 400,000 books while the largest library in Christian Europe probably had 400 manuscripts.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 1:569 #832.

⁸⁷ The Qur'an 96:1-5, author's translation.

⁸⁸ Maria Menocal, *The Ornament of the World* (Boston: Back Bay Books, 2002), 33.

He ﷺ validated his followers' intellectual potential by saying, "You know better concerning your worldly affairs."⁸⁹ Through statements like these, the early Muslim understood that demonstrated expertise and empirical findings ought to be respected. Stemming from that paradigm, Islam instituted the liability of physicians and set intellectual standards for centuries. This was no coincidence, but rather due to the Prophet ﷺ saying, "He who practices medicine without being known for proficiency in medicine shall be liable."⁹⁰ Cautioned by that statement, tenth-century Baghdad (Iraq) instituted a medical licensing exam that all physicians had to take before practicing medicine.⁹¹ In addition to pioneering this accountability, Islam also provides by it a way to counteract the enormous amount of medical misinformation circulated on the internet by non-specialists today. Now that the phenomenon of democratizing knowledge has infected our world with the inability to distinguish between reliable facts and pseudo-scientific medical claims, the Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ teachings offer a safeguard against falling back into the dogmatic anti-intellectualism that characterized the world before mass literacy.

In another tradition, the Prophet ﷺ said, "Allah has not sent down a disease except that He sent down for it a cure, regardless of who may know it and who may be ignorant of it."⁹² In other words, these cures are all discoverable, so let the research renaissance begin. Muslims became so advanced in medicine that William Osler, a founder of the Medical Library Association, said the Canon (*Qanūn*) of Avicenna (*Ibn Sīna*) had remained a medical bible in Europe for a longer period than any other work.⁹³

It was also the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ who introduced the concept of medical quarantine. When 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (rA), the Prophet's second successor,

⁸⁹ Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 4:1836 #2363.

⁹⁰ Ibn Mājah, *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, 8:52 #4830; a *ḥasan* (acceptable) chain according to al-Albānī in the comments.

⁹¹ Firas Alkhateeb, *Lost Islamic History: Reclaiming Muslim Civilisation from the Past* (London: Hurst, 2014), 72.

⁹² Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad Aḥmad*, 6:50 #3578; authenticated by al-Arnā'ūṭ in the comments. In another narration, Usāmah ibn Sharīk (rA) reports that the Bedouins said, "O Messenger of Allah, should we seek treatments?" He said, "Seek treatments, for Allah has not created an ailment except that He created its cure, except for one." They said, "O Messenger of Allah, what is it?" He said, "Aging." (*Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, 3:451 #2038; authenticated by al-Tirmidhī in the comments)

⁹³ Evelyn B. Kelly, "The Significance of Ibn Sina's Canon of Medicine in the Arab and Western Worlds," *Encyclopedia.com by Cengage*, updated June 13th, 2020.

reached a place called Sargh during his travels, he was informed that there was a plague in the lands of Shām where he was heading. ‘Abdul-Raḥmān ibn ‘Awf (rA), another senior Companion of the Prophet ﷺ, told ‘Umar that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ had said, “When you hear about its occurrence in a land, do not enter it. And when it happens in a land, do not flee it.”⁹⁴

On the renaissance of knowledge sparked by the guidance of Muhammad ﷺ, Yale University’s Franz Rosenthal says in *Knowledge Triumphant*,

For ‘ilm (knowledge) is one of those concepts that have dominated Islam and given Muslim civilization its distinctive shape and complexion. In fact, there is no other concept that has been operative as a determinant of Muslim civilization in all its aspects to the same extent as ‘ilm... There is no branch of Muslim intellectual life, of Muslim religious and political life, and of the daily life of the average Muslim that remained untouched by the all-pervasive attitude toward knowledge as something of supreme value for Muslim being. ‘Ilm is Islam, even if the theologians have been hesitant to accept the technical correctness of this equation. The very fact of their passionate discussion of the concept attests to its fundamental importance for Islam.⁹⁵

In *The Classical Heritage in Islam*, Rosenthal adds,

Neither practical utilitarianism, however, which made an acquaintance with medicine, alchemy and the exact sciences appear desirable to Muslims, nor theoretical utilitarianism, which prompted them to occupy themselves with philosophical-theological questions, might have sufficed to support an extensive activity of translation, had not Muhammad’s religion, from the very beginning, emphasized the role of knowledge (‘ilm) as the driving force in religion and, thereby, in all human life.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 7:130 #5728; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 4:1737 #2218.

⁹⁵ Franz Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant: The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 2.

⁹⁶ Franz Rosenthal, *The Classical Heritage in Islam* (London: Routledge, 2003), 5.

Robert Briffault (d. 1948), a British surgeon and social anthropologist, writes,

The debt of our science to that of the Arabs does not consist of startling discoveries or revolutionary theories; science owes a great deal more to the Arabs; its own existence...⁹⁷ Roger Bacon was no more than one of the apostles of Muslim science and method to Christian Europe; and he never wearied of declaring that knowledge of Arabic and Arabic science was for his contemporaries the only way to true knowledge... Science is the most momentous contribution of Arab civilization to the modern world...⁹⁸

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was therefore not just an orphan who adopted the world with his compassion, but an unlettered shepherd who provided an extraordinary prism that addresses every theological, ethical, or civilizational inquiry until the end of time. He propounded a message of profound substance, coupled with fine-tuned laws that remained flexible enough that the message would remain forever pertinent and never become outdated. He offered the world a definitive message, but one also versatile enough to accommodate the transformations in world dynamics that were unimaginable to the brightest minds 1,400 years ago. Such vitality reflects the impeccable equilibrium that was struck in his teachings, and somehow without any trial-and-error phase.

With that, we complete our tour of what could be described as the intellectual miracle of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, namely that his message was among the most compelling facets of his prophethood and the strongest indicators of its divine origins. His teachings laid the foundation for a coherent and integrated system of theology, law, and ethics that addressed all the needs of the existential human condition: physical, mental, social, and spiritual. His system endures to this day

Rosenthal adds elsewhere that the advent of the Qur'an also stimulated historical research in a way that changed the course of history when it came to historiography. The reason, he argues, is that suddenly the actions of individuals (like prophets), the events of the past, and the circumstances of all peoples of the earth had now become matters of religious importance, in addition to the abundance of historical data in the Qur'an which Muhammad ﷺ brought that incentivized pursuing additional illustrative historical information. (See: Franz Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1968), 28)

⁹⁷ Robert Briffault, *The Making of Humanity* (London: G. Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1919), 191.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 201-202.

and will persist for as long as God wills, bringing enlightenment, wisdom, and comfort to millions of believers throughout history and across a diverse range of social and cultural contexts.