

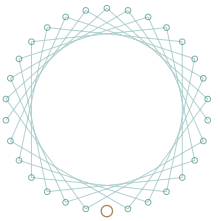
A READING COMPANION

Invitation to Islam

Thirty Conversations on God, Meaning and How to Live

دعوة إلى الإسلام

tasneeminstitute



Invitation to Islam

A READING COMPANION

بِسْمِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلرَّحْمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ

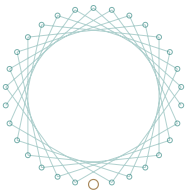
In the name of God, the All-Compassionate, the All-Merciful

A READING COMPANION

Invitation to Islam

دعوة إلى الإسلام

Thirty Conversations on God,
Meaning and How to Live



TASNEEM INSTITUTE

Invitation to Islam: A Reading Companion
Thirty Conversations on God, Meaning and How to Live

New edition, 2026

Published by Tasneem Institute
Surrey, British Columbia, Canada
tasneeminstitute.org

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This book accompanies *Invitation to Islam*, a video series from Tasneem Institute taught by Hajjah Najah Bazzy, Shaykh Mehdi Hazari and Shaykh Azhar Nasser.

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Hadith are quoted from the standard collections as published in the Thaqalayn digital library (thaqalayn.net), with the gradings of classical scholars recorded there. **Practical rulings** follow the published works of Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Ali al-Sistani (sistani.org).

Every quotation in this book has been checked against its source; the Notes give the locators. Corrections are warmly welcomed at tasneeminstitute.org/contact.

Set in EB Garamond, Inter and Amiri.

ٱدْعُ إِلَىٰ سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِٱلْحِكْمَةِ وَٱلْمَوْعِظَةِ ٱلْحَسَنَةِ وَجَٰدِلْهُم
بِٱلَّتِى هِىَ أَحْسَنُ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَن ضَلَّ عَن سَبِيلِهِۦ
وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِٱلْمُهْتَدِينَ ﴿١٢٥﴾

Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good counsel, and reason with them in the way that is best. Your Lord knows best who has strayed from His way, and He knows best who is rightly guided.

QUR'AN 16:125 · SURAT AL-NAHL

Welcome

You are welcome here.

Perhaps a friend put this book into your hands. Perhaps you are not Muslim and want to understand what your neighbours, classmates or colleagues believe, and why. Perhaps you embraced Islam recently and are learning everything at once. Or perhaps you grew up Muslim, know the words of the prayer by heart, and have quietly wondered what they mean. Whoever you are, and whatever you believe, there is a place for you here, and your questions are welcome.

This book is an invitation, not a sales pitch. It introduces Islam as it is understood in the Shia tradition: the school that looks to the family of the Prophet Muhammad (s), the *Ahl al-Bayt*, as the trusted guides to his message. It will not ask you to believe anything without reasons. The Qur'an itself asks people who make religious claims to "bring your proof, if you are truthful" (Qur'an 2:111), and it praises those "who listen to what is said and follow the best of it" (Qur'an 39:18). We have tried to write in that spirit: honestly, warmly and from the sources.

The thirty chapters follow the thirty episodes of *Invitation to Islam*, a video series from Tasneem Institute presented by Hajjah Najah Bazzy, Shaykh Mehdi Hazari and Shaykh Azhar Nasser. Their teaching is the heart of this book; we have set it in one voice and added the sources behind it. The chapters are arranged around three questions that any thoughtful person might ask of a faith:

- **Is it true?** Part One examines the foundations: God, prophets and revelation, reason and science, the soul, suffering, death and what comes after.
- **Is it good?** Part Two turns to how Islam asks us to live with one another: mercy and justice, family and work, the earth, and the hardest questions people ask about Islam today.
- **What would it mean to live it?** Part Three looks at the practices that turn belief into a life: returning to God after failure, prayer, fasting, giving and the great pilgrimage.

You can read this book on your own. But it was written to be read together. For centuries Muslims have learned in circles: a few people, a teacher, a text, a pot of tea. The Prophet (s) reported that God says: "My servants' discussing knowledge together is one of the things that bring dead hearts to life, when it leads them to My command." So every chapter ends with questions to talk about, a small practice to carry home, and a page of notes for whoever leads the conversation.

We make you two promises. We will not hide the hard questions; several of them have a chapter of their own. And every quotation in this book is sourced, so that you can check our work.

Bring your questions. There is a place for you in the circle.

Tasneem Institute

The words of the Prophet (s) are from al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb faḍl al-ʿilm, bāb 9, ḥadīth 6 (al-Majlisī: ḥasan). Translation: this companion.

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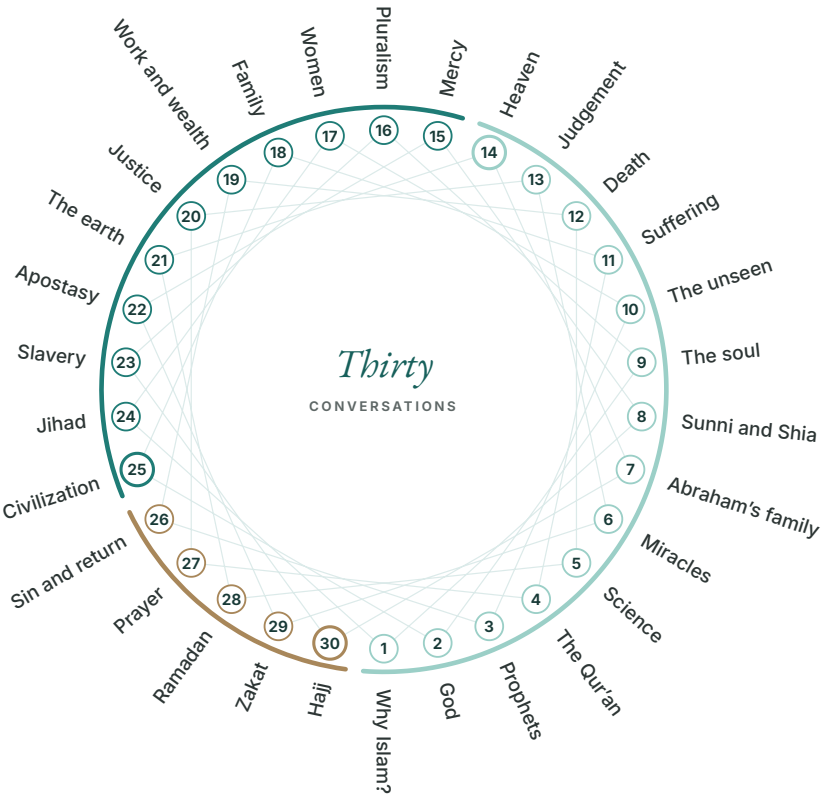
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The journey at a glance

Thirty conversations in three parts, joined in one circle. The chapters run counter-clockwise from the bottom, the direction in which pilgrims walk around the Ka'ba. Colour in each station as you finish its chapter; the larger stations, 14, 25 and 30, are milestones to celebrate together.



PART ONE · BELIEFS
Is it true?
Chapters 1–14

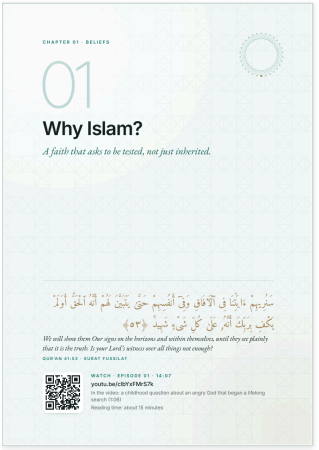
PART TWO · ETHICS
Is it good?
Chapters 15–25

PART THREE · PRACTICES
What would it mean to live it?
Chapters 26–30

How to use this book

Every chapter has the same shape

Once you know the shape of one chapter, you know them all. The pages below come from Chapter 1.


CHAPTER 01 · BELIEFS

01

Why Islam?

A faith that asks to be tested, not just inherited.

سَنُرِيهِمْ آيَاتِنَا فِي الْآفَاقِ وَفِي أَنفُسِهِمْ حَتَّىٰ يَتَبَيَّنَ لَهُمْ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ ۗ أَوَلَمْ يَكْفِ بِرَبِّكَ أَنَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدٌ ﴿٥٣﴾

We will show them Our signs on the horizons and within themselves, until they see plainly that it is the truth. Is your Lord's witness over all things not enough?

QUR'AN 41:53 · SURAT FUSSILAT

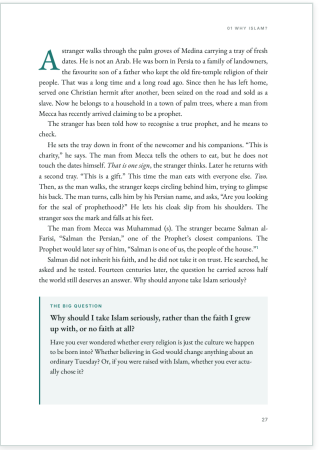
WATCH · EPISODE 01 · 14:07

youtu.be/zbYxF1N-57k

In the video: a childhood question about an angry God that began a lifelong search (1:08)

Reading time: about 15 minutes

1 **The threshold.** The chapter's question, a verse to set the tone, and a QR code for the episode.


01 WHY ISLAM?

A stranger walks through the palm groves of Medina carrying a tray of fresh dates. He is not an Arab. He was born in Persia to a family of landowners, the favourite son of a father who kept the old fire-temple religion of their people. That was a long time and a long road ago. Since then he has left home, served one Christian hermit after another, been seized on the road and sold as a slave. Now he belongs to a household in a town of palm trees, where a man from Mecca has recently arrived claiming to be a prophet.

The stranger has been told how to recognise a true prophet, and he means to check.

He sets the tray down in front of the newcomer and his companions. "This is charity," he says. The man from Mecca tells the others to eat, but he does not touch the dates himself. *That is one sign*, the stranger thinks. Later he returns with a second tray. "This is a gift." This time the man eats with everyone else. *Two.* Then, as the man walks, the stranger keeps circling behind him, trying to glimpse his back. The man turns, calls him by his Persian name, and asks, "Are you looking for the seal of prophethood?" He lets his cloak slip from his shoulders. The stranger sees the mark and falls at his feet.

The man from Mecca was Muhammad (ﷺ). The stranger became Salman al-Farisi, "Salman the Persian," one of the Prophet's closest companions. The Prophet would later say of him, "Salman is one of us, the people of the house."[1]

Salman did not inherit his faith, and he did not take it on trust. He searched, he asked and he tested. Fourteen centuries later, the question he carried across half the world still deserves an answer. Why should anyone take Islam seriously?

THE BIG QUESTION

Why should I take Islam seriously, rather than the faith I grew up with, or no faith at all?

Have you ever wondered whether every religion is just the culture we happen to be born into? Whether believing in God would change anything about an ordinary Tuesday? Or, if you were raised with Islam, whether you ever actually chose it?

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2 **The opening.** A story from the sources, then *The big question* and *Words to know*.


INVITATION TO ISLAM

This chapter looks at what Islam claims to be, what it says about God and about us, and why it asks to be examined rather than just inherited.

WORDS TO KNOW

Islām (إسلام) · is-LAAM · surrender to God. It comes from the root *s-l-m*, which it shares with *salām*, "peace."

muslim (مسلم) · MUS-lim · a person who surrenders to God.

tawḥīd (توحيد) · taw-HEED · the oneness of God, the foundation of every Islamic belief.

fiṭra (فطرة) · FIT-ra · the inborn human nature that recognises its Creator.

Ahl al-Bayt (أهل البيت) · AHL el-BAYT · "the people of the house," the Prophet's family, whom Shia Muslims follow as guides.

Is it enough to inherit a faith?

Ask people why they believe what they believe, and the most honest answer is often: *it's how I was raised*. That is a fine reason to love a tradition. It is not a reason to think it true. A religion can be familiar, comforting, even beautiful, and still be wrong. So Islam asks to be examined, not just admired.

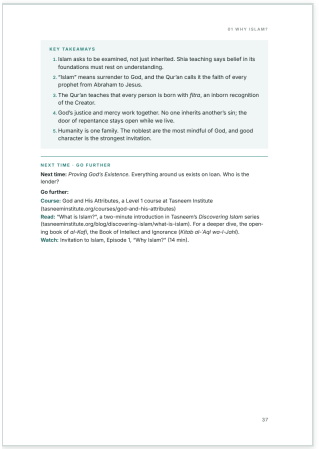
The Qur'an is blunt about this. It describes people who are invited to follow God's guidance and answer, "No, we will follow what we found our fathers doing." The Qur'an replies with a question: "Even if their fathers grasped nothing and missed the right path?" (Qur'an 2:170). Inheritance is not evidence.

Shia scholars took this so seriously that they made it a rule. The great theologian al-'Allama al-Hilli (d. 1325 CE) opened his famous handbook of belief by saying that knowledge of God, His prophets, the Imams and the life to come must rest on proof, not on imitation.[2] Today a leading Shia authority, Ayatollah al-Sistani, begins his book of religious rulings in the same place. A Muslim's belief in the foundations of the faith, he writes, must come from personal understanding. You cannot take it on anyone's word.[3] In the details of practice, Shia Muslims follow a trusted scholar, as we follow a doctor. But on the big questions—Is there a God? Was Muhammad His messenger?—every person must look for themselves.

That can be a relief to hear. Many people first meet God as a threat: *God is angry, God will punish you.* For some, that picture is the reason they walk away. For others, it is the start of a search. They sense that the Creator of everything cannot be smaller

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3 **The conversation.** Short sections with Qur'an and hadith panels and boxes along the way.


01 WHY ISLAM?

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Islam asks to be examined, not just inherited. Shia teaching says belief in its foundations must rest on understanding.
2. "Islam" means surrender to God, and the Qur'an calls it the faith of every prophet from Abraham to Jesus.
3. The Qur'an teaches that every person is born with *fitra*, an inborn recognition of the Creator.
4. God's justice and mercy work together. No one inherits another's sin; the door of repentance stays open while we live.
5. Humanity is one family. The noblest are the most mindful of God, and good character is the strongest invitation.

NEXT TIME · GO FURTHER

Next time: *Proving God's Existence.* Everything around us exists on loan. Who is the lender?

Go further:

Course: God and His Attributes, a Level 1 course at Tasneem Institute (tasneeminstitute.org/courses/god-and-his-attributes)

Read: "What is Islam?", a two-minute introduction in Tasneem's *Discovering Islam* series (tasneeminstitute.org/blog/discovering-islam/what-is-islam). For a deeper dive, the opening book of *al-Kafi*, the Book of Intellect and Ignorance (*Kitab al-'Aql wa-l-Jahl*).

Watch: Invitation to Islam, Episode 1, "Why Islam?" (14 min).

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4 **Key takeaways** and **Next time**, with ways to go further.


In the circle

CHAPTER 01 · WHY ISLAM?

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

1. What did you learn about God as a child, and who taught you?
2. What is one question about Islam you have always wanted to ask?
3. What would make these conversations worth your time?

TALK ABOUT IT

WARM-UP

1. When you were a child, what picture of God did you pick up, and from whom?

UNDERSTAND

2. What is the difference between inheriting a belief and holding it with understanding, as this chapter describes it?
3. How does the Qur'an's idea of *fitra* (Qur'an 30:30) answer the complaint, "I never asked to be created"?

REFLECT

4. Salman tested the Prophet with a tray of dates. What would a fair test of a religion look like to you?
5. The chapter says God's justice and mercy belong together. Which of the two do you find easier to believe in? You needn't say why.

APPLY

6. Imam al-Sadiq (a) asked his students to invite people "without your tongues." Who has shown you something about faith without saying a word? What could you show someone this week, in the same way?

GO DEEPER

7. Read Imam al-Baqir's full explanation of the covenant verse (al-Kafi, vol. 2, Book of Belief and Disbelief, ch. 6, no. 4; reliable chain). What does he add to Qur'an 7:172? Why might he link it to the saying "every child is born upon the *fitra*"?

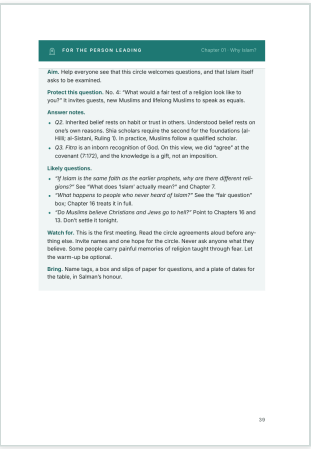
CARRY IT HOME

Choose one way in this week:

- ☐ **Notice:** Each evening, note one "sign within yourself" (Qur'an 41:53), such as a moment when you knew something was right or wrong without being told.
- ☐ **Do:** Write down the biggest question you bring to these conversations. Put it somewhere you will see it, or drop it in the circle's question box.
- ☐ **Learn:** Read Sura 1, *al-Fatiha*, the opening chapter of the Qur'an, in a translation. Count how many times it speaks of mercy.

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5 **In the circle.** Look back, talk about it, carry it home.


FOR THE PERSON LEADING

Chapter 01 · Why Islam?

Aim. Help everyone see that this circle welcomes questions, and that Islam itself asks to be examined.

Protect this question. No. 4: "What would a fair test of a religion look like to you?" It invites guests, new Muslims and lifelong Muslims to speak as equals.

Answer notes.

- Q2. Inherited belief rests on habit or trust in others. Understood belief rests on one's own reasons. Shia scholars require the second for the foundations (al-Hilli, al-Sistani, Ruling 1). In practice, Muslims follow a qualified scholar.
- Q3. *Fitra* is an inborn recognition of God. On this view, we did "agree" at the covenant (7:172), and the knowledge is a gift, not an imposition.

Likely questions.

- *"If Islam is the same faith as the earlier prophets, why are there different religions?"* See "What does 'Islam' actually mean?" and Chapter 7.
- *"What happens to people who never heard of Islam?"* See the "fair question" box; Chapter 16 treats it in full.
- *"Do Muslims believe Christians and Jews go to hell?"* Point to Chapters 16 and 13. Don't settle it tonight.

Watch for. This is the first meeting. Read the circle agreements aloud before anything else. Invite names and one hope for the circle. Never ask anyone what they believe. Some people carry painful memories of religion taught through fear. Let the warm-up be optional.

Bring. Name tags, a box and slips of paper for questions, and a plate of dates for the table, in Salman's honour.

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6 **For the person leading,** then **My thread**, a page for your own words.

Inside the chapter

Qur'an panels. The Arabic text with an English rendering and a *Notice* line that points out one detail worth seeing.

Hadith panels. Words of the Prophet (s) and the Imams (a), with the source and a strength label (see "How to read the sources").

A fair question. An objection put as strongly as its askers would put it, and answered fairly.

A story from the sources. A scene from the life of the Prophet (s), the Imams (a) or their companions, as the sources tell it.

A closer look. A step deeper into the scholarship, for readers who want it.

In practice. Step-by-step guidance, in the chapters on worship.

Pause and recall. One question midway through, to check that the idea has landed.

Talk about it: five kinds of question

- **Warm-up.** Easy and personal. Nobody can get it wrong.
- **Understand.** What the chapter says. The answers are in the text.
- **Reflect.** What you think, and why. There are no wrong answers, only honest ones.
- **Apply.** What difference it might make on an ordinary Monday.
- **Go deeper.** A primary source to explore, for those who want to dig.

Every question is written so that a curious guest, a new Muslim and a lifelong Muslim can each answer it honestly. Nobody is ever asked what they believe.

Short on time? The express route

Read the opening story, *The big question*, the Qur'an panels and the *Key takeaways*, then watch the episode. That takes about fifteen minutes and gives you the spine of the chapter. Come back for the rest when you can.

Four ways to read

- **A weekly circle.** One chapter a week for thirty weeks, in about seventy-five minutes. This is the format we recommend most: understanding and friendship both need time.
- **A ten-week intensive.** Two to four chapters at a time, with the videos watched at home.
- **Thirty nights of Ramadan.** One chapter each night, after the fast is broken.

- **On your own.** Three chapters a week for ten weeks, with a friend to check in with.

"Leading a circle" explains each format in detail.

My thread

At the end of every chapter is a lined page with a single prompt. Write a line or two in your own words. Nobody else needs to read it. By the last chapter you will be able to look back and see how your thinking has moved.

◆

How to read the sources

This book lets the sources speak. Here is what they are, and how to read them.

The Qur'an

Muslims believe the Qur'an is the word of God, revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (s) over about twenty-three years, from 610 CE until his death in 632. It has 114 chapters, called *suras*, made up of verses, called *ayas*. A reference such as "Qur'an 2:255" means sura 2, verse 255. The Qur'an was revealed in Arabic, and Muslims regard every translation as an interpretation of its meaning rather than the Qur'an itself. That is why this book always prints the Arabic beside the English.

Hadith: the words of the Prophet and his family

A *hadith* is a report of what the Prophet (s) said or did. In the Shia tradition the teachings of his daughter, Lady Fatima (a), and of the twelve Imams from his family carry the same authority, because the Prophet (s) entrusted his message to them; Chapter 8 explains why. Shia scholars gathered these reports into great collections. The most important are known as the Four Books:

- *al-Kafi*, by Muhammad ibn Ya'qub al-Kulayni (d. 941);
- *Man la yahduruhu al-faqih*, by al-Shaykh al-Saduq (d. 991);
- *Tahdhib al-ahkam* and *al-Istibsar*, by al-Shaykh al-Tusi (d. 1067).

You will also meet *Nahj al-Balagha* ("The Peak of Eloquence"), the sermons, letters and sayings of Imam Ali (a) compiled by al-Sharif al-Radi (d. 1015), and *al-Sahifa al-Sajjadiyya*, the supplications of Imam Zayn al-Abidin (a).

Strength labels

Every hadith comes with a chain of narrators, the people who passed it on, one to the next. For centuries scholars have weighed these chains. This book tells you, for every hadith it quotes, what they concluded:

RELIABLE CHAIN
Classical scholars, chiefly 'Allama al-Majlisi (d. 1699), judged the chain sound, good or trustworthy (*sahih*, *hasan* or *muwaththaq*).

UNVERIFIED CHAIN

A narrator is unknown, or a link in the chain is missing. The report may well be true, but it cannot be confirmed.

WEAK CHAIN
A narrator in the chain was judged unreliable.

COMPILED TEXT, NOT GRADED HERE
A text such as a sermon in *Nahj al-Balagha* or a famous supplication, which reached us through a compiled collection rather than a single chain.

SUNNI SOURCE
A report from a Sunni collection, quoted where it helps the argument and graded in its own tradition.

One rule runs through the whole book: **its central claims rest only on the Qur'an or on reports with reliable chains.** Weaker reports appear as stories or prayers, and are labelled as such.

Translations and spelling

Unless a note says otherwise, every translation of the Qur'an and hadith is this book's own, made from the Arabic and checked against published translations. Names and terms appear in their familiar spellings (Imam Jaʿfar al-Sadiq, al-Kafi). Full scholarly transliteration is kept for *Words to know*, the Notes and the Glossary. In it, a line over a vowel lengthens it (ā, ī, ū); a dot marks an emphatic consonant (ḥ, ṣ, ḍ, ṭ, ẓ); ʿ is the deep consonant *ʿayn*; and ʾ is a glottal stop.

Honorifics

Muslims honour the Prophet and his family with short prayers whenever they say their names. This book marks them, the first time a name appears in a section, as follows:

- **(s)** after the Prophet Muhammad: *salla Allahu ʿalayhi wa alih*, "God bless him and his family."
- **(a)** after the other prophets, Lady Fatima, Lady Maryam, Lady Zaynab and the Imams: *ʿalayhi* or *ʿalayha al-salam*, "peace be upon him" or "upon her."

Religious rulings

Where a chapter mentions a practical ruling, it follows the published rulings of Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Ali al-Sistani (sistani.org), one of the most widely followed Shia

scholars today. Shia Muslims follow a living scholar of their choice, a *marja'*, in matters of law, so readers who follow another scholar should check his rulings.

The Prophet's family and the Twelve Imams

By God's command, Shia Muslims believe, the Prophet (s) named twelve guides from his family to carry his message after him, each designating the next. Chapter 8 tells the story.

The Prophet Muhammad (s)
c. 570–632 · Medina

Lady Fatima al-Zahra' (a)
his daughter
c. 615–632 · Medina

married

1 **Ali ibn Abi Talib** (a)
Amir al-Mu'minin, Commander of the Faithful
c. 600–661 · Najaf

2 **al-Hasan ibn Ali** (a)
al-Mujtaba, the Chosen
625–669/70 · Medina (al-Baqi')

3 **al-Husayn ibn Ali** (a)
Sayyid al-Shuhada', Master of Martyrs
625/6–680 · Karbala

4 **Ali ibn al-Husayn** (a)
Zayn al-Abidin, al-Sajjad
658–713 · Medina (al-Baqi')

5 **Muhammad ibn Ali** (a)
al-Baqir, who splits knowledge open
677–733 · Medina (al-Baqi')

6 **Ja'far ibn Muhammad** (a)
al-Sadiq, the Truthful
702–765 · Medina (al-Baqi')

7 **Musa ibn Ja'far** (a)
al-Kazim, who restrains his anger
745–799 · Baghdad (Kazimayn)

8 **Ali ibn Musa** (a)
al-Rida, the One Who Is Pleasing
765–818 · Mashhad

9 **Muhammad ibn Ali** (a)
al-Jawad, the Generous
811–835 · Baghdad (Kazimayn)

10 **Ali ibn Muhammad** (a)
al-Hadi, the Guide
828–868 · Samarra

11 **al-Hasan ibn Ali** (a)
al-'Askari
846/7–874 · Samarra

12 **Muhammad ibn al-Hasan** (a)
al-Mahdi, the Rightly Guided
born 869 · In occultation since 874 (260 AH)

Dates CE, with the year of death AH. They follow al-Kulayni, *al-Kafi*, vol. 1, Kitab al-hujja, which gives the earliest Shia record; where it reports two dates, both are shown.

The videos

Invitation to Islam is a free video series from Tasneem Institute: thirty short episodes on the questions people most often ask about Islam. Each chapter of this book begins with a QR code for its episode. Point your phone's camera at the code to watch.

Three teachers lead the series:

- **Hajjah Najah Bazzy**, educator and founder of Zaman International;
- **Shaykh Mehdi Hazari**, scholar and teacher;
- **Shaykh Azhar Nasser**, scholar, teacher and co-founder of Tasneem Institute.

Each brings a different voice and a different way into the questions. This book follows the episodes closely, but it is written in one voice, so that it can be read straight through. It also goes further than the videos: it gathers the sources behind each idea, and it covers points that a short talk has no time for. Read the chapter before the episode or after it; either way, each will make the other richer.

The episodes are numbered in a different order from the chapters. The table at the back of the book, "Episodes and chapters", matches each chapter to its episode.

THE WHOLE SERIES

youtube.com/@tasneeminstitute

Playlist: Invitation to Islam

Leading a circle

"People perish only because they do not ask."

IMAM JA'FAR AL-SADIQ (A)

You are a host, not a lecturer

The book and the videos do the teaching. Your task is to hold the conversation: to welcome people, keep time, ask good questions and make sure every voice is heard. You do not need to be a scholar. You need to be warm, prepared and honest enough to say, "I don't know. Let's find out."

Before each session

Set aside about forty-five minutes.

- Read the chapter and watch the episode.
- Read *For the person leading* at the end of the chapter, and mark the question to protect if time runs short.
- Choose the *Talk about it* questions you will use. You will not need them all.
- Check *Watch for*. If the chapter opens with a note of care, plan to read it aloud.
- Prepare the room: chairs in a circle, tea and something sweet, name tags, pens, slips of paper and a box for questions.
- Bring anything the chapter suggests, such as a prayer mat, a copy of the Qur'an or a date for each person.

The session: seventy-five minutes

TIME		WHAT HAPPENS
0:00	**Welcome** · 5 min	Tea, name tags, and a question slip on every seat.
0:05	**Opening** · 5 min	A volunteer reads the first Qur'an panel aloud in English. Anyone who wishes may read the Arabic or play a recitation; no one is asked to recite. Then the *Warm-up* question goes round the circle. Anyone may pass.
0:10	**Look back** · 7 min	Two *Look back* questions, in pairs. Answer last week's slips from the question box, or say where the answer will come.

TIME		WHAT HAPPENS
0:17	**Watch** · 13 min	Play the episode from the chapter's QR code. If everyone watched at home, read the chapter's opening story aloud instead.
0:30	**Write** · 3 min	Each person writes down one thing that struck them and one question. Quiet members and newcomers start level with everyone else.
0:33	**Talk** · 30 min	*Understand* (8 minutes), then *Reflect* (14), then *Apply* (8). Use *Go deeper* if the group is ready; otherwise suggest it for home.
1:03	**Carry it home** · 5 min	Each person chooses one practice and tells a partner which.
1:08	**Close** · 7 min	One line each: "One thing I'm taking with me is…" Read the *Next time* teaser, and collect the slips. Those who wish may close with the Qur'an's prayer: "My Lord, increase me in knowledge" (Qur'an 20:114).

A sixty-minute version. Ask everyone to watch the episode at home. Shorten *Look back* to five minutes and *Talk* to twenty-five.

The question box

At every session, put out slips and a box. Anyone may write a question, without a name. Born Muslims can ask "basic" questions without embarrassment; guests can ask "hard" ones without confrontation. Read the slips after the session. Answer them at the next *Look back*, or say honestly where you will find the answer. Keep a log of what you could not answer (there is a page for it at the back of the book), and take those questions to a scholar.

When a question is hard, or hostile

1. **Welcome it.** "That's a question many people ask."
2. **Clarify it.** "What's behind the question for you?" Is it curiosity, hurt or a challenge?
3. **Respond briefly** from the book, with a page number. Or say, "I don't know. Let's find out," and write it in the log.
4. **Return it** to the group ("How do others see it?"), or put it in the box for next time.

Never debate a guest, and never let regulars pile on. Questions of religious law, and disputes between schools of thought, belong with a scholar. If someone keeps disrupting the circle, have a kind word in private and offer a one-to-one conversation with a scholar.

Mixed levels, quiet voices

Your circle may hold people who know a great deal and people who know nothing yet. Both are gifts.

- Use the two-minute write and pairs before the whole group shares.
- Seat newcomers beside warm regulars.
- Ask knowledgeable members to explain simply and never to lecture. The *Go deeper* questions are their stretch.
- Go round the circle so that everyone has a turn, and try "three before me": after you speak, wait for three others.
- "Let's hear from someone who hasn't spoken yet" works wonders. A kind word in private does more than a correction in public.

Grief and struggle

Some chapters touch raw places: division among Muslims, suffering, death and judgement, the place of women, apostasy, slavery, war and sin (Chapters 8, 11, 12, 13, 17, 22, 23, 24 and 26). These chapters open with *A note of care*. Read it aloud before the discussion.

- Offer choices: silence, stepping out for a moment, or sharing.
- Never explain anyone's pain, and never make a person's story into a lesson.
- Check in privately with anyone who seems shaken.
- Know whom to call. Keep the details of your imam or a scholar, and of trusted local support services, on the referral page at the back of the book.
- If anyone discloses abuse or a risk of harm, follow your centre's safeguarding policy. It overrides the circle's confidentiality.

Inviting without pressure

- Never single out a guest for "the non-Muslim view", or a new Muslim for the story of their conversion.
- If someone tells you they want to become Muslim, respond warmly and privately, and introduce them to the imam. There is no rush: "There is no compulsion in religion" (Qur'an 2:256).

Four ways to run a circle

Thirty weeks (recommended). One chapter a week, seventy-five minutes. Sessions 14, 25 and 30 run to about an hour and three-quarters, with a meal. If you can run only one format, choose this one: understanding and friendship both need time.

A ten-week intensive. Two to four chapters a session, two hours each, with the videos watched at home. Group the chapters so that no session crosses from one Part to the next: 1–3 · 4–6 · 7–10 · 11–14 | 15–17 · 18–21 · 22–23 · 24–25 | 26–27 · 28–30. Use one *Warm-up* per session, and one *Understand* and one *Reflect* question per chapter.

Thirty nights of Ramadan. Chapter one on the first night, and so on to chapter thirty: forty-five minutes after the fast is broken. On the nights when many seek *Laylat al-Qadr* (the 19th, 21st and 23rd; the 21st also marks the martyrdom of Imam Ali), members read and watch at home and answer one journal prompt, and the circle gives that chapter ten minutes the next evening. Mark the end of Part One around the 15th, when many communities celebrate the birth of Imam al-Hasan (a). Make Part Two's milestone a night of service. Celebrate completion at Eid; in a month of twenty-nine days, take Chapter 30 then.

On your own. Three chapters a week for ten weeks, perhaps Monday, Wednesday and Friday, thirty to forty minutes each. Read the leader's page as your own notes, and find a friend to check in with once a week.

Three milestones

After Chapter 14: "Is it true?" Share a meal. Anyone who wishes names one idea that changed for them. Reread your *My thread* pages. Try explaining one idea to a friend in two minutes. Bring someone new to Part Two.

After Chapter 25: "Is it good?" Do ethics together. Plan a service project during Chapters 19–21 and carry it out now: a shift at a food bank, an iftār for a shelter, a park clean-up.

After Chapter 30: Homecoming. Invite families and friends. Sign each other's completion pages. Anyone who wishes reads a line from *My thread*. Set out a "where next" table, and invite someone from the circle to host the next one.

The words of Imam al-Sadiq (a) are from al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb faḍl al-ʿilm, bāb 9, ḥadīth 2 (al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ). Translation: this companion.

Our circle agreements

Read these aloud at the first session and at each milestone.

1. **We speak for ourselves.** "I think" rather than "everyone knows."
2. **Anyone may pass.** No one ever has to speak.
3. **No one is asked what they believe.** Guests, new Muslims and lifelong Muslims are welcome exactly as they are.
4. **Every question is welcome,** especially the ones we are nervous to ask.
5. **We challenge ideas, never anyone's worth.**
6. **What is shared here stays here,** unless someone's safety is at risk.
7. **We start and end on time.**

My thread

This book asks you to keep a thread: a line or two in your own words at the end of each chapter. Nobody else needs to read it. Begin here, before Chapter 1, and come back to this page at the end.

Why am I here?

What is my biggest question?

What do I hope will change?

DATE

NOTES

PART ONE

العقائد

Beliefs

Is it true?

Begin with the foundations: God, prophets and revelation, the human soul, and what waits beyond death. These chapters ask the oldest questions and listen carefully to the answers.

Why Islam?	01
Proving God's Existence	02
Does Humanity Need Prophets?	03
Why the Qur'an Is the Word of God	04
Does Islam Contradict Science?	05
Islam, Miracles & Science	06
How Islam Embodies the Abrahamic Faiths	07
The Difference Between Sunni and Shia	08
What Is the Soul?	09
Angels, Jinn & the Unseen	10
Why Is There Suffering?	11
What Happens When We Die?	12
Understanding the Afterlife	13
What Is Heaven?	14

01

Why Islam?

A faith that asks to be tested, not just inherited.

سَنُرِيهِمْ ءَايَٰتِنَا فِى ٱلْءَافَاقِ وَفِىٓ أَنفُسِهِمْ حَتَّىٰ يَتَبَيَّنَ لَهُمْ أَنَّهُ ٱلْحَقُّ أَوَلَمْ يَكْفِ بِرَبِّكَ أَنَّهُۥ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَىْءٍ شَهِيدٌ ﴿٥٣﴾

We will show them Our signs on the horizons and within themselves, until they see plainly that it is the truth. Is your Lord's witness over all things not enough?

QUR'AN 41:53 · SURAT FUSSILAT

WATCH · EPISODE 01 · 14:07

youtu.be/clbYxFMrS7k

In the video: a childhood question about an angry God that began a lifelong search (1:06)

Reading time: about 15 minutes

A stranger walks through the palm groves of Medina carrying a tray of fresh dates. He is not an Arab. He was born in Persia to a family of landowners, the favourite son of a father who kept the old fire-temple religion of their people. That was a long time and a long road ago. Since then he has left home, served one Christian hermit after another, been seized on the road and sold as a slave. Now he belongs to a household in a town of palm trees, where a man from Mecca has recently arrived claiming to be a prophet.

The stranger has been told how to recognise a true prophet, and he means to check.

He sets the tray down in front of the newcomer and his companions. "This is charity," he says. The man from Mecca tells the others to eat, but he does not touch the dates himself. *That is one sign*, the stranger thinks. Later he returns with a second tray. "This is a gift." This time the man eats with everyone else. *Two.* Then, as the man walks, the stranger keeps circling behind him, trying to glimpse his back. The man turns, calls him by his Persian name, and asks, "Are you looking for the seal of prophethood?" He lets his cloak slip from his shoulders. The stranger sees the mark and falls at his feet.

The man from Mecca was Muhammad (s). The stranger became Salman al-Farisi, "Salman the Persian," one of the Prophet's closest companions. The Prophet would later say of him, "Salman is one of us, the people of the house."[1]

Salman did not inherit his faith, and he did not take it on trust. He searched, he asked and he tested. Fourteen centuries later, the question he carried across half the world still deserves an answer. Why should anyone take Islam seriously?

THE BIG QUESTION

Why should I take Islam seriously, rather than the faith I grew up with, or no faith at all?

Have you ever wondered whether every religion is just the culture we happen to be born into? Whether believing in God would change anything about an ordinary Tuesday? Or, if you were raised with Islam, whether you ever actually chose it?

> This chapter looks at what Islam claims to be, what it says about God and about us, and why it asks to be examined rather than just inherited.

WORDS TO KNOW

islām (إسلام) · *is-LAAM* · surrender to God. It comes from the root *s-l-m*, which it shares with *salām*, "peace."

muslim (مسلم) · *MUS-lim* · a person who surrenders to God.

tawḥīd (توحيد) · *taw-HEED* · the oneness of God, the foundation of every Islamic belief.

fiṭra (فطرة) · *FIT-ra* · the inborn human nature that recognises its Creator.

Ahl al-Bayt (أهل البيت) · *AHL al-BAYT* · "the people of the house," the Prophet's family, whom Shia Muslims follow as guides.

◆

Is it enough to inherit a faith?

Ask people why they believe what they believe, and the most honest answer is often: *it's how I was raised*. That is a fine reason to love a tradition. It is not a reason to think it true. A religion can be familiar, comforting, even beautiful, and still be wrong. So Islam asks to be examined, not just admired.

The Qur'an is blunt about this. It describes people who are invited to follow God's guidance and answer, "No, we will follow what we found our fathers doing." The Qur'an replies with a question: "Even if their fathers grasped nothing and missed the right path?" (Qur'an 2:170). Inheritance is not evidence.

Shia scholars took this so seriously that they made it a rule. The great theologian al-'Allama al-Hilli (d. 1325 CE) opened his famous handbook of belief by saying that knowing God, His prophets, the Imams and the life to come must rest on proof, not on imitation.[2] Today a leading Shia authority, Ayatollah al-Sistani, begins his book of religious rulings in the same place. A Muslim's belief in the foundations of the faith, he writes, must come from personal understanding. You cannot take it on anyone's word.[4] In the details of practice, Shia Muslims follow a trusted scholar, as we follow a doctor. But on the big questions—Is there a God? Was Muhammad His messenger? —every person must look for themselves.

That can be a relief to hear. Many people first meet God as a threat: *God is angry. God will punish you.* For some, that picture is the reason they walk away. For others, it is the start of a search. They sense that the Creator of everything cannot be smaller

and meaner than the best people they know. The Qur'an seems to agree: all but one of its 114 chapters begin with the words *In the name of God, the All-Compassionate, the All-Merciful.* And the Imams of the Prophet's family met that fear head-on. A student once asked Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (a), the sixth Imam (d. 765 CE), whether love and aversion had anything to do with faith. He answered with a question of his own: "Is faith anything but love and aversion?" Then he recited, "God has made faith beloved to you and beautiful in your hearts" (Qur'an 49:7).[3] Faith, on this view, begins in love: love for what is good and beautiful, and a turning away from what is ugly.

Islam makes a bold promise about that search. God, it says, has scattered evidence everywhere, in the world around us and in the world within us. The chapter's key verse puts it this way: "We will show them Our signs on the horizons and within themselves, until they see plainly that it is the truth" (Qur'an 41:53). This book is an invitation to look.

◆

What does "Islam" actually mean?

"Islam" is not a brand name. It is an Arabic word meaning *surrender*: the trusting surrender of a person to God. It comes from the same root as *salām*, peace. A *muslim* is someone who surrenders in this way. Imam Ali (a), the Prophet's cousin and the first Imam, once defined Islam in a chain of links: "Islam is surrender; surrender is certainty; certainty is affirming the truth; affirming is acknowledging; acknowledging is fulfilling what is due; and fulfilling what is due is action."[5] Surrender here is not a slump of resignation. It begins in conviction and ends in a changed life.

That is why the Qur'an can describe people who lived long before Muhammad (s) as *muslims*. It says of Abraham (a): "Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian. He was upright in faith, one who surrendered to God" (Qur'an 3:67). In the Qur'an's telling, Noah (a), Abraham (a), Moses (a), Jesus (a) and Muhammad (s) did not found rival religions. They called people to the same God, in the language and circumstances of their own times.

Think of how a child learns. A toddler is not handed a university textbook. Lessons come in doses, each one building on the last, as the child grows. Muslims see the story of revelation in a similar way. Guidance came to humanity in stages, each prophet confirming the one before. Jesus (a), according to the Qur'an, came "confirming the Torah that preceded me, and announcing the good news of a messenger who will come after me, named Ahmad" (Qur'an 61:6). Many Muslims have also heard an

echo of this promise in Jesus' words in the Gospel of John about a "Comforter" who would come after him. Christians understand that passage as speaking of the Holy Spirit.[6] The Qur'an, for its part, calls Muhammad (s) "the seal of the prophets" (Qur'an 33:40): the last in the line, carrying the final form of the message.

At the end of his mission the Qur'an announced: "Today I have completed your religion for you, made My blessing on you whole, and I am pleased with Islam as your religion" (Qur'an 5:3). Shia Muslims remember this verse with special love. According to Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a), the Prophet's great-great-grandson and the fifth Imam, it was revealed just after the Prophet presented his cousin Imam Ali (a) at Ghadir Khumm as the guide who would follow him.[7] Chapter 8 tells that story. Here the point is simpler. Islam presents itself as the completion of one long conversation between God and humanity: "God wants to make things clear to you, to guide you along the ways of those who came before you, and to turn to you in mercy" (Qur'an 4:26).

A FAIR QUESTION

Isn't it arrogant to claim that your religion is the true one?

Every serious belief makes claims, including the belief that no religion is true. The question is how a claim is held. The Qur'an holds its claim to truth together with deep respect for earlier prophets and scriptures, and with a firm rule: "There is no compulsion in religion" (Qur'an 2:256). Shia teaching adds that God judges people fairly, according to what truly reached them (we return to this in Chapter 16). Believing something is true does not mean despising those who disagree. It means you think the question matters enough to talk about honestly.

◆

"I never asked to be created"

Here is a question that comes up again and again in study circles: *Why did God create me, and then hold me responsible? I never asked to be here. I never signed anything.*

The Qur'an answers with one of its most mysterious scenes, which commentators read in more than one way.[8] As Imam al-Baqir (a) explained it, before any of us walked the earth, God gathered all of Adam's descendants and asked them a single question.

وَإِذْ أَخَذَ رَبُّكَ مِنۢ بَنِىٓ ءَادَمَ مِن ظُهُورِهِمْ ذُرِّيَّتَهُمْ وَأَشْهَدَهُمْ
عَلَىٰٓ أَنفُسِهِمْ أَلَسْتُ بِرَبِّكُمْ قَالُوا۟ بَلَىٰ شَهِدْنَآ أَن تَقُولُوا۟ يَوْمَ ٱلْقِيَٰمَةِ
إِنَّا كُنَّا عَنْ هَٰذَا غَٰفِلِينَ ﴿١٧٢﴾

And when your Lord brought forth from the children of Adam, from their loins, their offspring, and made them testify about themselves: "Am I not your Lord?" They said, "Yes indeed, we testify!" This is so that you will not say on the Day of Resurrection, "We knew nothing of this."

QUR'AN 7:172 · SURAT AL-AʿRAF

NOTICE Look at who is speaking. God asks; humanity answers "Yes!" together. The verse then explains why the scene matters: no one will be able to say, "We knew nothing of this."

Muslims call this the *covenant*. Few people remember it. But the Imams of the Prophet's family taught that it left a mark that never fades. Imam al-Baqir gave that explanation when one of his students, Zurara, asked him about this verse.

IMAM MUHAMMAD AL-BAQIR (A), THE FIFTH IMAM

قَالَ أَخْرَجَ مِنْ ظَهْرِ آدَمَ ذُرِّيَّتَهُ إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ فَخَرَجُوا كَالذَّرِّ فَعَرَّفَهُمْ
وَأَرَاهُمْ نَفْسَهُ وَلَوْ لا ذَلِكَ لَمْ يَعْرِفْ أَحَدٌ رَبَّهُ وَقَالَ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللهِ (صَلَّى
اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وآلِه) كُلُّ مَوْلُودٍ يُولَدُ عَلَى الْفِطْرَةِ يَعْنِي الْمَعْرِفَةَ بِأَنَّ اللهَ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ
خَالِقُهُ ...

He said: "He brought out from Adam's back all of his offspring until the Day of Resurrection. They came out like tiny specks. He made Himself known to them and showed them Himself. Were it not for that, no one would know his Lord." And he said: "The Messenger of God (s) said: 'Every child is born upon the *fitra*,' meaning the knowledge that God, Mighty and Majestic, is his Creator..."[9]

al-Kafi 2 · Belief & Disbelief · ch. 6 · no. 4 · **Reliable chain**

This is the Qur'an's idea of *fitra*: an inborn nature that already recognises its Creator. "So set your face toward the faith, as one upright: the nature God gave people when He made them. There is no changing God's creation" (Qur'an 30:30). On this view, faith is not something foreign pressed on us from outside. It is more like remembering. A human being is wired for God the way an eye is made for light. We can ignore that pull, bury it or argue with it. We can never quite remove it.

So the complaint "I never asked to be created" turns out to have an answer. In a sense we did agree, in a language deeper than words. And the Qur'an says God gave us a dignity to match. He taught Adam "the names, all of them" (Qur'an 2:31), and He declares, "We have honoured the children of Adam" (Qur'an 17:70). Human beings can know, choose and love. That is exactly why our choices matter.

A modern saying asks whether we are human beings having a spiritual experience, or spiritual beings having a human experience. The Qur'an leans toward the second. It describes God breathing into the first human "of My spirit" (Qur'an 15:29). Our lives here are a stage in a longer story. We come from God, and we are travelling back to Him.

> **PAUSE AND RECALL**
>
> *In your own words, what is fitra? How does it answer the complaint, "I never asked to be created"?*

◆

What kind of God?

If God made us with such care, what is He like? Islam's answer begins with *tawhid*, the oneness of God. God is one and has no rival, no partner and no equal. Because He has no rival, no person, nation, race or appetite can claim the allegiance that belongs to Him alone.

That oneness also means His qualities are not at war with each other. God is perfectly just, and He is perfectly merciful. Justice is so central to Shia belief that it is counted among the five foundations of the faith, alongside God's oneness, prophethood, the Imamate and the Return. Part One of this book follows those five.[10] But justice in the Qur'an is never cold. God says, "My mercy embraces all things" (Qur'an 7:156), and He invites even the worst sinners: "Do not despair of God's mercy. God forgives all sins" (Qur'an 39:53).

Picture a good judge, then: fair, careful and hearing every side. The Qur'an says that on the Day of Judgement "every soul will come pleading for itself" (Qur'an

16:111). No one is condemned without being heard. And the record is honest. Two angels accompany each of us, one on the right and one on the left, noting what we do (Qur'an 50:17–18). If we could, most of us would send the one on the left into early retirement. Yet even here mercy runs ahead of justice. The Prophet (s) taught that when someone means to do a good deed but does not, one good deed is written for the intention, and if they do it, ten. When someone means to do wrong but holds back, nothing is written. And if they do it, the record waits seven hours, while the angel of good deeds tells the angel on the left: "Don't rush! Perhaps they will follow it with a good deed that erases it, or ask forgiveness."[11]

On the last day, the Qur'an says, each of us is handed the record of our own life: "Read your book. Today your own self is enough to take account of you" (Qur'an 17:14). It is a sobering image, and a fair one. We will be judged on what we actually did, not on what someone else did.

◆

No inherited guilt, no closed door

That last point sets Islam apart from some other traditions. Many Christians believe that Adam's first sin passed to every one of his descendants, and that the death of Jesus (a) was needed to take that guilt away. The Qur'an tells the story differently.

In the Qur'an, Adam and his wife were both tempted in the garden, and both turned back to God together. "Our Lord," they prayed, "we have wronged ourselves. If You do not forgive us and have mercy on us, we will surely be lost" (Qur'an 7:23). God accepted their repentance (Qur'an 2:37). The Qur'an never blames Eve for the fall of humanity. And it states as a principle that "no one carries another's burden" (Qur'an 6:164). No child is born guilty. Every child is born with the *fitra*.

So in Islam no one needs rescuing from someone else's sin. Each of us turns back to God from our own, and that door stays open for as long as we live. Jesus (a), in turn, is not a sacrifice for inherited guilt but one of the greatest of God's messengers. Believers are taught to say: "We make no distinction between any of His messengers" (Qur'an 2:285).

◆

One human family

If God is one, humanity is one family. The Qur'an addresses everyone at once.

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَٰكُم مِّن ذَكَرٍ وَأُنثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَٰكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَآئِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوٓا۟ إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِندَ ٱللَّهِ أَتْقَىٰكُمْ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ ﴿١٣﴾

O people, We created you from a male and a female and made you nations and tribes so that you may come to know one another. The noblest of you in God's sight is the one most mindful of Him. God is all-knowing, all-aware.

QUR'AN 49:13 · SURAT AL-HUJURAT

NOTICE The verse speaks to "people," not "believers." Differences of nation and tribe are a gift for getting to know one another. The only rank it allows is one no one can see from outside.

The first Muslim community lived this out, imperfectly but strikingly. Bilal, a formerly enslaved Black African, became the voice that called Medina to prayer. Salman, the Persian stranger with the tray of dates, was counted by the Prophet (s) among his own household.[12] Islam does not say that one race, nation or class is better than another. It says that the best person is the one who is most aware of God and most just to others.

The same is true of the Qur'an itself. Its message was meant for every people and every age, which is why it can still surprise a reader who has read it many times before. Imam Ali (a) said of it: "Its outside is beautiful and its inside is deep. Its wonders never run out, and its marvels never end."[13] Asked why the Qur'an only grows fresher the more it is read, Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (a) explained that God "did not make it for one age rather than another, or for one people rather than another. So in every age it is new."[14] Muslims believe the Qur'an is the very word of God, and Chapter 4 asks how anyone could know that. For now, notice what the Qur'an says about the Prophet who brought it: he was sent "only as a mercy to all the worlds" (Qur'an 21:107).

A STORY FROM THE SOURCES

The Imam who walked the wrong way

Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (a) told this story about his ancestor Imam Ali (a). Ali was travelling to Kufa, in Iraq, and fell into step on the road with a man who was not a Muslim. They talked as they walked. When they reached a fork, the man turned off, and Ali turned with him.

"Didn't you say you were going to Kufa?" the man asked.

"Yes."

"Then you have left your road."

"I know."

"Then why are you coming with me?"

"It is part of being a good companion," Ali said, "to walk a little way with your friend when you part. Our Prophet taught us to do this."

"Is that what he taught you? Then those who follow him follow him for his noble ways. I bear witness that I am of your religion." He turned back and walked with Ali, and when he learned who his companion was, he became a Muslim.[15]

◆

Where is the story going?

Islam does not only describe where we came from. It also tells us where history is heading. Muslims believe that near the end of time a final guide from the Prophet's family, the *Mahdi* ("the rightly guided one"), will appear, and Jesus (a) will return alongside him. In a phrase found in Shia and Sunni collections alike, the Mahdi "will fill the earth with fairness and justice, as it had been filled with oppression and injustice."[16] After that age of peace come the end of this world, the resurrection and the judgement, the subjects of Chapters 12 to 14.

In the meantime, Islam offers what you might call the *how*: how to live, how to be good, how to find our way back to God. Daily prayer, the fast of Ramadan, giving to those in need and the pilgrimage to Mecca are not hoops to jump through. They are ways of turning a belief into a life, and Part Three of this book looks at each of them. The Imams named one more thing that holds the rest together. "Islam is built on five things," Imam al-Baqir (a) taught: "prayer, zakat, the pilgrimage, fasting and *wilaya*." When Zurara asked which was greatest, he said: "*Wilaya*, because it is their key, and

the guide is the one who leads to them."[17] *Wilaya* is devoted loyalty to the guides God has chosen: the Prophet (s) and, after him, the Imams of his family. It is the heart of what makes Shia Islam distinctive, and Chapter 8 explains who these guides are.

Not all Muslims live up to any of this, any more than all Christians, Jews or anyone else live up to their ideals. Islam should never be judged only by its worst followers. But its best followers are its most persuasive argument. That is exactly what the Imams asked of their own students.

> **IMAM JAʿFAR AL-SADIQ (A), THE SIXTH IMAM**
>
> كُونُوا دُعَاةً لِلنَّاسِ بِغَيْرِ أَلْسِنَتِكُمْ لِيَرَوْا مِنْكُمُ الْوَرَعَ وَالإِجْتِهَادَ وَالصَّلاةَ وَالْخَيْرَ فَإِنَّ ذَلِكَ دَاعِيَةٌ
>
> Be callers to people without your tongues. Let them see in you restraint, real effort, prayer and goodness, for that is what truly invites.[18]
>
> al-Kafi 2 · Belief & Disbelief · ch. 37 · no. 14 · **Reliable chain**

> *"Be callers to people without your tongues.*
>
> IMAM JAʿFAR AL-SADIQ (A)

For many who come to Islam, that is the heart of it. They find a home that does not shrink God, a God who is just and loving at once, and a faith that respects their questions. Its message is not for one people or one century but for the whole human family. Salman found it after years on the road and a test with a tray of dates. You are welcome to take your own time and to bring your own tests. The next chapter begins with the most basic question of all: is there a God at all?

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Islam asks to be examined, not just inherited. Shia teaching says belief in its foundations must rest on understanding.
2. "Islam" means surrender to God, and the Qur'an calls it the faith of every prophet from Abraham to Jesus.
3. The Qur'an teaches that every person is born with *fitra*, an inborn recognition of the Creator.
4. God's justice and mercy work together. No one inherits another's sin; the door of repentance stays open while we live.
5. Humanity is one family. The noblest are the most mindful of God, and good character is the strongest invitation.

NEXT TIME · GO FURTHER

Next time: *Proving God's Existence.* Everything around us exists on loan. Who is the lender?

Go further:

Course: God and His Attributes, a Level 1 course at Tasneem Institute (tasneeminstitute.org/courses/god-and-his-attributes)

Read: "What is Islam?", a two-minute introduction in Tasneem's *Discovering Islam* series (tasneeminstitute.org/blog/discovering-islam/what-is-islam). For a deeper dive, the opening book of *al-Kafi*, the Book of Intellect and Ignorance (*Kitab al-ʿAql wa-l-Jahl*).

Watch: Invitation to Islam, Episode 1, "Why Islam?" (14 min).

In the circle

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

1. What did you learn about God as a child, and who taught you?
2. What is one question about Islam you have always wanted to ask?
3. What would make these conversations worth your time?

TALK ABOUT IT

WARM-UP

1. When you were a child, what picture of God did you pick up, and from whom?

UNDERSTAND

2. What is the difference between inheriting a belief and holding it with understanding, as this chapter describes it?
3. How does the Qur'an's idea of *fitra* (Qur'an 30:30) answer the complaint, "I never asked to be created"?

REFLECT

4. Salman tested the Prophet with a tray of dates. What would a fair test of a religion look like to you?
5. The chapter says God's justice and mercy belong together. Which of the two do you find easier to believe in? You needn't say why.

APPLY

6. Imam al-Sadiq (a) asked his students to invite people "without your tongues." Who has shown you something about faith without saying a word? What could you show someone this week, in the same way?

GO DEEPER

7. Read Imam al-Baqir's full explanation of the covenant verse (al-Kafi, vol. 2, Book of Belief and Disbelief, ch. 6, no. 4; reliable chain). What does he add to Qur'an 7:172? Why might he link it to the saying "every child is born upon the *fitra*"?

CARRY IT HOME

Choose one way in this week:

☐ **Notice:** Each evening, note one "sign within yourself" (Qur'an 41:53), such as a moment when you knew something was right or wrong without being told.

☐ **Do:** Write down the biggest question you bring to these conversations. Put it somewhere you will see it, or drop it in the circle's question box.

☐ **Learn:** Read Sura 1, *al-Fatiha*, the opening chapter of the Qur'an, in a translation. Count how many times it speaks of mercy.

Aim. Help everyone see that this circle welcomes questions, and that Islam itself asks to be examined.

Protect this question. No. 4: "What would a fair test of a religion look like to you?" It invites guests, new Muslims and lifelong Muslims to speak as equals.

Answer notes.

- *Q2.* Inherited belief rests on habit or trust in others. Understood belief rests on one's own reasons. Shia scholars require the second for the foundations (al-Hilli; al-Sistani, Ruling 1). In practice, Muslims follow a qualified scholar.
- *Q3. Fitra* is an inborn recognition of God. On this view, we did "agree" at the covenant (7:172), and the knowledge is a gift, not an imposition.

Likely questions.

- *"If Islam is the same faith as the earlier prophets, why are there different religions?"* See "What does 'Islam' actually mean?" and Chapter 7.
- *"What happens to people who never heard of Islam?"* See the "fair question" box; Chapter 16 treats it in full.
- *"Do Muslims believe Christians and Jews go to hell?"* Point to Chapters 16 and 13. Don't settle it tonight.

Watch for. This is the first meeting. Read the circle agreements aloud before anything else. Invite names and one hope for the circle. Never ask anyone what they believe. Some people carry painful memories of religion taught through fear. Let the warm-up be optional.

Bring. Name tags, a box and slips of paper for questions, and a plate of dates for the table, in Salman's honour.

MY THREAD · CHAPTER 01

Why am I here, and what do I hope to find?

MY QUESTION FOR THE BOX

NOTES

02

Proving God's Existence

Everything we see is on loan. Who is the lender?

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّاسُ أَنتُمُ ٱلْفُقَرَآءُ إِلَى ٱللَّهِ وَٱللَّهُ هُوَ ٱلْغَنِىُّ ٱلْحَمِيدُ ﴿١٥﴾

People, you are the poor ones, in need of God, and God is the Rich, the Praiseworthy.

QUR'AN 35:15 · SURAT FATIR

WATCH · EPISODE 11 · 12:16

youtu.be/hoQgfWd0kC0

In the video: an endless row of archers, each waiting for the next to shoot (7:13)

Reading time: about 15 minutes

The sun has set over an ancient city. A young man stands outside in the dark, watching the sky. His people bow to idols and pray to the lights above them. He has questions.

A star appears low in the west, brighter than all the others: the evening star. "This is my Lord," he says. He watches it sink toward the horizon until it is gone. "I do not love things that set."

The moon comes up, wide and silver. "This is my Lord." He follows it across the sky until it, too, slips away. "If my Lord does not guide me, I will surely be one of those who are lost."

Then the sun climbs over the horizon and floods everything with light. "This is my Lord. This one is greater." But the day wears on, and by evening the sun has gone the way of the star and the moon. The young man turns to his people. "My people, I am free of all the partners you set up beside God. I have turned my face to the One who brought the heavens and the earth into being" (Qur'an 6:76–79).

The young man is Abraham (a), Ibrahim in Arabic, forefather of a long line of prophets. He is not confused. The Qur'an calls this scene "Our argument, which We gave to Abraham against his people" (Qur'an 6:83). He is putting each candidate to the test in front of them, and each one fails the same test. It rises and it sets. It comes and it goes. Whatever comes and goes does not hold itself in being. Something else holds it.[1]

Abraham had no telescope and no textbook. He had his eyes, his reason and an honest heart. People still look up at the same sky and ask the same question. Is belief in God a leap in the dark? Or can reason, like Abraham, see past the things that set to the One who does not?

THE BIG QUESTION

Is there really a God, or is belief just a leap in the dark?

Have you ever wondered whether anyone has a good reason to believe in God, or whether believers are only hoping? Whether it would change anything about how you live if God really exists? Or, if you grew up believing, whether you could explain why to a friend who asks?

> This chapter follows the way the Qur'an and the Imams of the Prophet's family argue for God: by asking questions that anyone can test.

WORDS TO KNOW

īmān (إيمان) · *ee-MAAN* · faith: knowing what is true and embracing it in heart, word and deed.

fiṭra (فطرة) · *FIT-ra* · the inborn human nature that recognises its Creator, even untaught.

mumkin al-wujūd (ممكن الوجود) · *MUM-kin al-wu-JOOD* · a contingent being: one that may exist or not, and so receives its existence from another.

wājib al-wujūd (واجب الوجود) · *WAA-jib al-wu-JOOD* · the Necessary Being: the One who exists by Himself and gives existence to everything else.

tasalsul (تسلسل) · *ta-SAL-sul* · an endless chain of causes, each depending on the one before it.

zindīq (زنديق) · *zin-DEEQ* · in the Imams' time, a freethinker or dualist who denied God or revelation.

◆

Is faith a leap in the dark?

Nearly every civilisation has asked whether God exists, and the question still comes up in lecture halls, hospital corridors and kitchens. So first: what do Muslims mean when they say they believe?

In everyday English, "faith" often means trust: you have faith in a friend because you know her. But it can also mean believing without evidence, as in "blind faith." The Qur'an's word for faith, *iman*, points the other way. Asked what faith is, Imam Ali (a), the Prophet's cousin and the first Imam (d. 661 CE), replied: "Faith is knowledge in the heart, affirmation on the tongue and action with the limbs."[2] Faith starts with knowing what is true, then embraces it with a whole life. That is why Ayatollah al-Sistani, a leading Shia authority today, teaches that belief in God must rest on one's own understanding, not on someone else's word. Yet whoever is sincerely certain of the truth is a believer, even without formal proofs.[3]

What evidence, then, does the Qur'an offer? Of its 6,236 verses, only a handful set out to prove that God exists. One reason is that its first audience did not doubt it. "If you ask them who created the heavens and the earth," the Qur'an says of the Meccans, "they will surely say, 'God'" (Qur'an 31:25). Their quarrel with the Prophet (s) was over partners: idols they hoped would "bring us near to God" (Qur'an 39:3). So the Qur'an argues mostly for God's oneness, not His existence.

There is a deeper reason too. The Qur'an treats God's existence as nearly self-evident: "Is there any doubt about God," its messengers ask, "the Originator of the heavens and the earth?" (Qur'an 14:10). Every argument rests on some self-evident starting point, and science is no exception. Every experiment assumes a real world outside our minds, and none can prove it; in theory you could be dreaming all of this. Yet no scientist waits for proof before entering the laboratory. The Shia philosopher ʿAllama Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i (d. 1981 CE) began from the same place: reality exists, and even the sceptic relies on it while doubting it.[4]

Still, self-evident is not the same as unarguable. For anyone who wants a clear reason, the Qur'an offers one: a set of questions.

◆

Three questions, one answer

أَمْ خُلِقُوا۟ مِنْ غَيْرِ شَىْءٍ أَمْ هُمُ ٱلْخَٰلِقُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾ أَمْ خَلَقُوا۟ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضَ بَل لَّا يُوقِنُونَ ﴿٣٦﴾

Were they created from nothing? Or are they their own creators? Or did they create the heavens and the earth? No: they have no certainty.

QUR'AN 52:35–36 · SURAT AL-TUR

NOTICE Three questions, and no answers. The verse speaks of human beings, but its logic fits anything that comes into being. Each question names a possibility and leaves the reader to rule it out.

From nothing? Try a recipe. Take nothing. Add nothing to it, layer more nothing on top, sprinkle it with nothing and surround it with nothing. What do you get? Nothing. Nothing has no energy, no laws and no possibilities; it is not a very thin kind of something. Muslim philosophers had a maxim for it: what lacks a thing cannot give it.[5] When popular science speaks of a universe arising "from nothing," it usually means a quantum vacuum, a field full of energy and governed by precise laws. That is something, and the question of why it exists remains.

Self-made? Stranger still. To make itself, a thing would have to exist before it existed, as cause and effect at the same moment. Imagine someone telling you, with a

straight face, that his mother gave birth to herself. Cross it off.

Makers of the world? The third question widens the frame. No one claims to have made the heavens and the earth. Whatever brought us into being, it was not nothing, and it was not us.

A chain of makers? Reason asks one question more: perhaps A was made by B, B by C, and so on. Muslim philosophers called such an endless chain *tasalsul* and argued that it explains nothing. Picture a row of archers stretching to the horizon. The first says, "I will shoot as soon as the archer beside me shoots." The second says the same about the third, and so on forever. Will a single arrow ever fly? No. Every archer is waiting, and adding more archers, even infinitely many, only adds more waiting. If an arrow is in the air, somewhere an archer shoots without waiting for anyone.

The only answer left. Whatever comes into being, then, cannot come from nothing, cannot make itself and cannot rest forever on other things that came into being. In the end it rests on something that never came into being at all: an uncreated Creator. In a report whose chain cannot be confirmed, Imam Ali al-Rida (a), the eighth Imam (d. 818 CE), puts the whole argument in two sentences: "You were not, and then you were. And you know that you did not make yourself, and that no one like you made you."[6]

> **PAUSE AND RECALL**
>
> *Without looking back, name the three questions Qur'an 52:35–36 asks. What further question do the archers answer?*

◆

Who is the lender?

The archers are not about a moment long ago. They are about now: no arrow flies unless some archer is shooting at this moment. The Persian philosopher Ibn Sina (Avicenna, d. 1037 CE) built his most famous proof on this insight.

Look at anything around you: a tree, a mountain, a star, your own hand. None of them has to exist, and one day each will be gone. Each receives its existence, moment by moment, from causes outside itself. Ibn Sina called such things *contingent* (*mumkin al-wujud*). Everything we see is on loan.

Picture a long line of borrowers, each passing on money borrowed from the next. However long the line, there is no money at all unless someone owns what he lends. Ibn Sina called that someone the Necessary Being (*wajib al-wujud*): the One whose existence is not borrowed, who exists by Himself and lends existence to everything

else.[7] The Qur'an had used the same language centuries before: "People, you are the poor ones, in need of God, and God is the Rich, the Praiseworthy" (Qur'an 35:15). Its words, *faqir* and *ghani*, belong to the marketplace: poor and rich. Human beings are not called small or wicked here. They are called needy.

The proof became the backbone of Shia theology. Nasir al-Din al-Tusi (d. 1274 CE) and his student al-'Allama al-Hilli (d. 1325 CE) built their handbooks of belief on it.[8] Ibn Sina called it the "proof of the truthful," because it reasons from existence itself. He heard it in the closing words of a verse: "Is your Lord's witness over all things not enough?" (Qur'an 41:53). Mulla Sadra of Shiraz (d. c. 1640 CE) later rebuilt it on his own philosophy of existence.[9]

Nor does the proof depend on the age of the universe. Ibn Sina believed the world had no beginning in time, yet held that it depends on God at every moment. Modern cosmology finds that the universe expanded from an extremely hot, dense state about 13.8 billion years ago.[10] Whether time itself began there is still an open question. Whatever science concludes about "before," the deeper question remains. Science asks *how* one state of nature leads to another. This argument asks *why* there is any nature at all. The two are not rivals, and Chapter 5 returns to them.

A FAIR QUESTION

Then who created God?

The argument never said that everything needs a cause. It said that everything *dependent* needs one: everything that once was not, that changes, that holds its existence on loan. For such things, "Who made it?" is exactly the right question. But the argument ends at a source that is not dependent and borrows its existence from nothing. To ask who made that source is to turn it back into one more borrower and start the chain again. That does not refute the argument; it changes the subject. Something must exist without having been made, or nothing would exist at all. The real question is what that something is: a universe that changes, ages and runs down, or a Creator who depends on nothing. When a sceptic asked Imam al-Rida (a) when God came to be, he answered, in a report with a weak chain, "Tell me when He was not, and I will tell you when He was."[11]

◆

What kind of God does reason find?

The Greek philosopher Aristotle (d. 322 BCE) also reasoned his way to an "unmoved mover." But his first mover does not create the world; it moves an eternal universe the way a beloved draws a lover. The God of the Qur'an gives the world its very existence.

Not one more thing. The source of everything dependent cannot be one more dependent thing. He has no parts to assemble, no place to contain Him and no beginning to explain. Imam Jaʿfar al-Sadiq (a), the sixth Imam (d. 765 CE), put it plainly to his student Zurara.

> **IMAM JAʿFAR AL-SADIQ (A), THE SIXTH IMAM**
>
> إِنَّ اللهَ خِلْوٌ مِنْ خَلْقِهِ وَخَلْقَهُ خِلْوٌ مِنْهُ وَكُلُّ مَا وَقَعَ عَلَيْهِ اسْمُ شَيْءٍ مَا خَلَا اللهَ فَهُوَ مَخْلُوقٌ وَاللهُ خَالِقُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ تَبَارَكَ الَّذِي لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْبَصِيرُ
>
> God is distinct from His creation, and His creation is distinct from Him. Everything that can be called a "thing," apart from God, is created, and God is the Creator of every thing. Blessed is He: nothing is like Him, and He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing.[12]
>
> al-Kafi 1 · Divine Unity · ch. 2 · no. 4 · **Reliable chain**

Imam Ali (a) opens *Nahj al-Balagha*, the classic collection of his words, in the same spirit. God, he says, "is, without having come to be; existent, not out of non-existence; with everything, but not joined to it; other than everything, but not apart from it."[13] He is not beyond time and space because He arrived before them, like the first guest at a party. He is beyond them because He depends on nothing. Shia teachers mark a path between two mistakes: emptying the word "God" of all meaning (*taʿtil*), and picturing Him as a magnified creature, an old man in the sky (*tashbih*).[14]

Living, knowing, powerful. We know, we choose, we love. Could the source of all existence be less than what it gives? Shia philosophers such as Mulla Sadra went further. The Necessary Being is not a limited thing that happens to exist but existence itself, lacking nothing that existence contains. So God is not merely powerful enough to start a universe; He is unlimited in life, knowledge and power. Yet unlimited power is not power to do nonsense. Asked whether God could fit the world inside an egg,

without the world shrinking or the egg growing, Imam Ali (a) replied, in a report with an unverified chain: "God is never described as unable. But what you asked cannot be."[15] A contradiction is not a task that power fails at. It is not a task at all.

Wise. The world's order points the same way. From the atom to the galaxy, from a single cell to a body of trillions, the universe is arranged with a precision that rewards all who study it. Imam Ali once asked his listeners to consider an ant: its digestive tract, the plating of its belly, the eyes and ears in its tiny head. "Take your thought to its furthest reach," he said, "and the evidence will lead you only here: the Maker of the ant is the Maker of the date palm."[16]

A STORY FROM THE SOURCES

The egg in the Imam's hand

'Abd Allah al-Daysani, a follower of a dualist sect, came to Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (a) with a request: "Guide me to the One I should worship."

"What is your name?" asked the Imam.

Al-Daysani got up and left without answering. His friends asked why. "If I had told him 'Abd Allah,'" he said, "he would have asked, 'Whose servant are you, then?'" The name means "servant of God." His friends sent him back, and this time he said, "Guide me, but don't ask my name."

The Imam told him to sit. A small boy of the household was nearby, playing with an egg. "Pass me the egg, child," said the Imam, and the boy handed it to him.

"This is a sealed fortress. It has a thick skin, and under the thick skin a thin one. Under the thin skin lie liquid gold and flowing silver, and the gold does not mix with the silver, nor the silver with the gold. Nothing has come out of it to report that it is sound, and nothing has gone in to spoil it. No one knows whether it was made for a male or a female. Then it breaks open into colours like a peacock's. Do you see anyone directing it?"

Al-Daysani bowed his head for a long time. Then he bore witness to God, to His Prophet (s) and to the Imam as God's proof over His creation, and turned back from what he had believed.[17]

One, not many. Why one God, and not a committee? "Had there been gods in the heavens and the earth other than God," says the Qur'an, "both would have fallen into ruin" (Qur'an 21:22). Imam al-Sadiq's student Hisham ibn al-Hakam once asked him for proof that God is one. The Imam pointed to "the continuity of governance and

the completeness of the making," and recited this verse.[18] One set of laws holds everywhere we look. Imam Ali gave his son, Imam al-Hasan (a), a gentler version: "If your Lord had a partner, that partner's messengers would have come to you... But He is one God."[19] Muslims call Him *Allah*, the Arabic word for God, and Arabic-speaking Christians use it too: their Bible opens, "In the beginning Allah created the heavens and the earth."[20]

◆

Why can't we see Him?

Many people's real objection is simpler: if God exists, why doesn't He show Himself? A man named Dhi'lib once asked Imam Ali (a), "Have you seen your Lord?" "Would I worship what I do not see?" the Imam replied. Asked how he saw Him, he said: "Eyes do not see Him with their sight, but hearts perceive Him through the realities of faith."[21] The Qur'an agrees: "Sight does not reach Him, but He reaches all sight" (Qur'an 6:103). A God the eyes could see would have a shape, a size and a place. He would be one more thing that sets.

The freethinkers of the Imams' day, the *zindiqs*, pressed this question hard. Their reports have weak or unverified chains of narrators, so they are told here as stories, not proofs. But they show a method: courtesy, patience, and a question first.

Near the Ka'ba, the ancient shrine at Mecca, a well-known sceptic named 'Abd al-Karim ibn Abi al-'Awja' challenged Imam al-Sadiq (a). If God is real, why does He hide behind messengers instead of appearing to all? The Imam turned him toward himself. "How can He be hidden from you, when He has shown you His power within your own self? Your coming to be when you were not, your growing after being small... your contentment after anger and anger after contentment, your resolve after hesitation and hesitation after resolve..." The list went on, Ibn Abi al-'Awja' said later, until he half expected God to appear between them.[22]

Another day the Imam offered an image. If you had a purse of jewels and could not even describe a gold coin, could you swear there was none inside? "The world is far bigger than a purse," he said. "Perhaps it carries the marks of being made, and you cannot tell the made from the unmade." Not seeing is not disproving. To an Egyptian sceptic the Imam put it in one line: "Does a reasonable person deny what he does not know?"[23]

The Imam had opened their first meeting with a wake-up call, not a proof. "If things are as these pilgrims say, and they are," Imam al-Sadiq told Ibn Abi al-'Awja', "then they are saved and you are ruined. And if things are as you say, and they are not,

you and they are equal." Imam al-Rida (a) made the same point to another doubter, nearly nine centuries before Blaise Pascal (d. 1662 CE) made a similar wager famous.[24] The point is not that belief is a bet. It is that indifference is not neutral.

The story has no tidy ending. A year later Ibn Abi al-'Awja' was at the pilgrimage again, still mocking its rites. The Imam would not argue there, since the Qur'an forbids "quarrelling during the pilgrimage" (Qur'an 2:197), but he repeated his wager. "I feel a burning in my heart," Ibn Abi al-'Awja' told his friends. "Take me back." He died unconvinced. Arguments can open a door. They cannot walk anyone through it.

Most people, though, first meet God not in an argument but in a storm.

فَإِذَا رَكِبُوا۟ فِى ٱلْفُلْكِ دَعَوُا۟ ٱللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ ٱلدِّينَ فَلَمَّا نَجَّىٰهُمْ إِلَى ٱلْبَرِّ إِذَا هُمْ يُشْرِكُونَ ﴿٦٥﴾

When they board a ship, they call on God, sincere in their devotion to Him alone. But once He brings them safely to land, they set up partners beside Him.

QUR'AN 29:65 · SURAT AL-'ANKABUT

NOTICE Sincerity arrives with the danger and leaves with the shore. The verse does not mock the cry for help. Its concern is how quickly the rescued forget who rescued them.

Some sceptics say this shows that belief is only fear. The Qur'an reads it the other way: when every other support falls away, something in a person turns, untaught, toward a power that can save. Chapter 1 called this inborn recognition *fitra*. Fear does not invent it; fear uncovers it. What the Qur'an criticises is the forgetting afterwards. And *fitra* is a starting point, not a finish line: reason must test what the heart suggests.

Imam Ali (a) found the same witness in a quieter place: in plans that fall apart.

> **IMAM ALI (A), THE FIRST IMAM**
>
> عَرَفْتُ اللهَ سُبْحَانَهُ بِفَسْخِ الْعَزَائِمِ وَحَلِّ الْعُقُودِ
>
> I came to know God, glory be to Him, through resolutions broken and firm intentions undone.[25]
>
> Nahj al-Balagha · Saying 250 · **Compiled text, not graded here**

Anyone who has tried to break a habit, or watched a sure plan come apart, knows what he meant. We resolve, and the resolve dissolves. We are not the authors of our own hearts. Imam al-Rida pointed to the body in the same way. He could not add to it or take from it, keep harm away from it or draw good to it. And so, he said, "I knew that this building has a builder."[26]

> *"I do not love things that set.*
>
> ABRAHAM (A), QUR'AN 6:76

Abraham (a) watched the star, the moon and the sun go down and said, "I do not love things that set." Sooner or later everything we love sets: health, youth, the people we cannot imagine losing, the plans we were sure of. All of it is on loan. That can sound like a sad thought. Islam hears it as an invitation. "Everything about God is wondrous," Imam al-Sadiq said, "yet He has made His case to you through what He has made known to you of Himself."[27] And He has made this much known: every breath is lent, and lent again, by a Lender who never runs short. The fitting answer is not anxiety but gratitude, and a love for the One who does not set.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. In Islam, faith (*iman*) means knowing the truth and embracing it, not believing without evidence.
2. Qur'an 52:35–36 asks three questions: were we made from nothing, by ourselves, or did we make the world?
3. Like a row of archers who all wait, an endless chain of dependent things explains nothing by itself.
4. Everything we see exists on loan; science explains how nature changes, not why anything exists at all.
5. God is not one more thing needing a cause but the uncreated source, and "nothing is like Him."

NEXT TIME · GO FURTHER

Next time: *Does Humanity Need Prophets?* Reason can tell us there is a Lender. Can it tell us what He wants of us, or would He leave us guessing?

Go further:

Course: God and His Attributes, a Level 1 course at Tasneem Institute (tasneeminstitute.org/courses/god-and-his-attributes)

Read: "One God. Tawḥīd.", a short introduction in Tasneem's *Discovering Islam* series (tasneeminstitute.org/blog/discovering-islam/one-god-tawhid). For a deeper dive, *al-Kafi*, vol. 1, Book of Divine Unity (*Kitab al-Tawhid*), ch. 1: the Imams answer sceptics, from the Egyptian at the Kaʿba to the egg.

Watch: Invitation to Islam, Episode 11, "Proving God's Existence" (12 min).

In the circle

LOOK BACK

1. What is the difference between believing something because it is familiar and believing it because it is true?
2. What is *fitra*, and what did Chapter 1 say it recognises?
3. Part One asks, "Is it true?" On a question as large as God, what would count as good evidence for you?

TALK ABOUT IT

WARM-UP

1. As a child, did you ever ask "Who made God?" or "Where did everything come from?" What answer did you get, and did it satisfy you?

UNDERSTAND

2. In your own words, how is asking *how* the universe developed different from asking *why* there is anything at all?
3. Retell the row of archers in your own words. What does it show about an endless chain of things that each depend on another?

REFLECT

4. The chapter answers "Who created God?" by saying the argument concerns only dependent things. Does that satisfy you? What would you still ask?
5. Qur'an 52:35–36 argues entirely through questions. Why might a scripture ask rather than tell?

APPLY

6. If a friend asked, "Why do you, or don't you, believe in God?", what honest sentence could you offer, and what question could you ask back?

GO DEEPER

7. Read Imam al-Sadiq's conversation with an Egyptian sceptic at the Kaʿba (al-Kafi, vol. 1, Book of Divine Unity, ch. 1, no. 1; unverified chain, graded *majhul* by al-Majlisi). Treat it as a teaching story. How does the Imam use questions rather than assertions?
8. Read the opening of Imam Ali's first sermon (Nahj al-Balagha, Sermon 1; compiled text, not graded). Which of its lines speaks most directly to the question "Who created God?"

CARRY IT HOME

Choose one way in this week:

☐ **Notice:** Once a day, stop and name one thing you depend on but did not make: your heartbeat, the morning light, the food on your plate. Tell yourself, "This is on loan." Then ask who lent it.

☐ **Do:** Explain the row of archers to a friend, a child or a sceptical colleague in under two minutes. Then ask what they think, and listen.

☐ **Learn:** Read the whole story of Abraham under the night sky in Qur'an 6:74–83, in any modern translation. Notice the word that verse 83 uses for the scene: an *argument*.

Aim. Show that belief in God can rest on reasons anyone can examine, and let everyone in the room test them honestly.

Protect this question. No. 4: "Does that satisfy you? What would you still ask?" It gives the sceptic a real voice and shows believers how to listen.

Answer notes.

- *Q2.* Science traces how one physical state leads to another, such as the expansion from a hot, dense state about 13.8 billion years ago. The argument asks why there is any physical reality at all. See "Who is the lender?"
- *Q3.* Each archer waits on another, so even infinitely many never shoot. A chain of dependent things needs something that depends on nothing: an uncreated Creator. See "Three questions, one answer."

Likely questions.

- *"Doesn't the Big Bang, or evolution, make God unnecessary?"* See "Who is the lender?" Chapter 5 goes further.
- *"Isn't belief just fear, like praying on a sinking ship?"* See the storm passage (Qur'an 29:65) in "Why can't we see Him?"
- *"Can God make a rock too heavy for Him to lift?"* See Imam Ali's answer about the egg in "What kind of God does reason find?": a contradiction is not a task.

Watch for. Sceptics may feel outnumbered. Thank them for hard questions, and never let insiders pile on. Some believers feel uneasy when arguments are tested; remind them that the Imams welcomed questions. Don't try to settle everything tonight; use the question box. The debate stories have weak or unverified chains, so let the arguments carry the weight.

Bring. An egg, for the story of the sealed fortress. If the sky is clear, end the evening outside and look for the evening star.

MY THREAD · CHAPTER 02

What in my life have I treated as mine that is really on loan? Whom would I thank for it?

MY QUESTION FOR THE BOX

NOTES

03

Does Humanity Need Prophets?

If God made us for a purpose, would He leave us guessing?

قَالَ رَبُّنَا ٱلَّذِىٓ أَعْطَىٰ كُلَّ شَىْءٍ خَلْقَهُۥ ثُمَّ هَدَىٰ ﴿٥٠﴾

[Moses] said, "Our Lord is He who gave each thing its nature, and then guided it."

QUR'AN 20:50 · SURAT TA HA

WATCH · EPISODE 24 · 9:50

youtu.be/O9llPHoGVvI

In the video: why a messenger must never mix his own opinions into God's message (8:27)

Reading time: about 20 minutes

A circle of students sits with Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (a), the sixth Imam (d. 765 CE). Among them is a young man from Kufa, in Iraq: Hisham ibn al-Hakam. The Imam asks him, "Hisham, won't you tell me how you questioned 'Amr ibn 'Ubayd?"

Hisham hesitates. "Son of the Messenger of God, I hold you in such awe that my tongue will not work in front of you."

"When I ask you to do something," says the Imam, "do it."

So Hisham tells his story. 'Amr ibn 'Ubayd, a famous theologian, held court in the great mosque of Basra, and the reports troubled Hisham. He arrived on a Friday to find a huge circle around the scholar, who sat wrapped in black wool, taking questions. Hisham asked the crowd for room, knelt at the back and called out: "Learned sir, I am a stranger here. May I ask you something?"

"Ask."

"Do you have eyes?"

"My son, what kind of question is that? You can see that I do."

"That is my question."

Hisham went through the senses. Eyes? For colours and shapes. Nose? For smells. Mouth? For tastes. Ears? For sounds. "And do you have a heart?" "Yes." "What do you do with it?" "I sort out whatever my senses bring me." "Aren't the senses enough?" "No. When they are unsure of anything they perceive, they refer it to the heart. The heart settles what is certain and cancels the doubt."

Then Hisham sprang his trap. "So God did not leave your senses without a guide, an *imam*, to confirm what is sound and settle what is doubtful. Would He give your body a guide for its doubts, and leave the whole human race in its confusion and disagreement, with no guide to bring them to?"

The great man fell silent. At last he asked where the young man came from. "Kufa." "Then you must be Hisham ibn al-Hakam." He drew Hisham close, gave him his own seat, and said nothing more until he left.

The Imam laughs. "Hisham, who taught you this?"

"Something I took from you, and put together."

"By God," says the Imam, "this is written in the scrolls of Abraham and Moses."[1]

Hisham's question is this chapter's question. Reason can find its way to God. But can it find its way alone? If God made us for a purpose, would He leave us

guessing?

THE BIG QUESTION

If reason can find God, why would anyone need a prophet?

Have you ever wondered why God would speak through one person in one place, instead of to everyone at once? Whether a working conscience is all the guidance a decent person needs? Or, if you grew up hearing that the prophets never sinned, how that fits with the Qur'an's words, "Adam disobeyed his Lord"?

This chapter asks what reason can and cannot find, why a wise God sends human messengers, why Shia Muslims hold that those messengers were protected from error, and what became of the scriptures they brought.

WORDS TO KNOW

nabī, rasūl (نبي، رسول) · *NA-bee, ra-SOOL* · prophet, messenger. Every messenger is a prophet; a messenger is also sent to a people with a mission.

waḥy (وحي) · *WAH-yee* · revelation: God's communication to a prophet. The Qur'an uses the same word for His guidance of the bee.

ʿaql (عقل) · *AQL* · reason, the intellect, which Shia teaching calls God's "inner proof."

ḥujja (حجة) · *HUJ-ja* · "proof": a guide through whom God's guidance reaches people, so that no one is left without it.

ʿiṣma (عصمة) · *ISS-ma* · God-given protection from sin, and from error in conveying His message.

luṭf (لطف) · *LUTF* · grace: God's help that draws people toward good without forcing them.

◆

What can reason find on its own?

Chapter 2 followed reason all the way to God. Everything we see holds its existence on loan, so there must be a Lender who borrows from no one. Nothing in this chapter takes that back. Shia Islam holds reason in such honour that its most important collection of hadith (reports from the Prophet and Imams), *al-Kafi*, opens with a Book of the Intellect. The Imams of the Prophet's family spoke of reason as one of God's own proofs.

So the real question is not whether reason works, but how far it reaches. The senses bring in a constant stream of signs: the sun rising and setting, wind moving through trees, birdsong, the smell of rain. Reason reads them and concludes that a wise Maker stands behind them all. The heart, as Chapter 2 showed, perceives Him too.

Yet knowing *that* someone is there is not the same as knowing *what* they want. Picture a sealed letter with your name on it. The envelope alone tells you a great deal: someone wrote it, someone who knows you, someone with something to say. But you cannot read the letter through the envelope.

The Imams drew this line with care. Asked whether people can make do with reason alone, Imam al-Sadiq (a) gave reason its due, then marked its edge, in a report with an unverified chain that Chapter 5 quotes.[2]

Reason can tell you that you owe thanks to the One who gave you everything. It cannot tell you whether He wants those thanks in words, in fasting, in giving to the poor, or in a forehead pressed to the ground before dawn. It can expect a just God to settle accounts beyond the grave. It cannot describe what lies there. One of the Imam's students, Mansur ibn Hazim, worked the argument through aloud, and the Imam blessed it.

MANSUR IBN HAZIM, REASONING BEFORE IMAM JAʿFAR AL-SADIQ (A)

إِنَّ مَنْ عَرَفَ أَنَّ لَهُ رَبّاً فَيَنْبَغِي لَهُ أَنْ يَعْرِفَ أَنَّ لِذَلِكَ الرَّبِّ رِضًا وَسَخَطاً وَأَنَّهُ لا يُعْرَفُ رِضَاهُ وَسَخَطُهُ إِلا بِوَحْيٍ أَوْ رَسُولٍ فَمَنْ لَمْ يَأْتِهِ الْوَحْيُ فَقَدْ يَنْبَغِي لَهُ أَنْ يَطْلُبَ الرُّسُلَ فَإِذَا لَقِيَهُمْ عَرَفَ أَنَّهُمُ الْحُجَّةُ وَأَنَّ لَهُمُ الطَّاعَةَ الْمُفْتَرَضَةَ ... فَقَالَ رَحِمَكَ اللهُ

Whoever knows that he has a Lord should realise that this Lord is pleased by some things and angered by others, and that His pleasure and anger can be known only through revelation or a messenger. So whoever has not received revelation should go looking for the messengers. When he finds them, he will know that they are God's proof, and that obeying them is a duty. ... And the Imam said, "God have mercy on you."[3]

al-Kafi 1 · The Proof · ch. 1 · no. 2 · **Reliable chain**

Reason has a second limit, closer to home: it is only as honest as we are. People are very good at reasoning their way to what they already want. Even honest people disagree about what is fair in a business deal, a divorce or a will. The Qur'an names the problem: "People were one community. Then God sent the prophets with good news and warning, and sent down with them the Book in truth, to judge between people in what they disputed" (Qur'an 2:213).

The Shia philosopher and Qur'an commentator 'Allama Tabataba'i (d. 1981 CE) drew out the lesson. Human beings are built to cooperate, and also to use one another. The instinct that builds a marketplace also rigs its scales. A cure cannot come from the very thing that causes the disease, he argued, so the remedy must come from beyond human nature: through revelation.[4]

That is why Shia teaching never sets reason and revelation against each other. Imam Musa al-Kazim (a), the seventh Imam (d. 799 CE), once put it to his student Hisham, the same Hisham who silenced the theologian of Basra. In a famous teaching, preserved without a complete chain of narrators, he said: "God has two proofs over people, an outer proof and an inner proof. The outer proof is the messengers, the prophets and the Imams. The inner proof is the intellect."[5] Each needs the other. Reason brings us to God's door. Revelation tells us what lies beyond it.

◆

Why would God speak at all?

When Moses (a) first stood before Pharaoh, the king asked him a blunt question: "So who is your Lord, Moses?" Moses answered in a single line: "Our Lord is He who gave each thing its nature, and then guided it" (Qur'an 20:49–50).

Look around and you see that guidance everywhere. No one teaches a bee to build its comb. "Your Lord inspired the bee," says the Qur'an (16:68), using the same word, *wahy*, that it uses for revelation to the prophets. Each creature is guided in the way that suits it. Human beings can think and choose, so they are guided through reason, and through messengers who speak to reason.

A sceptic once asked Imam al-Sadiq (a) to prove that prophets exist at all. Our Maker is wise, the Imam said, and far above His creatures. They cannot see Him or touch Him, and He does not deal with them face to face. So He must have envoys among them, ambassadors who speak for Him. They guide people to what will sustain them, and away from what would destroy them.[6] Shia theologians gave this kind of help a name: *lutf*, grace.

A CLOSER LOOK

Does God owe us prophets?

The theologians asked a bold question. If God owes nothing to anyone, why call prophets "necessary"? Their answer lay in the idea of *lutf*. Al-Shaykh al-Mufid of Baghdad (d. 1022 CE) defined it as whatever draws people closer to obeying God and further from disobeying Him, short of forcing them.[7] A lighthouse does not steer the ship. It shows where the rocks are, and leaves the captain free. A wise and generous God, the argument runs, does not set His creatures a goal and then withhold what they need to reach it. So the necessity is not a debt laid on God from outside. It flows from who He is: "He has made mercy binding on Himself" (Qur'an 6:12). Later theologians such as Nasir al-Din al-Tusi (d. 1274 CE) and al-'Allama al-Hilli (d. 1325 CE) took one more step: the Imams who guard the prophets' message are a grace as well.[8] Chapter 8 explains how they guard it.

What, then, did the prophets come to do? Imam Ali (a), the first Imam (d. 661 CE), answers in the first sermon of *Nahj al-Balagha*, the classic collection of his words. Most people, he says, had broken God's covenant with them. They ignored what was due to Him and set up rivals beside Him.

IMAM ALI (A), THE FIRST IMAM

فَبَعَثَ فِيهِمْ رُسُلَهُ، وَوَاتَرَ إِلَيْهِمْ أَنْبِيَاءَهُ، لِيَسْتَأْدُوهُمْ مِيثَاقَ فِطْرَتِهِ، وَيُذَكِّرُوهُمْ مَنْسِيَّ نِعْمَتِهِ، وَيَحْتَجُّوا عَلَيْهِمْ بِالتَّبْلِيغِ، وَيُثِيرُوا لَهُمْ دَفَائِنَ الْعُقُولِ

So He sent His messengers among them, and sent His prophets to them one after another, to call in the pledge of the nature He gave them, to remind them of His blessings they had forgotten, to make His case before them by delivering the message, and to unearth for them the buried treasures of the intellect.[9]

Nahj al-Balagha · Sermon 1 · **Compiled text, not graded here**

Every phrase repays a slow reading. The "pledge of the nature He gave them" recalls the covenant of Chapter 1, when all of Adam's children answered God, "Yes indeed" (Qur'an 7:172). The prophets come to collect on a promise we have already made. The "forgotten blessings" are the gifts we stop noticing because they never stop: breath, sight, the people who love us.

To "make His case" means that no one is left saying, "Nobody told us." And the last phrase may be the most beautiful. Imam Ali's verb is the one the Qur'an uses for tilling the soil (Qur'an 30:9). Prophets do not plant something foreign in us. Like a farmer turning the earth, they bring up what was already buried in our own minds.

The Qur'an adds a public purpose: "We sent Our messengers with clear signs, and sent down with them the Book and the Balance, so that people would uphold justice" (Qur'an 57:25). Notice who does the upholding: people. The prophets brought the scales; everyone was to weigh fairly with them, in the market, the court and the home. Their guidance reached every part of life, from worship and family to the dealings of nations and the care of the earth. And no people was left out: "There is no community but a warner has passed among it" (Qur'an 35:24).

إِنَّآ أَوْحَيْنَآ إِلَيْكَ كَمَآ أَوْحَيْنَآ إِلَىٰ نُوحٍ وَٱلنَّبِيِّـۧنَ مِنۢ بَعْدِهِۦ ۚ
وَأَوْحَيْنَآ إِلَىٰٓ إِبْرَٰهِيمَ وَإِسْمَٰعِيلَ وَإِسْحَٰقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ وَٱلْأَسْبَاطِ
وَعِيسَىٰ وَأَيُّوبَ وَيُونُسَ وَهَٰرُونَ وَسُلَيْمَٰنَ ۚ وَءَاتَيْنَا دَاوُۥدَ زَبُورًا
﴿١٦٣﴾ وَرُسُلًا قَدْ قَصَصْنَٰهُمْ عَلَيْكَ مِن قَبْلُ وَرُسُلًا لَّمْ
نَقْصُصْهُمْ عَلَيْكَ ۚ وَكَلَّمَ ٱللَّهُ مُوسَىٰ تَكْلِيمًا ﴿١٦٤﴾ رُّسُلًا
مُّبَشِّرِينَ وَمُنذِرِينَ لِئَلَّا يَكُونَ لِلنَّاسِ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ حُجَّةٌۢ بَعْدَ ٱلرُّسُلِ ۚ
وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ عَزِيزًا حَكِيمًا ﴿١٦٥﴾

We have revealed to you as We revealed to Noah and the prophets after him. We revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the Tribes [of Israel], to Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron and Solomon, and to David We gave the Psalms. There are messengers We have told you about before, and messengers We have not told you about, and to Moses God spoke directly: messengers bringing good news and warning, so that people would have no argument against God once the messengers had come. God is Almighty, All-Wise.

QUR'AN 4:163–165 · SURAT AL-NISA'

NOTICE Twelve prophets are named, all of them familiar from the Bible. Then the list is left open: "messengers We have not told you about." The last verse gives the reason for them all.

A well-known narration puts the number of prophets at 124,000, from Adam to Muhammad (s), with 313 of them sent as messengers.[10] The Qur'an itself gives no number. Imam Ali summed up the pattern in the same sermon: "God never left His creation without a prophet sent, or a book revealed, or a binding proof, or a clear road."[11] Every one of those prophets carried the same core message: "Worship God,

and shun false gods" (Qur'an 16:36). And they joined that worship to good character and to justice.

> **PAUSE AND RECALL**
>
> *Imam Ali named four things the prophets were sent to do. How many can you recall without looking back?*

◆

Why a human being, and why trust one?

Here is the objection at its strongest. If God wanted to be heard, why not send angels, or speak from the sky to everyone at once? Why entrust His word to one man in one town, who ate, slept and shopped like everyone else? The Qur'an quotes people who said exactly this: "What kind of messenger is this, who eats food and walks in the markets?" (Qur'an 25:7). And it answers them.

وَمَا مَنَعَ ٱلنَّاسَ أَن يُؤْمِنُوٓا۟ إِذْ جَآءَهُمُ ٱلْهُدَىٰٓ إِلَّآ أَن قَالُوٓا۟ أَبَعَثَ ٱللَّهُ بَشَرًا رَّسُولًا ﴿٩٤﴾ قُل لَّوْ كَانَ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ مَلَٰٓئِكَةٌ يَمْشُونَ مُطْمَئِنِّينَ لَنَزَّلْنَا عَلَيْهِم مِّنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ مَلَكًا رَّسُولًا ﴿٩٥﴾

Nothing kept people from believing when guidance came to them except that they said, "Has God sent a human being as a messenger?" Say: "Had there been angels walking the earth, at home in it, We would have sent down to them from heaven an angel as messenger."

QUR'AN 17:94–95 · SURAT AL-ISRA

NOTICE The objection is quoted in full before it is answered. The answer is a thought experiment: a messenger is sent in the form of those he is sent to.

An angel could tell us what to do. It could not show us how a human being does it. No angel has been hungry on a fasting day, sat up with a sick child, or been wronged and chosen to forgive. People learn most from people. "In the Messenger of God you

have an excellent example," says the Qur'an, "for anyone who hopes in God and the Last Day" (Qur'an 33:21).

Not everyone who claims to be a prophet is one, and the coming chapters show how such a claim is tested: by its message, the messenger's character and the signs that support him. But suppose the messenger is genuine. If he is our only window onto God's will, how far can we trust him?

Imagine an interpreter at peace talks who now and then slips in a sentence of his own. Even if most of his words were faithful, no one could be sure whose words were whose. A messenger who could mix his own opinions, moods or mistakes into God's message would leave people in exactly that place.

The Qur'an closes the gap. The Prophet (s) "does not speak from his own desire; it is only a revelation revealed" (Qur'an 53:3–4). And "We sent no messenger except to be obeyed, by God's leave" (Qur'an 4:64). A wise God would not command people to follow someone who might lead them astray.

This is the Shia teaching of *'isma*, protection. Al-Shaykh al-Saduq (d. 991 CE), one of the great early Shia scholars, set it down in his creed. The prophets, the messengers and the Imams, he wrote, are protected, and commit no sin, minor or major.[12] Shia theology adds that they never err in receiving God's message or in passing it on.

Protection does not turn a prophet into a puppet. The Qur'an tells how Joseph (a), sold as a slave into an Egyptian household, was cornered by his master's wife behind bolted doors. "She was set on him, and he would have been set on her, had he not seen the proof of his Lord" (Qur'an 12:24). Joseph could have sinned. He saw too much to want to.

'Allama Tabataba'i described *'isma* as a kind of knowledge that never fails. Picture someone who knows for certain that a cup holds deadly poison. Nothing stops his hand except what he sees, and he refrains, freely, every time.[13] The prophets see sin the way we see poison.

Here Islam parts company with the Jewish and Christian traditions, though they share so many prophets. The Hebrew Bible tells how King David saw another man's wife bathing, took her, and sent her husband to die in battle. Then the prophet Nathan confronted him, and he repented.[14] Many Jews and Christians treasure that honesty: if God could forgive David, He can forgive anyone.

A version of the story, embroidered with a beautiful bird that lured David from his prayers, reached Muslim storytellers too. When a scholar repeated it before Imam Ali al-Rida (a), the eighth Imam (d. 818 CE), the Imam struck his forehead. "We belong to God, and to Him we are returning. You have accused one of God's prophets of treating his prayer lightly, then of indecency, then of murder."[15]

Muslims take their comfort from a different place. The door of repentance is open to everyone, as Chapter 1 showed. But the guides who mark the road are protected, so the road itself can be trusted.

A FAIR QUESTION

If prophets never sin, why does the Qur'an say "Adam disobeyed"?

The Imams heard this question too, and answered it verse by verse. It was put to Imam al-Rida (a) at the court of the caliph al-Ma'mun, by scholars and by the caliph himself. He began with a rule of reading: "Fear God. Do not attribute indecencies to God's prophets, and do not interpret God's Book by your own opinion." Adam's lapse (Qur'an 20:121), he explained, came in the Garden, before God sent him down to earth as His proof; the next verse says God then "chose him, turned to him and guided him." Moses (a) struck a man who was fighting an Israelite, and the man died; his words "This is Satan's work" (Qur'an 28:15) meant the brawl, not his blow. And the Prophet's "sin, past and future" (Qur'an 48:2) was the crime Mecca's idol-worshippers held against him, preaching one God; the conquest of Mecca wiped it from their ledger.[16] Theologians add one more key. At times a prophet "left the better course" (*tark al-awla*), choosing something permitted when something better was possible. For anyone else that is no fault at all. For people so close to God, it was enough to send them to their knees (Qur'an 7:23; 28:16).

◆

What about the Torah and the Gospel?

Many figures of the Qur'an are familiar to readers of the Bible: Abraham and Isaac, Moses and Aaron, David and Solomon, Jonah and Job, Jesus and his mother Mary. Their stories overlap, and so do their lessons. Joseph's story fills the last chapters of Genesis and a whole sura (chapter) of the Qur'an.

The Qur'an also names the scriptures some of them brought. Remember the "scrolls of Abraham and Moses" that Imam al-Sadiq (a) mentioned to Hisham? The Qur'an speaks of them too (Qur'an 87:18–19). It names the *Tawrat* given to Moses, "guidance and light" (Qur'an 5:44); the *Zabur* given to David, which translators often call the Psalms (Qur'an 4:163); and the *Injil* given to Jesus (Qur'an 5:46).

These words need care. The Qur'an's *Tawrat* is the revelation given to Moses, not every book of the Hebrew Bible, which also holds histories, prophecies and poetry. Its *Injil* is the revelation God gave to Jesus himself. It is not the four Gospels, which

Christians understand as inspired accounts of his life and teaching written by his followers, nor the New Testament as a whole.

Muslims honour those first revelations as God's word. They also believe that the texts we have today preserve them only in part: the Qur'an speaks of communities that "forgot a portion of what they had been reminded of" (Qur'an 5:13–14). So Muslims read the Bible with respect, and often hear the prophets' voices echoing in it. To hear the message whole, they turn to the Qur'an and to the teaching of the Prophet (s) and his family.

Underneath, there was only ever one religion. What changed from prophet to prophet was the law: "For each of you We have appointed a law and a way" (Qur'an 5:48). Jesus (a) himself came "to make lawful for you some of what was forbidden to you" (Qur'an 3:50).

The Qur'an is the final form of the message. It describes itself as "confirming" the scriptures before it and "watching over" them (Qur'an 5:48), and its messenger as "the seal of the prophets" (Qur'an 33:40), sent "to all people" (Qur'an 34:28). Earlier laws gave way; the faith and the core ethics they taught did not. Chapter 7 tells the story of that one family of prophets.

◆

Does guidance end with the last prophet?

If Muhammad (s) was the last prophet, does God's guidance end at his grave? Prophethood ended with him, and every Muslim agrees that the Qur'an remains. Shia Muslims hold that God also leaves a living guide in every age.

Remember Mansur ibn Hazim, who reasoned from "I have a Lord" to "I must find His messengers"? He went further. After the Prophet, he asked people, who is God's proof? "The Qur'an," they said. But rival parties all argued from the Qur'an, each for its own view; even a man who did not believe in it could quote it to win a debate. So, Mansur concluded, the Qur'an cannot serve as a proof without a custodian who knows all of it.

Who could that be? Only one man was said to know all of it, the one who answered "I know" where others said "I do not know": Ali (a). So Mansur bore witness that after the Prophet, Ali was the Qur'an's custodian and God's proof over the people, and Imam al-Sadiq (a) affirmed it with a blessing.[17] Chapter 8 continues the argument.

Imam al-Sadiq put the principle in a single line: "The proof was before creation, is with creation, and will be after creation."[18] The Qur'an itself says, "For every people

there is a guide" (Qur'an 13:7). Hisham's question in the mosque at Basra did not stop at the prophets either.

> *God never left His creation without a prophet sent, or a book revealed, or a binding proof, or a clear road.*
>
> IMAM ALI (A)

Most of us know what it is to stand at a crossroads in the dark. What we long for then is someone who has walked the road and can say, "This way." Islam's answer to Hisham's question is that God has never left anyone without that voice. He "gave each thing its nature, and then guided it." Reason was His first gift, and it brought us to His door. The prophets were His second, and they opened it. Whether we walk through is the one thing He leaves to us.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Reason can know that God exists and has wishes, but revelation is needed to learn what those wishes are.
2. Shia teaching calls reason God's inner proof and the prophets His outer proof: partners, not rivals.
3. Out of grace, God sent messengers to every people, to awaken reason and establish justice.
4. Messengers are human so that we can follow them, and protected from sin and error so that we can trust them.
5. One religion ran through every prophet. Muhammad (s) sealed prophethood, but guidance continues after him.

NEXT TIME · GO FURTHER

Next time: *Why the Qur'an Is the Word of God.* If prophets bring God's message, how could anyone know that a book really comes from Him? What kind of book gives orders to the man who brought it?

Go further:

Courses: The Miraculous Qur'an and Imamate in Islamic Thought, Level 1 courses at Tasneem Institute (tasneeminstitute.org/courses/the-miraculous-quran; tasneeminstitute.org/courses/imamate-in-islamic-thought)

Read: "Messengers of God.", a short introduction to prophethood in Tasneem's *Discovering Islam* series (tasneeminstitute.org/blog/discovering-islam/prophethood-nubuwwa). For a deeper dive, the first chapters of the Book of the Proof (*Kitab al-Hujja*) in *al-Kafi*, vol. 1.

Watch: Invitation to Islam, Episode 24, "Does Humanity Need Prophets?" (10 min).

In the circle

LOOK BACK

1. Chapter 2 said that everything we see is "on loan." What did that mean?
2. What is *fitra*, the inborn nature described in Chapter 1?
3. Part One asks, "Is it true?" Which argument so far has seemed most worth weighing to you?

TALK ABOUT IT

WARM-UP

1. Think of a time someone guided you through something new: a city, a job or a skill. What made you trust them?

UNDERSTAND

2. Chapter 2 followed reason all the way to God. According to this chapter, what can reason still not find without revelation, and why?
3. Why does Shia teaching hold that a messenger must be protected from error (*ʿisma*)? What would be lost if he were not?

REFLECT

4. Imam Ali said the prophets came "to unearth the buried treasures of the intellect." When has someone helped you see something you half-knew already? You needn't share what it was.
5. Joseph turned away because he "saw the proof of his Lord" (12:24). When has seeing a situation for what it was made a hard choice easier for you?

APPLY

6. The Qur'an calls the Prophet "an excellent example" (33:21). Who might learn from watching you? What could you show them this week, rather than tell them?

GO DEEPER

7. Read Mansur ibn Hazim's whole conversation with Imam al-Sadiq (al-Kafi, vol. 1, Book of the Proof, ch. 1, no. 2; reliable chain). How does his reasoning move from God, to the prophets, to the Qur'an's "custodian"?
8. Read Imam al-Rida's answers on the prophets' sinlessness (ʿUyun akhbar al-Rida, vol. 1, ch. 14, no. 1; not graded, so read it as teaching). Which of his readings of the "hard verses" persuades you most?

CARRY IT HOME

Choose one way in this week:

☐ **Notice:** Each evening, note one moment when you knew *that* something mattered but not *how* to do it well, such as comforting a friend or settling a quarrel. Where did you turn for guidance?

☐ **Do:** Choose one prophet named in Qur'an 4:163–164 and read his story, in the Qur'an or in the Bible. Write down one thing he *showed* rather than said.

☐ **Learn:** Read Imam Ali's account of why the prophets were sent (*Nahj al-Balagha*, Sermon 1, the passage on the choosing of the prophets). Put each purpose he names into your own words, with an example from your own life.

Aim. Help the circle see why a wise God would send human guides, and how Shia teaching keeps reason and revelation together.

Protect this question. No. 4, on the "buried treasures of the intellect." Guests, new Muslims and lifelong Muslims can all answer it from their own experience.

Answer notes.

- *Q2.* Reason can know that God exists and that He loves some things and dislikes others. It cannot find the details, such as how to worship Him or what lies beyond death, and it cannot settle our disputes impartially (Mansur's hadith; 2:213).
- *Q3.* The messenger is the only channel of the message. If he could add his own opinions or errors, no one could tell God's words from his (53:3–4). *'Isma* does not remove choice: it is clear sight, as Joseph shows (12:24).

Likely questions.

- *"Were the Buddha, Zoroaster or Krishna prophets?"* Every community had a warner (35:24), and many messengers are unnamed (4:164). Naming particular figures goes beyond the evidence. See "Why would God speak at all?"
- *"Doesn't the Qur'an say Adam sinned?"* See the "fair question" box.
- *"So do Muslims believe in the Bible?"* See "What about the Torah and the Gospel?"

Watch for. Christians and Jews in the room may hold the Bible dear. Present the Muslim view of scripture without belittling theirs, and never ask anyone to defend their own. The David story is about the honour of the prophets, not an attack on anyone's faith. Some lifelong Muslims were taught that prophets never made the smallest slip; note 12 sets out the scholarly discussion, and detailed questions can go to a scholar.

Bring. A sealed envelope with "To you" written on it, for the sealed-letter image. Open it at the end and read Qur'an 20:50 aloud.

MY THREAD · CHAPTER 03

What do I already know is right, but still need someone to show me how to live?

MY QUESTION FOR THE BOX

NOTES

04

Why the Qur'an Is the Word of God

A book that commands its own messenger.

أَفَلَا يَتَدَبَّرُونَ ٱلْقُرْءَانَ وَلَوْ كَانَ مِنْ عِندِ غَيْرِ ٱللَّهِ لَوَجَدُوا۟ فِيهِ ٱخْتِلَٰفًا كَثِيرًا ﴿٨٢﴾

Will they not reflect on the Qur'an? Had it come from anyone but God, they would have found much in it that contradicts itself.

QUR'AN 4:82 · SURAT AL-NISA'

WATCH · EPISODE 02 · 12:41

youtu.be/ekSI6mfTCAk

In the video: why a forger could never have let revelation fall silent (9:48)

Reading time: about 20 minutes

Mecca, early in the seventh century. In the sanctuary around the Ka'ba, the ancient shrine at the city's heart, an old man is listening.

Al-Walid ibn al-Mughira is one of the great men of Quraysh, the tribe that rules Mecca. He has wealth, and sons always at his side (Qur'an 74:12–13). He knows poetry when he hears it, in a city that prizes eloquence above almost everything, and people call him the sweet basil of Quraysh.

A few steps away, Muhammad (s) is reciting words he says have come down to him from God. He sees the old man listening, and recites them again.

Al-Walid walks back to his clan, Banu Makhzum. "By God," he tells them, "I have just heard words from Muhammad that are not the speech of human beings, nor the speech of the jinn [the unseen spirits]. They have a sweetness, and a beauty lies over them. Their branches are heavy with fruit, and their roots drink deep. They rise above everything, and nothing rises above them."

Alarm runs through Quraysh: al-Walid has gone over. His nephew Abu Jahl, a fierce enemy of the new preaching, goes to bring him back into line, and soon the old man stands before his people. He puts their own charges to them. You say Muhammad is mad: have you ever seen him in a fit? *No, by God.* A soothsayer: have you seen any sign of it? *No.* A poet: have you ever heard him recite verse? *No.* A liar: have you ever caught him in a lie? *No.* Long before any of this, they had called him al-Sadiq al-Amin, the truthful, the trustworthy.

"Then what is he?"

The Qur'an describes the next moment. "He thought, and he weighed it up... Then he looked. Then he frowned and scowled. Then he turned his back in pride and said, 'This is nothing but magic, handed down. This is nothing but the word of a mortal'" (Qur'an 74:18–25).[1]

Fourteen centuries later, al-Walid's verdict is still the real alternative. Either the Qur'an is what it claims to be, the speech of God, or it is the word of a mortal. Which is it?

THE BIG QUESTION

How could anyone know that the Qur'an comes from God, and not from Muhammad himself?

Have you ever wondered whether a brilliant, sincere man could have written it, and believed it came from God? Whether it would change how you read a book to know that God wrote it? Or, if you grew up hearing it recited, whether you could explain why you trust it, or what to say when someone asks if Shia Muslims have a different Qur'an?

This chapter weighs the evidence the Qur'an offers for itself, and the evidence of the man who brought it.

WORDS TO KNOW

waḥy (وحي) · *WAH-yee* · revelation: God's word or message conveyed to a prophet; in the Qur'an's case, through the angel Gabriel.

sūra (سورة) · *SOO-ra* · one of the Qur'an's 114 chapters; the shortest has three verses, the longest 286.

iʿjāz (إعجاز) · *ij-AAZ* · inimitability: the quality of the Qur'an that defeats every attempt to produce its like.

ʿiṣma (عصمة) · *ISS-ma* · God's protection of the prophets and Imams from sin and error, so that their message can be trusted.

muṣḥaf (مصحف) · *MUS-haf* · a written copy of the whole Qur'an, bound between two covers.

taḥrīf (تحريف) · *tah-REEF* · distortion of a scripture, whether of its words or of its meaning.

◆

What exactly is the Qur'an claiming?

Muslims do not think of the Qur'an as inspired writing, the way a great poem is called inspired. They believe it is the speech of God Himself, brought down by the angel Gabriel, "the Trustworthy Spirit," to the Prophet's heart "in clear Arabic" (Qur'an 26:193–195). Muhammad (s) did not compose it; he received it and passed it on, word for word.

It is a claim worth questioning: history has known many who said they spoke for God. The Qur'an does not dodge the question. It records the rival explanations its first hearers offered. He is a soothsayer, or mad (Qur'an 52:29), or a poet (52:30). He forged it, "and other people helped him" (25:4). Or, in al-Walid's words, it is "nothing but the word of a mortal" (74:25). Then the Qur'an answers with a test.

وَإِن كُنتُمْ فِى رَيْبٍ مِّمَّا نَزَّلْنَا عَلَىٰ عَبْدِنَا فَأْتُوا۟ بِسُورَةٍ مِّن مِّثْلِهِۦ
وَٱدْعُوا۟ شُهَدَآءَكُم مِّن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ إِن كُنتُمْ صَٰدِقِينَ ﴿٢٣﴾ فَإِن
لَّمْ تَفْعَلُوا۟ وَلَن تَفْعَلُوا۟ فَٱتَّقُوا۟ ٱلنَّارَ ٱلَّتِى وَقُودُهَا ٱلنَّاسُ وَٱلْحِجَارَةُ
أُعِدَّتْ لِلْكَٰفِرِينَ ﴿٢٤﴾

If you doubt what We have sent down to Our servant, bring one sura like it, and call your witnesses besides God, if you are truthful. If you do not, and you never will, then guard yourselves against a Fire fuelled by people and stones, made ready for those who deny the truth.

QUR'AN 2:23–24 · SURAT AL-BAQARA

NOTICE The challenge announces its result before anyone has tried: "and you never will." And it calls the Prophet "Our servant," not the book's author.

The challenge comes in several forms: the like of the whole book, beyond humans and jinn together (Qur'an 17:88); ten suras (11:13); a single sura (10:38; 2:23). The shortest sura in the Qur'an has three verses.

Its first hearers boasted, "If we wished, we could say the like of this" (Qur'an 8:31). They never did. They answered the challenge the way people answer an argument they cannot win: with ridicule, then persecution, and finally war.

What would count as "like it"? More than rhyme and rhythm. Muslim scholars have long debated where exactly the Qur'an's inimitability (*i'jaz*) lies: in its eloquence, its arrangement, its style. The Shia theologian al-Sharif al-Murtada (d. 1044 CE) devoted a whole book to the question.[2] The challenge asks for a text that does what this one does: speaks this beautifully about God and the heart, law and history, holds together, and changes those who hear it.

And readers who know no Arabic? They are in good company: most of the world's Muslims are not Arabs. They cannot judge the style for themselves, but they can weigh the testimony of those who could, the masters of the language who reached for

swords instead of a sura. Much else survives translation: the voice, the coherence, the moral force.

◆

Who was the man who brought it?

The Qur'an treats its messenger's past as part of the evidence. "Had God willed," he is told to say, "I would not have recited it to you... I had spent a whole lifetime among you before it. Do you not understand?" (Qur'an 10:16).

That lifetime was lived far from the libraries of Persia and Byzantium. Muhammad (s) grew up an orphan in a trading town, and for forty years he was known above all for one thing: he could be trusted.

Years before his mission, floods had cracked the walls of the Ka'ba, and Quraysh pulled it down to rebuild it. When the new walls reached the sacred Black Stone, the clans quarrelled over who would have the honour of setting it, until they agreed to accept the judgement of the next man through the gate of Banu Shayba. It was Muhammad. "Here comes al-Amin," they said: the trustworthy one. He spread out his cloak, laid the stone on it and called for a man from each clan. Together they lifted it, and he himself set it in place.[3]

Then, at forty, he began to recite the Qur'an. Until then, the Qur'an says, he had never recited a scripture or written one with his own hand: "otherwise, those who deal in falsehood would have had reason to doubt" (Qur'an 29:48).[4] Each year he withdrew for a time to a cave on Mount Hira, above Mecca. His young cousin Ali (a), who grew up in his house and would become the first Imam (d. 661 CE), remembered: "I would see him, and no one else did... I saw the light of revelation and of the message, and I breathed the fragrance of prophethood."[5]

Two centuries later, Ali's descendant Imam Ali al-Rida (a), the eighth Imam (d. 818 CE), made the same argument at the court of the caliph (ruler) al-Ma'mun, to the Exilarch, the head of the Jewish community. Among Muhammad's signs, he said, is his own life: "He was an orphan, poor, a shepherd and a hired hand. He never studied a book or went to a teacher. Then he brought the Qur'an, with the stories of the prophets and their histories, letter by letter."[6]

A FAIR QUESTION

Isn't the Qur'an just borrowed from the Bible?

The charge is as old as the Qur'an, which records it. "We know well that they say, 'Some mortal is teaching him'" (Qur'an 16:103). Biblical stories did reach Arabia: written Arabic translations seem to come only after Islam, but Jews and Christians told the stories aloud.[7] The real question is what the Qur'an does with them. It does not copy; it retells, often differently. In Exodus, Aaron (a) collects the people's gold and makes the golden calf himself (Exodus 32:2–5). In the Qur'an, Aaron pleads, "This is only a trial for you. Your Lord is the All-Merciful, so follow me and do as I say" (20:90), and a man called al-Samiri makes the calf (20:85–88). In Genesis, the ruler whom Joseph (a) served is "Pharaoh," a title it uses even in the day of Abraham (Genesis 41:14; 12:15). The Qur'an calls him only "the king" (12:43, 50, 54) and keeps "Pharaoh" for the ruler Moses (a) faced. Egyptians, historians note, began calling the king himself *per-aa*, "great house," only in the New Kingdom, from about 1539 BCE.[8] No one knows when Joseph lived, so this proves nothing on its own. But the Qur'an calls itself a guardian over earlier scriptures (5:48): it confirms them, and where they differ, it corrects. A borrower who corrects his source, consistently and with a purpose, is no longer just borrowing.

◆

Why would an author take orders from his own book?

Open the Qur'an at any page and ask who is speaking. It is almost never Muhammad (s). God speaks, often as "We." The Prophet is the one spoken to, and more than three hundred times he is handed his lines with a single word: *Say*. "Say: He is God, One" (Qur'an 112:1). "Say: I am a mortal like you; it is revealed to me that your God is one God" (18:110). *Bashar*, "mortal," is al-Walid's word.

Is the Qur'an's voice really different from Muhammad's own? Researchers have tried to measure it.

A CLOSER LOOK

Can a computer tell who wrote it?

Stylometry is the statistical study of style. It counts things a writer rarely controls on purpose, such as favourite words, sentence lengths and the small words that hold sentences together, and it has helped to identify the authors of disputed texts. In a 2012 study, an Algerian computer scientist, Halim Sayoud, reported sixteen such experiments on the Qur'an and on a sample of the Prophet's reported sayings (*hadith*) from al-Bukhari's collection, the best known in the Sunni tradition. Every series pointed the same way: on his measures, the two had different authors.[9]

That is a suggestive finding, not a proof. Scripture recited in worship and sayings remembered from conversation are different kinds of speech, and genre alone changes vocabulary. Nor does the Qur'an's own style stand still: the historian Behnam Sadeghi found that measures such as average verse length change smoothly from the earliest suras to the latest, the pattern of a single source over many years.[10] Stylometry can ask whether two texts share a voice. It cannot say whose voice it is. Here it modestly confirms al-Walid's first impression: the Qur'an does not sound like the man who recited it.

Once, his opponents tried to bargain over the text itself.

وَإِذَا تُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْهِمْ ءَايَاتُنَا بَيِّنَٰتٍ قَالَ ٱلَّذِينَ لَا يَرْجُونَ لِقَآءَنَا ٱئْتِ
بِقُرْءَانٍ غَيْرِ هَٰذَآ أَوْ بَدِّلْهُ قُلْ مَا يَكُونُ لِىٓ أَنْ أُبَدِّلَهُۥ مِن تِلْقَآئِ
نَفْسِىٓ إِنْ أَتَّبِعُ إِلَّا مَا يُوحَىٰٓ إِلَىَّ إِنِّىٓ أَخَافُ إِنْ عَصَيْتُ رَبِّى
عَذَابَ يَوْمٍ عَظِيمٍ ﴿١٥﴾

When Our clear verses are recited to them, those who do not look forward to meeting Us say, "Bring us another Qur'an, or alter this one." Say: "I have no right to alter it on my own. I only follow what is revealed to me. Were I to disobey my Lord, I would fear the punishment of a terrible Day."

QUR'AN 10:15 · SURAT YUNUS

NOTICE Asked to change the book, he answers in words he is given: the reply begins with "Say." Even his refusal to edit his own scripture is dictated.

It spells out what would happen if he put words in God's mouth: "Had he invented sayings and passed them off as Ours, We would have seized him by the right hand, then cut the vein of his heart" (Qur'an 69:44–46). It warns him, as it warned every prophet before him: "If you set up partners with God, all your deeds will be wasted" (39:65). It tells him how to listen: "Do not race your tongue to hurry it along" (75:16). And it gives him a prayer: "Say: My Lord, increase me in knowledge" (20:114).

Here is a strange fact for a man supposedly writing his own scripture. Moses (a) is named 136 times in the Qur'an; Muhammad, four. Mary (a), the mother of Jesus (a), is named thirty-four times and has a sura of her own. The Prophet's mother, his wives and his beloved daughter, Lady Fatima (a), are never named at all. One of the four reminds believers that he will die: "Muhammad is only a messenger; messengers have passed away before him" (3:144).

The Qur'an could even fall silent on him. Once, revelation stopped for days, fifteen in one early report. His enemies were delighted: "His Lord has said goodbye to him and turned against him. If this were from God, it would keep coming."[11] A man composing his own scripture could have solved that problem in an afternoon. He waited.

When the silence broke, it broke with a sura: "By the light of morning, and by the night when it lies still: your Lord has not said goodbye to you, nor has He turned against you." A few lines later it reminds him of his childhood: "Did He not find you an orphan and take you in?" (93:1–3, 6).

How do Shia Muslims read these verses? They believe that God protected the Prophet from sin and error (*'isma*), as Chapter 3 explained. A command is not an accusation, and a warning that begins "had he..." or "if you..." describes what never happened. For verses that sound like a rebuke, the Imams taught a principle. "The Qur'an came down," said Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (a), the sixth Imam (d. 765 CE), "in the manner of 'It is you I mean, but listen, O neighbour'": an Arab proverb for speaking to one person so that another will hear.[12] Picture a ruler who announces a new law by addressing his own son in public. If even the prince is bound, everyone is.

When the caliph al-Ma'mun asked about the verse "God has pardoned you: why did you give them leave?" (Qur'an 9:43), Imam al-Rida (a) answered that God addressed His Prophet with it but meant his community.[13] One verse the Imams cited makes the point by itself: "Had We not held you steady, you would have come close to leaning toward them a little" (17:74). It does not say that he leaned. It says that God held him steady, and so he did not. Leading Shia commentators read "He frowned and turned away" (80:1) with the same care. The sura never names the man who frowned, and the Qur'an had already praised the Prophet's "tremendous character" (68:4). A report from Imam al-Sadiq says it was revealed about a man of the Umayyad clan who was sitting with him; al-Tabrisi (d. 1154 CE) allows that it addresses the Prophet, since frowning at a blind man who could not see it was no sin.[14] Either way, the core point stands. The Qur'an addresses its messenger, instructs him and binds him, in public. An author writing for his own glory would not.

> **PAUSE AND RECALL**
>
> *Without looking back, name three things the Qur'an tells its own messenger to say or do. How do Shia Muslims read the verses that seem to rebuke him?*

◆

What would a forger have done?

Suppose Muhammad (s) made the Qur'an up. What would we expect? A forger wants something: money, power, comfort. Over twenty-three years of exile, war and grief, he contradicts himself. And he hedges his predictions. At each point the record shows the reverse.

Quraysh tried a bargain. Four of their leaders, al-Walid among them, stopped him with an offer. "Muhammad, come: let us worship what you worship, and you worship what we worship... If ours is the truth, you will have your share of it. If yours is, we will have ours." The answer came as a sura: "Say: You who deny the truth, I do not worship what you worship... You have your religion, and I have mine" (Qur'an 109:1–2, 6).[15] "The world was offered to him," Imam Ali (a) remembered, "and he refused to accept it." He ate sitting on the ground, mended his own sandals and patched his own clothes.[16] In the tenth year of his mission he lost his wife, Lady Khadija (a), and his uncle and protector Abu Talib; he called it the Year of Sorrow.[17] The verses kept coming, and he kept going.

The Qur'an came down piece by piece over some twenty-three years, through persecution and power, victory and defeat. Yet it stakes its claim on its own consistency: "Will they not reflect on the Qur'an? Had it come from anyone but God, they would have found much in it that contradicts itself" (Qur'an 4:82). The claim is about coherence, not an unchanging style. The early suras of Mecca are short and blazing; the later ones of Medina are long and full of law. The message does not change. The orphan who must not be crushed in an early sura (93:9) is the orphan whose property the laws of Medina protect (4:2).

Imam Ali (a) once turned this verse on the judges of his day. One judge rules on a case by his own opinion, he said, and another rules the opposite on the same case. Then both go to the ruler who appointed them, and he approves every verdict, "and yet their God is one, their Prophet is one, their Book is one!" Did God, he asked, command them to disagree?

IMAM ALI (A), THE FIRST IMAM

أَمْ أَنْزَلَ اللهُ سُبْحَانَهُ دِيناً تَامّاً فَقَصَّرَ الرَّسُولُ (صلى الله عليه وآله) عَنْ تَبْلِيغِهِ وَأَدَائِهِ؟ ... وَذَكَرَ أَنَّ الكِتَابَ يُصَدِّقُ بَعْضُهُ بَعْضاً، وَأَنَّهُ لاَ اخْتِلاَفَ فِيهِ، فَقَالَ سُبْحَانَهُ: ﴿وَلَوْ كَانَ مِنْ عِندِ غَيْرِ اللَّهِ لَوَجَدُوا فِيهِ اخْتِلَافًا كَثِيرًا﴾

Or did God send down a complete religion, and the Messenger fall short in delivering it? ... God has told us that the Book confirms itself, one part bearing out another, and that there is no inconsistency in it. For He says: "Had it come from anyone but God, they would have found much in it that contradicts itself."[18]

Nahj al-Balagha · Sermon 18 · **Compiled text, not graded here**

The Qur'an also took a risk no careful forger would take: a public prediction with a time limit. Most commentators date the sura called The Romans to Mecca, when Persia seemed unstoppable. It had taken Damascus and, in 614 CE, Jerusalem, carrying off the relic Christians revered as the True Cross. The Meccans saw an omen: the Romans of Byzantium had a scripture and had been crushed, and so would the Muslims be.[19] Then came the verses: "The Romans have been beaten in the nearest land. Yet after their defeat, they will win, within a few years" (Qur'an 30:2–4). The Arabic for "a few," *bidʿ*, means a handful: between three and ten, by one early grammarian's definition. In 622 the emperor Heraclius struck back. In December 627 he crushed the Persian army near Nineveh, and in 628 Persia sued for peace.[20]

On its most natural reading, then, the Qur'an staked its word on a war that looked lost, and the war turned. That is one striking sign, not a proof on its own. Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a), the fifth Imam (d. c. 733 CE), read the passage differently, in a report with a reliable chain that places its revelation in Medina. Its inner meaning (*ta'wil*), he said, was that the Persians, the victors of that day, would themselves be overcome by the believers, as happened years later.[21]

A genius can write beautifully, and a sincere man can be sincerely wrong. But a theory has to explain the whole pattern. At forty, this man had no scripture or verse to his name. His book commands and binds him, falls silent when he needs it, and forbids him to change a word. He refuses a fortune and a truce. Its teaching holds

together for twenty-three years, and its challenge still stands. Muslims find one explanation that fits it all: the one the Qur'an gives for itself.

◆

Has the Qur'an reached us as it was revealed?

A book can come from God and still be damaged on its way to us. Is the Qur'an we hold the one Muhammad (s) recited? The Qur'an makes a promise about that.

إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا ٱلذِّكْرَ وَإِنَّا لَهُۥ لَحَٰفِظُونَ ﴿٩﴾

It is We who sent down the Reminder, and We who keep it safe.

QUR'AN 15:9 · SURAT AL-HIJR

NOTICE Both halves are emphatic in Arabic: "It is We who sent… and We who keep it safe." The One who sent the Reminder down also takes charge of keeping it.

Muslims of every school recite the same Arabic Qur'an, with the same 114 suras in the same order. Shia Muslims read, print and memorise the same *mushaf* as everyone else, and their Imams told them to recite complete suras from it in the daily prayers.[22]

Yet Shia Muslims are often asked whether they believe the Qur'an was changed. From the earliest centuries, the great majority of Shia scholars have answered no. Al-Shaykh al-Saduq (d. 991 CE), one of the early masters of hadith, wrote: "Our belief is that the Qur'an God sent down to His Prophet Muhammad is what lies between the two covers." Anyone who claims the Shia believe it was longer, he added, "is a liar."[23] Al-Sharif al-Murtada argued that the Qur'an's transmission is as certain as the existence of great cities. Slip a new chapter into the famous grammar of Sibawayh, the eighth-century grammarian, and scholars would spot it at once. The Qur'an, he said, was guarded far more closely.[24] Al-Shaykh al-Tusi (d. 1067 CE), al-Tabrisi and, in modern times, 'Allama Tabataba'i (d. 1981 CE) and Ayatollah al-Khu'i (d. 1992 CE) taught the same. Al-Khu'i called it the accepted view among Muslims.[25]

Why does the question come up at all? The hadith collections of every school hold reports that, read on their own, seem to say otherwise. A minority of scholars, Shia and Sunni, took them at face value. One report in al-Kafi, the great Shia hadith collection, says the Qur'an Gabriel brought had seventeen thousand verses, against 6,236 in

the *mushaf*. Al-Saduq explained that much was revealed to the Prophet besides the Qur'an, and that all of it together would come to seventeen thousand. Many of the other reports have weak chains of narrators, and some use "thus it was revealed" for revealed explanation, not missing text.[26]

In the Imams' own language, distorting a book usually meant twisting its meaning. Imam al-Baqir (a) wrote of people who "kept its letters upright and distorted its limits: they pass it on, but do not keep it."[27] The Imams also told their followers to recite the Qur'an as everyone else did. When a man recited some words differently, Imam al-Sadiq (a) stopped him: "Read as the people read, until the Qa'im [the awaited Imam] rises."[28]

The strongest answer comes from the Imams themselves. They made the Qur'an the test of every report, including reports about them.

> **IMAM JA'FAR AL-SADIQ (A), THE SIXTH IMAM**
>
> كُلُّ شَيْءٍ مَرْدُودٌ إِلَى الْكِتَابِ وَالسُّنَّةِ وَكُلُّ حَدِيثٍ لا يُوَافِقُ كِتَابَ اللهِ فَهُوَ زُخْرُفٌ.
>
> Everything is to be referred back to the Book and the Sunna. Every report that does not agree with the Book of God is gilded falsehood.[29]
>
> al-Kafi 1 · Excellence of Knowledge · ch. 22 · no. 3 · **Reliable chain**

The Prophet (s) had said the same in a sermon at Mina, near Mecca: "Whatever comes to you from me that agrees with the Book of God, I said it. Whatever comes to you that contradicts the Book of God, I did not say it."[30] A bent ruler is useless for checking straight lines. As 'Allama Tabataba'i pointed out, no one would make a corrupted book the test of everything else.[31] The Prophet's great bequest points the same way. He left his community "two weighty things," the Book of God and his family, and said the two "will not separate" (see Chapter 8).[32] The Imams did not compete with the Book. They were its living interpreters, and they kept sending people back to it.

For them the Qur'an was never a museum piece to defend. It was a daily companion. Imam al-Sadiq called it "God's covenant with His creation" and said that a Muslim should look into that covenant and read fifty verses of it each day.[33] Imam Ali described what such reading does: "No one sits with this Qur'an without rising from it with more or with less: more guidance, or less blindness."[34]

It changed whole peoples, too. In Medina, the Prophet's new home, the Aws and the Khazraj had been bitter enemies; no two Arab tribes, al-Tabrisi notes, were more

hostile. The Qur'an credits God with their reconciliation: "Had you spent everything on earth, you could not have brought their hearts together; it was God who brought them together" (Qur'an 8:63).[35] "In every age it is new," Imam al-Sadiq said, "and for every people it is fresh."[36]

> *"No one sits with this Qur'an without rising from it with more or with less: more guidance, or less blindness.*
>
> IMAM ALI (A)

Al-Walid ibn al-Mughira heard the Qur'an, admitted that nothing rose above it, and then called it the word of a mortal. Every reader since has faced the same choice, and no chapter can make it for anyone. It can only suggest where to begin: with the book itself, read slowly, a little each day. When Imam Zayn al-Abidin (a), the Prophet's great-grandson and the fourth Imam (d. c. 713 CE), finished reading it, he thanked God for a Book "sent down as a light," made "a guardian over every book" before it, and asked that it be "a ladder on which we climb to the place of safety."[37] That is the invitation: not to win an argument, but to climb.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. The Qur'an claims to be God's own speech, and stakes that claim on a challenge no one has met.
2. Its messenger lived forty trusted years among his people without reciting or writing any scripture.
3. The Qur'an commands and binds its own messenger; Shia Muslims read these verses alongside his protection from error.
4. Its teaching holds together across twenty-three years, and the Imams made it the test of every report.
5. Shia scholars overwhelmingly hold that the Qur'an in our hands is complete, and the Imams urged reading it daily.

NEXT TIME · GO FURTHER

Next time: *Does Islam Contradict Science?* The Qur'an tells its readers to study the sky, the rain and their own bodies. Is it a science textbook? Must a believer choose between faith and the laboratory?

Go further:

Courses: The Miraculous Qur'an and Introduction to Tajweed, Level 1 courses at Tasneem Institute (tasneeminstitute.org/courses/the-miraculous-quran; tasneeminstitute.org/courses/introduction-to-tajweed)

Read: "The Qur'an and duʿāʾ.", a short introduction in Tasneem's *Discovering Islam* series (tasneeminstitute.org/blog/discovering-islam/the-quran-and-dua). For a deeper dive, Imam Ali on the Qur'an, *Nahj al-Balagha*, Sermon 176.

Watch: Invitation to Islam, Episode 2, "Why the Qur'an Is the Word of God" (13 min).

In the circle

LOOK BACK

1. Why, according to Chapter 3, would a wise God send messengers? Name one reason.
2. In Chapter 1, what did Salman's two trays of dates test?
3. Part One asks, "Is it true?" If someone said a book came from God, what would you check first?

TALK ABOUT IT

WARM-UP

1. Think of a book, a song or a speech that changed how you saw something. What did it do to you?

UNDERSTAND

2. What does the Qur'an challenge its doubters to do (Qur'an 2:23–24), and why do the words "and you never will" matter?
3. How do Shia Muslims read verses that seem to rebuke the Prophet, such as Qur'an 9:43, without denying his protection from error?

REFLECT

4. Al-Walid admitted that nothing rose above the Qur'an, yet called it "the word of a mortal." Why might someone see strong evidence and still say no?
5. Moses is named 136 times in the Qur'an, Muhammad four. What, if anything, does that suggest to you about who wrote it?

APPLY

6. Imam al-Sadiq taught that every report must be tested against the Book. What is one claim about Islam you have heard, and how could you check it this week?

GO DEEPER

7. Read Imam Ali on the judges who contradict each other (Nahj al-Balagha, Sermon 18; compiled text, not graded). How does he use Qur'an 4:82? What does his argument assume about the Book?
8. Read al-Kafi, vol. 1, Book of the Excellence of Knowledge, ch. 22, nos. 3 and 5 (reliable chains). What do they ask believers to do with reports, and what does that imply about the Qur'an?

CARRY IT HOME

Choose one way in this week:

☐ **Notice:** When someone says "the Qur'an says…", online or in conversation, ask "Where?" Look the verse up and read the verses around it.

☐ **Do:** Try Imam al-Sadiq's fifty verses a day for one week, in any translation, or listen to a recitation while you follow the English. Note one line that stays with you.

☐ **Learn:** Read two short suras that appear in this chapter: Sura 93, *The Morning Light*, which broke the silence, and Sura 109, *Those Who Deny the Truth*, the answer to the bargain. What do they show about the man who recited them?

Aim. Help the circle weigh the Qur'an's claim to be God's word as a case to examine, not a slogan to accept.

Protect this question. No. 4: why someone might see strong evidence and still say no. Sceptics, seekers and believers can all answer it honestly, and it shows how conviction really works.

Answer notes.

- *Q2.* To produce even one sura like it (2:23), a result the verse predicts will never come. Its opponents answered with persecution and war instead. See "What exactly is the Qur'an claiming?"
- *Q3.* Through the Imams' principle "It is you I mean, but listen, O neighbour": such verses address the Prophet but are meant for the community, and 17:74 itself says God kept him firm. Note also that the reproach in 8:67–68 is in the plural ("you desire… you took"). See "Why would an author take orders from his own book?"

Likely questions.

- *"Isn't it copied from the Bible?"* See the fair-question box.
- *"Do Shia Muslims have a different Qur'an?"* No. See the last section. If someone cites Mirza Husayn al-Nuri's nineteenth-century book claiming omissions, explain that it represents the minority view the chapter describes.
- *"Didn't Joseph serve the Hyksos 'shepherd kings'?"* That is speculation; no one knows when Joseph lived. The box makes a smaller, safer point.
- *"What about the embryo and the mountains?"* Keep it for Chapter 5, which weighs such claims with care.

Watch for. Don't score points off the Bible or off Sunni collections; describe each as its own readers would. Those who know no Arabic may feel shut out, so point to what survives translation. Never ask anyone to recite.

Bring. A Qur'an with a modern translation, and a short recitation of Sura 93 to play at the start.

MY THREAD · CHAPTER 04

If a book really came from God, how would I want to read it, and what would I want to ask it first?

MY QUESTION FOR THE BOX

05

Does Islam Contradict Science?

Science explains the world. It cannot explain why there is one.

قُلْ سِيرُوا۟ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ فَٱنظُرُوا۟ كَيْفَ بَدَأَ ٱلْخَلْقَ ثُمَّ ٱللَّهُ يُنشِئُ ٱلنَّشْأَةَ ٱلْءَاخِرَةَ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَىْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٢٠﴾

Say, "Travel through the earth and see how He began creation." Then God will bring creation into being a second time. God has power over all things.

QUR'AN 29:20 · SURAT AL-'ANKABUT

WATCH · EPISODE 12 · 10:14

youtu.be/Bh883Xso_OI

In the video: why a shepherd with no laboratory is no further from God (9:08)

Reading time: about 15 minutes

You have probably watched a storm like this. The clouds come in low and dark. Lightning splits the sky, a heartbeat later the thunder rolls in, and everyone hurries for shelter.

Thirteen centuries ago, one man would look up at such moments. He was Ali ibn al-Husayn (a), a great-grandson of the Prophet Muhammad (s), remembered as Zayn al-Abidin, "the adornment of the worshippers" (d. c. 713 CE, 95 AH). Shia Muslims honour him as the fourth Imam, one of the twelve guides from the Prophet's family. Whenever he saw clouds and lightning and heard the thunder, he prayed. His words were kept, with dozens of his other prayers, in a book called *al-Sahifa al-Sajjadiyya*:

"O God, these two are two of Your signs, and these two are two of Your helpers. They race to obey You, bringing a mercy that helps or a punishment that harms."[1]

Today we can say a great deal about what he was watching. Inside a storm cloud, rising ice crystals collide with pellets of soft hail, and the collisions pull electric charges apart. When enough charge has built up, it leaps across the sky as lightning. The air along its path heats so suddenly that it bursts outward, and the shock wave reaches us as thunder.[2]

So which is it? Is lightning a sign from God, or a spark of electricity? Was the Imam's prayer a guess from before the age of science, to be politely retired now that we know better? Many people assume they have to choose: the laboratory or the prayer mat, the forecast or the prayer. Do they?

THE BIG QUESTION

Do I have to choose between science and faith?

Have you ever wondered whether science has made God unnecessary? What you would say to a friend who calls religion the enemy of progress? Or, if you grew up with the Qur'an, whether the videos claiming it predicted modern science are telling the whole story?

This chapter follows the Qur'an and the Imams of the Prophet's family as they send reason out to study the world. It asks what science can explain, what faith explains, and why the two need not compete.

WORDS TO KNOW

ʿaql (عقل) · *AQL* · reason, the intellect; in the Imams' teaching, God's best-loved creation and His "inner proof."

āya (آية), plural **āyāt** (آيات) · *AA-ya, aa-YAAT* · a sign: a verse of the Qur'an, or anything in nature that points to God.

ḥujja (حجة) · *HUJ-ja* · proof: what settles God's case with people; outwardly the prophets and Imams, inwardly reason.

ʿilm (علم) · *ILM* · knowledge; in the hadith chiefly knowledge of faith, and by extension all true knowledge.

sabab (سبب), plural **asbāb** (أسباب) · *SA-bab, as-BAAB* · a cause: the means through which God works in the world.

iʿjāz ʿilmī (إعجاز علمي) · *ij-AAZ ILM-ee* · "scientific miracle": the modern claim that verses foretold scientific discoveries.

◆

Does faith ask you to switch off your mind?

Many people picture faith and reason as rivals: faith believes without asking, and reason asks until belief runs out. The Qur'an treats an idle mind as a failure. "In God's sight the worst of creatures are the deaf and the mute who do not use their reason," it says of people who hear but will not listen (Qur'an 8:21–22). The people of the Fire, it says, will have this regret: "If only we had listened, or used our reason, we would not be among the people of the Blaze" (Qur'an 67:10).

What sets human beings apart is reason (*ʿaql*), a mind that asks how things work and why they matter. Shia Muslims treasure *al-Kafi*, a great collection of hadith, the recorded words of the Prophet (s) and the Imams, compiled by al-Kulayni (d. 941 CE). Before any chapter on prayer or law, its first book is about reason.

Its very first report comes from Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a), the fifth Imam (d. c. 733 CE). When God created reason, the Imam said, He told it: "I have created nothing more beloved to Me than you... It is you I command and you I forbid; you I punish and you I reward."[3] Reason is the part of a person that God addresses. Faith is not something done to us while the mind waits outside.

Imam Musa al-Kazim (a), the seventh Imam (d. 799 CE), turned this teaching into a lesson for his student Hisham ibn al-Hakam, a gifted debater from Kufa, in Iraq. He recited a run of verses about nature: sky and earth, night and day, ships at sea, wind and cloud and rain reviving dead land (Qur'an 2:164). Then the stars, a human life from dust to old age, and palms and vines that drink one water yet taste different (16:12; 40:67; 13:4). And lightning.

وَمِنْ ءَايَٰتِهِۦ يُرِيكُمُ ٱلْبَرْقَ خَوْفًا وَطَمَعًا وَيُنَزِّلُ مِنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ مَآءً
فَيُحْيِۦ بِهِ ٱلْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَآ إِنَّ فِى ذَٰلِكَ لَءَايَٰتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ يَعْقِلُونَ

﴿٢٤﴾

Among His signs: He shows you the lightning, in fear and in hope, and sends down water from the sky, and by it brings the earth back to life after its death. In that are signs for people who use their reason.[4]

QUR'AN 30:24 · SURAT AL-RUM

NOTICE One flash, two feelings. Imam al-Rida (a), the eighth Imam, explained them: fear for the traveller, hope for the one at home. And notice "by it": God revives the land by means of the rain.

Each verse ends with an appeal to reason. Later in the same lesson (its chain is incomplete), the Imam summed it up. "God has two proofs over people," he said, "an outer proof and an inner proof. The outer proof is the messengers, the prophets and the Imams. The inner proof is the intellect."[5] A proof (*hujja*) is evidence that settles a case. Reason is not religion's rival but one of its two witnesses, and the Qur'an keeps sending it outdoors.

◆

What is science looking at?

The Qur'an uses one word for a verse of scripture and for a thing in nature that points to God: *aya*, a sign. Night and day, a cloud, a seed, a human face: all are signs, in a language anyone can learn to read. The Qur'an even describes the people who read them best.

إِنَّ فِي خَلْقِ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ وَٱخْتِلَٰفِ ٱلَّيْلِ وَٱلنَّهَارِ لَءَايَٰتٍ
لِّأُو۟لِى ٱلْأَلْبَٰبِ ﴿١٩٠﴾ ٱلَّذِينَ يَذْكُرُونَ ٱللَّهَ قِيَٰمًا وَقُعُودًا وَعَلَىٰ
جُنُوبِهِمْ وَيَتَفَكَّرُونَ فِي خَلْقِ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ رَبَّنَا مَا خَلَقْتَ
هَٰذَا بَٰطِلًا سُبْحَٰنَكَ فَقِنَا عَذَابَ ٱلنَّارِ ﴿١٩١﴾

In the creation of the heavens and the earth, and in the way night and day take turns, there are signs for people of insight: those who remember God standing, sitting and lying on their sides, and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth. "Our Lord, You did not create all this for nothing. Glory be to You. Shield us from the punishment of the Fire."

QUR'AN 3:190–191 · SURAT AL ʿIMRAN

NOTICE One passage holds two activities that people often keep apart: remembering God and studying what He made. Here the studying ends in a prayer: "You did not create all this for nothing."

So Islam sends people out to look: at the planets, the wind, the trees, clean water running in a stream, and at themselves (Qur'an 41:53). The closer you look, the more one truth comes into view. The Maker of the tree and the wind, the river and the cells of your body, the planets in their orbits, is One. There is beauty in that unity, and once you see it, you keep finding it.

Imam Ali (a), the Prophet's cousin and the first Imam (d. 661 CE), once turned a sermon toward an ant. "Look at the ant," he told his listeners, "so small in body and so delicate in form." He described how it drags a grain to its nest, gathers in the heat for the cold, and finds its living even in dry stone. The sermon survives in *Nahj al-Balagha*, the classic collection of his words. Then he looked closer.

IMAM ALI (A), THE FIRST IMAM

وَلَوْ فَكَّرْتَ فِي مَجَارِي أُكْلِهَا، وَفِي عُلْوِهَا وَسُفْلِهَا، وَمَا فِي الجَوْفِ مِنْ شَرَاسِيفِ بَطْنِهَا، وَمَا فِي الرَّأْسِ مِنْ عَيْنِهَا وَأُذُنِهَا، لَقَضَيْتَ مِنْ خَلْقِهَا عَجَباً، وَلَقِيتَ مِنْ وَصْفِهَا تَعَباً ... وَلَوْ ضَرَبْتَ فِي مَذَاهِبِ فِكْرِكَ لِتَبْلُغَ غَايَاتِهِ، مَا دَلَّتْكَ الدَّلَالَةُ إِلاَّ عَلَى أَنَّ فَاطِرَ النَّمْلَةِ هُوَ فَاطِرُ النَّخْلَةِ، لِدَقِيقِ تَفْصِيلِ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ، وَغَامِضِ اخْتِلاَفِ كُلِّ حَيٍّ، وَمَا الْجَلِيلُ وَاللَّطِيفُ، وَالثَّقِيلُ وَالخَفِيفُ، وَالْقَوِيُّ وَالضَّعِيفُ، فِي خَلْقِهِ إِلاَّ سَوَاءٌ.

If you thought about the channels its food runs through, its upper parts and its lower, the ribbed walls of its belly, and the eye and ear in its head, you would come away amazed at how it was made, and weary from trying to describe it. ... Follow your thinking down every path to its end, and the evidence will lead you only here: the Maker of the ant is the Maker of the palm tree, for everything is made in fine detail, and every living thing differs in subtle ways. The great and the slight, the heavy and the light, the strong and the weak: all are alike in His creation.[6]

Nahj al-Balagha · Sermon 185 · **Compiled text, not graded here**

This is a naturalist's eye at work: the Imam observes, describes and wonders, and only then concludes. Science does the same with finer tools, testing its ideas again and again. A biologist who spends years on the ant's nervous system does with a microscope what the Imam did with his eyes. Nothing in his sermon tells her to stop.

But doesn't explaining a thing explain God away? Look again at the lightning verse: God revives the land "by it," by means of the rain. The Qur'an speaks this way again and again: winds stir up clouds, and "by it" God brings out every kind of fruit (Qur'an 30:48; 7:57). God works through causes (*asbab*), as a report from Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (a), the sixth Imam (d. 765 CE), also teaches (Chapter 6).[7] Science studies those causes. To a believer, a meteorologist explaining a storm is describing how God brings the rain.

Ask why a kettle is whistling. One true answer: the stove has boiled the water. Another: a friend has come over, and you are making tea. The answers do not compete; they answer different questions. Science asks how one part of nature leads to another. Why there is a nature at all, with laws to discover, is another question, which

Chapter 2 took up. And the two answers can agree for a deeper reason: one God made the world and the minds that study it.

A FAIR QUESTION

Isn't God just a name for what science hasn't explained yet?

"People once thought thunder was the anger of the gods. Now we know it is electricity. Every time science explains something, God shrinks a little. Won't He disappear one day?"

That would follow if God were a gap in our knowledge. But look where the Qur'an points: not to mysteries, but to the most ordinary things there are. Night following day, rain on dry ground, ships on the sea, a child growing in the womb (Qur'an 2:164; 23:12–14). The better we understand them, the more there is to see. In the prayer of Imam Zayn al-Abidin (a), the storm is a sign not because no one can explain it, but because its powers "race to obey" God. A God who works through causes is not pushed out when the causes are found. Finding them is finding how He works. And one question is no gap that science will close someday: why is there a world with laws to discover at all? Every experiment assumes that world. None can explain why it exists.

PAUSE AND RECALL

Without looking back: what are the "two proofs" in Imam al-Kazim's teaching? And in what sense is a storm a "sign"?

◆

How does a mind grow?

Put a sixty-year-old and an eighteen-year-old in the same crisis, and you will usually see a difference. The older person is not always cleverer, but has spent decades gathering experience, sifting it, dropping what failed and keeping what worked. Imam Ali (a) told his son, Imam al-Hasan (a): "Reason is holding on to experience, and the best of your experiences is the one that taught you a lesson."[8] He also said, "An old man's judgement is dearer to me than a young man's vigour."[9]

The mind works less like a storage cupboard than like a computer that learns. Train it on good information and hard problems, and its judgement sharpens. Train it on information that does harm, and it learns the wrong lessons. A mind that is challenged and fed keeps growing, and keeps its footing when society shifts around it. A

mind left idle grows dull: it understands the world less well, and may find the way to its Lord harder too.

Experience alone does not make anyone wise. Some people repeat the same mistake for forty years. When his companions were discussing reason and cultivation, Imam Ali al-Rida (a), the eighth Imam (d. 818 CE), drew a careful line. "Reason is a gift from God," he said, "and cultivation is hard work. Whoever works at cultivation will master it. Whoever puts on a show of reason only adds to his ignorance."[10] Our capacity is given. What we make of it is up to us.

Reason also knows where its own map ends. Imam al-Sadiq (a) was once asked whether reason alone was enough.

IMAM JA'FAR AL-SADIQ (A), THE SIXTH IMAM

فَبِالْعَقْلِ عَرَفَ الْعِبَادُ خَالِقَهُمْ ... وَاسْتَدَلُّوا بِعُقُولِهِمْ عَلَى مَا رَأَوْا مِنْ خَلْقِهِ مِنْ سَمَائِهِ وَأَرْضِهِ وَشَمْسِهِ وَقَمَرِهِ وَلَيْلِهِ وَنَهَارِهِ ... قِيلَ لَهُ فَهَلْ يَكْتَفِي الْعِبَادُ بِالْعَقْلِ دُونَ غَيْرِهِ قَالَ إِنَّ الْعَاقِلَ ... عَلِمَ أَنَّ لِخَالِقِهِ مَحَبَّةً وَأَنَّ لَهُ كَرَاهِيَةً وَأَنَّ لَهُ طَاعَةً وَأَنَّ لَهُ مَعْصِيَةً فَلَمْ يَجِدْ عَقْلَهُ يَدُلُّهُ عَلَى ذَلِكَ وَعَلِمَ أَنَّهُ لا يُوصَلُ إِلَيْهِ إِلا بِالْعِلْمِ وَطَلَبِهِ ... فَوَجَبَ عَلَى الْعَاقِلِ طَلَبُ الْعِلْمِ وَالادَبِ الَّذِي لا قِوَامَ لَهُ إِلا بِهِ.

Through reason people came to know their Creator... By their reason they drew conclusions from what they saw of His creation: His sky and His earth, His sun and His moon, His night and His day... He was asked, "Can people make do with reason alone?" He said: "The reasoning person... knows that his Creator loves some things and dislikes others, and that He may be obeyed or disobeyed. Yet he does not find his reason pointing him to them, and he knows they can be reached only through knowledge and seeking it... So it is a duty for the reasoning person to seek knowledge, and the discipline without which he has no footing."[11]

al-Kafi 1 · Intellect & Ignorance · no. 35 · **Unverified chain**

Reason reads the sky, finds its Maker and sees that He must care how we live. Then it looks for the details, what exactly He loves and forbids, and finds blank pages. So the

reason that found God sends us out to learn, from revelation and from those who can teach it. That knowledge (*'ilm*) is first of all knowing how to live before God. But Imam Ali (a) opened the door wide, calling wisdom the believer's lost property (Chapter 25).[12]

Muslim scholars took him at his word. The Qur'an gave birth to whole sciences, from Arabic grammar to law, and gave every other inquiry a purpose. Astronomers and physicians also drew on Greek, Persian and Indian learning translated into Arabic, then tested and improved it. In the thirteenth century the Shia theologian Nasir al-Din al-Tusi (d. 1274 CE) wrote a handbook of belief still studied today. He also persuaded a Mongol ruler to build an observatory at Maragha, in Iran. Chapter 25 tells that story.[13]

◆

Does the Qur'an predict modern science?

Search online for "the Qur'an and science," and bold claims soon appear: the Qur'an described the embryo before the microscope, and the expanding universe before the telescope. Such "scientific miracles" (*i'jaz 'ilmi*) became popular in the 1970s and 1980s, often shared out of real love for the Qur'an.[14] They deserve an honest look: what do the verses say, and what don't they say?

Start with what the Qur'an says about itself. It calls itself "a clarification of everything," then adds, "and guidance, mercy and good news for those who submit" (Qur'an 16:89). In a report with an incomplete chain, Imam al-Rida (a) explains that in it God "made clear the lawful and the unlawful, the limits and the rulings, and all that people need, in full."[15] Everything needed for guidance and law is there. It is not a physics textbook. Now, the five most quoted passages.

وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا ٱلْإِنسَٰنَ مِن سُلَٰلَةٍ مِّن طِينٍ ﴿١٢﴾ ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَٰهُ نُطْفَةً
فِى قَرَارٍ مَّكِينٍ ﴿١٣﴾ ثُمَّ خَلَقْنَا ٱلنُّطْفَةَ عَلَقَةً فَخَلَقْنَا ٱلْعَلَقَةَ
مُضْغَةً فَخَلَقْنَا ٱلْمُضْغَةَ عِظَٰمًا فَكَسَوْنَا ٱلْعِظَٰمَ لَحْمًا ثُمَّ أَنشَأْنَٰهُ
خَلْقًا ءَاخَرَ فَتَبَارَكَ ٱللَّهُ أَحْسَنُ ٱلْخَٰلِقِينَ ﴿١٤﴾

We created the human being from an extract of clay. Then We placed him as a drop in a secure resting place. Then We made the drop a clot, and made the clot a lump of flesh, and made the lump bones, and clothed the bones with flesh. Then We brought him into being as another creation. So blessed is God, the best of creators.

QUR'AN 23:12–14 · SURAT AL-MU'MINUN

NOTICE Count the stages, each joined by "then" or "and." Then see where the passage ends: not with a fact to memorise but with praise, "So blessed is God, the best of creators."

The embryo. The passage describes growth in stages, "creation after creation" (Qur'an 39:6). That is notable: as late as the eighteenth century, many European scientists pictured the embryo as a ready-made miniature. But the stages were not hidden knowledge. The Greek physician Galen (d. c. 216 CE) described four of them, and Aristotle (d. 322 BCE) taught that the body's parts form one after another.[16] Classical Shia commentators read *'alaqa*, the "clot," as a clot of blood; "leech-like" is a modern reading.[17]

The heaven. "We built the heaven with might, and We are *musi'un*" (Qur'an 51:47). The last word can mean "expanding it," "making it vast" or "possessed of vast power," and translators divide.[18] "Expanding" fits strikingly with what Georges Lemaître (1927) and Edwin Hubble (1929) found: distant galaxies are moving apart. Cosmologists now trace that expansion back about 13.8 billion years, to an extremely hot, dense state.[19] *Consonant with* is fair; *predicted* is not.

The mountains. The Qur'an calls mountains "pegs" (Qur'an 78:7), set firm in the earth "lest it sway with you" (16:15). Imam Ali (a) says God "pegged with rocks the

swaying of His earth."[20] A peg is mostly hidden, and mountains do have deep roots, several times deeper than their height, as the astronomer George Airy proposed in 1855. But the verses speak of a steady "cradle" for life (78:6). They do not say that mountains stop earthquakes.[21]

Rain and springs. Winds raise the clouds, rain pours from them, and God threads the water "through the earth as springs" (Qur'an 30:48; 24:43; 39:21). It is a coherent picture: for centuries afterwards, many writers thought springs were fed by seawater from below, even after Bernard Palissy argued in 1580 that rain was enough. Yet parts of the water cycle had been described before. Aristotle wrote of the sun drawing water up as vapour, and the Bible says, "All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full" (Ecclesiastes 1:7, KJV).[22] The Qur'an never mentions evaporation explicitly.

The two seas. God "let the two waters flow, this one sweet and fresh, that one salt and bitter, and set between them a barrier" (Qur'an 25:53; 55:19–20). Where a river meets the sea, the lighter fresh water spreads over the salt, and the two mix only gradually. It is observable, and the Qur'an turns it into a question: "Is there a god besides God?" (27:61). The story that the oceanographer Jacques Cousteau (d. 1997) became a Muslim after "discovering" it is untrue; his funeral Mass was held at Notre-Dame in Paris.[23]

Put the five side by side and a pattern appears. Several fit modern knowledge strikingly. Yet none says anything its first hearers could not understand, and every one is framed as a sign for gratitude and thought, not a leak of hidden science. The scholar Zafar Ishaq Ansari (d. 2016) notes that the idea that the Qur'an holds "all knowledge, including scientific" knowledge has not been a mainstream view among Muslim scholars.[24] Tie a verse to today's theory, and you make the Qur'an hostage to the next textbook. Muslims hold it to be God's word for other reasons, which Chapter 4 explores.

Imam al-Sadiq (a) left a rule protecting both sides. "God singled out His servants with two verses of His Book," he said: "that they should not speak until they know, and should not reject what they do not know."[25] It stops the sceptic from dismissing what he has not studied, and the enthusiast from announcing that the Qur'an "predicted" what it does not say.

And if a finding seems to clash with a verse? Revelation and sound reason are both proofs from one God, so they cannot truly contradict each other. An apparent clash calls for three questions. Is the finding established, or still a working theory? Is this reading of the verse the only fair one? The Imams read some words figuratively when reason required it. Asked about God's "hands" (Qur'an 38:75), Imam al-Baqir (a) said:

"The hand, in the speech of the Arabs, means power and favour."[26] And is the honest answer, for now, patience?

◆

Do you need a laboratory to reach God?

Science finds out how something works and puts it to use: it purifies water, lights homes and makes medicines. But the ingenuity that purifies water can also poison it. A mind that can heal can also manipulate, waste and destroy; power magnifies whatever intention holds it. So the Qur'an pairs its delight in creation with limits on how we use it: "Eat and drink, but do not waste" (Qur'an 7:31). Chapter 21 returns to that trust.

Can science help the soul? It can bring a person to the doorstep. Learn how a single cell grows into a body of trillions, or how each cell switches its genes on and off. You may catch yourself thinking: *what an astonishing system God has placed inside us.* Learning has turned into gratitude. But the doorstep is not the house. Spiritual growth begins when we see how limited the physical world is, and turn toward the One who is not.

What about people with no laboratory at all: a Bedouin in the desert, or a shepherd in the mountains of Afghanistan who has never looked through a microscope? Is the way to God narrower for them? The Qur'an answers: "God does not charge any soul beyond its capacity" (Qur'an 2:286). Imam al-Rida (a) once said that "no weight is given to religious people who have no reason." A companion objected that some good believers lack such minds. "They are not among those whom God addressed," the Imam replied.[27] God asks each person only for what He has given.

The reason the Imams prized is not a university degree. A shepherd who reads the night sky with a grateful heart may have more of it than a professor who never looks up. How we see the world depends not only on the eyes in our heads but on the eyes of the heart. "It is not the eyes that go blind," says the Qur'an, "but the hearts within the breasts" (Qur'an 22:46).

> *"These two are two of Your signs, and these two are two of Your helpers.*
>
> IMAM ZAYN AL-ABIDIN (A)

Go back, one last time, to the storm. The prayer of Imam Zayn al-Abidin (a) did not stop at calling it a sign. It goes on: "Send down on us the benefit of these clouds and their blessing, and turn their harm and injury away from us."[28] A forecast can tell you when the storm will break. The prayer asks what no forecast can: what the storm is for, and whether we will meet it with gratitude. Science explains the world. Faith receives it as a gift. You can hold both, as the Imam did, and still look up.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. In Shia teaching, reason is God's "inner proof," and the Qur'an faults those who refuse to use it.
2. The Qur'an calls the wonders of nature "signs," and Imam Ali read an ant as a sign of one Maker.
3. God works through causes, so explaining how nature works describes His ways rather than replacing Him.
4. The Qur'an is a book of guidance, not science; its nature verses invite wonder and should not be oversold.
5. God asks each person only for what He gave them; a shepherd without a laboratory is no further from Him.

NEXT TIME · GO FURTHER

Next time: *Islam, Miracles & Science.* If God works through causes, can He also act beyond them? What exactly is a miracle, and can a reasonable person believe in one?

Go further:

Course: The Miraculous Qur'an, a Level 1 course at Tasneem Institute (tasneeminstitute.org/courses/the-miraculous-quran)
Read: Imam Musa al-Kazim's lesson on reason for Hisham ibn al-Hakam, in the opening book of *al-Kafi*, the Book of Intellect and Ignorance (vol. 1, no. 12); then Imam Zayn al-Abidin's prayer for a storm (*al-Sahifa al-Sajjadiyya*, Supplication 36).
Watch: Invitation to Islam, Episode 12, "Does Islam Contradict Science?" (10 min).

In the circle

LOOK BACK

1. What challenge does the Qur'an set for anyone who doubts that it comes from God?
2. Chapter 2 said that everything we see is "on loan." What did it mean?
3. Part One asks, "Is it true?" Apart from experiments, how do you come to know that something is true?

TALK ABOUT IT

WARM-UP

1. When has learning how something works, such as a rainbow, a heartbeat or a seed, made it more wonderful to you? Or less?

UNDERSTAND

2. In your own words, what are the "two proofs" in Imam al-Kazim's teaching, and how does the chapter say they work together?
3. Choose one of the five groups of verses in "Does the Qur'an predict modern science?" What does it say, and what does it not say?

REFLECT

4. Imam Zayn al-Abidin called lightning a sign of God. Does knowing how lightning forms change what you feel in a storm? Why, or why not?
5. Imam al-Sadiq's rule: don't speak until you know, and don't reject what you don't know. Which half is harder for you? You needn't say why.

APPLY

6. Imam Ali studied an ant until it led him to its Maker. What small thing could you watch closely for five minutes this week?

GO DEEPER

7. Read Imam al-Kazim's lesson to Hisham (al-Kafi, vol. 1, Book of Intellect and Ignorance, no. 12; unverified chain). Which nature verse in it would you teach first, and why?
8. Read Imam Zayn al-Abidin's whole prayer for a storm (al-Sahifa al-Sajjadiyya, Supplication 36; compiled text, not graded here). What does he ask for, besides rain?

CARRY IT HOME

Choose one way in this week:

☐ **Notice:** The next time it rains or the wind picks up, stop for one minute. Name one thing you know about how it works, and one thing it gives you to be grateful for.

☐ **Do:** Find out how one everyday thing works, such as a cloud, a seed or your own heartbeat. Explain it to a friend or a child in two minutes, then ask what it makes them wonder.

☐ **Learn:** Read Qur'an 2:164 slowly, in any modern translation. List each sign it names, then write one sentence about what science has since learned of it.

Aim. Help the circle see that Islam, and the Prophet's family above all, treats reason and the study of nature as allies of faith, while staying honest about what the Qur'an claims.

Protect this question. No. 4, on feeling a storm. It lets the scientist, the sceptic and the devout all speak from experience, not from a position.

Answer notes.

- *Q2.* The outer proof is the prophets, messengers and Imams; the inner proof is reason. Reason finds God, then sees that it needs revelation for the details of His will (the al-Kafi panel). See "Does faith ask you to switch off your mind?"
- *Q3.* For example, 51:47: *musiʿun* can mean "expanding" or "making vast." It is consonant with an expanding universe, not a prediction of it.

Likely questions.

- *"Is evolution compatible with Islam?"* Muslim scholars, Shia among them, differ on human origins; don't present one "Islamic position." Al-Tabataba'i held that humans descend from Adam, not from another species (*al-Mizan* 4:143). The Qur'an's fixed points are that God creates and sustains every process and that human beings are honoured (17:70). Chapter 2's argument does not depend on how biological history unfolded.
- *"I've seen videos proving the Qur'an predicted science."* See the five groups of verses and Imam al-Sadiq's rule.
- *"What if science contradicts a verse?"* See the three questions at the end of that section.

Watch for. Some people will have shared "scientific miracle" videos in good faith; honour the love behind them as you test the claims. Scientists and people with little schooling may sit side by side, and the shepherd passage is for both. If evolution threatens to take over the evening, put it in the question box.

Bring. A magnifying glass and a leaf or seed to pass round, or a thunderstorm recording to open with.

MY THREAD · CHAPTER 05

When has understanding something better made me more grateful for it? What would I like to understand next?

MY QUESTION FOR THE BOX

CHAPTER 06 · BELIEFS

06

Islam, Miracles & Science

Open to wonder, careful with evidence.

وَكَأَيِّن مِّنْ ءَايَةٍ فِى ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ يَمُرُّونَ عَلَيْهَا وَهُمْ عَنْهَا مُعْرِضُونَ ﴿١٠٥﴾

How many a sign in the heavens and the earth they walk past, their faces turned away.

QUR'AN 12:105 · SURAT YUSUF

WATCH · EPISODE 26 · 9:30

youtu.be/YJiZHDtDzV0

In the video: an atheist professor's challenge in an undergraduate biology class (0:46)

Reading time: about 15 minutes

It is a festival day in Egypt, and by mid-morning the whole city has been called out to watch. Pharaoh has sent messengers to every town in his kingdom to bring back its most skilled magicians. They arrive with one question for the king: will they be paid if they win? A reward, he promises, and a place in his inner circle.

Facing them stand two brothers, Moses (a) and Aaron (a), with nothing between them but a shepherd's staff.

"Will you throw first," the magicians ask, "or shall we?"

"You throw," says Moses.

Ropes and staffs hit the ground, and they seem to writhe and slither. The magicians have cast a spell on the people's eyes, and the crowd is terrified. Even Moses feels a stab of fear. Then he throws down his staff, and it swallows everything they have conjured.

The crowd may think it is watching a better trick. The magicians know better. Every sleight of hand in Egypt is theirs. They know exactly what a trick looks like from the inside, and this is not one. Before anyone else moves, they fall to the ground in prostration. "We believe in the Lord of all the worlds," they cry, "the Lord of Moses and Aaron."

Pharaoh is livid. How dare they believe before he gives them permission? He swears to cut off their hands and feet on opposite sides and crucify them on the trunks of palm trees. Their answer is one of the bravest lines in the Qur'an: "Pass whatever sentence you will. Your sentence reaches only the life of this world."[1]

That morning, the experts in illusion were the first to see what was no illusion. But none of us stood in that square. We live in an age that trusts the laboratory and doubts wonders. Can a thinking person still believe that a staff swallowed the sorcerers' ropes, that a sea parted, that the dead rose? And if so, what exactly would they be believing?

THE BIG QUESTION

If Islam honours reason, how can anyone believe in miracles?

Have you ever wondered whether believing that a sea parted means switching off the part of your mind you use in a laboratory? What to make of the mira-

cle stories that arrive on your phone? Or, if you grew up with the prophets' wonders as bedtime stories, whether you believe them because they are true or because they are familiar?

This chapter asks what a miracle is, why prophets brought them, and how anyone today could know that one happened.

WORDS TO KNOW

āya (آية) · *AA-ya* · a sign; the Qur'an's word for a prophet's miracle, for a verse of the Qur'an and for nature's wonders.

mu'jiza (مُعْجِزة) · *MU-ji-za* · a miracle: an act beyond nature's ordinary course, brought to prove a mission from God, which no one can match.

khāriq lil-'āda (خارِق للعادة) · *KHAA-riq lil-AA-da* · "breaking the habitual course": going beyond what usually happens, not against what reason allows.

bi-idhn Allāh (بِإِذْنِ الله) · *bi-IDH-nil-LAAH* · "by God's permission"; the Qur'an's phrase for the source of every prophet's signs.

siḥr (سِحْر) · *SIHR* · sorcery or illusion, resting on skills that others can learn.

tawātur (تَواتُر) · *ta-WAA-tur* · mass transmission: a report carried by so many independent witnesses that collusion is not credible.

◆

Has science ruled out miracles?

Many students have heard a version of this in a lecture hall. A science professor tells the class: *At university we believe in science, not fiction. No respectable scientist can believe in miracles, because miracles defy science, and logic too.* Some students nod. Others sit wondering whether the faith they grew up with has just been ruled out of court.

Science is one of humanity's great tools, and Islam asks no one to distrust it. It studies the patterns of nature: how gravity works, how cells divide, how planets move, how fire consumes its fuel. But science tells us what usually happens. It cannot tell us that nature is sealed against every exception. Run an experiment a thousand times, or ten thousand, and the most you can honestly report is: *in all our experience, this is what happens.* That is a great deal. It is not the same as *this could never happen otherwise.*

When people call miracles unscientific, they usually mean that miracles are not what we normally observe. But that is the whole point. A miracle, by definition, is not

the repetition of the ordinary; if staffs swallowed ropes every week, no one would have bowed in Pharaoh's square.

The leap from "we have never seen it" to "it cannot happen" is not a finding of science. It is a belief that nature is a closed box with no one outside it. Chapter 2 gave reasons to think the box has a Maker. If so, the real question is whether its Maker has ever acted in a way we could recognise.

None of this makes miracles easy to believe, and it should not. Nature's regularities are among the best-tested facts we have. So a reported miracle deserves hard questions, and an event no one can explain today is not automatically a miracle. It may be explained tomorrow.

There is also a difference between the impossible and the extraordinary. Some things are impossible by definition: a square circle, a married bachelor, two and two making five, a thing existing and not existing at once. These are not hard tasks; they are not tasks at all. Imam Ali (a), the Prophet's cousin and the first Imam (d. 661 CE), was once asked whether God could put the world inside an egg, with neither changing size. God is never unable, he replied, but what you asked "cannot be" (Chapter 2).[2]

Raising the dead is a different kind of claim: rare, astonishing, even unbelievable, but not contradictory. So is the moment when Moses (a) stood at the water's edge, with Pharaoh's army closing in, and was told, "Strike the sea with your staff" (Qur'an 26:63). Experience says a stick striking water splits nothing. No experiment could prove that it never can.

◆

What exactly is a miracle?

The word Muslims use for a miracle, *mu'jiza*, never appears in the Qur'an. It is a later theological term, from a root meaning "to leave someone unable." Ayatollah Abu al-Qasim al-Khu'i (d. 1992 CE), a leading Shia scholar, set out its conditions. Someone claims a mission from God and proves it by doing what goes beyond the ordinary laws of nature, something no one can match.

The claim must be one that could be true: no feat can turn a false or absurd message into God's. And magic, trickery and expert technique do not count, because they rest on causes that others can learn.[3] That is how the magicians could tell.

His contemporary 'Allama Muhammad Husayn al-Tabataba'i (d. 1981 CE), author of the Qur'an commentary *al-Mizan*, used the theologians' term: a miracle is *khariq lil-'ada*, "something that breaks the habitual course." It shows a power from beyond nature at work within nature, he wrote, "not something that overturns what reason

requires."[4] Notice the word *habit*. A miracle breaks with what usually happens, not with reason.

Nor did the prophets ever claim such power as their own. When the Qur'an describes the signs of Jesus (a), one phrase keeps returning.

وَرَسُولًا إِلَىٰ بَنِيٓ إِسۡرَٰٓءِيلَ أَنِّي قَدۡ جِئۡتُكُم بِـَٔايَةٖ مِّن رَّبِّكُمۡ أَنِّيٓ
أَخۡلُقُ لَكُم مِّنَ ٱلطِّينِ كَهَيۡـَٔةِ ٱلطَّيۡرِ فَأَنفُخُ فِيهِ فَيَكُونُ طَيۡرَۢا
بِإِذۡنِ ٱللَّهِۖ وَأُبۡرِئُ ٱلۡأَكۡمَهَ وَٱلۡأَبۡرَصَ وَأُحۡيِ ٱلۡمَوۡتَىٰ بِإِذۡنِ ٱللَّهِۖ
وَأُنَبِّئُكُم بِمَا تَأۡكُلُونَ وَمَا تَدَّخِرُونَ فِي بُيُوتِكُمۡۚ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَأٓيَةٗ
لَّكُمۡ إِن كُنتُم مُّؤۡمِنِينَ ﴿٤٩﴾

And he will be a messenger to the Children of Israel: "I have come to you with a sign from your Lord. I will make for you out of clay the shape of a bird, then breathe into it, and it will be a bird, by God's permission. I will heal the blind and the leper, and bring the dead to life, by God's permission. I will tell you what you eat and what you store in your houses. In that is a sign for you, if you are believers."[5]

QUR'AN 3:49 · SURAT AL ʿIMRAN

NOTICE Jesus' words open and close with the word "sign." In between, he says "by God's permission" twice. The power is God's; the prophet is the one through whom it comes.

Does God, then, break His own laws? "We have created everything according to a measure" (Qur'an 54:49): the order that science studies is God's own design. Yet "His command, when He wills a thing, is only to say to it 'Be!', and it is" (Qur'an 36:82). The One who set the measure is not trapped inside it. In a report with an unverified chain, Imam Jaʿfar al-Sadiq (a), the sixth Imam (d. 765 CE), adds that God "refuses to make things happen except through causes."[6]

Al-Tabataba'i concluded that a miracle, too, works through real causes, though they may be hidden from us. "This is not a denial of cause and effect between things," he wrote. "It affirms that they are in God's hand, and He turns them as He wills."[7] A miracle is not chaos, and not God at war with His own order. It is the Author of the ordinary course acting beyond it, for a purpose.

A modern image helps, if held lightly. A programmer is not bound by her own code; she can add a new function when she has reason to. Nature's Author is not its prisoner either. But God is not an engineer outside a finished machine, reaching in now and then. In the Qur'an's picture, every line of the code runs on His power at every moment, the ordinary as much as the extraordinary.

Miracles make sense only inside that larger picture. If God made the world and cares how its people live, it is not irrational to think He might act beyond its ordinary course to guide them toward the truth.

> **PAUSE AND RECALL**
>
> *In your own words, what is the difference between something impossible and something extraordinary? Give one example of each.*

◆

Why did the prophets bring signs?

The Qur'an's own word for a miracle is *aya*, "sign." A sign is not the destination; it points beyond itself, as a road sign points to a town. A crowd that only wants more wonders has missed the point. As al-Tabataba'i noticed, the prophets gave reasons for God and the life to come. Their signs vouched for the one thing no one else could check: that God was speaking to them.[8]

When Abraham (a) smashed his people's idols and asked them, "Do you not use your reason?" (Qur'an 21:67), they threw him into a fire, and God said, "Fire, be cool and safe for Abraham" (Qur'an 21:69). The sign did not replace his argument. It protected the man who made it.

وَمَا مَنَعَنَآ أَن نُّرۡسِلَ بِٱلۡأٓيَٰتِ إِلَّآ أَن كَذَّبَ بِهَا ٱلۡأَوَّلُونَۚ وَءَاتَيۡنَا
ثَمُودَ ٱلنَّاقَةَ مُبۡصِرَةٗ فَظَلَمُواْ بِهَاۚ وَمَا نُرۡسِلُ بِٱلۡأٓيَٰتِ إِلَّا تَخۡوِيفٗا

﴿٥٩﴾

Nothing has kept Us from sending the signs except that earlier peoples denied them. We gave Thamud the she-camel as a sign to open their eyes, and they wronged her. We send the signs only as a warning.

QUR'AN 17:59 · SURAT AL-ISRA

NOTICE The she-camel is called *mubsira*, "one that gives sight." A sign can open people's eyes. The same verse shows that it cannot make them look.

Signs also fitted the people who received them. Ibn al-Sikkit (d. 858 CE), a celebrated scholar of Arabic, once asked Imam Abu al-Hasan (a) why Moses (a) came with a staff, Jesus (a) with healing and Muhammad (s) with speech. Moses came when magic held sway, the Imam explained, Jesus when people needed medicine for chronic diseases, and Muhammad when oratory, and perhaps poetry, ruled. Each brought what the experts of his day could not match.[9]

The scholar al-Saduq (d. 991 CE) identifies this Imam as Ali al-Rida, the eighth Imam (d. 818 CE), but other evidence points to the tenth, Ali al-Hadi (d. 868 CE). The report is famous but weak in its chain: read it as an illustration. Its idea is the Qur'an's own scene in Pharaoh's square: experts know where their craft ends.

But signs were never performances on demand. The leaders of Mecca, the Prophet's hometown, drew up a list. Make a spring gush from the ground, they said; own a house of gold; climb into the sky and bring down a book we can read. The Prophet (s) was told to reply: "Glory be to my Lord. Am I anything but a human being, a messenger?" (Qur'an 17:90–93).

Even dazzling signs do not open a closed heart. If angels came down and the dead spoke to them, the Qur'an says, "they still would not believe," unless God willed (Qur'an 6:111). Imam Ali (a) saw this happen.

A STORY FROM THE SOURCES

The tree that walked

Imam Ali (a) was there, and told the story himself. Chiefs of Quraysh, the ruling tribe of Mecca, came to the Prophet (s). "Muhammad," they said, "you have made a huge claim, one none of your forefathers made. Show us one thing, and we will know you are a prophet. If not, we will know you are a sorcerer and a liar." They pointed to a tree: "Call it to pull itself up by its roots and stand before you."

"God has power over all things," he said. "If God does this for you, will you believe?" They said yes. "I will show you what you ask," he said, "though I know you will not turn to the good." Then he called the tree to come "by God's permission."

"By the One who sent him with the truth," Ali recalled, "it tore itself up by its roots and came with a great roar, rustling like the beating of birds' wings, until it stood before the Messenger of God... Some of its branches came down on my shoulder, for I was at his right."

The chiefs demanded that half the tree come forward. It did. They demanded that the half go back. It did. "There is no god but God," said Ali. "I am the first to believe in you, Messenger of God." The whole company answered: "A sorcerer and a liar, wondrous at sorcery and quick at it."[10]

Nor does a sign make its bearer divine. Imam al-Rida (a) once debated the leaders of other faiths at the court of the caliph al-Ma'mun (r. 813–833 CE) in Marw, in today's Turkmenistan. There a senior Christian bishop, the Catholicos, argued that anyone who raised the dead must be a lord worthy of worship. The Imam replied that the prophet Elisha (a) had done the same, "yet his people did not take him as a lord." So, he added, had Ezekiel (a).[11]

A century later, al-Husayn ibn Rawh, the third of four deputies for the hidden Twelfth Imam (a), faced a harder question. If Imam Husayn (a), the Prophet's grandson (d. 680 CE), was God's friend and his killer God's enemy, how could God let the enemy win? God sends human messengers, Ibn Rawh answered, who "eat food and walk in the markets" (Qur'an 25:7), and He gave them signs no one could match.

Yet He let them win at some times and lose at others. "Had God made them victorious and dominant in every situation..." he said, "people would have taken them as gods besides God." He later insisted it was no opinion of his own but had come from the Imam.[12] The signs pointed to God. The suffering kept the prophets human.

◆

How could anyone know it happened?

Grant all this: miracles are neither illogical nor ruled out by science. How could anyone today know that one happened? None of us stood on that shore.

The honest answer: the way we know most of the past. Why do you believe that Socrates taught in Athens, or that a battle was fought at Waterloo in 1815? No laboratory can show it. We know through testimony: reports handed down, checked against one another and kept alive by those who retold them. History rests on witnesses.

Imam al-Rida (a) made this very argument at the same gathering in Marw. He asked the Exilarch, the head of the Jewish community, how the prophethood of Moses (a) was proved. Moses had brought signs no one could match, said the Exilarch: the parting of the sea, the staff that became a snake, the springs from the rock. Then why not believe in Jesus (a), who raised the dead? "It is said that he did that," the Exilarch replied, "but we did not witness it."

"And the signs of Moses," asked the Imam, "did you witness them? Did the reports not reach you from Moses' trustworthy companions?" "Yes." "Then it is the same. Widely transmitted reports have reached you of what Jesus did. How can you believe Moses and not Jesus?"

Asked about Zoroaster, the chief Zoroastrian priest gave the same answer: the reports reached us, and we followed him.[13] This report's chain has a missing link, so it is told here as a story. But the reasoning stands, and notice its standard: not any rumour, but trustworthy and widely transmitted reports.

For Muslims, the Qur'an is a further witness. It reports the signs of Abraham (a), Moses and Jesus, and its testimony is as strong as the case that it is God's word (Chapter 4). It records a sign of the Prophet (s) too: "The Hour has drawn near, and the moon has split. Yet whenever they see a sign, they turn away and say, 'Sorcery, as ever'" (Qur'an 54:1–2).

But when the Meccans demanded more, the Qur'an pointed to something they could keep examining: "Is it not enough for them that We have sent down to you the Book, recited to them?" (Qur'an 29:51). Al-Khu'i explained why: a miracle that lasts a moment reaches later people only by report, so a message for every age needed a sign that would last.[14]

A FAIR QUESTION

Isn't it always more likely that the witnesses were wrong?

This is the sceptic's strongest card, played by the Scottish philosopher David Hume (d. 1776). Hume did not call miracles illogical. He called a miracle "a violation of the laws of nature," and argued that our experience of those laws is so uniform that testimony could hardly outweigh it: "No testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind, that its falsehood would be more miraculous, than the fact, which it endeavours to establish."[15] There is wisdom here: most wonder stories should not be believed. But three things change the sum. First, a sign is not a random break in nature. If God sends messengers, a sign that comes with a credible messenger is what one might expect; as Richard Price (d. 1791) replied to Hume, a miracle is "more properly an event different from experience than contrary to it." Second, testimony comes in grades: Imam al-Rida asked for trustworthy, widely transmitted reports, not one excited voice. Third, for Muslims the case rests not on old reports alone but on a Qur'an still here to examine.

What is left for those of us who were not there? Ibn al-Sikkit asked exactly that. "By God, I have never seen anyone like you," he told the Imam, and pressed on.

> IMAM ABU AL-HASAN (A), WHOM AL-SADUQ IDENTIFIES AS IMAM AL-RIDA
>
> فَمَا الْحُجَّةُ عَلَى الْخَلْقِ الْيَوْمَ قَالَ فَقَالَ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلام) الْعَقْلُ يُعْرَفُ بِهِ الصَّادِقُ عَلَى اللهِ فَيُصَدِّقُهُ وَالْكَاذِبُ عَلَى اللهِ فَيُكَذِّبُهُ
>
> "So what is the proof over people today?" He said: "Reason. By it the one who speaks truly about God is recognised and believed, and the one who lies about God is recognised and rejected."[16]
>
> al-Kafi 1 · Intellect & Ignorance · no. 20 · **Weak chain**

That is not a demotion. It treats us as adults. God has not stopped speaking in signs; He has entrusted us with the faculty that reads them.

◆

What about the wonders of our own day?

Most of us will never judge a staff or a parted sea. We meet smaller claims: a healing after a visit to a shrine, a dream that came true, a video forwarded with the words *share this with ten people*. Islam is open to God's power in every age. The Qur'an tells of wonders granted to people who were not prophets. Zechariah (a) kept finding food with Mary (a) in her sanctuary. "It is from God," she told him (Qur'an 3:37). Shia theologians call such favours *karamat*, "honours."[17]

But openness to God's power is not a duty to believe every report. Imam al-Sadiq (a) taught that "every report that does not agree with the Book of God is gilded falsehood."[18] That is why this book labels the strength of every report it quotes. So ask what exactly is claimed, who first reported it, how strong the source is, and whether it fits what the Qur'an teaches about God. And when you don't know, say so.

> IMAM JA'FAR AL-SADIQ (A), THE SIXTH IMAM
>
> إِذَا سُئِلَ الرَّجُلُ مِنْكُمْ عَمَّا لا يَعْلَمُ فَلْيَقُلْ لا أَدْرِي وَلا يَقُلْ اللهُ أَعْلَمُ فَيُوقِعَ فِي قَلْبِ صَاحِبِهِ شَكّاً وَإِذَا قَالَ الْمَسْئُولُ لا أَدْرِي فَلا يَتَّهِمُهُ السَّائِلُ
>
> When one of you is asked about something he does not know, let him say, "I don't know." Let him not say, "God knows best," and so plant doubt in his companion's heart. And when the one asked says, "I don't know," let the one who asked not hold it against him.[19]
>
> al-Kafi 1 · Virtue of Knowledge · ch. 11 · no. 6 · **Reliable chain**

The same care applies to a newer kind of wonder story: claims that a verse predicted a modern discovery. Such parallels can move people, and any verse that sends a reader back to the night sky does good. But by the classical definition these are not miracles. A miracle challenged the prophet's own contemporaries and was recognised by the experts of their day, as the magicians recognised the staff. A reading made centuries later, which the next textbook might overturn, cannot carry that weight (Chapter 5 looks at the verses).

The tradition models a better balance. A famous dictation on the wonders of creation is attributed to Imam al-Sadiq: *Tawhid al-Mufaddal*. It walks its reader through the eyelid, the voice, a bird's light body and the veins of a leaf, to wake

wonder at their Maker. Scholars debate its chain, and its medicine is that of its century: it has the liver turning food into blood.[20] Read it for wonder, not for science.

The Qur'an uses the same word, *aya*, for the staff in Pharaoh's square and for what happens every day: "Among His signs is your sleep, by night and by day" (Qur'an 30:23); "Among His signs is that He created for you spouses from among yourselves, that you might find rest in them, and He placed love and mercy between you" (Qur'an 30:21).

Imam Ali (a) told his listeners to marvel at the human being, who "sees with a lump of fat, speaks with a piece of flesh, hears with a bone and breathes through a slit."[21] The Qur'an's complaint is not that people lack signs, but that they walk past them: "How many a sign in the heavens and the earth they walk past, their faces turned away" (Qur'an 12:105).

The magicians in Pharaoh's square were careful with evidence: they knew every trick in Egypt, and no one could fool them. They were also open to wonder: when they saw what no trick could do, they did not explain it away. They bowed. Few of us will see a staff swallow anything. But tomorrow we will wake from sleep, someone will forgive someone, and somewhere a child will be born. Those are signs too. Will we stop to notice them?

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Science describes what usually happens. It cannot show that nature is closed to the One who made it.
2. A miracle is extraordinary, not illogical: never having seen something does not make it impossible.
3. Prophets' signs came "by God's permission," pointed beyond themselves to God, and never forced a closed heart.
4. Past miracles are known by trustworthy, widely transmitted testimony; for Muslims, the Qur'an itself remains open to examination.
5. Be open to wonder and careful with evidence: test reports, say "I don't know," and notice everyday signs.

NEXT TIME · GO FURTHER

Next time: *How Islam Embodies the Abrahamic Faiths.* The fire that would not burn Abraham saved a man whom three great faiths now call their father. How can one man belong to all three?

Go further:

Course: The Miraculous Qur'an, a Level 1 course at Tasneem Institute (tasneeminstitute.org/courses/the-miraculous-quran)

Read: Imam al-Rida's debate with the leaders of other faiths at Marw, in al-Saduq's *'Uyun akhbar al-Rida*, vol. 1, ch. 12, no. 1 (in English at thaqalayn.net).

Watch: Invitation to Islam, Episode 26, "Islam, Miracles & Science" (10 min).

In the circle

LOOK BACK

1. Chapter 5 said science explains the world but cannot explain why there is one. What did that mean?
2. Chapter 3 said a prophet's claim must be tested. What tests did it name?
3. Part One asks, "Is it true?" What would convince you that something extraordinary really happened?

TALK ABOUT IT

WARM-UP

1. What is the most astonishing thing you have ever seen with your own eyes, in nature or anywhere else?

UNDERSTAND

2. What is the difference between the impossible and the extraordinary? How does Imam Ali's answer about the egg help?
3. According to Qur'an 17:59 and Imam Ali's story of the walking tree, what can a sign do, and what can it not do?

REFLECT

4. The magicians, experts in illusion, were the first to bow. Does expertise make people more open to wonder, or less? Why?
5. Ibn al-Sikkit was told that today's proof is reason. Does that sound to you like a loss or a compliment, and why?

APPLY

6. Weigh a wonder story you heard recently against this chapter's four questions: what is claimed, who first reported it, how strong is the source, and does it fit the Qur'an?

GO DEEPER

7. Read Imam Ali's full account of the tree (*Nahj al-Balagha*, Sermon 192; compiled text, not graded here). Why do you think the chiefs kept changing their demands? What, in the end, decides whether someone believes?
8. Read Imam al-Rida's exchange with the Exilarch (*'Uyun akhbar al-Rida*, vol. 1, ch. 12, no. 1; unverified chain). What standard of testimony does he ask for? Would it satisfy Hume?

CARRY IT HOME

Choose one way in this week:

☐ **Notice:** Each evening, write down one everyday sign you nearly walked past (Qur'an 12:105): waking from sleep, rain on a window, a kindness, a face you love. Say a word of thanks for it.

☐ **Do:** The next time a wonder story reaches your phone, pause before sharing it. Ask what exactly is claimed, who first reported it, how strong the source is and whether it fits what the Qur'an teaches about God. If you can't answer, don't send it on.

☐ **Learn:** Read the whole contest in Pharaoh's square in Qur'an 20:56–76, in any modern translation. Mark the moment the magicians change sides, and what they say to Pharaoh.

Aim. Show that believing in miracles does not mean switching off reason, and practise weighing reports with care.

Protect this question. No. 4, on the magicians. It lets a sceptic, a new Muslim and a lifelong Muslim talk as equals about what expertise sees.

Answer notes.

- *Q2.* The impossible is self-contradictory: a square circle, the world inside an unchanged egg. It is not a task at all. The extraordinary departs from usual experience but contains no contradiction, like the dead rising. See "Has science ruled out miracles?"
- *Q3.* A sign opens eyes and serves as a warning (17:59). It points to God and supports a messenger, but it cannot force a closed heart: the chiefs saw the tree and still cried "sorcery."

Likely questions.

- *"If miracles happened then, why not now?"* See the end of "How could anyone know it happened?": the lasting miracle (29:51) and reason as today's proof.
- *"Doesn't raising the dead make Jesus divine?"* See "by God's permission" (3:49) in "What exactly is a miracle?", then Elisha and Ibn Rawh in "Why did the prophets bring signs?"
- *"What about the Qur'an's scientific miracles?"* See "What about the wonders of our own day?" Chapter 5 treats the verses.

Watch for. Christians in the room may see Jesus' miracles as signs of his divinity. Present the Muslim view without belittling theirs. Some people treasure experiences they consider miraculous; never mock or cross-examine them. The Ibn al-Sikkit and Marw reports have weak or incomplete chains, so let the Qur'an and the arguments carry the weight.

Bring. A seed or a sprouting bean for the table: an everyday sign, easy to walk past.

MY THREAD · CHAPTER 06

Which sign have I been walking past, and what would it take for me to stop and look?

MY QUESTION FOR THE BOX

07

How Islam Embodies the Abrahamic Faiths

One God, one family of prophets, one unbroken message.

قُولُوٓاْ ءَامَنَّا بِٱللَّهِ وَمَآ أُنزِلَ إِلَيۡنَا وَمَآ أُنزِلَ إِلَىٰٓ إِبۡرَٰهِـۧمَ وَإِسۡمَٰعِيلَ وَإِسۡحَٰقَ وَيَعۡقُوبَ وَٱلۡأَسۡبَاطِ وَمَآ أُوتِيَ مُوسَىٰ وَعِيسَىٰ وَمَآ أُوتِيَ ٱلنَّبِيُّونَ مِن رَّبِّهِمۡ لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيۡنَ أَحَدٖ مِّنۡهُمۡ وَنَحۡنُ لَهُۥ مُسۡلِمُونَ ﴿١٣٦﴾

Say: We believe in God and in what was sent down to us... and in what Moses and Jesus and the prophets were given by their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them.

QUR'AN 2:136 · SURAT AL-BAQARA

WATCH · EPISODE 19 · 9:54

youtu.be/kzAu8b7n0fo

In the video: why no one is born an adult, and what that says about the laws of the prophets (8:01)

Reading time: about 20 minutes

Night falls, and a young man stands among his people, watching the sky.

His people are religious, deeply so. They carve statues and bow down before them. Some of them worship the bright evening star, some the moon, some the sun. Even his father prays to idols.

The evening star comes out. "This is my Lord?" the young man says. The star sinks below the horizon. "I do not love things that set."

The moon rises. "This is my Lord?" It crosses the sky and sets. "If my Lord does not guide me, I will surely be one of those who lose their way."

Morning comes, and the sun climbs. "This is my Lord? This one is greater." By evening it too has gone down. Now he turns to the crowd. "My people, I am done with all the partners you set up beside God. I have turned my face to the One who brought the heavens and the earth into being, as a man of pure faith. I am not one of those who set up partners" (Qur'an 6:76–79).

The young man is Abraham (a). The Qur'an calls that night "Our argument, which We gave Abraham against his people" (6:83). Imam Ali al-Rida (a), the eighth Imam (d. 818 CE), explained that Abraham was never confused. Each "This is my Lord?" was a question meant to expose an error: a teacher leading his listeners, step by step, to see that whatever rises and sets cannot be God.[1]

That night would cost him dearly. He would break his people's idols, be thrown into a fire and leave his homeland. Yet today three great faiths, and billions of believers, trace their story back to him. Jews call him "our father Abraham." Christians call him "the father of all them that believe." Muslims call him the Friend of God.[2] How can one man belong to three faiths? Is his legacy an inheritance to fight over, or one message passed from hand to hand?

THE BIG QUESTION

If Jews, Christians and Muslims all look back to Abraham, why are there three religions, and where does Islam fit?

Have you ever wondered whether Islam is just a later faith retelling older stories? Whether a Muslim and a Christian at the same table are praying to the same God? Or, if you grew up Muslim, why the Qur'an names a whole chapter after Mary, the mother of Jesus?

> This chapter traces the one message the Qur'an says every prophet carried, and asks what it means for the way Abraham's children live together.

WORDS TO KNOW

ḥanīf (حنيف) · *ha-NEEF* · one who turns from every false god to the one God; the Qur'an's word for Abraham.

islām (إسلام) · *is-LAAM* · surrender to God; in the Qur'an, the faith of every prophet, not only of Muhammad's followers.

ahl al-kitāb (أهل الكتاب) · *AHL al-ki-TAAB* · "People of the Book": communities given earlier scripture, chiefly Jews and Christians.

sharīʿa (شريعة) · *sha-REE-ah* · a revealed law; the Qur'an says each community was given its own.

ulū al-ʿazm (أولو العزم) · *OO-loo al-AZM* · "the resolute": Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad, who each brought a new law.

imām (إمام) · *ee-MAAM* · a leader whom people follow; in the Qur'an, a rank God gave Abraham after his trials.

◆

Why do three faiths call Abraham "father"?

Many people first wondered about God as children, looking up at the night sky. Abraham (a) began his search under the same sky, but he did not stop at wonder. He reasoned his way past the stars to their Maker. The Qur'an calls such a person a *hanif*: one who turns from every false god to the one God.

When the People of the Book argued over Abraham, the Qur'an answered with a point of history. "Why do you argue about Abraham, when the Torah and the Gospel were not sent down until after him?" (Qur'an 3:65). Then it adds: "Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian. He was a man of pure faith, a *muslim*, and he was not one of those who set up partners with God" (3:67). The next verse names those nearest to him: his followers, this Prophet and the believers (3:68).

And *muslim* in the Qur'an is not the name of a club. It describes an act: surrender to God. So the Qur'an can use it of Noah (10:72), of Joseph (12:101), of the Queen of Sheba, who surrendered "with Solomon" (27:44), and of Jesus' disciples: "Bear witness that we are *muslims*" (3:52). Its clearest picture comes at the hardest moment of Abraham's life. When Abraham was commanded in a dream to sacrifice his son, father and son "both surrendered" (37:103). The verb is *aslama*, from which *islam* comes.

Abraham's faith was costly, but never cruel. He begged his father, Azar (in the Shia reading, an uncle or guardian), to stop worshipping "what can neither hear nor see" (19:42). Azar threatened to stone him and drove him away. Abraham answered, "Peace be upon you. I will ask my Lord to forgive you. He has always been kind to me" (19:46–47).[3] He disagreed about the deepest things, and still wished him peace.

The Qur'an then follows Abraham to a dry valley in Arabia. There, at God's command, he settled Hagar and their baby son, Ishmael (a), beside the site of God's House, the Ka'ba. "Our Lord," he prayed, "I have settled some of my children in a valley without crops, by Your Sacred House... so make people's hearts long for them" (14:37).

Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (a), the sixth Imam (d. 765 CE), told what happened next. The baby grew thirsty. Hagar climbed the hill of Safa and called, "Is there anyone in these valleys?" No one answered. She hurried to the hill of Marwa and called again. Seven times she went between them. Then the angel Gabriel came. "To whom did Abraham leave you?" he asked. She had asked Abraham that very question as he left, she said, and he had answered, "To God."

"Then he has entrusted you," said Gabriel, "to One who is enough." The child scraped the ground with his foot, and the spring of Zamzam burst out. Birds circled over the water, a caravan from Yemen followed the birds, and the empty valley came to life.[4]

"God made that a rite," the Imam said. Pilgrims still hurry seven times between Safa and Marwa in Hagar's footsteps. They circle the House that Abraham and Ishmael raised together, praying as they built: "Our Lord, make us *muslims* to You... and raise up among them a messenger from among them" (2:127–129). Muslims believe it was answered, centuries later, in a descendant of Ishmael named Muhammad (s).

◆

One religion, or three?

So the Qur'an does not present Islam as a new religion born in seventh-century Arabia. It presents it as the oldest one: the faith of every prophet, renewed one last time.

شَرَعَ لَكُم مِّنَ ٱلدِّينِ مَا وَصَّىٰ بِهِۦ نُوحًا وَٱلَّذِىٓ أَوْحَيْنَآ إِلَيْكَ
وَمَا وَصَّيْنَا بِهِۦٓ إِبْرَٰهِيمَ وَمُوسَىٰ وَعِيسَىٰٓ أَنْ أَقِيمُوا۟ ٱلدِّينَ وَلَا
تَتَفَرَّقُوا۟ فِيهِ كَبُرَ عَلَى ٱلْمُشْرِكِينَ مَا تَدْعُوهُمْ إِلَيْهِ ٱللَّهُ يَجْتَبِىٓ إِلَيْهِ
مَن يَشَآءُ وَيَهْدِىٓ إِلَيْهِ مَن يُنِيبُ ﴿١٣﴾

He has laid down for you the same religion He charged Noah with, which We have revealed to you, and which We charged Abraham, Moses and Jesus with: "Hold firm to the religion, and do not split apart over it." What you call them to weighs heavily on those who set up partners with God. God chooses for Himself whomever He wills, and guides to Himself whoever turns to Him.

QUR'AN 42:13 · SURAT AL-SHURA

NOTICE Five messengers, one *din* ("religion"), in the singular. Muhammad (s) is not added at the end: he is placed second, straight after Noah. And the command is the same for all: hold to it, and do not split apart.

Muslim tradition calls these five *ulu al-ʿazm*, "the resolute" (compare 46:35). Each brought a book and a law: Noah first, then the Scrolls of Abraham (87:19), the Torah of Moses, the Gospel of Jesus and the Qur'an. The Psalms (*Zabur*) came to David (4:163), who kept the Torah and sang. Asked why they are called "the resolute," Imam al-Sadiq (a) traced the whole line.

IMAM JA'FAR AL-SADIQ (A), THE SIXTH IMAM

لأَنَّ نُوحاً بُعِثَ بِكِتَابٍ وَشَرِيعَةٍ وَكُلُّ مَنْ جَاءَ بَعْدَ نُوحٍ أَخَذَ بِكِتَابِ نُوحٍ وَشَرِيعَتِهِ وَمِنْهَاجِهِ حَتَّى جَاءَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ (عَلَيهِ السَّلام) بِالصُّحُفِ وَبِعَزِيمَةِ تَرْكِ كِتَابِ نُوحٍ لا كُفْراً بِهِ ... حَتَّى جَاءَ مُوسَى بِالتَّوْرَاةِ وَشَرِيعَتِهِ وَمِنْهَاجِهِ ... حَتَّى جَاءَ الْمَسِيحُ (عَلَيهِ السَّلام) بِالإِنْجِيلِ ... حَتَّى جَاءَ مُحَمَّدٌ (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وآلِه) فَجَاءَ بِالْقُرْآنِ وَبِشَرِيعَتِهِ وَمِنْهَاجِهِ فَحَلالُهُ حَلالٌ إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ وَحَرَامُهُ حَرَامٌ إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ

Because Noah was sent with a book and a law, and everyone who came after Noah held to his book, his law and his way, until Abraham came with the Scrolls, and with the resolve to leave Noah's book, not out of disbelief in it... until Moses came with the Torah, his law and his way... until the Messiah came with the Gospel... until Muhammad came with the Qur'an, his law and his way. What he made lawful is lawful until the Day of Resurrection, and what he forbade is forbidden until the Day of Resurrection.[5]

al-Kafi 2 · Belief & Disbelief · ch. 12 · no. 2 · **Reliable chain**

The answer turns on a play on words. Abraham, Moses and Jesus each came "with the resolve" (*'azima*) to set aside what came before: hence "the resolute." And the Imam insists that Abraham set Noah's book aside "not out of disbelief in it." The new law did not make the old one false. Its season was over.

A perfect God does not change His mind. So why would the rules change? No one is born an adult. A parent tells a four-year-old, "Hold my hand when we cross," and hands a twenty-year-old the car keys. The rules change because the child has grown; the parent's love and the values of the house do not. The Qur'an puts it this way: "For each of you We have appointed a law and a way... So race one another in doing good" (5:48).

This is not a ladder, with bare rules at the bottom and love at the top. The Torah already commands, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Leviticus 19:18). What changed was the law. What never changed was its heart: worship the one God, and do good.

The same verse gives the Qur'an a special role. It came "confirming the scripture before it and standing guard over it" (*muhaymin*, 5:48). Muslims honour the Torah

and the Gospel as revelations, and read the earlier stories through the Qur'an. Where the accounts differ, the Qur'an has the final say.

Muslims believe this final law reaches into every room of life, from prayer and fasting to marriage, trade and the care of the dying. Applying it to new questions still takes trained scholars, which is why Shia Muslims follow a qualified jurist (*marja'*) in practice.

Nor did the prophets come to switch off the mind. Imam Ali (a), the Prophet's cousin and the first Imam (d. 661 CE), said they came "to unearth for them the buried treasures of the intellect" (Chapter 3).[6] Each prophet, on this view, spoke to the same human nature and woke what was already there.

> *"Hold firm to the religion, and do not split apart over it.*
>
> QUR'AN 42:13

Even the name fits. Judaism is named after a people, the tribe of Judah, and Christianity after a title, "Christ," though both have spoken to the whole world. "Islam" names neither a people nor a person, but an act that anyone, anywhere, can make. The Qur'an says Muhammad (s) was sent "to all people" (34:28) and "as a mercy to all the worlds" (21:107).

> **PAUSE AND RECALL**
>
> *Pause and recall: Why can the Qur'an call Abraham a muslim, though he lived long before Muhammad (s)?*

◆

Who is Jesus in the Qur'an?

Muslims are taught to say of all the prophets, "We make no distinction between any of them" (2:136). That means giving each one his due: no less, and no more. Nowhere does that matter more than with Jesus (a) and his mother, Mary (a).

Mary is the only woman the Qur'an names, and it names her thirty-four times. Sura 19 bears her name. "God has chosen you and purified you," the angels tell her. "He has chosen you above the women of the worlds" (3:42). The Qur'an tells the birth itself: a woman alone, in pain, beneath a palm tree. "I wish I had died before this," she cries. A voice answers: "Do not grieve. Your Lord has set a stream flowing beneath

you. Shake the trunk of the palm toward you, and fresh ripe dates will fall for you" (19:23–25).

Her son, conceived without a father, is "the Messiah" (*al-Masih*), the same title as "Christ": both mean "the anointed one" (3:45). He is "a Word from God" and "a spirit from Him" (4:171). He speaks from the cradle, and his first words about himself are, "I am a servant of God" (19:30). He shapes a bird from clay and it flies; he heals the blind and the leper and raises the dead, each time "by God's leave" (3:49).

The Imams loved him. Imam Ali (a) once gave his listeners four models of the simple life. There was Muhammad (s). There was Moses (a), so thin from eating wild herbs that their green showed through his skin. There was David (a), "master of the Psalms," who wove palm-leaf baskets to buy barley bread. And there was Jesus.

IMAM ALI (A), THE FIRST IMAM

وَإِنْ شِئْتَ قُلْتُ فِي عِيسَى بْنِ مَرْيَمَ(عليه السلام)، فَلَقَدْ كَانَ يَتَوَسَّدُ الْحَجَرَ، وَيَلْبَسُ الْخَشِنَ، و يَأْكُلُ الْجَشِبَ، وَكَانَ إِدَامُهُ الْجُوعَ، وَسِرَاجُهُ بِاللَّيْلِ الْقَمَرَ... وَلَمْ تَكُنْ لَهُ زَوْجَةٌ تَفْتِنُهُ، وَلاَ وَلَدٌ يَحْزُنُهُ، وَلاَ مَالٌ يَلْفِتُهُ، وَلاَ طَمَعٌ يُذِلُّهُ، دَابَّتُهُ رِجْلاَهُ، وَخَادِمُهُ يَدَاهُ

If you wish, I will tell you of Jesus son of Mary. He used a stone for a pillow, wore rough clothes and ate coarse food. Hunger was his relish, and the moon his lamp at night... He had no wife to distract him, no child to grieve him, no wealth to turn his head and no greed to humble him. His feet were his mount, and his hands his servant.[7]

Nahj al-Balagha, Sermon 160 · **Compiled text, not graded here**

Here Muslims and Christians part ways, and honesty is a form of respect. Most Christians believe the one God exists eternally as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, that Jesus is fully God and fully human, and that his death and resurrection bring salvation. They do not believe in three gods. The Qur'an, for its part, says, "Do not say 'Three'... God is only one God" (4:171). It compares Jesus to Adam (a), whom God "created from dust, then said to him, 'Be,' and he was" (3:59).

A wondrous birth shows God's power; it does not make the child divine. And the Qur'an says Jesus was neither killed nor crucified, "though it was made to appear so to them... God raised him up to Himself" (4:157–158). Muslims believe he is still alive.

On the Day of Judgement, the Qur'an says, God will ask Jesus whether he told people to worship him and his mother as gods. "Glory be to You," he will answer. "It is not for me to say what I have no right to say" (5:116). Then he goes on:

مَا قُلْتُ لَهُمْ إِلَّا مَآ أَمَرْتَنِى بِهِۦٓ أَنِ ٱعْبُدُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ رَبِّى وَرَبَّكُمْ
وَكُنتُ عَلَيْهِمْ شَهِيدًا مَّا دُمْتُ فِيهِمْ فَلَمَّا تَوَفَّيْتَنِى كُنتَ أَنتَ
ٱلرَّقِيبَ عَلَيْهِمْ وَأَنتَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَىْءٍ شَهِيدٌ ﴿١١٧﴾ إِن تُعَذِّبْهُمْ
فَإِنَّهُمْ عِبَادُكَ وَإِن تَغْفِرْ لَهُمْ فَإِنَّكَ أَنتَ ٱلْعَزِيزُ ٱلْحَكِيمُ ﴿١١٨﴾

I told them only what You commanded me: "Worship God, my Lord and your Lord." I was a witness over them as long as I remained among them, and when You took me, You Yourself were watching over them. You are witness to all things. If You punish them, they are Your servants. And if You forgive them, You are the Almighty, the Wise.

QUR'AN 5:117–118 · SURAT AL-MA'IDA

NOTICE Jesus stands beside the people he taught: "my Lord and your Lord." And even at the Judgement he pleads for them gently: "they are Your servants."

The Imams argued such points frankly, sometimes sharply, from the other side's scriptures. At the court of the caliph al-Ma'mun (r. 813–833 CE), Imam al-Rida (a) met a senior Christian bishop, the Catholicos. The Imam tried a deliberate provocation: he had nothing against the Christians' Jesus, he said, except that he fasted and prayed too little. The bishop protested that Jesus fasted every day and prayed every night. "Then for whom," the Imam asked, "did he fast and pray?" The bishop fell silent.[8]

A Christian today might answer that Jesus, as a man, prayed to the Father. That is where the two faiths divide. Muslims see in those prayers the most devoted of servants, turning to his Lord.

A FAIR QUESTION

Do Muslims worship a different God?

"Allah" sounds like a different god. Is He the God of Jews and Christians?

Allah is the ordinary Arabic word for God. Arabic-speaking Christians pray to Allah, and the classic Arabic Bible opens, "In the beginning Allah created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1).[9] The Qur'an tells Muslims to say to Jews and Christians, "Our God and your God is One" (29:46). Real disagreements remain, about the Trinity and about Jesus. But they concern what is true of the one God, not which God is meant. Two people can describe the same friend differently, and one may be wrong; both still mean the same friend.

Who inherits Abraham's covenant?

The story of Abraham (a) has one more chapter, one that Shia Muslims read closely.

وَإِذِ ٱبْتَلَىٰٓ إِبْرَٰهِـۧمَ رَبُّهُۥ بِكَلِمَٰتٍ فَأَتَمَّهُنَّ قَالَ إِنِّى جَاعِلُكَ لِلنَّاسِ إِمَامًا قَالَ وَمِن ذُرِّيَّتِى قَالَ لَا يَنَالُ عَهْدِى ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ﴿١٢٤﴾

And when his Lord tested Abraham with certain words, and he fulfilled them, He said, "I am making you an Imam for humankind." Abraham asked, "And from my descendants?" He said, "My covenant does not reach the wrongdoers."

QUR'AN 2:124 · SURAT AL-BAQARA

NOTICE God is already speaking to Abraham, so he is already a prophet. The Imamate comes after the testing. And God does not refuse Abraham's descendants outright. He excludes only "the wrongdoers."

The great Shia commentator al-Tabataba'i (d. 1981 CE) places this scene at the end of Abraham's life. By then Abraham had passed the trials the verse calls "words": the stars, the idols, the fire, the exile and the command to sacrifice his son.[10] An *imam* is

one whom people follow. Now God made him, by His own appointment, a leader for all humanity.

What does "the wrongdoers" exclude? Al-Tabataba'i records a neat argument from one of his teachers. People fall into four groups: those who do wrong all their lives, those who never do, those who do wrong and later reform, and those who start well and end badly. Abraham would never ask God to make leaders of the first group or the last. God then ruled out the third. Only one group is left: those who never do wrong at all.[11] Shia Muslims see here a root of their belief that the Imams are protected from sin (*'isma*).

The prophets also looked for help within their families. Moses (a) prayed, "Appoint for me a helper from my family: Aaron, my brother" (20:29–30). Shia teaching holds that every prophet left a trustee (*wasi*) to guard his message,[12] and that the trustee of the Prophet (s) was Ali (a), who was to him "as Aaron was to Moses" (Chapter 8).[13]

Imam al-Sadiq (a) described the Prophet's family as heirs of the whole line: "David inherited the knowledge of the prophets, Solomon inherited David, Muhammad inherited Solomon, and we inherited Muhammad. With us are the scrolls of Abraham and the tablets of Moses."[14] Chapter 8 tells what this meant after the Prophet's death.

In Muhammad (s), Muslims see the answer to Abraham's prayer and the "seal of the prophets" (33:40). In the Qur'an, Jesus (a) himself brings "good news of a messenger who will come after me, whose name is Ahmad" (61:6). And the story is not over. Muslims, Shia and Sunni alike, believe Jesus will return.

Shia hadith add that he will come in the days of the Mahdi (a), the twelfth Imam from the Prophet's family, and pray behind him.[15] The Messiah sent to the Children of Israel, praying behind a descendant of Ishmael: in that picture, the pieces of Abraham's family fall into place.

◆

How should Abraham's children speak to one another?

If the prophets are one family, how should their followers treat each other? The Qur'an gives Muslims a manner and a script. "Do not argue with the People of the Book except in the best way... Say: We believe in what was sent down to us and to you" (29:46). It invites them to "a word common to us and you: that we worship none but God" (3:64). It refuses to lump people together: "They are not all alike. Among the People of the Book is an upright community, who recite God's signs through the night and prostrate themselves" (3:113).

Naming the houses of worship that God protects, the Qur'an lists "monasteries, churches, synagogues and mosques, where God's name is remembered often" (22:40). The mosque comes last. Difference itself is part of God's design: "Among His signs are... the variety of your languages and your colours" (30:22). He made humanity "nations and tribes so that you may come to know one another" (49:13). He could have made everyone alike, and chose not to.

Islam's first community was meant to show it. Once some men of Quraysh sat in the mosque boasting of their ancestors, and one of them asked Salman the Persian, the Prophet's companion, about his. "I am Salman, son of a servant of God," he replied. "I was lost, and God guided me through Muhammad. I was poor, and God made me rich through Muhammad. I was a slave, and God freed me through Muhammad. This is my lineage, and this is my nobility."[16]

What about people who never truly heard the message? The Qur'an is plain: "We never punish until We have sent a messenger" (17:15). Imam al-Sadiq (a) taught, "God holds people to account by what He has given them and made known to them."[17] Judgement belongs to God, who knows what reached each heart. Chapter 16 returns to this question.

The real test is often the family table. Many who come to Islam go home to Christian or Jewish parents.

A STORY FROM THE SOURCES

The son who served his mother

Zakariyya ibn Ibrahim, a Christian from Kufa in Iraq, became a Muslim. On pilgrimage he told Imam Jaʿfar al-Sadiq (a) his worry: his family were Christians, his mother was blind, and he lived and ate with them. The Imam asked whether they ate pork. They did not. "Then there is no harm," he said. "Be good to your mother. When she dies, see to her yourself."

Back home, Zakariyya fed his mother, picked the lice from her clothes and hair, and waited on her. "My son," she said one day, "you never did this when you shared my religion. What is this I see in you since you entered the faith of the *hanif*?" A descendant of the Prophet had told him to, he said. "Is he a prophet?" "No, a prophet's son." "My son," she said, "these are the teachings of the prophets." She asked to learn his faith, and became a Muslim before she died. Her son prayed over her and laid her in her grave.[18]

Today a leading Shia authority, Ayatollah al-Sistani, rules that Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians are ritually pure, so a Muslim may share a home and a table with them.[19] Check the rulings of the scholar you follow (your *marja'*), including on food.

People still ask the old question: Should I be a Jew? A Christian? A Muslim? The Qur'an's answer is an invitation, not a threat: "There is no compulsion in religion" (2:256). It does not ask anyone to leave Abraham, Moses or Jesus (a) behind. It invites everyone to do what Abraham did under the stars: look past everything that rises and sets, and turn to the One who made them. And in a once-empty valley, a mother's search for water has become a rite that millions repeat each year: a sign that God does not leave the searcher alone.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. The Qur'an teaches one religion, surrender to the one God, carried by every prophet from Noah to Muhammad (s).
2. Laws changed to suit each people and age; the heart of the message, worship and goodness, never changed.
3. Muslims honour Mary and Jesus deeply, as chosen woman and Messiah, but worship God alone.
4. God made Abraham an Imam after his trials, and His covenant never reaches wrongdoers: a root of Shia belief.
5. The Qur'an asks Muslims to speak with Jews and Christians "in the best way": "our God and your God is One."

NEXT TIME · GO FURTHER

Next time: *The Difference Between Sunni and Shia.* One Prophet, one Qur'an, and the question of who would guide after him. If every prophet left a trustee, whom did Muhammad (s) leave?

Go further:

Course: God and His Attributes, a Level 1 course at Tasneem Institute (tasneeminstitute.org/courses/god-and-his-attributes)

Read: "Messengers of God.", a short introduction to prophethood in Tasneem's *Discovering Islam* series (tasneeminstitute.org/blog/discovering-islam/prophethood-nubuwwa). For a deeper dive, *Nahj al-Balagha*, Sermon 160, where Imam Ali (a) holds up Muhammad (s), Moses, David and Jesus as models of the simple life.

Watch: Invitation to Islam, Episode 19, "How Islam Embodies the Abrahamic Faiths" (10 min).

LOOK BACK

1. Chapter 6's motto was "open to wonder, careful with evidence." What would that mean for a report of a miracle?
2. Chapter 3 asked whether humanity needs prophets. What is one reason it gave?
3. Part One asks, "Is it true?" Which idea so far has helped you most with that question?

TALK ABOUT IT

WARM-UP

1. Did anyone tell you stories of Abraham, Moses, Mary or Jesus when you were young? Which one stayed with you?

UNDERSTAND

2. According to Qur'an 42:13 and Imam al-Sadiq's explanation, what stayed the same from Noah to Muhammad (s), and what changed?
3. What does the Qur'an say about Jesus that Christians would agree with, and where does it differ?

REFLECT

4. Abraham told his angry father, "Peace be upon you. I will ask my Lord to forgive you" (19:47). When is it hardest to disagree that gently with someone you love?
5. Gabriel told Hagar she was entrusted "to One who is enough." When have you had to trust without seeing how it would work out? You needn't share what it was.

APPLY

6. Qur'an 29:46 asks for conversation "in the best way." Who is one person of another faith, or none, whose beliefs you could ask about this week, and really listen?

GO DEEPER

7. Read Imam al-Sadiq's full answer about "the resolute" messengers (al-Kafi, vol. 2, Book of Belief and Disbelief, ch. 12, no. 2; reliable chain). Why might he stress that Abraham left Noah's book "not out of disbelief in it"?
8. Reread Qur'an 2:124 alongside the "four groups" argument in this chapter. Does the argument persuade you? What would you want to ask?

CARRY IT HOME

Choose one way in this week:

☐ **Notice:** When you disagree with someone this week, especially family, listen to your first words. Are they closer to Abraham's "Peace be upon you" or to his father's threat? What would it take to begin with peace?

☐ **Do:** Do one kind, practical thing for a relative or neighbour whose faith differs from yours, the way Zakariyya served his mother. Don't bring up religion unless they do.

☐ **Learn:** Read Sura 19 (*Maryam*), verses 16–36, the Qur'an's story of Mary and the birth of Jesus, in one sitting. Note one thing that surprises you, and bring it to the circle.

Aim. Help the circle see how the Qur'an places Islam inside one family of prophets, and practise speaking about real differences with respect.

Protect this question. No. 4, on Abraham's "Peace be upon you." Everyone has disagreed with someone they love, so guests, reverts and lifelong Muslims can all answer it as equals.

Answer notes.

- *Q2.* The same: one religion (*din*), to be upheld without splitting apart (42:13). What changed: the law (*sharīʿa*) brought by each "resolute" messenger, ending with the Qur'an's, which stays in force.
- *Q3.* Shared: Mary's purity and virginity; Jesus as Messiah, Word and miracle-worker; his return. Different: the Qur'an denies his divinity and the Trinity (4:171; 5:116–117) and says he was raised, not crucified (4:157–158).

Likely questions.

- *"Do Muslims worship a different God?"* See the "fair question" box.
- *"If the Torah and Gospel came from God, why don't Muslims follow them?"* See "One religion, or three?" on laws and the Qur'an as guardian (5:48).
- *"Was it Isaac or Ishmael on the altar?"* The Qur'an does not name him (37:99–113). Most Muslims say Ishmael; even early Shia narrators differed (al-Kafi, vol. 4, Book of Hajj, ch. 7, no. 4). Don't let it become a contest.
- *"What happens to good Christians and Jews?"* See the last section (17:15); Chapter 16 treats it in full. Don't settle it tonight.

Watch for. Jewish and Christian guests may hear "Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian" as a claim on their ancestor; explain that the verse is about faith before labels. Don't debate the Trinity or the crucifixion. If a Christian present is willing, let them describe their own belief. Reverts may have non-Muslim parents: let the convert's story encourage, never test.

Bring. A jug of water and cups for everyone, in memory of Hagar's search and the spring of Zamzam.

MY THREAD · CHAPTER 07

Abraham looked up and asked, "Is this my Lord?" What question do I keep returning to, and where am I looking for its answer?

MY QUESTION FOR THE BOX

08

The Difference Between Sunni and Shia

One Prophet, one Qur'an, and the question of who would guide after him.

إِنَّمَا ٱلْمُؤْمِنُونَ إِخْوَةٌ فَأَصْلِحُوا۟ بَيْنَ أَخَوَيْكُمْ وَٱتَّقُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ ﴿١٠﴾

The believers are brothers, so make peace between your brothers, and be mindful of God, so that you may be shown mercy.

QUR'AN 49:10 · SURAT AL-HUJURAT

A NOTE OF CARE This chapter touches on identity and family, and for some on painful memories of sectarian hurt. Speak from your own understanding, describe others as they would describe themselves, and remember that no one here has to answer for history.

WATCH · EPISODE 03 · 11:29

youtu.be/dj4wh7rHmJE

In the video: why a Sunni and a Shia can stand side by side in the same prayer (3:03)

Reading time: about 20 minutes

The pilgrims are going home. It is 632 CE (10 AH), and the Prophet Muhammad (s) has just made his farewell pilgrimage, the only one he performed after leaving Mecca for Medina. Great crowds came to make it with him.[1] Now the long caravan is winding north again, and at Khumm, a watering place between Mecca and Medina, he calls a halt.

The Prophet stands to speak. He praises God and gives the people counsel, and then he says something that sounds like a farewell.

"People, I am only a human being. The messenger of my Lord will soon come for me, and I will answer. I am leaving among you two weighty things. The first is the Book of God, in which there is guidance and light. So take hold of the Book of God, and hold on to it." He urges them to keep the Qur'an close. Then he adds: "And my household. I remind you of God concerning my household." He says that sentence three times.[2]

Reports in both Sunni and Shia books remember another moment on that road home. The Prophet calls the people to prayer, takes the hand of his cousin, Ali ibn Abi Talib (a), and asks the crowd, "Am I not closer to the believers than they are to themselves?" "Yes," they answer. "Then this man is the guardian of everyone whose master I am."[3]

Within three months, the Prophet had died.[4]

Generations later, his descendant Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (a), the sixth Imam (d. 765 CE), travelled the same road. At the mosque that now stood at Ghadir Khumm, "the pool of Khumm," he looked toward its left side. "That is where the Messenger of God set his foot," he told his camel driver, "when he said, 'Whoever I am master of, Ali is his master.'"[5]

Sunni and Shia Muslims both preserve these words, and both love the man whose hand the Prophet took. Yet for fourteen centuries they have understood that day differently. What did the Prophet mean, and why does the answer still matter?

THE BIG QUESTION

If Sunni and Shia Muslims share one God, one Prophet and one Qur'an, what actually divides them?

Have you ever wondered whether the split is really about religion, or about an argument over power long ago? Whether the small differences you might notice in a mosque, such as hands folded or at the sides, or a little tablet of clay, mean two different faiths? Or, if you grew up in one community, what the other believes when it speaks for itself?

This chapter looks at what the two share, what happened after the Prophet's death, and why Shia Muslims believe his guidance continued through his family. It also asks how Muslims who disagree can live as one family.

WORDS TO KNOW

sunna (سنّة) · *SOON-na* · the Prophet's example: what he said, did and approved. Sunnis are *ahl al-sunna*, "people of the Prophet's way."

shīʿa (شيعة) · *SHEE-ah* · "followers" or "partisans"; short for *shīʿat ʿAlī*, the followers of Ali.

imām (إمام) · *ee-MAAM* · a leader, especially in prayer; for Shia Muslims, one of twelve guides chosen by God after the Prophet.

mawlā (مولى) · *MAW-laa* · master, guardian or close friend; the key word of the Prophet's words at Ghadir Khumm.

thaqalayn (الثقلين) · *tha-qa-LAYN* · "the two weighty things": the Qur'an and the Prophet's household.

ʿiṣma (عصمة) · *ISS-ma* · protection from sin and error, given by God to the prophets and, Shia Muslims believe, to the Imams.

◆

What do Sunni and Shia Muslims share?

Walk into a large mosque at prayer time and watch the rows form. People stand shoulder to shoulder, all facing the Kaʿba, the ancient House of God in Mecca. They bow together and prostrate together. Look closely and you may see small differences. One man folds his hands over his chest; the man beside him lets his arms hang at his sides. One woman rests her forehead on a small tablet of clay. But they are saying the same prayer, in the same Arabic words, to the same God.

That scene is the right place to begin: what the two share is vast. Both believe in one God, without partner or rival. This oneness, *tawhid*, is the foundation of everything else. Both believe that God sent prophets to humanity, from Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus (a) to Muhammad (s), the last of them. His message completed God's guidance for every people and every age. Both believe in angels and the unseen, and in a Day of Judgement when every person will answer to God.

Both hold the same Qur'an, with the same 114 chapters in the same order. Some claim that Shia Muslims have a different one, and Shia scholars have rejected that claim for a thousand years. Al-Shaykh al-Saduq (d. 991 CE), one of the great early Shia scholars, wrote that the Qur'an God revealed to Muhammad is exactly the book Muslims hold in their hands. Anyone who says that Shia believe it was longer, he added, "is a liar."[6]

The practices are shared too. Sunni and Shia Muslims pray five times a day and fast in Ramadan from before dawn until sunset. They give *zakat*, the alms owed to the poor, and they make the pilgrimage to Mecca, where they circle the Ka'ba side by side.

They even share a prayer for the Prophet's family. A Companion of the Prophet named Ka'b ibn 'Ujra once offered a man he met "a gift" from the Prophet. The Companions had asked the Prophet how they should bless him and his household. He taught them: "O God, bless Muhammad and the family of Muhammad, as You blessed Abraham and the family of Abraham."[7] Sunni Muslims recite these words near the end of their prayers. Shia Muslims bless "Muhammad and the family of Muhammad" in every prayer too.[8] Love for the Prophet's household belongs to every Muslim.

A 2009 study estimated that 87 to 90 percent of the world's Muslims are Sunni and 10 to 13 percent are Shia.[9] Neither group is uniform. Sunni Muslims follow several schools of law, the best known being the Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i and Hanbali. Shia Muslims include Zaydis and Ismailis as well as the largest group, the Twelvers, whose tradition this book follows.

So what is the difference? It is not about whom Muslims worship, or which book they read. It is about how the Prophet's guidance was meant to continue after him.

◆

What happened when the Prophet died?

The Prophet (s) died in Medina in 632 CE (11 AH). His cousin Ali (a), the first Imam (d. 661 CE), later remembered washing the Prophet's body, with the angels helping him.[10] While the family prepared the burial, the question of leadership arrived, urgent and unavoidable.

Sunni Muslims tell what followed like this. The Prophet had not named a successor, so the community had to choose one. The Muslims of Medina, the *Ansar* ("helpers"), gathered in a meeting hall, the Saqifa of Banu Sa'ida. Abu Bakr and 'Umar went to them with other emigrants from Mecca. After a tense debate, the gathering pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr (d. 634 CE) as the Prophet's *khalifa*, or "successor."

ʿUmar himself later recalled that Ali, the Companion al-Zubayr and those with them held back. Ali pledged six months later.[11]

Abu Bakr was the Prophet's close friend and father-in-law, and in the Prophet's final illness had led the prayers at his command.[12] Before he died, Abu Bakr named ʿUmar ibn al-Khattab (d. 644) as his successor. ʿUmar named a council of six senior Companions, which chose ʿUthman ibn ʿAffan (d. 656). When ʿUthman was killed, the people pledged allegiance to Ali.

When ʿUmar lay dying and was urged to name a successor, his reply put the Sunni view in two sentences: "If I name a successor, someone better than me named one: Abu Bakr. And if I leave it, someone better than me left it: the Messenger of God."[13] Muslims who accept these four as *al-khulafa al-rashidun*, "the rightly guided caliphs," came to be known as Sunnis, and most Sunni scholars rank them in merit in that same order.[14]

Shia Muslims tell the same months differently. The Prophet, they hold, had already named his successor at God's command, and Ghadir Khumm was the public announcement. Ali was more than the Prophet's cousin and the husband of his daughter, Lady Fatima (a). He was the executor of the Prophet's will, his *wasi*, and the first of twelve Imams whom God had chosen to guide the community. The name Shia comes from *shiʿat Ali*, "the followers of Ali."

The most respected Sunni collections of hadith, the reports of the Prophet's words and deeds, preserve a painful scene from his last days. Years later, his young cousin Ibn ʿAbbas (d. c. 687) wept as he remembered it, until his tears wet the pebbles. "Thursday," he said, "and what a Thursday!" The Prophet, gravely ill, had asked for something to write on: "Let me write you a document after which you will never go astray." Those in the room disagreed. ʿUmar said that the Prophet was overcome by pain, and that the Book of God was enough. Voices rose, and the Prophet asked them to leave. "The calamity, the whole calamity," Ibn ʿAbbas used to say, "is what came between the Messenger of God and that writing."[15] Sunni Muslims hear in ʿUmar's words concern for a dying man. Shia Muslims see guidance that was never written down, and hear in "you will never go astray" an echo of the two weighty things.

What did Ali himself do? He said openly that the leadership was his by right, yet he would not split the young community. When the council chose ʿUthman, he told its members: "You know that I have a better right to it than anyone else. Yet by God, I will keep the peace as long as the affairs of the Muslims are safe, and the only injustice falls on me alone."[16] He also explained why he had come to Islam's aid when people began turning back from the faith after the Prophet's death. "I feared," he wrote,

"that if I did not help Islam and its people, I would see a breach in it, or its ruin."[17] The hero of the Shia story put the safety of Islam before his own right.

A STORY FROM THE SOURCES

Let whoever heard it stand

A quarter of a century after Ghadir, Ali (a) was caliph, ruling from Kufa in Iraq. One day, in an open square called al-Rahba, he asked anyone who had heard the Messenger of God speak on the day of Ghadir Khumm to stand and bear witness.

Men rose, six from one side of the crowd and six from the other. They testified that they had heard the Prophet ask, "Is not God closer to the believers?" The people had answered, "Yes." Then he had said: "O God, whoever I am master of, Ali is his master. O God, befriend whoever befriends him, and be the enemy of whoever is his enemy."

The report is preserved in the *Musnad* of Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d. 855), the founder of the Hanbali school of Sunni law.[18]

◆

Why would guidance need a guide?

For Twelver Shia Muslims, succession is not only a question of history. It is part of belief. Shia teachers sum up the faith in five foundations: God's oneness, His justice, prophethood, the Imamate (the leadership of the Imams) and the Return to God on the Last Day.[19] The Imamate belongs on that list because it continues the argument of Chapter 3. If God made human beings for a purpose, would He leave them guessing? The Qur'an is complete, but a book cannot answer questions about itself. Someone must show how it is to be lived.

Abu Basir, a student of Imam al-Sadiq (a), once brought him an objection people still raise. The Imam had taught that this verse was revealed about Ali (a) and his family:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓاْ أَطِيعُواْ ٱللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُواْ ٱلرَّسُولَ وَأُوْلِى ٱلْأَمْرِ
مِنكُمْ فَإِن تَنَٰزَعْتُمْ فِى شَىْءٍ فَرُدُّوهُ إِلَى ٱللَّهِ وَٱلرَّسُولِ إِن كُنتُمْ
تُؤْمِنُونَ بِٱللَّهِ وَٱلْيَوْمِ ٱلْءَاخِرِ ذَٰلِكَ خَيْرٌ وَأَحْسَنُ تَأْوِيلًا ﴿٥٩﴾

You who believe, obey God, and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you. If you disagree about anything, refer it to God and the Messenger, if you truly believe in God and the Last Day. That is better, and best in the end.

QUR'AN 4:59 · SURAT AL-NISA'

NOTICE "Obey" appears twice: once for God, and once for the Messenger and "those in authority" together. A single command covers both.

"People say," Abu Basir told him, "then why didn't God name Ali and his family in His Book?" The Imam replied:

IMAM JA'FAR AL-SADIQ (A), THE SIXTH IMAM

قُولُوا لَهُمْ إِنَّ رَسُولَ اللهِ (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وآلِه) نَزَلَتْ عَلَيْهِ الصَّلاةُ وَلَمْ يُسَمِّ اللهُ لَهُمْ ثَلاثاً وَلا أَرْبَعاً حَتَّى كَانَ رَسُولُ اللهِ (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وآلِه) هُوَ الَّذِي فَسَّرَ ذَلِكَ لَهُمْ ... وَنَزَلَتْ أَطِيعُوا اللهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ وَأُولِي الأَمْرِ مِنْكُمْ وَنَزَلَتْ فِي عَلِيٍّ وَالْحَسَنِ وَالْحُسَيْنِ فَقَالَ رَسُولُ اللهِ (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وآلِه) فِي عَلِيٍّ مَنْ كُنْتُ مَوْلاهُ فَعَلِيٌّ مَوْلاهُ وَقَالَ (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وآلِه) أُوصِيكُمْ بِكِتَابِ اللهِ وَأَهْلِ بَيْتِي فَإِنِّي سَأَلْتُ اللهَ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ أَنْ لا يُفَرِّقَ بَيْنَهُمَا حَتَّى يُورِدَهُمَا عَلَيَّ الْحَوْضَ فَأَعْطَانِي ذَلِكَ

Tell them: prayer was revealed to the Messenger of God, but God did not name three or four units for them. It was the Messenger of God who explained that to

> them... Then *Obey God, and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you* was revealed, and it was revealed about Ali, al-Hasan and al-Husayn. So the Messenger of God said about Ali, "Whoever I am master of, Ali is his master." And he said, "I charge you with the Book of God and my household. I asked God, Mighty and Majestic, not to separate them until He brings them to me at the Pool [on the Day of Judgement], and He granted me that."[20]
>
> al-Kafi 1 · Divine Authority · ch. 64 · no. 1 · **Reliable chain**

The answer rests on something every Muslim knows. The Qur'an commands prayer, but never says how many units each prayer has. It commands alms, but never states the rate. It commands pilgrimage, but never says to circle the Kaʿba seven times. In each case the Prophet (s) explained, and Muslims of every school follow him. In the same way, the Imam says, the Qur'an commanded obedience to "those in authority," and the Prophet named them.

What is an Imam for? Imam al-Sadiq put it in one sentence: "The earth is never left without an Imam, so that if the believers add something [to the religion], he turns them back, and if they leave something out, he completes it for them."[21] The Imam guards the revelation as its trusted interpreter and living example. That is why Shia Muslims believe that God protected the Imams from sin and error, which they call *ʿisma*. If God commands everyone to follow a guide, that guide must not lead them astray. As Chapter 7 showed, when God made Abraham (a) an Imam, He said, "My covenant does not reach the wrongdoers" (Qur'an 2:124). Shia commentators read several other verses in the same light.[22]

None of this makes the Imams prophets, still less divine. "God sealed the prophets with your Prophet," Imam al-Sadiq taught, "so there will never be a prophet after him. And He sealed the scriptures with your Book, so there will never be a book after it."[23] The Imams brought no new revelation. They explained the one they had inherited.

Shia Muslims count twelve Imams, each named by the one before him:

1. Ali ibn Abi Talib (d. 661 CE)
2. al-Hasan (d. c. 670)
3. al-Husayn, killed at Karbala in Iraq (680)
4. Ali Zayn al-Abidin (d. c. 713)
5. Muhammad al-Baqir (d. c. 733)
6. Jaʿfar al-Sadiq (d. 765)

7. Musa al-Kazim (d. 799)
8. Ali al-Rida (d. 818)
9. Muhammad al-Jawad (d. 835)
10. Ali al-Hadi (d. 868)
11. al-Hasan al-ʿAskari (d. 874)
12. Muhammad al-Mahdi (born 869)[24]

"There will be nine Imams after al-Husayn," said the fifth Imam, al-Baqir (a); "the ninth of them is their *Qa'im*," the one who will rise.[25] Shia Muslims believe this twelfth Imam is alive but hidden, in what is called the *ghayba*, or occultation. For nearly seventy years (874–941 CE) he guided his followers through four trusted deputies. Since then his absence has been longer, as the Imams foretold: "The Qa'im will have two occultations, one short and one long."[26] Most Sunni Muslims also expect a Mahdi. In a report that Sunni scholars accept, the Prophet said, "The Mahdi is from my family, from the descendants of Fatima."[27] Shia Muslims add that he has already been born.

How are believers guided while the Imam is hidden? One of his letters answered with an image: people benefit from him as they would "from the sun when clouds hide it from sight." The same letter told them where to turn in practice: "As for events that arise, refer them to the narrators of our hadith. They are my proof to you, and I am God's proof to them."[28] Shia Muslims today follow a living, upright and learned jurist, a *marjaʿ* ("reference"), in matters of religious law, much as a patient trusts a doctor. On the foundations of faith, though, a leading Shia jurist, Ayatollah al-Sistani, rules that no one may follow another: belief must rest on a person's own understanding.[29]

This is also why the two traditions read from different shelves. Both treasure the Prophet's *sunna*: his words, his actions and what he silently approved. Sunni Muslims receive it mainly through the Companions, in collections such as those of al-Bukhari (d. 870) and Muslim (d. 875). Shia Muslims receive it above all through the Prophet's family, so their collections, such as al-Kafi, also gather the words and example of the Imams. Jurists on both sides still derive the law from them, even for questions no one asked before.

A FAIR QUESTION

Why do Shia Muslims pray differently?

The differences are small, and each rests on reports about how the Prophet (s) and his family prayed.

- **Arms.** Most Sunnis fold their hands. Shia let their arms rest at their sides, as Imam al-Sadiq (a) did when he showed a student how to pray.[30]
- **Times.** Shia often pray the noon and afternoon prayers together, and the sunset and night prayers too. *Sahih Muslim* records the Prophet doing this "without fear or travel."[31] Shia also wait until the redness in the eastern sky has passed overhead, a few minutes after sunset, before the sunset prayer, and usually break the Ramadan fast then.[32]
- **The clay tablet.** Shia prostrate only on earth or what grows from it, never on what is eaten or worn. Prostration is humility before God, Imam al-Sadiq explained, and the people of this world are slaves to what they eat and wear. The *turba* is clean earth: "The earth has been made for me a place of prostration," the Prophet said.[33]
- **The call to prayer.** Many Shia add a testimony that Ali is God's *wali*, His "friend" or "guardian." Al-Sistani rules that it is not part of the call, but good to say, to draw near to God.[34]

Shia Muslims also pay *khums*, a fifth of their yearly surplus income (Qur'an 8:41). Chapter 29 explains it. For the details, check the rulings of the scholar you follow (your *marja'*).

PAUSE AND RECALL

In your own words: what do Sunni and Shia Muslims share, and where do they mainly differ? Why, according to Imam al-Sadiq, is Ali not named in the Qur'an?

◆

The same words, read two ways

Strikingly, the Prophet's words that Shia Muslims quote most often appear in the most respected Sunni collections too.

The Khumm sermon is in *Sahih Muslim*. Al-Tirmidhi (d. 892) records a related report that names no place: "I am leaving among you that which, if you hold fast to it, you will never go astray after me." It lists "the Book of God, a rope stretched from

heaven to earth, and my family, my household," and promises: "The two will not separate until they come to me at the Pool."[35] "Whoever I am master of, Ali is his master" is recorded by al-Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah (d. 887) and Ahmad ibn Hanbal. Leading Sunni hadith scholars grade it authentic, though it is not in al-Bukhari or Muslim.[36]

When the Prophet (s) left Ali (a) in charge of Medina during a campaign, he asked him, "Will you not be content to be to me as Aaron was to Moses, except that there is no prophet after me?"[37] And he foretold, "This religion will remain mighty and secure until there have been twelve successors," adding, "all of them from Quraysh," his own tribe.[38]

ʿA'isha (d. 678), the Prophet's wife, remembered him going out one morning wrapped in a cloak woven of black hair. Al-Hasan (a) came, and he drew him in under it; then al-Husayn (a), then Fatima (a), then Ali. Then he recited the end of this verse:[39]

وَقَرْنَ فِي بُيُوتِكُنَّ وَلَا تَبَرَّجْنَ تَبَرُّجَ ٱلْجَٰهِلِيَّةِ ٱلْأُولَىٰ وَأَقِمْنَ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ
وَءَاتِينَ ٱلزَّكَوٰةَ وَأَطِعْنَ ٱللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُۥٓ ۚ إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ ٱللَّهُ لِيُذْهِبَ عَنكُمُ
ٱلرِّجْسَ أَهْلَ ٱلْبَيْتِ وَيُطَهِّرَكُمْ تَطْهِيرًا ﴿٣٣﴾

Stay in your houses, and do not make a display of yourselves as in the old age of ignorance. Keep up the prayer, give the alms, and obey God and His Messenger. God only wishes to remove all impurity from you, People of the House, and to purify you completely.

QUR'AN 33:33 · SURAT AL-AHZAB

NOTICE The verse opens with commands to the Prophet's wives, in feminine plural forms. In its final sentence, the one the Prophet recited under the cloak, "you" becomes masculine plural.

When another verse called him to a solemn prayer-challenge with Christians who disputed about Jesus (a), bringing "our sons... our women... ourselves" (Qur'an 3:61), he brought the same four and said, "O God, these are my family."[40]

How do Sunni Muslims read these texts? With love, and differently. Many Sunni scholars take *mawla*, the word translated "master" above, in its everyday sense of "friend" or "ally." Read that way, the words at Ghadir defend Ali, as the Prophet had done when a soldier complained about him after a mission to Yemen.[41] The two weighty things, on this reading, are a charge to honour and care for the Prophet's family. Zayd ibn Arqam, who reported the Khumm sermon, explained that family as the clans of Ali, ʿAqil, Jaʿfar and al-ʿAbbas.[42] For Sunnis, the Aaron saying is a lasting honour, though its deputyship lasted one campaign. The twelve successors are twelve rulers.[43] And the purification verse, set among verses to the Prophet's wives, includes them too.

Shia Muslims read the same words as a single design. Before saying "whoever I am master of," the Prophet asked, "Am I not closer to the believers than they are to themselves?" He was echoing the Qur'an: "The Prophet is closer to the believers than their own selves" (Qur'an 33:6). In that setting, *mawla* means the one with authority. In the Qur'an, Aaron (a) was Moses' minister, partner and deputy (Qur'an 20:29–32; 7:142). Ali held every one of those roles except prophethood, which the Prophet himself set aside. A household paired with the Qur'an, and promised never to part from it, must be as trustworthy as the Book. And twelve successors from Quraysh match twelve Imams from the Prophet's own family.

Neither reading requires bad faith. Sunni Muslims honour the Imams as great scholars and righteous descendants of the Prophet. Malik ibn Anas (d. 795), the founder of the Maliki school, narrated hadith from Imam al-Sadiq (a) in his famous book of hadith and law, the *Muwatta*.[44] What Sunnis do not accept is the Imams' authority as sinless guides. That, and not love, is the real difference. Nor does the disagreement cast doubt on the revelation itself. Both sides begin from the same God, Prophet and Book, and argue the question between them from the evidence.

◆

How do Muslims who disagree stay one family?

We live in a world divided by sectarianism, and extremists on every side would like Sunni and Shia Muslims to see each other as enemies. Most never have. In Lebanon, Iraq, Pakistan and India, Sunni and Shia families have lived as neighbours for centuries. They share streets and markets, and stand by each other in joy and grief.

The Imams set the pattern. During the battle of Siffin, fought between Muslim armies, Imam Ali (a) heard some of his own men cursing the soldiers they faced, and he stopped them. "I dislike that you should be revilers," he said. Instead of cursing,

they should pray: "O God, spare our blood and theirs, and set things right between us and them."[45] His grandson Imam Zayn al-Abidin (a), the fourth Imam, prayed for the Prophet's Companions, "those who kept his company well": "Do not forget them, O God, for what they gave up for You and in You."[46] And Imam al-Sadiq (a) sent his followers a charge that still shapes Shia life:

IMAM JA'FAR AL-SADIQ (A), THE SIXTH IMAM

صِلُوا عَشَائِرَكُمْ وَاشْهَدُوا جَنَائِزَهُمْ وَعُودُوا مَرْضَاهُمْ وَأَدُّوا حُقُوقَهُمْ فَإِنَّ الرَّجُلَ مِنْكُمْ إِذَا وَرِعَ فِي دِينِهِ وَصَدَقَ الْحَدِيثَ وَأَدَّى الأَمَانَةَ وَحَسُنَ خُلُقُهُ مَعَ النَّاسِ قِيلَ هَذَا جَعْفَرِيٌّ فَيَسُرُّنِي ذَلِكَ وَيَدْخُلُ عَلَيَّ مِنْهُ السُّرُورُ وَقِيلَ هَذَا أَدَبُ جَعْفَرٍ

Keep ties with your people. Attend their funerals, visit their sick and give them their rights. For when one of you is careful in his religion, truthful in what he says, faithful to what is entrusted to him and good-natured with people, they say, "This is a Ja'fari," and that delights me and fills me with joy. And they say, "This is the training of Ja'far."[47]

al-Kafi 2 · Social Relations · ch. 1 · no. 5 · **Reliable chain**

> *"O God, spare our blood and theirs, and set things right between us and them.*
>
> IMAM ALI (A)

A few habits help people who disagree stay a family. Describe the other tradition as its own thoughtful members would. Separate a teaching from the behaviour of any one person who holds it. Never make a neighbour answer for the seventh century. And when argument turns to contempt, remember that making peace is itself worship. "To make peace between two people," said Imam al-Sadiq, "is dearer to me than giving two gold dinars in charity."[48] The Qur'an says the same: "The believers are brothers, so make peace between your brothers" (Qur'an 49:10).

Picture the mosque again, the rows straight and the shoulders touching. At Khumm, the Prophet (s) asked his people to hold fast to the Book and to remember his family. Shia Muslims believe that means following the Imams; Sunni Muslims

believe it means honouring the family. Both can stand in the same row, facing the same Kaʿba, and pray as he taught them: "O God, bless Muhammad and the family of Muhammad." Over them both stands the Qur'an's command: "Hold fast, all together, to the rope of God, and do not be divided" (Qur'an 3:103).

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Sunni and Shia Muslims share one God, one Prophet, one Qur'an and the same pillars of worship.
2. Their central difference is how the Prophet's guidance was meant to continue after his death in 632 CE.
3. Sunnis honour the first four caliphs as rightly guided; Shia follow twelve Imams, from Ali onward, designated by God.
4. The Prophet's key words, such as the "two weighty things" and Ghadir, are preserved in Sunni and Shia books alike.
5. The Imams modelled unity: no cursing, keeping ties, visiting the sick and making peace between people.

NEXT TIME · GO FURTHER

Next time: *What Is the Soul?* From the guides God gives, we turn to the self that must follow them. If we know what is right, why is it so hard to do?

Go further:

Courses: Imamate in Islamic Thought and Fiqh Made Easy: Practical Principles, Level 1 courses at Tasneem Institute (tasneeminstitute.org/courses/imamate-in-islamic-thought; tasneeminstitute.org/courses/fiqh-made-easy-practical-principles)
Read: "The Twelve Imams.", a short introduction in Tasneem's *Discovering Islam* series (tasneeminstitute.org/blog/discovering-islam/the-twelve-imams). For a deeper dive, al-Kafi, vol. 1, Book of Divine Authority, ch. 64.
Watch: Invitation to Islam, Episode 3, "The Difference Between Sunni and Shia" (11 min).

LOOK BACK

1. In Chapter 7, what did God make Abraham after testing him, and whom did He say His covenant would never reach?
2. Chapter 3 argued that prophets must be protected from error. Why does guidance need that?
3. Part One asks, "Is it true?" What makes an old report trustworthy?

TALK ABOUT IT

WARM-UP

1. Have you ever shared a meal, a celebration or a prayer with someone from a different tradition? What stayed with you?

UNDERSTAND

2. How does Imam al-Sadiq's comparison with the number of units in each prayer answer the question, "Why isn't Ali named in the Qur'an?"
3. How do Sunni and Shia readings of *mawla* at Ghadir differ, and which words in the reports does each reading lean on?

REFLECT

4. Ali believed the leadership was his, yet promised to "keep the peace as long as the affairs of the Muslims are safe." What do you make of that choice?
5. When has someone described your beliefs, or your family's, in a way you did not recognise? How did it feel? You needn't share the details.

APPLY

6. Imam al-Sadiq hoped people would say of his followers, "This is the training of Jaʿfar." What could you do this week that would honour whoever raised or taught you?

GO DEEPER

7. Read Imam al-Sadiq's full answer about Qur'an 4:59 (al-Kafi, vol. 1, Book of Divine Authority, ch. 64, no. 1; reliable chain). What does the scene in the house of Umm Salama, the Prophet's wife, add?
8. Compare the two weighty things in *Sahih Muslim* (no. 2408) and al-Tirmidhi's *Jamiʿ* (no. 3788), both Sunni sources. What does the second wording add?

CARRY IT HOME

Choose one way in this week:

☐ **Notice:** Whenever you hear a group described this week, Sunni or Shia, religious or not, pause and ask: would its own thoughtful members recognise that description?

☐ **Do:** Take up Imam al-Sadiq's charge in one small way. Visit someone who is ill, go to a community event outside your usual circle, or offer help to a neighbour you rarely speak to.

☐ **Learn:** Read the hadith of the two weighty things in *Sahih Muslim* (no. 2408) and in al-Kafi (vol. 1, Book of Divine Authority, ch. 64, no. 1). Write down one thing the two versions share and one thing that differs.

Aim. Help the circle see how much Sunni and Shia Muslims share, understand the Shia belief in the Imamate from within, and practise describing others fairly.

Protect this question. No. 4, on Ali's choice to keep the peace. It lets everyone, whatever their background, talk about conviction and unity together.

Answer notes.

- *Q2.* The Qur'an commands prayer, alms and pilgrimage without every detail, and the Prophet explained them. Likewise 4:59 commands obedience to "those in authority," and the Prophet named them, as at Ghadir (al-Kafi 1, ch. 64, no. 1).
- *Q3.* Many Sunnis read *mawla* as "friend" or "ally"; read that way, Ghadir defends Ali, as the Prophet had after a soldier's complaint (Bukhari 4350). Shia point to the question before it, "Am I not closer to the believers than they are to themselves?", which echoes 33:6 and implies authority.

Likely questions.

- *"Do Shia have a different Qur'an?"* No. See the first section and al-Saduq's words.
- *"Do Shia think Ali was a prophet?"* No. See "Why would guidance need a guide?" and Imam al-Sadiq on the seal of the prophets.
- *"Why the clay tablet and the arms at the sides?"* See "A fair question."

Watch for. Read the care note aloud. Some members may have family in both communities, or memories of sectarian violence. Keep to the texts, and never speculate about anyone's motives, the Companions' included. Don't let the evening become a debate about the first caliphs, and never ask a guest to speak for all Sunnis or all Shia. Send detailed legal questions to a scholar.

Bring. A *turba* and a prayer mat to show, and a simple map marking Mecca, Medina and Khumm.

MY THREAD · CHAPTER 08

Where in my life could I hold a firm conviction and a warm friendship at the same time?

MY QUESTION FOR THE BOX

NOTES

09

What Is the Soul?

We know what is right. Why is it so hard to do?

وَنَفْسٍ وَمَا سَوَّىٰهَا ﴿٧﴾ فَأَلْهَمَهَا فُجُورَهَا وَتَقْوَىٰهَا ﴿٨﴾ قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَن زَكَّىٰهَا ﴿٩﴾ وَقَدْ خَابَ مَن دَسَّىٰهَا ﴿١٠﴾

By the self and the One who shaped it, and inspired it with its wickedness and its God-consciousness: whoever purifies it has succeeded, and whoever buries it has failed.

QUR'AN 91:7–10 · SURAT AL-SHAMS

WATCH · EPISODE 09 · 13:36

youtu.be/engs8IGFZE0

In the video: a hard-won career, and the whisper that comes with success: "Forget about God" (6:38)

Reading time: about 15 minutes

Basra, in southern Iraq, in the 650s CE. One of the town's young men is giving a banquet. Fine dishes are picked out for the guest of honour, and great platters are carried to his place. The guest is 'Uthman ibn Hunayf, a companion of the Prophet Muhammad (s) from Medina and now the governor of the city. Around the table sit the well-off. The poor have not been invited.

Word of the dinner reaches Imam Ali (a), the Prophet's cousin and the first Imam (d. 661 CE), who now leads the Muslim community. He writes to his governor. The letter opens not with a ruling but with disappointment: "I never thought you would accept the table of a people who turn away their poor and invite their rich."

Then the Imam turns to himself. Your leader, he writes, has made do in this world with two worn garments, and for food with two loaves. "You cannot do that. But help me with restraint and effort, with chastity and integrity." Why live so plainly? "It is only my own self that I am training with God-consciousness, so that it may come safe on the Day of the Great Fear." He could have the purest honey, the finest wheat and woven silk, if he wanted them. But: "Am I to spend the night full-bellied while around me are empty stomachs and parched hearts?"[1]

'Uthman was no villain. He was a good man who said yes to a dinner, and that is what brings the letter so close to home. Most of us do not fall in some grand battle between good and evil. We slip at the dinner table, in the late-night scroll, in the sharp word we knew not to say. We know what is right. Why is it so hard to do? And what is this self that even Ali (a) said he had to train?

THE BIG QUESTION

What am I, beneath my body, and why is it so hard to do what I know is right?

Have you ever wondered whether you are anything more than your brain? Why you can know exactly what you should do, and still not do it? Or, if you grew up hearing words like *nafs* and *ruh*, what they really mean?

This chapter looks at how the Qur'an and the Prophet's family describe a human being: a body, a restless self and a spirit from God, with a mind and a heart to steer by, and a lifetime of growing to do.

WORDS TO KNOW

nafs (نفس) · *NAFS* · the self: the living, wanting, choosing "I"; often just "a person."

rūḥ (روح) · *ROOH* · the spirit God breathes into each human being: created, and "from the command of my Lord."

ʿaql (عقل) · *AQL* · the intellect, which the hadith calls God's most beloved creation and His "inner proof."

qalb (قلب) · *QALB* · the heart: not the organ, but the inner centre where understanding and faith live.

tazkiya (تزكية) · *taz-KEE-ya* · purifying the self so that it grows; its root means both "to be pure" and "to thrive."

jihād al-nafs (جهاد النفس) · *ji-HAAD an-NAFS* · the struggle with one's own self, which a well-known report calls "the greater struggle."

◆

What are we made of?

Muslim teachers often describe a human being with a simple map: the body (*jism*), the self (*nafs*) and the spirit (*ruh*). The map is useful, as long as no one mistakes it for anatomy. The Qur'an uses these words flexibly, and *nafs* often just means "a person." Think of them as three ways of looking at one living human being, not three boxes inside one.

The body is the easiest to see. It is the shell we live in, the part that is born, grows, ages and is one day left behind. The self is the restless, wanting, striving "I" that gets us out of bed and drives us toward our goals. It is also the part most likely to stumble. And the spirit is what God gives to make us live. God "began the creation of the human being from clay," and then He "shaped him and breathed into him of His spirit, and gave you hearing, sight and hearts. How little you give thanks" (Qur'an 32:7–9).

Because God calls it "My spirit" (Qur'an 15:29), some people wonder whether a piece of God lives inside every human being. The Imams of the Prophet's family answered firmly: no. Asked about the spirit breathed into Adam (a), Imam Jaʿfar al-Sadiq (a), the sixth Imam (d. 765 CE), said: "This is a created spirit, and the spirit in Jesus is created." A further report, less firmly attested, explains why God still says "My spirit." He chose it above other spirits, just as He calls one house "My House" (Qur'an 2:125). The words honour the spirit; they do not make it part of God.[2]

وَيَسْـَٔلُونَكَ عَنِ ٱلرُّوحِ قُلِ ٱلرُّوحُ مِنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّى وَمَآ أُوتِيتُم مِّنَ ٱلْعِلْمِ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا ﴿٨٥﴾

They ask you about the spirit. Say: "The spirit is from the command of my Lord, and of knowledge you have been given only a little."

QUR'AN 17:85 · SURAT AL-ISRA

NOTICE One small word matters here: the spirit is *from*, or *of*, the command of my Lord. Either way, it comes from God; it is not part of God. Then the verse turns to the questioners: what you know is little.

What is God's "command"? The great Shia commentator al-Tabataba'i (d. 1981 CE) pointed to another verse: "His command, when He wills a thing, is only to say to it, 'Be,' and it is" (Qur'an 36:82). The spirit, he explained, is of the same kind as that creative word. It is God's work, not God's substance.[3] Imam al-Sadiq (a) also read this verse as speaking of a great created Spirit, "greater than Gabriel and Michael," that was with the Prophet (s) and is with the Imams.[4] Chapter 10 returns to it.

What does the spirit do in us? Imam al-Sadiq (a) described it in layers. In believers, he said, God placed four spirits. By "the spirit of faith" they fear God. By "the spirit of strength" they are able to obey Him. By "the spirit of desire" they long to obey Him. By "the spirit of movement" people come and go. The messengers and God's chosen ones have a fifth, the Holy Spirit, "by which they know things."[5] Strength, then, is a gift from God, and so is desire. The question is where they are aimed.

Where do we go when we sleep?

ٱللَّهُ يَتَوَفَّى ٱلْأَنفُسَ حِينَ مَوْتِهَا وَٱلَّتِى لَمْ تَمُتْ فِى مَنَامِهَا فَيُمْسِكُ ٱلَّتِى قَضَىٰ عَلَيْهَا ٱلْمَوْتَ وَيُرْسِلُ ٱلْأُخْرَىٰٓ إِلَىٰٓ أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى إِنَّ فِى ذَٰلِكَ لَءَايَٰتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ ﴿٤٢﴾

God takes the selves at the moment of their death, and those that have not died, in their sleep. He keeps those for whom He has decreed death and sends the others back until a set time. In that are signs for people who reflect.

QUR'AN 39:42 · SURAT AL-ZUMAR

NOTICE One verb, *takes*, covers both death and sleep. The verse does not say where the self goes. It says Who holds it, and Who decides whether it comes back.

A man once asked Imam al-Sadiq (a) why some dreams come true. In sleep, the Imam said, a movement from the believer's spirit stretches up toward heaven. "Does all of it leave?" the man asked. "No. If all of it left, he would die." Then how? "Do you not see the sun in its place in the sky, while its light and its rays are on the earth? So it is with the spirit: its root is in the body, and its movement stretches toward heaven."[6] Every night rehearses the last one, and every morning is a return. Chapter 12 asks what happens when the return does not come.

A STORY FROM THE SOURCES

The stranger in the Sacred Mosque

Imam Muhammad al-Jawad (a), the ninth Imam (d. 835 CE), told this story about his ancestor Imam Ali (a).

Ali walked into the Sacred Mosque in Mecca leaning on the arm of Salman al-Farisi, the Prophet's Persian companion, with his son al-Hasan (a), later the second Imam, beside him. A handsome, finely dressed stranger greeted him, sat down and asked three questions. The first: "Tell me about a man who sleeps. Where does his spirit go?"

Ali turned to his son. "Abu Muhammad, answer him." Al-Hasan answered all three. The stranger bore witness to God and the Prophet (s), then to Ali, to al-Hasan and to each Imam to come. As he rose to leave, Ali said, "Follow him." But the moment the man stepped outside the mosque, al-Hasan lost all trace of him.

"Do you know who he was?" Ali asked. "God, His Messenger and the Commander of the Faithful know best," al-Hasan replied, using his father's title. "That was al-Khidr," the mysterious servant of God whom Muslim tradition remembers as the teacher of Moses (a) in Qur'an 18:65.[7]

A later collection preserves the answers. The first echoes Qur'an 39:42: if God permits, the sleeper's spirit is drawn back into its body; if not, it is held until the Resurrection.

◆

Which voice is talking?

The Qur'an describes the self in three conditions. They are often taught as stages, but they are more like weather than ranks. One person can pass through all three in a single afternoon.

The first is *the self that urges evil* (*al-nafs al-ammara*). Its voice says *more, now, me*. Left unchecked, it chases whatever pleases the body, pulls us away from God and sometimes into hurting others. The phrase comes from the story of Joseph (a). When the powerful woman in whose house he lived bolted the doors and called him to her, he refused (Qur'an 12:23). As the pressure grew, he prayed: "My Lord, prison is dearer to me than what they call me to. Unless You turn their scheming away from me, I will incline to them" (Qur'an 12:33). Years later, with his innocence proven, come words most commentators hear from Joseph himself: "I do not claim my self is blameless. The self urges to evil, except where my Lord has mercy" (Qur'an 12:53).[8] He did the

right thing at great cost, and still gave the credit to God. Faith is the brake on this self, and mercy makes the brake hold.

The second is *the self that reproaches* (*al-nafs al-lawwama*). God swears by it: "And I swear by the self that reproaches" (Qur'an 75:2). It is the guilty conscience that pricks you from the inside: *that was wrong; turn back, apologise, put it right*. This is the voice to cultivate, an inner governor that holds us to account. The nightly habit below gives it a hearing.

The third is *the self at peace* (*al-nafs al-mutma'inna*). It is content with God in every circumstance, accepting what He gives and what He takes, and thankful for both. Its creed fits in a line: *nothing is mine; everything is God's*. Because it no longer lives for itself, it can leave this world in peace. The Qur'an speaks to such a self directly.

يَٰٓأَيَّتُهَا ٱلنَّفْسُ ٱلْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ ﴿٢٧﴾ ٱرْجِعِىٓ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكِ رَاضِيَةً
مَّرْضِيَّةً ﴿٢٨﴾ فَٱدْخُلِى فِى عِبَٰدِى ﴿٢٩﴾ وَٱدْخُلِى جَنَّتِى
﴿٣٠﴾

O self at peace, return to your Lord, pleased and pleasing. Enter among My servants. Enter My garden.

QUR'AN 89:27–30 · SURAT AL-FAJR

NOTICE *Pleased and pleasing*: the contentment runs both ways. The self is content with God, and God with it. And the invitation comes in order: first into the company of "My servants," then into "My garden."

Muslims see this self most fully in the prophets and the Imams. Shia devotion hears these verses above all in Imam Husayn (a), the Prophet's grandson, killed with his family and companions at Karbala in 680 CE (61 AH). A report from Imam al-Sadiq (a) calls this sura, the Qur'an's eighty-ninth chapter, "the sura of al-Husayn."[9] Yet this peace is not reserved for saints. The Qur'an says of believers in general that "hearts find rest in the remembrance of God" (Qur'an 13:28). Anyone who has known a moment of stillness in prayer has tasted it. Hardly anyone is permanently "commanding" or permanently "at peace." What matters is which voice gets the last word.

> **PAUSE AND RECALL**
>
> *Without looking back, name the three conditions of the self and the verse of the Qur'an that speaks of each.*

◆

If desire comes from God, why does it pull us the wrong way?

Here is the puzzle. The drive that makes us strong is also the door through which we are most easily led astray.

Picture a young woman who wants to become a doctor. The ambition is good. It carries her through exams, night shifts and debt. Then one day she has it all: the degree, the career, a good living. And a quiet voice says: *You made it. Forget about God. You don't need to help anyone. On to the next thing.* The Qur'an knows this moment: "The human being oversteps all bounds when he sees himself as self-sufficient" (Qur'an 96:6–7).

The Qur'an tells of a man who failed this test. Qarun (the Korah of the Bible) was one of Moses' people, so rich that the keys to his treasure weighed down a band of strong men. His people did not tell him to despise his wealth. They said: "Seek the home of the hereafter through what God has given you, but do not forget your share of this world. Do good, as God has done good to you" (Qur'an 28:77). He answered: "I was given it only because of knowledge I have" (Qur'an 28:78). In other words, *I did this myself*.

So Islam does not ask anyone to kill desire, only to aim it. The danger the Qur'an names is *hawa*, caprice: desire that has stopped listening. Paradise belongs to whoever "restrained the self from caprice" (Qur'an 79:40–41). Imam Ali (a) put the secret in one line: "Whoever holds his own self in honour finds his cravings small."[10]

Why is the pull so strong? The Imams answered with an image.

IMAM JA'FAR AL-SADIQ (A), THE SIXTH IMAM

مَا مِنْ قَلْبٍ إِلا وَلَهُ أُذُنَانِ عَلَى إِحْدَاهُمَا مَلَكٌ مُرْشِدٌ وَعَلَى الأُخْرَى شَيْطَانٌ مُفْتِنٌ هَذَا يَأْمُرُهُ وَهَذَا يَزْجُرُهُ الشَّيْطَانُ يَأْمُرُهُ بِالْمَعَاصِي وَالْمَلَكُ يَزْجُرُهُ عَنْهَا

...

There is no heart that does not have two ears. At one of them is an angel who guides, and at the other a devil who tempts. One urges it on and the other holds it back: the devil urges it to sin, and the angel holds it back from sin...[11]

al-Kafi 2 · Belief & Disbelief · ch. 109 · no. 1 · **Reliable chain**

In another report, the Imam adds that God strengthens the believer through that angel, citing the Qur'an: "He strengthened them with a spirit from Him" (Qur'an 58:22).[12] The struggle is real, but no one faces it alone.

How is desire kept on course? First, by remembering where success comes from: "Whatever blessing you have is from God" (Qur'an 16:53). Humility is not thinking little of yourself. It is knowing who gave you what you have. It keeps the self from waste and showing off, and turns our eyes toward people who have no one: the poor, the overlooked, the voiceless. That is why Ali (a) could not enjoy a feast while "around me are empty stomachs." For him, training the self and feeding the hungry were one work. If you have reached your goal, your next goal is someone else's.

> *"It is only my own self that I am training.*
>
> IMAM ALI (A)

Islam also builds this training into the week. The daily prayers interrupt a person's absorption in themselves, and "prayer restrains from indecency and wrongdoing" (Qur'an 29:45). Fasting, in Ramadan and beyond, trains the will to say no to what it wants right now, "so that you may become mindful of God" (Qur'an 2:183). The pilgrimage to Mecca strips away rank and comfort and forbids even quarrelling (Qur'an 2:197). Each teaches the difference between what we need and what is only an extra. Chapters 27, 28 and 30 explore all three.

Head or heart?

God did not send anyone into this struggle unequipped. The Qur'an and the Imams point to three inner gifts. The first is *fitra*, the nature we are born with. Explaining Qur'an 30:30, Imam al-Sadiq (a) said that God "created them all upon *tawhid*," the recognition that He is one.[13] Chapter 1 explored this inborn knowledge.

The second is the intellect (*'aql*). It is tempting to picture it as a computer that gathers data and works out what to do. Shia teaching sees far more. In the first hadith of al-Kafi, the great Shia collection, God tells the intellect: "I have created nothing more beloved to Me than you."[14] The intellect is what makes us answerable. In a report with an incomplete chain, Imam Musa al-Kazim (a), the seventh Imam (d. 799 CE), calls it God's inner proof, which agrees from within with what the prophets bring from outside.[15] Chapter 5 explores both reports.

A FAIR QUESTION

Isn't the soul just the brain?

"When the brain is injured, people can change beyond recognition. Doesn't that show the 'soul' is just what the brain does?"

Islam need not deny what medicine shows. The Qur'an describes a person shaped from clay before the spirit is breathed in, and Muslim philosophers long held that the soul acts through the body. The Shia philosopher Mulla Sadra (d. 1640 CE) taught that the soul begins bodily and grows into something spiritual that outlives the body.[16] Damage the instrument, and what can be played on it changes.

But a scan shows activity, not what it is like to be you. The physician-philosopher Ibn Sina (Avicenna, d. 1037 CE) asked readers to imagine someone created in mid-air, eyes covered, limbs apart, touching nothing. Would he know he exists? Yes, argued Ibn Sina: our awareness of our self does not come through the senses.[17] Such arguments are still debated, and this book claims no proof from science either way. The Qur'an is humbler than both sides' slogans: "of knowledge you have been given only a little."

The third gift is the heart (*qalb*). In the Qur'an the heart is not the muscle in your chest but the inner centre of a person, where understanding and faith live. The Qur'an never uses the noun *'aql*. It speaks instead of hearts that reason: "Have they not travelled through the land, so that they might have hearts with which to reason,

or ears with which to hear? It is not the eyes that go blind, but the hearts within the breasts" (Qur'an 22:46).

Mind and heart are partners, and each is a brake on the other. Reason without a heart can be clever in the service of anything. Feeling without reason can be sincere and still go astray. Working together under the guidance of the Qur'an and the Prophet's family, they give the self its direction: toward what is good for this life and the next.

Sometimes the self gets caught in a loop that looks like piety. A companion once told Imam al-Sadiq (a) about a man who kept repeating his ablutions and prayers, never sure he had done them right. "He is an intelligent man," the companion added. "What intellect does he have," the Imam replied, "when he obeys Satan? ... Ask him where this thing that comes to him comes from. He will tell you: from the work of Satan."[18] The Imam was not mocking the man. He named the loop for what it was, and gave the man's own reason the job of refusing it. Islamic law does the same. Ayatollah al-Sistani, a leading Shia jurist, addresses the person who doubts "more than usual." If such a person doubts whether he did an obligatory part of the prayer, he "must assume he has performed it."[19] (Check the rulings of your own *marja'*, the scholar you follow.) Such loops can also be a treatable condition, and seeking a doctor's or therapist's help is fully compatible with faith. A struggle like this is not a moral failure.

◆

How does a self grow?

Why map the self at all? Because Islam asks one thing of every self: that it grow. This chapter's key verse swears by the self "and the One who shaped it, and inspired it with its wickedness and its God-consciousness." Then comes the verdict: "whoever purifies it has succeeded, and whoever buries it has failed" (Qur'an 91:7–10). We already know both roads; that is what "inspired" means. The Arabic word for this purifying, *tazkiya*, also carries the sense of growth, as a garden thrives once the weeds are cleared.

A well-known report, whose chains are weak or unverified, calls this work "the greater struggle," the struggle with the self (see Chapter 24).[20] The hardest opponent most of us will face is the one in the mirror. That struggle is not a retreat from life. It means eating what we need, loving our families, working and building, while keeping God first. It means removing weaknesses one by one, making up for mistakes and repairing the damage we have caused. It takes awareness, effort and patience. The Imams offered a daily tool for it.

IMAM MUSA AL-KAZIM (A), THE SEVENTH IMAM

لَيْسَ مِنَّا مَنْ لَمْ يُحَاسِبْ نَفْسَهُ فِي كُلِّ يَوْمٍ فَإِنْ عَمِلَ حَسَناً اسْتَزَادَ اللهَ وَإِنْ عَمِلَ سَيِّئاً اسْتَغْفَرَ اللهَ مِنْهُ وَتَابَ إِلَيْهِ

Whoever does not take account of himself every day is not one of us. If he has done good, he asks God for more of it; if he has done wrong, he asks God's forgiveness for it and turns back to Him.[21]

al-Kafi 2 · Belief & Disbelief · ch. 203 · no. 2 · **Reliable chain**

Notice the balance. The reckoning is not a hunt for faults: good deeds bring a prayer for more, and wrongs a prayer for forgiveness. Be specific, too. Not "I am a terrible person," but "I was harsh with my brother at dinner; tomorrow I will apologise." A vague verdict crushes. A specific one can be repaired.

Even serious failure does not close the door. The Imams taught that a grave sin such as adultery drives the "spirit of faith" out of a person in the very act, and that it returns when they stop. Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a), the fifth Imam (d. c. 733 CE), said this is the "spirit from Him" of Qur'an 58:22.[22] Sin can push it away. Turning back lets it in again.

We know what is right. The hard part is doing it, and the Qur'an never pretends otherwise. Joseph (a) prayed for help. Ali (a), of all people, said he was still training his own self. But no one is left alone with the work. There is an angel at one ear of the heart, an intellect God loves and a door back that stays open while we live. Train the self as a rider trains a strong young horse: not to break it, but so that it carries you home. At the end of that road waits a welcome: "O self at peace, return to your Lord, pleased and pleasing."

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Islam pictures a person as body, self and spirit; the spirit is created and honoured, never part of God.
2. The self moves between urging evil, reproaching itself and resting at peace: conditions, not ranks.
3. Desire is a God-given strength. What corrupts it is caprice, especially the self-sufficiency success can breed.
4. Within, God gave us an inborn nature, an intellect that is His inner proof, and a heart for faith.
5. The self grows through daily reckoning, worship, humility and service, and the door back stays open while we live.

NEXT TIME · GO FURTHER

Next time: *Angels, Jinn & the Unseen.* The Qur'an speaks of beings we cannot see: angels who record and guard, jinn who choose as we do, and the Spirit greater than Gabriel. How do you believe in the unseen without believing everything?

Go further:

Course: Introduction to Islamic Ethics, a Level 1 course at Tasneem Institute (tasneeminstitute.org/courses/introduction-to-islamic-ethics)

Read: Imam Ali's letter to ʿUthman ibn Hunayf, *Nahj al-Balagha*, Letter 45 (Subhi al-Salih numbering): the banquet, the two loaves and the self in training.

Watch: Invitation to Islam, Episode 9, "What Is the Soul?" (14 min).

In the circle

LOOK BACK

1. Chapter 8 set out what Sunni and Shia Muslims share. Name three things, and the question on which they part.
2. Chapter 3 asked whether God would leave us guessing. Why do people need prophets?
3. Part One asks, "Is it true?" Which idea so far have you found hardest to weigh?

TALK ABOUT IT

WARM-UP

1. Think of a small promise you made to yourself and didn't keep. What pulled you away from it? You needn't say what it was.

UNDERSTAND

2. Why does it matter whether the spirit comes "from the command of my Lord" (Qur'an 17:85) or is part of God? How did the Imams answer?
3. The chapter compares the three conditions of the self to weather rather than to ranks. What does that comparison mean, and why does it matter?

REFLECT

4. Joseph (a) prayed, "Unless You turn their scheming away from me, I will incline to them" (Qur'an 12:33). Why might a prophet admit he needed help?
5. Imam Ali (a) spoke of "training" his own self. What in you would you most like to train, rather than get rid of? You needn't share it.

APPLY

6. Tonight, spend three minutes reviewing your day, as Imam al-Kazim (a) advised. What is one specific thing you could put right tomorrow?

GO DEEPER

7. Read Imam al-Sadiq's teaching on the spirits God places in believers (al-Kafi, vol. 1, Book of the Proof, ch. 55, no. 1; reliable chain). What changes if desire is a gift meant to "long to obey God"?
8. Read Imam Ali's letter to ʿUthman ibn Hunayf (Nahj al-Balagha, Letter 45; compiled text, not graded here). How does he tie training the self to the hunger of others?

CARRY IT HOME

Choose one way in this week:

☐ **Notice:** When you feel a strong pull this week, to scroll, snap, overspend or overeat, pause and ask which voice is speaking: the self that urges, the self that reproaches or the self at peace.

☐ **Do:** Each night, take three minutes for a reckoning. Write down one good thing to be grateful for and build on, and one specific thing to put right tomorrow.

☐ **Learn:** Read Sura 91, *al-Shams* (The Sun), in a translation. Count the oaths before the verdict on the self. Why might the Qur'an set the self beside the sun, the moon and the sky?

Aim. Help the circle see the self as Islam does, created, struggling and able to grow, and leave with one practical habit.

Protect this question. No. 5: what would you most like to train, rather than get rid of? It turns a conversation about sin into a conversation about hope. Short on time? Read the opener aloud, then go straight to No. 5 and the practice.

Answer notes.

- *Q2.* The spirit is "from," or "of," God's command (17:85): the work of His creative word, not a piece of Him. Imam al-Sadiq (a): "a created spirit." "My spirit" honours it, as "My House" honours the Kaʿba.
- *Q3.* The self that urges evil (12:53), the self that reproaches (75:2) and the self at peace (89:27–30) are passing conditions, like weather. One person can feel all three in a day, so they cannot be used to rank or label anyone.

Likely questions.

- *"Is the soul just the brain?"* See the "fair question" box in "Head or heart?"
- *"If desire is bad, why did God give it to us?"* Desire is a God-given spirit; caprice is the problem. See "If desire comes from God..."
- *"Isn't the 'greater jihad' hadith weak?"* Its chains are weak or unverified, and the chapter says so ("How does a self grow?", note 20); Chapter 24 weighs it in full. The teaching itself rests on Qur'an 91:9–10 and 79:40.

Watch for. Some in the room may live with obsessive doubts, addiction or heavy guilt. Keep the tone of the passage on the man who repeated his prayers: a struggle is not a moral failure, and professional help is compatible with faith. Never invite confessions; Reflect questions are optional to answer aloud. If the adultery example in the last section comes up, keep to its point: the door back stays open.

Bring. A recitation of Qur'an 89:27–30 to close the session, and small cards for the nightly reckoning.

MY THREAD · CHAPTER 09

What is one thing I know is right but keep not doing, and what would help me do it?

MY QUESTION FOR THE BOX

10

Angels, Jinn & the Unseen

Believing in the unseen without believing everything.

ٱلَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِٱلْغَيْبِ وَيُقِيمُونَ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَٰهُمْ يُنفِقُونَ ﴿٣﴾

Those who believe in the unseen, uphold the prayer, and spend from what We have provided for them.

QUR'AN 2:3 · SURAT AL-BAQARA

WATCH · EPISODE 18 · 10:31

youtu.be/0oWEP8uLVHo

In the video: the whisper that comes back after you push it away (5:37)

Reading time: about 15 minutes

A man sits in the shade of a palm tree, in a walled garden at Ta'if, a town in the mountains east of Mecca. His feet are bleeding.

He came here looking for protection. His uncle Abu Talib, who sheltered him for years, has died, and Mecca has grown dangerous for him. But the leaders of Ta'if only mocked him. "Was God unable to send anyone but you?" one of them asked. Then the townspeople lined his road in two rows and stoned his feet as he walked between them.

The man is Muhammad (s). On the way home, at a place called Nakhla, he rises in the depth of the night to pray, and recites the Qur'an into the dark.

He is not as alone as he seems. Listeners have gathered whom no human eye can see. They hush one another: "Listen quietly!" When the recitation is over, they turn back to their own people to warn them. "We have heard a wondrous Qur'an that guides to what is right, so we have believed in it" (Qur'an 46:29; 72:1–2). The town had stoned him. The jinn stayed to listen.

That is how one early account, preserved by the commentator al-Tabrisi (d. 1154 CE), tells the story. Other reports set that night elsewhere, and the modern commentator al-Tabataba'i (d. 1981 CE) warned that they differ widely and cannot be confirmed.[1] The Qur'an itself keeps only what matters most: a recitation, unseen listeners, and faith.

So the story has two layers. One is scripture. The other is memory, precious but less certain. Many people treat the two layers alike. Some dismiss the whole thing as a fairy tale. Others believe every tale about the jinn they have ever heard, and grow afraid of the dark. Is there a way to believe in the unseen without believing everything?

THE BIG QUESTION

Do Muslims really believe in angels and jinn? And how can anyone believe in what they cannot see without believing every story?

Have you ever wondered whether angels and jinn are just the myths of a pre-scientific age? What you would say if a relative blamed an illness on a jinn or the evil eye? Or, if you grew up with stories about the jinn, which of them are actually in the Qur'an?

> This chapter sets out what the Qur'an and the Prophet's family teach about angels, jinn and Satan, and how they taught believers to sort faith from folklore.

WORDS TO KNOW

al-ghayb (الغيب) · *al-GHAYB* · the unseen: whatever lies beyond our senses, known fully only to God.

malak, plural **malā'ika** (ملك، ملائكة) · *MA-lak, ma-LAA-'i-ka* · an angel: an honoured servant and messenger of God who never disobeys Him.

jinn (جنّ) · *JINN* · beings created from smokeless fire who, like humans, can believe or disbelieve, and will be judged.

Iblīs, **shayṭān** (إبليس، شيطان) · *ib-LEES, shay-TAAN* · Iblis is the jinn who refused to bow to Adam; a *shayṭān* is any devil or tempter.

waswasa (وسوسة) · *WAS-wa-sa* · whispering: the suggestions a tempter slips into the heart.

siḥr (سحر) · *SIH-r* · magic or sorcery. It harms only by God's leave, and Islamic law forbids it.

◆

Why believe in what you cannot see?

Right now your senses are busy: the warmth of a lamp, a draught across your skin, the weight of this book in your hands. That world is real, but it is not all there is. The air you are breathing is invisible. So are the microbes on your fingertips, the signal reaching your phone and the quarks inside every atom. We know them through instruments, or through what they do.

The Qur'an calls everything beyond the senses *al-ghayb*, the unseen, and counts belief in it among the first marks of faith. Early in its longest chapter it describes the God-conscious as "those who believe in the unseen, uphold the prayer, and spend from what We have provided for them" (Qur'an 2:3). Look at the company that belief keeps: prayer and generosity, not ghost stories.

Here is the objection at its strongest: every age had its spirits, and belief in invisible beings belongs to the time before people understood the world. Part of the answer is that microbes only take us so far. They show that "unseen" need not mean "unreal," but angels are not found by looking harder. In Islam they are known the way most of what we know is known: through trustworthy testimony. You never saw your own birth, yet you believe in it because the sources are good.

So belief in angels sits downstream of questions this book has already asked. Is there a God (Chapter 2)? Does He guide humanity through prophets (Chapter 3)? Is the Qur'an His word (Chapter 4)? If those answers hold, believing what the messenger reports about the unseen is not gullibility but consistency. That is why the Qur'an lists the angels among the articles of faith (Qur'an 2:285).

The same Qur'an draws a firm line around the unseen. "The keys of the unseen are with Him; none knows them but He" (Qur'an 6:59). Some of it He chooses to reveal, and only to some.

عَٰلِمُ ٱلْغَيْبِ فَلَا يُظْهِرُ عَلَىٰ غَيْبِهِۦٓ أَحَدًا ﴿٢٦﴾ إِلَّا مَنِ ٱرْتَضَىٰ
مِن رَّسُولٍ فَإِنَّهُۥ يَسْلُكُ مِنۢ بَيْنِ يَدَيْهِ وَمِنْ خَلْفِهِۦ رَصَدًا ﴿٢٧﴾

He knows the unseen, and He discloses His unseen to no one, except a messenger He is pleased to choose. Then He sends watchers to go before him and behind him.

QUR'AN 72:26–27 · SURAT AL-JINN

NOTICE Two verses, two doors. The first closes: God shows His unseen to no one. The second opens a crack, for a messenger He approves, and even then God posts watchers around him.

Shia Muslims believe that God gave the Prophet (s) and the Imams of his family deep knowledge, but the Imams never claimed the keys as their own. Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (a), the sixth Imam (d. 765 CE), once came out to his companions angry. "How strange that some people claim we know the unseen! No one knows the unseen but God." What the Imams held, he explained later, was knowledge of God's Book, given by God.[2] The chain is unverified, but its line is the classic Shia guard against exaggeration: whatever the Imams knew, God taught them. No one has a licence to sell the unseen.

◆

What are angels like?

The Qur'an introduces the angels by their work. God "made the angels messengers, with wings, two, three or four" (Qur'an 35:1). They are "honoured servants" who "act at His command" (21:26–27), and they "do not disobey God in what He commands them" (66:6). A widely reported saying adds that they were created from light.[3]

Do they choose? An answer is reported from Imam Ali (a), the Prophet's cousin and the first Imam (d. 661 CE). God gave the angels intellect without desire, the animals desire without intellect, and human beings both. "Whoever's intellect overcomes his desire is better than the angels, and whoever's desire overcomes his intellect is worse than the animals."[4] Angels never fall, but they never have to climb. A human being can do both.

That does not make angels robots. They "never hold themselves above worshipping Him" (21:19): willing devotion, not machinery. Imam Ali (a) described them as beings whose every longing is gathered in God. Yet if they saw the depth of what is hidden from them, he said, they "would think little of their deeds."[5] Nor do they need food. When angels visited Abraham (a) in human form, their hands never reached for the roasted calf he served them (11:69–70).

"No creation is more numerous than the angels," Imam al-Sadiq (a) said; seventy thousand descend every night to circle the Ka'ba, the House of God in Mecca.[6] Imam Ali (a) pictured the heavens crowded with them: "Some are in prostration and never rise to bow; some bow and never stand upright... No sleep comes to their eyes, no lapse to their minds."[7]

A few are named. Gabriel (Jibril), "the Trustworthy Spirit" (26:193), brought the Qur'an down "upon your heart" (2:97). Michael (Mika'il) is named beside him (2:98). Israfil, who will sound the Trumpet, appears in the Imams' prayers to the "Lord of Gabriel, Michael and Israfil."[8] Then there is "the angel of death, who has been given charge of you" (32:11). Many Muslims call him 'Izra'il, but that is popular usage; the Qur'an never names him.[9]

Above even Gabriel, the Imams taught, stands the Spirit (*al-ruh*), "a creation greater than Gabriel and Michael," which was with the Prophet (s) and is with the Imams (Chapter 9).[10] On the Night of Destiny, a night in Ramadan, "the angels and the Spirit descend" (97:4).

Yet even the angels do not know everything. God announced that He would place a deputy on the earth. The angels asked, "Will You put on it someone who will cor-

rupt it and spill blood, while we exalt You with praise and declare You holy?" God replied, "I know what you do not know" (2:30). Then He taught Adam (a) the names.

وَعَلَّمَ ءَادَمَ ٱلْأَسْمَآءَ كُلَّهَا ثُمَّ عَرَضَهُمْ عَلَى ٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةِ فَقَالَ أَنۢبِـُٔونِى
بِأَسْمَآءِ هَٰٓؤُلَآءِ إِن كُنتُمْ صَٰدِقِينَ ﴿٣١﴾ قَالُوا۟ سُبْحَٰنَكَ لَا عِلْمَ
لَنَآ إِلَّا مَا عَلَّمْتَنَآ ۖ إِنَّكَ أَنتَ ٱلْعَلِيمُ ٱلْحَكِيمُ ﴿٣٢﴾

And He taught Adam the names, all of them. Then He brought them before the angels and said, "Tell Me what these are called, if you are right." They said, "Glory to You! We know nothing except what You have taught us. Truly You are the All-Knowing, the All-Wise."

QUR'AN 2:31–32 · SURAT AL-BAQARA

NOTICE The angels' first word is praise, not an excuse. Beings who never disobey still say, "We know nothing except what You have taught us." Humility is the oldest lesson in heaven.

Who keeps watch over us?

Each person, says the Qur'an, has angels "before him and behind him, guarding him by God's command" (Qur'an 13:11). Imam Ali (a) put it plainly: "With every person are two angels guarding him. When the decree comes, they leave him to it."[11]

Others keep the record: "noble scribes, who know whatever you do" (82:11–12), one on the right and one on the left (50:17–18). Many find this frightening. The Prophet (s) painted it differently. A good deed intended but not done is written once; done, it is written ten times. A wrong intended but resisted is not written at all. And when a wrong is done, the angel on the right tells the one on the left, "Don't hurry. Perhaps he will follow it with a good deed that wipes it out." The record waits seven hours.[12] Notice what the angel on the right is hoping for.

Chapter 9 heard Imam al-Sadiq (a) say that a guiding angel stands at one ear of the heart.[13] Some angels even pray for people. The bearers of God's Throne "ask forgive-

ness for those who believe" (40:7). And believers who send blessings on the Prophet (s) join what God and His angels already do (33:56).

Angels also meet the dead. The tradition names two, Munkar and Nakir, who question people in the grave. Imam al-Sadiq (a) added a surprising detail, in a report with a sound chain: only those whose faith was pure, or whose disbelief was pure, are questioned there.[14] Chapter 12 returns to that moment.

How should a believer feel about these unseen servants? Imam Zayn al-Abidin (a), the Prophet's great-grandson and the fourth Imam (d. c. 713 CE), answered with a prayer in *al-Sahifa al-Sajjadiyya*, his collected supplications. He asks the angels for nothing. He asks God to bless them.

FROM THE SUPPLICATION IN BLESSING THE BEARERS OF THE THRONE
IMAM ZAYN AL-ABIDIN (A), THE FOURTH IMAM

اللَّهُمَّ وَ حَمَلَةُ عَرْشِكَ الَّذِينَ لَا يَفْتُرُونَ مِنْ تَسْبِيحِكَ ، وَ لَا يَسْأَمُونَ مِنْ تَقْدِيسِكَ ... فَصَلِّ عَلَيْهِمْ ، وَ عَلَى الْمَلَائِكَةِ الَّذِينَ مِنْ دُونِهِمْ مِنْ سُكَّانِ سَمَاوَاتِكَ ... وَ الْحَفَظَةِ الْكِرَامِ الْكَاتِبِينَ ، وَ مَلَكِ الْمَوْتِ وَ أَعْوَانِهِ ، وَ مُنْكَرٍ وَ نَكِيرٍ ، وَ رُومَانَ فَتَّانِ الْقُبُورِ ... وَ صَلِّ عَلَيْهِمْ صَلَاةً تَزِيدُهُمْ كَرَامَةً عَلَى كَرَامَتِهِمْ وَ طَهَارَةً عَلَى طَهَارَتِهِمْ

O God, the bearers of Your Throne, who never flag in glorifying You and never weary of calling You holy... bless them, and the angels beneath them who dwell in Your heavens... the noble guardians who write, the angel of death and his helpers, Munkar and Nakir, and Ruman, the tester in the graves... Bless them with a blessing that adds honour to their honour and purity to their purity.[15]

al-Sahifa al-Sajjadiyya · Supplication 3 · **Compiled text, not graded here**

Even the angels of death and of the grave appear here, not as monsters but as servants whose honour the Imam asks God to increase. The unseen world of this prayer is not a haunted house. It is a congregation.

PAUSE AND RECALL

Without looking back, name three tasks the Qur'an gives to angels. What did the angels say when God asked them the names?

◆

Who are the jinn?

The jinn are a second creation with a moral life like ours. God "created the jinn from a pure flame of fire," as He made humans from clay (Qur'an 55:14–15), and for the same purpose: "I created jinn and humans only to worship Me" (51:56). Both will face the same questions on the Last Day (6:130). And jinn choose, as we do. "Among us are some who submit to God," said the jinn who heard the Qur'an, "and some who swerve" (72:14).

Shia tradition keeps a vivid picture of believing jinn. Sa'd al-Iskaf, a companion of Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a), the fifth Imam (d. c. 733 CE), once waited long in the hot sun outside the Imam's door. At last some strangers came out, pale and thin from worship. "Those are your brothers from among the jinn," the Imam told him. "They come to ask us about their religion, what is lawful and what is not."[16] The chain is unverified, so this is a story, not a doctrine. But it shows how the Imams wanted the jinn seen: as fellow worshippers, not monsters.

The most famous jinn is Iblis. When God commanded the angels to bow to Adam (a), the tireless worshippers of heaven bowed to a creature of clay. All bowed "but Iblis: he was one of the jinn, and he broke away from his Lord's command" (18:50). His reason was pride of origin: "I am better than he. You made me of fire, and him of clay" (7:12). Imam Ali (a) called him "the leader of the bigots," who "boasted over Adam about his creation." He had worshipped God for six thousand years and lost it all "for the pride of a single hour."[17] Ali also calls him an angel, because he stood in the angels' ranks; by nature he was a jinn.[18] Either way, his fall was his own choice.

The Qur'an also calls Iblis *al-shaytan*, Satan, and any tempter who works against God's way is a *shaytan*. Such tempters can be human too, for the whisperer comes "from among jinn and people" (114:6). "Satan is truly your enemy," the Qur'an warns, "so regard him as an enemy" (35:6).

How does he work? By whispering. The Qur'an's last chapter seeks refuge "from the evil of the whisperer, the *khannas*, who whispers into people's hearts" (114:4–5). *Khannas* means one who draws back: "He whispers, and when the servant remembers his Lord, he draws back."[19] Drawing back is not leaving. You catch the thought, push it away and feel you have won. Then, on a tired evening, it returns from an angle you did not expect. "He and his tribe see you from where you do not see them" (7:27).

Yet the Qur'an is just as firm about that power's limits. On the Day of Judgement, Satan will admit them himself.

وَقَالَ ٱلشَّيْطَٰنُ لَمَّا قُضِىَ ٱلْأَمْرُ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ وَعَدَكُمْ وَعْدَ ٱلْحَقِّ
وَوَعَدتُّكُمْ فَأَخْلَفْتُكُمْ ۖ وَمَا كَانَ لِىَ عَلَيْكُم مِّن سُلْطَٰنٍ إِلَّآ أَن
دَعَوْتُكُمْ فَٱسْتَجَبْتُمْ لِى ۖ فَلَا تَلُومُونِى وَلُومُوٓا۟ أَنفُسَكُم ۖ مَّآ أَنَا۠
بِمُصْرِخِكُمْ وَمَآ أَنتُم بِمُصْرِخِىَّ ۖ إِنِّى كَفَرْتُ بِمَآ أَشْرَكْتُمُونِ مِن
قَبْلُ ۗ إِنَّ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٢﴾

When the matter is decided, Satan will say: "God made you a true promise. I made you promises too, and I broke them. I had no authority over you, except that I called you and you answered me. So do not blame me; blame yourselves. I cannot rescue you, and you cannot rescue me. I disown your making me His partner before." For the wrongdoers there is a painful punishment.

QUR'AN 14:22 · SURAT IBRAHIM

NOTICE Satan's last speech is a confession. His only power was an invitation, and he hands the blame straight back. The verse returns the choice, and the dignity, to the human being.

He has no authority at all "over those who believe and lean on their Lord" (16:99). The remedy for his whisper is not panic but memory: "When a passing suggestion from Satan touches those who are mindful of God, they remember, and at once they see" (7:201).

Can the jinn do nothing in the physical world, then? The Qur'an shows them building for Solomon (a) "by his Lord's leave," and one offering to fetch a queen's throne (34:12–13; 27:39). What it denies is that we are at their mercy. Their power is by God's leave, and Satan's real weapon against us is suggestion. The same story holds a quiet irony. Solomon died leaning on his staff, and the jinn toiled on, not knowing, until a creature of the earth gnawed through the staff and he fell. Then it was plain that "if the jinn had known the unseen, they would not have stayed in that humiliating toil" (34:14).

◆

How do you believe without believing everything?

Culture has added little to the angels and a great deal to the jinn. Think of the rules about whistling at night or sweeping after dark, the houses said to belong to them, the illnesses blamed on them. None of this comes from the Qur'an or from reliable words of the Prophet (s) and his family. It is culture, and it should be called culture. Imam al-Baqir (a) put the discipline into two sentences.

> IMAM MUHAMMAD AL-BAQIR (A), THE FIFTH IMAM
>
> مَا عَلِمْتُمْ فَقُولُوا وَمَا لَمْ تَعْلَمُوا فَقُولُوا اللهُ أَعْلَمُ إِنَّ الرَّجُلَ لَيَنْتَزِعُ الآيَةَ مِنَ الْقُرْآنِ يَخِرُّ فِيهَا أَبْعَدَ مَا بَيْنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالأَرْضِ
>
> What you know, say. What you do not know, say: "God knows best." A man may pull a verse out of the Qur'an and fall by it further than the distance between heaven and earth.[20]
>
> al-Kafi 1 · Virtue of Knowledge · ch. 11 · no. 4 · **Reliable chain**

The second sentence matters too: frightening claims are often built on a verse pulled out of its place.

A FAIR QUESTION

A relative was told her illness is caused by a jinn. Can a jinn really possess someone?

The Qur'an offers one image and several firm limits. It says that those who live on usury will rise "like someone Satan has struck with his touch" (2:275). Some commentators read this as the language of popular belief. Al-Tabataba'i held that it hints at a real role for the jinn in some cases of derangement. But he insisted that even then the near causes are natural ones, "such as disorder of the nerves and injury to the brain." Any unseen cause stands behind them, not in their place.[21] Satan has no authority over believers who trust God (16:99), and his weapon is suggestion (14:22). So no one should assume possession, and symptoms belong with a doctor. A ritual that beats, starves or isolates a person is abuse, not religion.

What about envy and the evil eye (*'ayn*)? Most of us have felt hostility in a room before anyone spoke. Ill will is real, and the Qur'an teaches refuge "from the evil of one who envies, when he envies" (113:5). Imam Ali (a) went further: "The evil eye is real; healing prayers are real; magic is real... bad omens are not real."[22] He did not explain how the evil eye works, and the tradition does not ask us to. It asks us to turn to God, not against our neighbours, for "some suspicion is a sin" (49:12). A family that blames every misfortune on an envious glance has traded one harm for another.

Magic is treated the same way. The Qur'an speaks of sorcery learned in ancient Babylon to split husbands from wives, and adds that "they could harm no one by it except by God's leave" (2:102).[23]

Imam Ali (a) met fortune-telling with the same discipline. As he set out against a rebel faction, the Kharijites, a companion warned him that the stars foretold failure if he left at that hour. Whoever believed such a claim, Ali answered, had denied the Qur'an. Then he faced the crowd: "People, beware of learning the stars, except what guides you on land or sea... The astrologer is like the soothsayer, the soothsayer like the sorcerer..." And he gave the order: "Set out in God's name!"[24]

> *"What you know, say. What you do not know, say: "God knows best."*
>
> IMAM MUHAMMAD AL-BAQIR (A)

The Qur'an warns that some people "used to seek refuge with jinn, and they only added to their burden" (72:6). A leading Shia authority today, Ayatollah Sayyid Ali al-Sistani, applies the same principles. Magic is forbidden "in all its shapes and forms," even to undo magic, unless something as grave as saving a life is at stake. Invoking jinn is forbidden if it puts anyone in harm's way. A palm reader's information "has no value," so no one may plan their life on it "except on legal or reasonable grounds." And to a man who believed he was under black magic, the office advised reciting the Qur'an, then added: "At the same time, you should visit a doctor."[25] Check the rulings of your own *marja'*, the scholar you follow.

What does protection look like, then? Prayer and good sense, side by side. The two refuges that close the Qur'an, *al-Falaq* and *al-Nas* (Chapters 113 and 114), are each a single sentence addressed to God. At bedtime the Prophet (s) recited the Verse of the Throne, *Ayat al-Kursi* (2:255), and prayed, "O God, guard me in my sleep and in my waking."[26] Asked whether it was wrong to travel on "unlucky" days such as

Wednesday, Imam al-Sadiq (a) answered, "Begin your journey with charity, and recite the Verse of the Throne." To another he said, "Give in charity, and set out on any day you wish."[27]

A CLOSER LOOK

Four shelves for every story

When you hear a claim about the unseen, ask which shelf it belongs on.

1. **Scripture.** Is it in the Qur'an? Then it is certain, though its meaning still needs care.
2. **Reliable reports.** Is it in a hadith (a reported saying) with a sound chain of narrators? Then it carries real weight.
3. **Readings and weaker reports.** Is it a scholar's interpretation, or a report with a weak chain? Hold it more lightly, and label it honestly.
4. **Folklore.** Does "everyone know" it, with no source at all? Then it is culture, not religion, however old it is.

This chapter's opening story sits on two shelves at once. The jinn who listened are scripture. The road from Ta'if is early memory. Both deserve respect. Only one is certain.

Held this way, belief in the unseen does not make life eerie. It makes it larger and more honest. A kindness no one sees is not wasted; noble scribes are writing it down. A hidden wrong is not small for being hidden, and the angel on the right still hopes you will turn back in time. The whisper that keeps returning has only the authority we hand it. And people who gather to learn are never alone. "The angels lower their wings for the seeker of knowledge," the Prophet (s) said.[28] At Nakhla, unseen listeners gathered around a recitation. In a circle like this one, the tradition says, the angels are lowering their wings.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Muslims believe in the unseen through trusted revelation; only God knows it fully, and He reveals what He wills.
2. Angels are honoured servants who never disobey. They bring revelation, guard us, record our deeds and pray for believers.
3. Jinn are a second responsible creation, made of fire; some believe, and Iblis fell through pride in his origin.
4. Satan can only invite; remembering God answers his whisper, and the door back stays open while we live.
5. Weigh every story against the Qur'an and reliable reports; seek refuge in God, and take illness to a doctor.

NEXT TIME · GO FURTHER

Next time: *Why Is There Suffering?* A boy is thrown into a well by his own brothers, and his father is told a wolf has eaten him. If God is merciful, why does He allow such pain?

Go further:

Course: Islamic Eschatology: Death to the Day of Judgement, a Level 1 course at Tasneem Institute (tasneeminstitute.org/courses/islamic-eschatology-death-to-the-day-of-judgement)

Read: Imam Zayn al-Abidin's prayer for the angels, *al-Sahifa al-Sajjadiyya*, Supplication 3; and Imam Ali's picture of the angels in their ranks, *Nahj al-Balagha*, Sermon 1.

Watch: Invitation to Islam, Episode 18, "Angels, Jinn & the Unseen" (11 min).

In the circle

LOOK BACK

1. Chapter 9 said the heart has two "ears." Who waits at each of them?
2. Chapter 4 asked why the Qur'an should be trusted as God's word. What is one reason you remember?
3. Part One asks, "Is it true?" What is something you believe is real but have never seen?

TALK ABOUT IT

WARM-UP

1. What stories about jinn, ghosts or angels did you hear growing up, and who told them to you?

UNDERSTAND

2. Why does the chapter say that belief in angels rests on trusting a messenger, not on the fact that air and microbes are invisible?
3. According to Qur'an 14:22 and 16:99, what power does Satan have over a person, and what power does he not have?

REFLECT

4. The angel on the right says, "Don't hurry. Perhaps he will follow it with a good deed." How does that compare with how you usually imagine being watched or judged?
5. Imam al-Baqir (a) said, "What you do not know, say: 'God knows best.'" Why might that sentence be hard to say, for believers and sceptics alike?

APPLY

6. Think of one claim about the unseen you have heard, from any tradition. Which of the four shelves does it belong on, and how could you find out?

GO DEEPER

7. Read Imam Zayn al-Abidin's prayer for the angels (*al-Sahifa al-Sajjadiyya*, Supplication 3; compiled text, not graded here). Why might he pray *for* the angels instead of asking them for help?
8. Read Imam Ali's answer to the astrologer (*Nahj al-Balagha*, Sermon 79; compiled text, not graded here). What, in his view, does trusting a fortune-teller take away?

CARRY IT HOME

Choose one way in this week:

☐ **Notice:** When a worrying or tempting thought keeps coming back, notice when it returns: when you are tired, hungry or alone? Naming the pattern is the first step in answering it (Qur'an 114:4).

☐ **Do:** Before you sleep, read the Verse of the Throne (Qur'an 2:255) in a translation. Before a trip, give a little in charity, and set out on whatever day suits you.

☐ **Learn:** Take one story about jinn or the evil eye that you have heard and trace it. Is it in the Qur'an, in a reliable hadith, in a scholar's reading, or nowhere? Bring what you find to the circle.

Aim. Help the circle take the Qur'an's unseen world seriously while practising one habit, asking "Where is that from?", so that people leave with less fear, not more.

Protect this question. No. 6, the four shelves. It turns the chapter into a skill that a guest, a new Muslim and a lifelong Muslim can all use.

Answer notes.

- *Q2.* Invisible physical things show only that "unseen" need not mean "unreal." Angels are known through revelation, so belief in them depends on trusting God and His messenger (Chapters 2–4; Qur'an 2:285).
- *Q3.* Only invitation: "I called you and you answered me" (14:22). He has no authority over believers who trust God (16:99). The remedy is remembrance (7:201).

Likely questions.

- *"Can a jinn possess someone?"* See the fair-question box: no one should assume it, and symptoms go to a doctor (al-Sistani gives the same advice about magic).
- *"Is the evil eye real? Should I wear something against it?"* The tradition says the evil eye is real (Nahj al-Balagha, Saying 400) and teaches refuge in God (Qur'an 113). Do not rule on objects tonight; refer people to their *marjaʿ*.
- *"Was Satan a fallen angel?"* See "Who are the jinn?": a jinn by nature (18:50), counted among the angels by rank.

Watch for. Someone present may have been told that they or a relative is possessed or bewitched, or may live with mental illness. Never treat anyone's case as a jinn story. Keep the talk on sources and on getting proper care, and avoid frightening anecdotes, even as jokes.

Bring. Copies of Chapters 113 and 114 in Arabic and English, or a recording of them, to close the session.

MY THREAD · CHAPTER 10

What do I fear that I cannot see, and what would it mean to hand that fear to God?

MY QUESTION FOR THE BOX

CHAPTER 11 · BELIEFS

11

Why Is There Suffering?

Pain is real. So is the promise that no one is forgotten.

فَإِنَّ مَعَ ٱلْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا ﴿٥﴾ إِنَّ مَعَ ٱلْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا ﴿٦﴾

So truly, with hardship comes ease. Truly, with hardship comes ease.

QUR'AN 94:5–6 · SURAT AL-SHARH

A NOTE OF CARE Some of us carry a loss or a pain that is still raw. No one here will be asked to explain or share their own suffering; you may listen, pass or step out at any time, and tears are welcome.

WATCH · EPISODE 08 · 12:48

youtu.be/PrkmzL_9OpA

In the video: an egg that landed on a nail, and a meal the Prophet left uneaten (8:23)

Reading time: about 20 minutes

A boy sits at the bottom of a well. It is dark down there, and lonely. His own brothers have put him there, and they have kept his shirt.

The Qur'an calls this "the best of stories" (Qur'an 12:3), and it begins in that darkness. The boy is Joseph (a), and his father is the prophet Jacob (a). Joseph's brothers, sick with jealousy, have agreed to be rid of him (12:8–15). Yet even at the bottom of the well he is not forgotten. God speaks to him there, promising that one day he will tell his brothers what they have done, when they no longer know who he is (12:15).

At nightfall the brothers come home weeping. They show their father Joseph's shirt, stained with blood that is not his. A wolf ate him, they say. Jacob looks at the shirt and knows he is being lied to. He does not rage, and he does not pretend. "No," he says. "Your souls have talked you into something. So: beautiful patience. And God is the One I ask for help against what you describe" (12:16–18).

Meanwhile, a passing caravan lowers a bucket into the well and pulls up a boy. Soon he is sold for a handful of coins (12:19–20).

Why would a merciful God allow this? Few of us first meet that question in a philosophy class. We meet it in a hospital corridor, beside a grave, or in the news on an ordinary morning.

Centuries later, Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (a), the sixth Imam (d. 765 CE), looked back at that well and said something startling: "The free person is free in every circumstance." Joseph was enslaved, overpowered and taken captive, he said, yet none of it harmed his freedom, "nor was he harmed by the darkness of the well and its loneliness."[1]

What kind of freedom survives the bottom of a well? And what kind of God lets a child be put there?

THE BIG QUESTION

If God is merciful, why is there so much suffering?

Have you ever wondered whether a world this cruel can have a loving God at all? Or what you could possibly say to a friend whose child is seriously ill? Or, if you grew up with faith, whether your own hardship means God is angry with you, and whether crying means your faith is weak?

> This chapter offers no slogan. It offers an honest account of human freedom, a refusal to make suffering look pretty, and a justice that does not end at the grave.

WORDS TO KNOW

ʿadl (عَدْل) · *ADL* · justice; God's justice, which wrongs no one. For Shia Muslims, one of the five roots of faith.

balāʾ (بَلاء) · *ba-LAA* · trial; the hardship, or the blessing, through which a person is tested.

ṣabr (صَبْر) · *SABR* · patience: steady endurance in doing right. Not passivity, and not pretending not to hurt.

ṣabr jamīl (صَبْر جَمِيل) · *SABR ja-MEEL* · "beautiful patience": grief taken to God rather than complained of to people (Qur'an 12:18).

innā lillāhi wa innā ilayhi rājiʿūn (إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ) · *IN-naa lil-LAA-hi wa IN-naa ʾi-LAY-hi raa-ji-OON* · "We belong to God, and to Him we are returning": said at news of a loss (Qur'an 2:156).

ʿĀshūrāʾ (عَاشُوراء) · *aa-shoo-RAA* · the tenth day of Muharram, when Imam Husayn was killed at Karbala in 680 CE.

◆

Does mercy mean no pain?

The question usually comes with pictures: children killed, whole populations starved, bombs falling from the sky, an earthquake that takes thousands of lives in a minute. Surely, we think, a loving God would step in.

Suffering raises two different questions. One belongs to the mind: *How can a merciful God allow this?* The other belongs to the heart: *How do I keep going?* They need different answers, and mixing them up does harm. A friend sitting by a hospital bed rarely needs an argument. She needs someone to sit beside her. This chapter tries to honour both, and to say which it is answering.

Begin with the mind's question and the assumption tucked inside it: that mercy means the removal of pain. A mercy that removed every pain would remove a great deal else. Patience, courage and generosity only grow where something is hard. Think of how people build strength in a gym. They choose discomfort, because muscle grows against resistance. The comparison has limits. No one chooses a bereavement the way they choose a workout, and no one should ever offer this picture to someone who is grieving. But it shows why a world made for growth cannot be a world without strain.

It also helps not to shrink God to a single quality. The Qur'an calls Him merciful, and also wise (*al-Hakim*) and knowing (*al-ʿAlim*). These are the very names its prophets reach for in their darkest hours. Jacob (a), losing a second son, says of God, "He is the All-Knowing, the All-Wise" (Qur'an 12:83). And the prophet Job (a), sick and stripped of everything, prays in words that hold pain and mercy together.

وَأَيُّوبَ إِذْ نَادَىٰ رَبَّهُۥٓ أَنِّى مَسَّنِىَ ٱلضُّرُّ وَأَنتَ أَرْحَمُ ٱلرَّٰحِمِينَ
﴿٨٣﴾ فَٱسْتَجَبْنَا لَهُۥ فَكَشَفْنَا مَا بِهِۦ مِن ضُرٍّ ۖ وَءَاتَيْنَٰهُ أَهْلَهُۥ
وَمِثْلَهُم مَّعَهُمْ رَحْمَةً مِّنْ عِندِنَا وَذِكْرَىٰ لِلْعَٰبِدِينَ ﴿٨٤﴾

And Job, when he called out to his Lord: "Harm has touched me, and You are the Most Merciful of all who show mercy." So We answered him and lifted the harm that was on him. We gave him back his family, and as many again with them: a mercy from Us, and a reminder for all who worship.

QUR'AN 21:83–84 · SURAT AL-ANBIYA'

NOTICE Job names his pain without softening it and God's mercy without doubting it, in a single breath. He accuses no one. He tells God the truth and leaves the answer to Him.

Shia Muslims build on this with one of the five roots of their faith: God's justice (*ʿadl*). Asked about justice, Imam Ali (a), the Prophet's cousin and the first Imam (d. 661 CE), answered in one line: "Justice is that you do not accuse Him."[2] The scholar al-Saduq (d. 991 CE) explained why: injustice comes only from ignorance or from need, and God has neither. Then he offered a picture. Imagine a father whose wisdom and goodness you have every reason to trust. You watch him cauterise his child's wound, or even amputate a limb, and no one tells you why. Not knowing his reason does not cancel what you know about him.[3] The argument is modest. It does not explain any particular tragedy. It shows why pain, by itself, does not prove that God is cruel.

◆

Why doesn't God just stop it?

Here is the objection at its strongest. If God is all-powerful and all-good, why does He not step in every time, before the bomb falls or the hand strikes?

Part of the answer is human freedom. If God stopped every cruel choice before it was made, no one would ever truly choose anything. Our kindness would be as automatic as a thermostat, and worth about as much. A world with real goodness has to be a world where real wrong is possible. And a great deal of suffering is human-made: wars someone started, famines someone allowed, money someone stole. "Corruption has appeared on land and sea because of what people's hands have earned" (Qur'an 30:41).

Imam Ali al-Rida (a), the eighth Imam (d. 818 CE), put it precisely: "God is not obeyed because He forces anyone, and He is not disobeyed because anyone overpowers Him." When people set out to do wrong, He may come between them and the deed. "And if He does not, and they do it, it is not He who led them into it."[4] Shia Muslims sum it up in a phrase from the Imams: "no compulsion and no handing over, but a matter between the two."[5] We are not puppets, and we are not abandoned.

Freedom explains much, but not everything. No one chooses an earthquake or a child's cancer. A world of stable laws, where fire warms and water quenches thirst, is also a world where fire burns and floods drown. A famous dictation attributed to Imam al-Sadiq (a) quotes the sceptics of his day: "If the world had a kind and merciful Creator, why do these hateful things happen in it?" A life with no hardship at all, the Imam answers, would leave people arrogant and blind to others' pain. And God can turn even calamity toward good, "just as, when the wind breaks a tree or a palm, a skilled craftsman takes it and puts it to all kinds of use."[6]

We see very little: a single pixel, where God sees the whole picture. The Qur'an tells of Moses (a) watching a servant of God knock a hole in a boat owned by poor sailors. Moses is outraged, until he learns that a king was seizing every boat by force; the damage saved it (18:71, 79). The story teaches humility about reasons. It does not promise that every loss will be explained in this life.

The hardest case is the suffering of children, and honesty means admitting it. Al-Saduq gave a whole chapter of his *Book of Divine Unity* to "children, and God's justice concerning them." The tradition offers no explanation of any one child's pain. It offers a promise.

That promise is that the account does not close at death. If this world were all there is, we would have every right to object. But "God does not wrong anyone by so

much as an atom's weight" (4:40), and "the patient will be paid their reward in full, beyond all reckoning" (39:10). Tyrants will answer for what they did: "The day of the oppressed against the oppressor," Imam Ali (a) warned, "will be harder than the day of the oppressor against the oppressed."[7] Shia theologians call the other half of the promise *'iwad*, compensation: no undeserved pain goes unrepaid.[8] No one is forgotten. "My Lord neither errs nor forgets" (20:52).

> **PAUSE AND RECALL**
>
> *Name the two questions that suffering raises. Which one have the last two sections been answering?*

◆

Does suffering mean God is angry?

Many people carry a quieter, more painful version of the question. *Is my illness a punishment? Did I lose my job because God is displeased with me?* And its mirror image: *Look how well life goes for them. God must be pleased.*

The Qur'an never promises a painless life. It announces that loss will come, and tells us what to say when it does.

وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُم بِشَيْءٍ مِّنَ ٱلْخَوْفِ وَٱلْجُوعِ وَنَقْصٍ مِّنَ ٱلْأَمْوَٰلِ
وَٱلْأَنفُسِ وَٱلثَّمَرَٰتِ وَبَشِّرِ ٱلصَّٰبِرِينَ ﴿١٥٥﴾ ٱلَّذِينَ إِذَآ أَصَٰبَتْهُم
مُّصِيبَةٌ قَالُوٓا۟ إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّآ إِلَيْهِ رَٰجِعُونَ ﴿١٥٦﴾ أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ عَلَيْهِمْ
صَلَوَٰتٌ مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ وَرَحْمَةٌ وَأُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلْمُهْتَدُونَ ﴿١٥٧﴾

We will surely test you with something of fear and hunger, and with loss of wealth, of lives and of harvests. But give good news to the patient: those who, when disaster strikes them, say, "We belong to God, and to Him we are returning." Blessings from their Lord are upon them, and mercy. They are the rightly guided.

QUR'AN 2:155–157 · SURAT AL-BAQARA

NOTICE Loss is announced, not ruled out. The good news goes to those whose first words in disaster are about belonging, not explanation: "We belong to God."

The test runs in both directions. "We test you with bad and good alike, as a trial" (21:35). Wealth tests us as surely as poverty, and health as surely as illness. Imam al-Sadiq (a) once said: "I marvel at the Muslim. God decrees nothing for him that is not good for him. If he is cut to pieces with shears, it is good for him. If he comes to own the east and the west of the earth, it is good for him."[9]

The Imams went further, and turned the punishment theory on its head.

IMAM JA'FAR AL-SADIQ (A), THE SIXTH IMAM, QUOTING THE BOOK OF ALI

إِنَّ فِي كِتَابِ عَلِيٍّ (عَلَيهِ السَّلام) أَنَّ أَشَدَّ النَّاسِ بَلاءً النَّبِيُّونَ ثُمَّ الْوَصِيُّونَ ثُمَّ الأَمْثَلُ فَالأَمْثَلُ وَإِنَّمَا يُبْتَلَى الْمُؤْمِنُ عَلَى قَدْرِ أَعْمَالِهِ الْحَسَنَةِ فَمَنْ صَحَّ دِينُهُ وَحَسُنَ عَمَلُهُ اشْتَدَّ بَلاؤُهُ وَذَلِكَ أَنَّ اللهَ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ لَمْ يَجْعَلِ الدُّنْيَا ثَوَاباً لِمُؤْمِنٍ وَلا عُقُوبَةً لِكَافِرٍ

In the Book of Ali it is written: the people most severely tried are the prophets, then their successors, then the best, and then the next best. The believer is tried in proportion to his good deeds: the sounder his faith and the better his conduct, the heavier his trial. That is because God, Mighty and Majestic, did not make this world a reward for the believer, or a punishment for the one who rejects faith.[10]

al-Kafi 2 · Belief & Disbelief · ch. 106 · no. 29 · **Reliable chain**

If suffering were a sign of God's anger, the prophets would be the people He loved least. A report from Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a), the fifth Imam (d. c. 733 CE), says that Job (a) was "tried without having sinned." God tried him, the report adds, "so that people would not despise the weak for weakness, the poor for poverty, or the sick for sickness."[11]

A STORY FROM THE SOURCES

The egg that did not break

The Prophet (s) was once invited to a meal. As he entered the man's house, he saw a hen on top of a wall lay an egg. It dropped onto a peg in the wall and stayed there, unbroken. The Prophet was amazed.

"Are you amazed at this egg?" said the host. "By the One who sent you with the truth, I have never suffered a loss of any kind."

The Prophet stood up and left without eating anything. "Whoever never suffers any loss," he said, "God has no need of him."

This story comes through a broken chain, but its point does not depend on it. A report with a sound chain has the Prophet say: "God has no need of anyone who has no share [of trial] in his wealth and his body."[12]

Most of us, sitting at that table, would have asked the host for his secret. The Prophet walked out instead. He was not cursing a fortunate man; ease, too, is a test. He was refusing the host's conclusion: that an unbroken life proves God's special favour.

Hardship can also do something comfort rarely does. When life runs smoothly, it is easy to forget how fragile we are. Imam Ali (a) taught that God tests His servants with hardship "to draw arrogance out of their hearts and settle humility in their souls." He makes such trials "open doors to His favour and easy paths to His forgiveness."[13] Many people find that their most honest prayers come from their hardest days. The Qur'an says that God is near (2:186), and asks: "Who answers the desperate when they call on Him, and lifts away the harm?" (27:62).

◆

Is it weak faith to cry?

Some people feel that grief is itself a failure of faith, as if a true believer should smile through a funeral. The Qur'an's portrait of Jacob (a) says otherwise. Years after losing Joseph (a), he loses a second son, and the old wound tears open.

وَتَوَلَّىٰ عَنْهُمْ وَقَالَ يَٰٓأَسَفَىٰ عَلَىٰ يُوسُفَ وَٱبْيَضَّتْ عَيْنَاهُ مِنَ
ٱلْحُزْنِ فَهُوَ كَظِيمٌ ﴿٨٤﴾ قَالُوا۟ تَٱللَّهِ تَفْتَؤُا۟ تَذْكُرُ يُوسُفَ حَتَّىٰ
تَكُونَ حَرَضًا أَوْ تَكُونَ مِنَ ٱلْهَٰلِكِينَ ﴿٨٥﴾ قَالَ إِنَّمَآ أَشْكُوا۟ بَثِّى
وَحُزْنِىٓ إِلَى ٱللَّهِ وَأَعْلَمُ مِنَ ٱللَّهِ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٨٦﴾

He turned away from them and said, "Oh, my sorrow for Joseph!" His eyes had turned white with grief, and he held it in. They said, "By God, you will never stop remembering Joseph until you waste away or die." He said, "I complain of my anguish and my grief only to God, and I know from God what you do not know."

QUR'AN 12:84–86 · SURAT YUSUF

NOTICE Jacob turns away from his sons, not from God. He holds his grief in before people and pours it out to God. Patience here concerns where grief goes, not whether it exists.

Jacob's grief whitens his eyes, yet he calls his patience beautiful (12:83). The line the Qur'an draws is not between tears and composure. It runs between complaining *to* God and complaining *about* Him.

The Prophet Muhammad (s) wept openly too. When his infant son Ibrahim died, the Prophet's eyes overflowed. "The eye weeps and the heart grieves," he said, "but we say nothing that angers the Lord. Ibrahim, we are grieving for you." Then he noticed a gap in the little grave and smoothed it with his own hand.[14] Imam Ali (a) once consoled a chieftain, al-Ash'ath ibn Qays, whose son had died. Your grief, he told him, is something "the bond of kinship has earned from you."[15]

> *"The free person is free in every circumstance.*
>
> IMAM JA'FAR AL-SADIQ (A)

Patience (*sabr*) is not passivity, either. Jacob, blinded by grief, still sends his sons out to search: "Do not despair of God's comfort" (12:87). Patience never asks anyone to stay in danger, to refuse treatment or to put up with abuse. A man once came to Imam al-Sadiq (a) with a condition on his face that people called a sign of God's disregard. The Imam brushed the idea aside and taught him a prayer for the night: name the pain, and ask God to take it away. The man said it was gone before he reached Kufa.[16]

This is why the chapter's key verse needs gentle handling: "So truly, with hardship comes ease. Truly, with hardship comes ease" (94:5–6). Classical grammarians noticed that "hardship" carries the definite article both times and "ease" does not: one hardship, two eases. The Shia commentator al-Tabrisi (d. 1154 CE) records a reading in which the first ease comes in this world and the second in the next.[17] The verse is a promise to hold, not a timetable to impose. Said to yourself, it can carry you through a long night. Said too quickly to someone else, it can sound like "hurry up and feel better."

◆

What does Karbala teach about suffering?

For Shia Muslims, every conversation about suffering eventually reaches Karbala, a plain in Iraq.

Imam Husayn (a), the Prophet's grandson and the third Imam, refused to pledge allegiance to Yazid, the new ruler in Damascus. On the road to Iraq he explained why: "Do you not see that truth is not acted upon, and falsehood is not forbidden?... I see death as nothing but happiness, and life with oppressors as nothing but misery." People cling to religion while life is easy, he added, "but when they are tested by trial, the truly religious become few."[18]

On the tenth day of the month of Muharram in 680 CE (61 AH), a day now called ʿAshura, Husayn was killed there after days of thirst. Many men of his family died with him, along with a small band of companions. The women and children were taken captive to Kufa and then to Damascus. Among them were his sister, Lady Zaynab (a), and his son Ali (a), too ill to fight.

Early accounts remember a moment late that day. Husayn was holding his infant son in his lap when an arrow struck the child's throat. He wiped away the blood and threw it toward the sky. A later account gives his words: "What has come down on me is made bearable because it happens before the eyes of God."[19]

Days later, the captives were brought before ʿUbayd Allah ibn Ziyad, the governor in Kufa. How, he taunted Zaynab, did she see what God had done to her family? A

tenth-century report, traced to the governor's own doorkeeper, gives her reply: "Being killed was written for them, so they went out to their resting places (Qur'an 3:154). God will bring you and them together, and you will argue your cases before Him."[20] The best-loved account, written nearly six centuries later, opens her answer with a now-famous phrase: "I saw nothing but beauty."[21] Her word, *jamil*, is the word Jacob (a) used for his patience. She was not calling a massacre beautiful. She saw God's decree, and her family's choice of honour over surrender, as beautiful, and in the same breath she told the governor he would answer for it.

In the tenth century, someone asked Abu al-Qasim ibn Rawh (d. 938 CE), a deputy of the twelfth Imam, how God could let His enemy overpower His friend. Had God's prophets always won, he replied, people would have worshipped them instead of God. So God let them prevail at some times and be overpowered at others, that they might be patient in trial and grateful in ease.[22]

Husayn's son Ali, later called Zayn al-Abidin, lived both halves of that answer. A report says that when a servant feared his weeping for his father would kill him, he answered with Jacob's words: "I complain of my anguish and my grief only to God."[23] Yet when he fell ill, he prayed this:

FROM HIS SUPPLICATION WHEN HE WAS ILL

IMAM ALI ZAYN AL-ABIDIN (A), THE FOURTH IMAM

فَمَا أَدْرِي، يَا إِلَهِي، أَيُّ الْحَالَيْنِ أَحَقُّ بِالشُّكْرِ لَكَ، وَأَيُّ الْوَقْتَيْنِ أَوْلَى بِالْحَمْدِ لَكَ، أَ وَقْتُ الصِّحَّةِ الَّتِي هَنَّأْتَنِي فِيهَا طَيِّبَاتِ رِزْقِكَ ... أَمْ وَقْتُ الْعِلَّةِ الَّتِي مَحَّصْتَنِي بِهَا، وَالنِّعَمِ الَّتِي أَتْحَفْتَنِي بِهَا، تَخْفِيفاً لِمَا ثَقُلَ بِهِ عَلَيَّ ظَهْرِي مِنَ الْخَطِيئَاتِ

I do not know, my God, which of the two states deserves more of my thanks, or which of the two times is more worthy of my praise. Is it the time of health, in which You let me enjoy the good things You provide... or the time of illness, by which You have refined me, and the gifts You have given me through it, lightening the sins that weighed on my back?[24]

al-Sahifa al-Sajjadiyya · Supplication 15 · **Compiled text, not graded here**

A CLOSER LOOK

How do we know what happened at Karbala?

Karbala is unusually well recorded for its time, but its sources come in layers. The oldest goes back to the Kufan historian Abu Mikhnaf (d. 774 CE), who gathered eyewitness accounts, usually through one or two intermediaries. His reports survive inside later works such as the histories of al-Tabari (d. 923 CE) and Abu al-Faraj al-Isfahani (d. 967 CE). Shia scholars, among them al-Saduq (d. 991 CE) and al-Mufid (d. 1022 CE), recorded parallel reports. Later centuries produced new *maqtals*, accounts of the killing written to be read aloud at mourning gatherings. The best loved, *al-Luhuf* by Ibn Tawus (d. 1266 CE), adds words the earliest reports do not record, including the two famous lines quoted above. Even names vary: early sources call the baby ʿAbd Allah, later ones Ali.

So the events are early and solid, and some treasured words are late. A careful reader can cherish those words as the community's memory, while resting history on the earliest witnesses.[25]

What Karbala asks of us

Karbala gave Shia Muslims a way to hold suffering. Every Muharram, communities around the world gather to retell the story and weep. But these tears are not passive. They refuse to let injustice become normal. Some twenty years before Karbala, Imam Ali (a) lay dying from an assassin's blow. In his will to his sons Hasan (a) and Husayn, he said: "Be an enemy to the oppressor and a helper to the oppressed."[26] At Karbala, Husayn kept that promise with his life.

So the question of suffering finally lands on us. When evil happens, we want God to step in. But God also works through people: the rescuer, the nurse, the neighbour who turns up with a meal. A modern saying puts it sharply. We would like to ask God why He allows poverty and injustice when He could end them. But we are afraid He would ask us the same question. "God does not change what is with a people until they change what is within themselves" (Qur'an 13:11).[27] And Imam al-Sadiq (a) promised that "God is in the help of the believer as long as the believer is in the help of his brother."[28]

Joseph's story ended within his lifetime. Years after the well, with his family around him, he said, "My Lord is subtle in working out what He wills. He is the All-Knowing, the All-Wise" (12:100). Husayn's story did not end that way, and many stories do not. Muslims believe that the account stays open past the grave, and that the

God who spoke to a boy at the bottom of a well forgets no one. Until then, believers are asked to grieve honestly, to take their complaint to God, and to become, for someone else, the help that God sends.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Mercy is not the absence of pain; God is also All-Wise and All-Knowing, and growth is part of His mercy.
2. Shia Muslims count God's justice (*ʿadl*) a root of faith: He wrongs no one, even when we cannot see why.
3. Human freedom makes cruelty possible and resisting it a duty; it explains much suffering, but not all.
4. Suffering is not proof of God's anger: the prophets were tried most, and ease is a test too.
5. Grief is not weak faith. From Jacob to Karbala, believers weep, complain to God alone and stand with the oppressed.

NEXT TIME · GO FURTHER

Next time: *What Happens When We Die?* Muslims meet every loss with "to Him we are returning." What does that return look like, from the last breath onward?

Go further:

Course: God and His Attributes, a Level 1 course at Tasneem Institute (tasneeminstitute.org/courses/god-and-his-attributes)
Read: "A just God. ʿAdl.", a short introduction in Tasneem's *Discovering Islam* series (tasneeminstitute.org/blog/discovering-islam/divine-justice-adl). For a deeper dive, al-Kafi, vol. 2, Book of Belief and Disbelief, ch. 106, "The severity of the believer's trial": thirty reports of mixed strength.
Watch: Invitation to Islam, Episode 8, "Why Is There Suffering?" (13 min).

In the circle

LOOK BACK

1. What did Chapter 10 say about the angels who record each person's deeds?
2. Who are the Ahl al-Bayt (Chapter 8), and why do Shia Muslims look to them?
3. Part One asks, "Is it true?" and follows the five roots of faith. Which can you name?

TALK ABOUT IT

WARM-UP

1. When someone is suffering, what do people say that helps? What do they say that hurts?

UNDERSTAND

2. The chapter separates the mind's question ("How can a merciful God allow this?") from the heart's ("How do I keep going?"). Why does it matter which one someone is asking?
3. How does human freedom explain some suffering? What does the chapter admit that freedom does not explain?

REFLECT

4. Jacob (a) wept until his eyes turned white, yet said, "I complain of my grief only to God" (Qur'an 12:86). What does a prophet's open grief say about faith and sadness?
5. "With hardship comes ease" (Qur'an 94:5–6). When could this verse comfort someone? When could quoting it to them feel dismissive?

APPLY

6. Think of someone near you who is carrying something heavy (you needn't say who). What one specific thing could you offer this week, while leaving them free to say no?

GO DEEPER

7. Imam al-Sadiq (a) taught that the most severely tried people are the prophets, then those nearest them (al-Kafi, vol. 2, Book of Belief and Disbelief, ch. 106, no. 1; reliable chain). If hardship falls hardest on those closest to God, what happens to the idea that suffering signals His displeasure? What remains unanswered?
8. Read Supplication 15 of al-Sahifa al-Sajjadiyya, "When he was ill" (compiled text, not graded). How does Imam Zayn al-Abidin (a) hold gratitude and pain together? Which line would you keep?

CARRY IT HOME

Choose one way in this week:

☐ **Notice:** When you hear hard news, notice the first thing you want to say. Is it an explanation, a fix, or the quieter gift of staying?

☐ **Do:** Put one heavy thing into plain words, as Job (a) did: "Harm has touched me." If you pray, say it to God in your own language. If you don't, write it in your notebook. Then add one thing you still trust.

☐ **Learn:** Learn the sentence Muslims say at news of a loss, *innā lillāhi wa innā ilayhi rājiʿūn*: "We belong to God, and to Him we are returning" (Qur'an 2:156). Then read the verses around it, 2:153–157, and notice what they promise and what they do not.

Aim. Help the circle hold real pain and a just, merciful God together, and leave everyone a little better able to sit with someone who suffers.

Protect this question. No. 4, on Jacob's grief. It lets everyone talk about faith and sadness without anyone having to disclose their own story.

Answer notes.

- *Q2.* The mind's question asks for reasons: freedom, justice, testing, a final reckoning. The heart's question asks for presence and strength. Answering the heart with arguments can wound, so listen first.
- *Q3.* If God stopped every wrong choice, no one would truly choose the good (Imam al-Rida: God is neither forced nor overpowered). Freedom does not explain earthquakes or a sick child; there the chapter offers partial answers, humility and the promise of compensation (4:40).

Likely questions.

- *"Is my illness a punishment?"* See "Does suffering mean God is angry?" Never answer this about someone else's suffering.
- *"Why do innocent children suffer?"* See "Why doesn't God just stop it?" Admit that it is the hardest case.
- *"Did Zaynab really say, 'I saw nothing but beauty'?"* See the Karbala section and its box on sources.

Watch for. Read the care note aloud. Someone may be newly bereaved, seriously ill or living with abuse. The warm-up is in the third person on purpose: never ask anyone to account for their own suffering. Never suggest a reason for anyone's pain, or let "it's a test" be said *to* someone who is hurting. Patience never means staying in danger: disclosures of abuse or risk follow your centre's safeguarding policy. Karbala is dear to Shia members; let them speak of it, and let guests listen without pressure. Keep the referral list to hand.

Bring. A box of tissues, within reach but never handed to anyone pointedly. Optionally, a recitation of Qur'an 12:84–87.

MY THREAD · CHAPTER 11

On my hardest day, what would I want someone to say to me, and what would I want left unsaid?

MY QUESTION FOR THE BOX

NOTES

12

What Happens When We Die?

Not an ending, but a return.

قُلْ يَتَوَفَّىٰكُم مَّلَكُ ٱلْمَوْتِ ٱلَّذِى وُكِّلَ بِكُمْ ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكُمْ تُرْجَعُونَ ﴿١١﴾

Say: "The angel of death, who has been given charge of you, will take you in full. Then to your Lord you will be brought back."

QUR'AN 32:11 · SURAT AL-SAJDA

A NOTE OF CARE Some of us are grieving, caring for someone who is dying, or carrying a loss that is still raw. No one will be asked to share their own story; you may listen, pass or step out at any time, and tears are welcome here.

WATCH · EPISODE 16 · 13:08

youtu.be/X6vYvsABzJc

In the video: a woman who had cancer three times, and why she would go through it again (6:52)

Reading time: about 15 minutes

Sa'id ibn Yasar is keeping watch at a deathbed. The dying man is one of two brothers, the sons of Sabur, both men of virtue, careful piety and humble devotion. Sa'id thinks it is Zakariyya, though he is not sure which of the two it was.

At the very end, the sick man stretches out his hand. "My hand has turned white," he says, "O Ali!"

Later, Sa'id goes to see Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (a), the sixth Imam of the Prophet's family (d. 765 CE). Another of the Imam's students, Muhammad ibn Muslim, is already sitting with him. When Sa'id gets up to leave, he guesses that Muhammad will tell the Imam the story. Instead, a messenger comes after him. The Imam wants him back.

"Tell me about this man whose death you attended," the Imam says. "What did you hear him say?"

"He stretched out his hand," Sa'id answers, "and said, 'My hand has turned white, O Ali.'"

The Imam replies with an oath, three times over: "By God, he saw him. By God, he saw him. By God, he saw him."[1]

The dying man had called out to Ali ibn Abi Talib (a), the Prophet's cousin and the first Imam, who had died long before. What did he see? Anyone who has sat beside a dying friend knows the feeling that something is happening which the people in the room cannot see. What is it? And when the breathing stops, where does the person go?

THE BIG QUESTION

What happens to us when we die?

Have you ever wondered whether anything of a person survives the last heartbeat? Why Muslims wash their dead and wrap them in plain white cloth? Or, if you grew up hearing about the questions in the grave, what those questions are, and who has to answer them?

This chapter follows the Qur'an and the Prophet's family from the last breath to the grave and the world beyond it. Then it asks what the living can still do for the people they have lost.

WORDS TO KNOW

barzakh (بَرْزَخ) · *BAR-zakh* · "barrier": the life between death and the Day of Resurrection (Qur'an 23:100).

wājib kifāʾī (وَاجِب كِفَائِيّ) · *WAA-jib ki-FAA-ee* · a collective duty: once some people fulfil it, everyone else is released.

ghusl al-mayyit (غُسْل الْمَيِّت) · *GHUSL al-MAY-yit* · the washing of the dead: three gentle washes before the shroud.

kafan (كَفَن) · *KA-fan* · the shroud: three plain pieces of cloth, the same for rich and poor.

walāya (وَلَايَة) · *wa-LAA-ya* · loving loyalty to the Prophet's family, the Ahl al-Bayt, as God's chosen guides.

ṣadaqa jāriya (صَدَقَة جَارِيَة) · *SA-da-qa JAA-ri-ya* · "flowing charity": a good work whose reward keeps reaching a person after death.

◆

Is death the end?

Lay your head on the pillow at night, and the big questions tend to arrive. Will I wake up in the morning? Will my children be safe? Will I lose a parent, or someone I love more than life? Behind them waits an older question: why did God make us at all? To punish us? To reward us? Modern culture mostly looks away, or sells death as a fright of skeletons and haunted graveyards.

Islam offers another picture, and it begins with a word. For the angel of death taking a person, the Qur'an uses the verb *tawaffa*: to receive something whole, the way a lender receives a debt repaid in full.[2] The chapter's key verse says: "The angel of death, who has been given charge of you, will take you in full. Then to your Lord you will be brought back" (Qur'an 32:11). That is why Muslims meet every death with *inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi rajiʿun*: "We belong to God, and to Him we are returning" (Qur'an 2:156).

What is received is the self, not the body. The verse answers people who scoffed, "When we are lost in the earth, shall we really be made anew?" (Qur'an 32:10). Bodies scatter in the earth, the Shia commentator al-Tabataba'i (d. 1981 CE) explained, but the people themselves are not lost, because the angel takes them whole.[3] Bodies age; selves, Muslims believe, do not. The body is the soul's carrying case for a time.

Many Muslims picture death as a bridge. A weakly sourced report takes the image back to Karbala, in Iraq, in 680 CE (61 AH). There Imam Husayn (a), the Prophet's grandson and the third Imam, tells his frightened companions: "Death is nothing but a bridge that carries you across from misery and hardship to wide gardens and lasting bliss. Which of you would hate to move from a prison to a palace?"[4]

Could God not have let us stay here forever? Imam al-Sadiq (a) told of a people who asked their prophet to pray that death be lifted from them, and it was. They mul-

tiplied until their houses could not hold them. A man would spend his morning feeding and washing his father, his grandfather, his mother and his great-great-grandfather, until no one had time to earn a living. So they asked their prophet to pray for the old way back, and God restored it.[5] Earth was never meant to be our lasting home.

Why, then, do we fear the crossing? Abu Dharr al-Ghifari (d. c. 652 CE), one of the Prophet's most outspoken companions, was asked exactly that. "Because you have built up this world and laid waste the next," he said, "and you hate to move from a place that is built to a place in ruins." The one who did good, he added, will come before God "like a traveller coming home to his family."[6] Our fear says something about how we are living, not about the One who "has written mercy upon Himself" (Qur'an 6:12). Imam Ali (a), the Prophet's cousin and the first Imam (d. 661 CE), had no such fear: "By God, the son of Abu Talib is more at ease with death than an infant with its mother's breast."[7]

> *"By God, the son of Abu Talib is more at ease with death than an infant with its mother's breast.*
>
> IMAM ALI (A)

◆

What happens as we die?

People who care for the dying often say they learn more from the dying than from the living, and that leaving life, like entering it, can be a beautiful passage. The body is closing down, yet the person can seem more present than ever. The Qur'an sets its own scene at a bedside.

فَلَوْلَآ إِذَا بَلَغَتِ ٱلْحُلْقُومَ ﴿٨٣﴾ وَأَنتُمْ حِينَئِذٍ تَنظُرُونَ ﴿٨٤﴾
وَنَحْنُ أَقْرَبُ إِلَيْهِ مِنكُمْ وَلَٰكِن لَّا تُبْصِرُونَ ﴿٨٥﴾ فَلَوْلَآ إِن
كُنتُمْ غَيْرَ مَدِينِينَ ﴿٨٦﴾ تَرْجِعُونَهَآ إِن كُنتُمْ صَٰدِقِينَ ﴿٨٧﴾

Why then, when the soul comes up to the throat, while you look on, and We are nearer to him than you, though you do not see: why, if you are answerable to no one, do you not bring it back, if what you say is true?

QUR'AN 56:83–87 · SURAT AL-WAQI'A

NOTICE Everyone in the room is watching, yet no one sees. God is "nearer to him than you," and the helpless onlookers are challenged: if you are answerable to no one, bring the soul back.

What is the dying person seeing? Imam al-Sadiq (a) was asked about these verses. At the throat, he said, the believer "is shown his home in Paradise, and he says, 'Send me back to the world, so that I can tell my family what I see.' He is told, 'There is no way to that.'"[8]

The Imams speak of these moments with great tenderness. "When the soul of one of you reaches here," Imam al-Sadiq said, pointing to his throat, "his eye is delighted." Of the tear that sometimes forms in a dying person's eye, he said: "That is when he sees the Messenger of God, and he sees what makes him glad. Have you never seen someone catch sight of what he loves, and his eyes fill with tears as he laughs?"[9] On the strength of such reports, Shia Muslims hold that the Prophet (s) and Imam Ali (a) come to the dying believer with good news, as in Sa'id's story.[10] Even a death that looks hard may be eased within: "People say, 'Death was hard on so-and-so,'" the Imam said, "when that was God making it easy for him."[11]

None of this makes death small. "The stupor of death comes with the truth," the Qur'an says: "this is what you used to run from" (Qur'an 50:19). Imam Ali (a) described a dying man among his family who can no longer speak. Yet he "sees with his eyes and hears with his ears, his mind sound," and he wonders "what he spent his life on, and where his years went."[12] At death the veil comes off.

Is a long final illness a punishment? Chapter 11 showed that suffering is no proof of God's anger. Nor does illness erase a person's good. The Prophet (s) once smiled up at

the sky. Two angels, he explained, had come down to record a good man's deeds, but he lay sick, held fast in God's ropes. God told them: "Write for My servant all the good he used to do when he was well."[13] A woman who had been through cancer three times was asked whether she had felt punished. "No," she said. "If I had to do it all over again, I would. It brought me closer to God." Illness brings us to our knees, and on our knees we look up. As Abraham (a) said, "When I am ill, it is He who heals me" (Qur'an 26:80).

◆

Why do Muslims care for their dead this way?

When a Muslim dies, the care of the body falls on the living. As Ayatollah al-Sistani, a leading Shia authority, rules it, the duty belongs first to the guardian, usually the closest heir; a married woman's guardian is her husband. If there is no guardian, or he will not act, the duty passes to every adult Muslim. Jurists call this a *wajib kifa'i*, a collective duty: once some people fulfil it, everyone else is released, but if no one does, all are answerable.[14] No one should go to the grave as a stranger.

Those who step forward are honoured. "No believer washes a believer," Imam al-Sadiq (a) said, "and says as he washes him, 'My Lord, Your pardon, Your pardon,' without God pardoning him."[15]

Many funerals today try to make the dead look alive: the best suit or dress, make-up, set hair, painted nails. Mourners can then say, "Doesn't Grandma look beautiful?" A Muslim funeral does almost the opposite: a gentle washing, often with family helping, and three plain pieces of cloth. No colour is required. White is recommended, but where white cloth cannot be found, in war or in poverty, another colour serves as well.[16]

A shroud has no pockets. "You have come to Us alone, as We created you the first time," the Qur'an pictures God telling the newly dead, "and you have left behind all that We gave you" (Qur'an 6:94). A report from Imam Ali (a), with an unverified chain, imagines a person's last day as a conversation. His wealth says, "Take your shroud from me." His children say, "We will carry you to your grave." Only his deeds say, "I am your companion in your grave, and on the day you are raised."[17] We own nothing except what we have done, as Chapter 13 explores.

IN PRACTICE

When someone dies: the rites, step by step

The main steps as Ayatollah al-Sistani rules them.[18] Details differ between scholars, so check the rulings of the scholar you follow (your *marja'*). Your local mosque or centre will usually guide a family through each step.

1. **At the bedside.** Lay the dying person on their back, soles toward the qibla, the direction of Mecca. Gently prompt them with the testimony of faith and their belief in the Prophet (s) and the Imams. Recite Qur'an, such as Sura Ya-Sin, the thirty-sixth chapter. Do not leave them alone.
2. **Who acts.** The guardian (usually the closest heir; for a married woman, her husband) arranges everything. If no one does, every adult Muslim shares the duty.
3. **Washing.** Three washes: water with lote leaves (*sidr*), water with camphor, then plain water. Men wash men and women wash women; spouses may wash each other.
4. **Camphor and shroud.** Camphor is touched to the forehead, palms, knees and big toes, which rest on the ground in prostration. Then come three plain cloths. No colour is required.
5. **The funeral prayer.** Five *takbirs* ("God is greater"), followed in turn by the testimony of faith, blessings on the Prophet and his family, a prayer for all believers and a prayer for the one who has died. The fifth ends the prayer.
6. **Burial.** On the right side, facing the qibla. A coffin is allowed if the body lies the same way.
7. **Afterwards.** Neighbours send food to the family for three days. On the first night, anyone may pray the two-unit "prayer of loneliness" (*salat al-wahsha*) for the one who has died.

◆

Where are the dead now?

When the mourners walk home, where is the one they have buried? The Qur'an answers at another deathbed.

حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَا جَآءَ أَحَدَهُمُ ٱلْمَوْتُ قَالَ رَبِّ ٱرْجِعُونِ ﴿٩٩﴾ لَعَلِّىٓ
أَعْمَلُ صَٰلِحًا فِيمَا تَرَكْتُ كَلَّآ إِنَّهَا كَلِمَةٌ هُوَ قَآئِلُهَا وَمِن وَرَآئِهِم
بَرْزَخٌ إِلَىٰ يَوْمِ يُبْعَثُونَ ﴿١٠٠﴾

When death comes to one of them, he says, "My Lord, send me back, so that I may do good in what I left behind." Never. It is only a word he speaks. Beyond them lies a barrier until the day they are raised.

QUR'AN 23:99–100 · SURAT AL-MU'MINUN

NOTICE Two people at the edge of death ask to go back. The believer at the throat wanted only to tell his family what he saw. This man wants a second chance, and the answer is no.

That barrier, the *barzakh*, is the life between death and the Day of Resurrection. The Qur'an uses the same word for the barrier between two seas that meet but never overrun each other (Qur'an 55:19–20). Imam al-Sadiq (a) called it "the grave, from the moment of death until the Day of Resurrection."[19] But *the grave* means more than a hole in the ground. Asked about a man who had been crucified and left unburied, an Imam said that God "commands the air to press him."[20] No one, buried or not, is beyond God's reach.

The Qur'an pictures the barzakh as far more alive than a waiting room. Pharaoh's people "are exposed to the Fire, morning and evening," before the Hour comes (Qur'an 40:46). Those killed in God's way "are alive with their Lord, provided for," rejoicing over those they left behind (Qur'an 3:169–170). In Sura Ya-Sin, a man who urged his people to follow God's messengers was, most commentators say, killed by them.[21] At once he is told, "Enter the Garden," and his first thought is for those he left: "If only my people knew how my Lord has forgiven me" (Qur'an 36:26–27).

Imam al-Sadiq rejected the popular idea that believers' souls ride inside green birds. The believer is too honoured by God for that, he said; they are "in bodies like their bodies." Elsewhere he said they live "in chambers in the Garden," praying, "Our Lord, bring on the Hour for us, keep Your promise to us, and join our last to our first."[22] A saying the Imams repeated sums it up: the grave is "a garden of the gardens of

Paradise, or a pit of the pits of the Fire." Its chains are weak, but the verses above support the idea.[23]

> **PAUSE AND RECALL**
>
> *In your own words, what is the barzakh? What do Qur'an 3:169–170 and 40:46 suggest happens there?*

Many people have heard that everyone is interrogated in the grave. The Imams taught something more surprising.

> **IMAM JA'FAR AL-SADIQ (A), THE SIXTH IMAM**
>
> لاَ يُسْأَلُ فِي الْقَبْرِ إِلاَّ مَنْ مَحَضَ الإِيمَانَ مَحْضاً أَوْ مَحَضَ الْكُفْرَ مَحْضاً.
>
> No one is questioned in the grave except one whose faith was pure through and through, or whose rejection of faith was pure through and through.[24]
>
> al-Kafi 3 · Funerals · ch. 88 · no. 4 · **Reliable chain**

Two other reports add: "As for anyone else, he is left alone."[25] The questioning in the grave is for those who stood most decisively for or against the truth. Everyone else waits for the Day of Judgement, when God weighs what each person knew and could do (Chapters 13 and 16).

Those who are questioned meet the two angels of the grave. Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a), the fifth Imam (d. c. 733 CE), relayed the Prophet's words about one who lived as God's enemy, crying out over his wasted life. Once he is laid in his pit, "the spirit is returned to his body, and the two angels of the grave come to him and test him." The Imam wept whenever he recalled it.[26] Weaker reports name the angels Munkar and Nakir, as does a prayer of Imam Zayn al-Abidin (a), the fourth Imam (d. c. 713 CE). They ask: Who is your Lord? What is your religion? Who is your prophet? Who is your Imam?[27] No one can cram for that test. "God makes firm those who believe with the firm word, in this life and in the hereafter" (Qur'an 14:27).

A report much loved among Shia Muslims, though its chain is broken, names five things the dead are asked about. They are prayer, zakat (the yearly alms), the pilgrimage, fasting, and *walaya*: love and loyalty toward the Prophet's family. Then *walaya* tells the other four, "Whatever is lacking in you, it is on me to make it complete."[28] Love for the Ahl al-Bayt does not replace the prayers; it makes up what they lack. Whoever is questioned, Imam al-Sadiq said, "is questioned while being pressed."[29]

Popular preaching adds serpents, iron clubs and angels with thunderous voices, all from weak reports. The reliable teaching is spare, and it is enough.

A FAIR QUESTION

Isn't this just what grieving people want to hear?

"A gentle angel, a garden, a reunion: isn't this the story people tell to dull the pain?" It is a fair challenge. But the picture the Qur'an and the Imams paint is not all comfort. It includes a man begging to be sent back and refused (Qur'an 23:99–100), a dying man counting his wasted years, and an Imam who told his own followers, in one report, "By God, I fear for you in the barzakh."[30] Wishful thinking rarely writes its own warnings. Nor do Muslims believe in life after death because it soothes, but because they believe God has spoken; Part One has set out why. Medicine can tell us when the heart stops. It cannot tell us whether the person has gone anywhere.

◆

What can we still do for those we love?

The Imams grieved, and they showed how. Zurara, a close student of Imam al-Baqir (a), tells of a boy of the Imam's household who fell gravely ill. The Imam sat to one side and kept people from handling the child: "He is at his weakest now, and whoever touches him works against him." When the boy died, the Imam had his eyes closed and his jaw bound. "We may be distressed until God's command comes," he said. "When it comes, we have nothing but surrender." He called for oil and kohl, ate with the people around him and said, "This is beautiful patience." Then he had the boy washed and went out to lead the funeral prayer.[31] Grief before, surrender after, care for the living: that is the model. It sets no timetable for anyone else's tears (see Chapter 11).

The community, meanwhile, carries the grieving. In 629 CE (8 AH), news came that the Prophet's cousin Ja'far ibn Abi Talib had been killed at the battle of Mu'ta. The Prophet (s) told his daughter Fatima (a) to cook for Ja'far's widow, Asma' bint 'Umays, for three days, and to stay with her. That, Imam al-Sadiq (a) said, is how feeding the bereaved for three days became the Sunna, the established practice.[32] The neighbours feed the family, not the other way round, and al-Sistani counts this among the recommended acts.[33]

Three days is for the gatherings and the meals, not a deadline for grief. In the seventy-five days that Fatima outlived her father, by one report, no one saw her smile. Twice a week she went to the graves of the martyrs and said, "Here was the Messenger of God; here were the idolaters."[34] And whoever remembers a loss "even after a long time," Imam al-Sadiq taught, and says, "We belong to God, and to Him we are returning," receives the reward of the first shock.[35]

The dead are not cut off from us. "They take comfort in you," the Imam said of those in the graves, "and when you are away, they feel lonely."[36] He taught a greeting for the cemetery: "Peace be on the people of these homes, Muslims and believers. You have gone ahead of us, and we, God willing, will be joining you."[37] Women may visit graves as men do.[38] And the believer who has died visits his family: "He sees what he loves, and what he would dislike is hidden from him."[39]

Love for the dead can still become action.

IMAM JA'FAR AL-SADIQ (A), THE SIXTH IMAM

مَا يَلْحَقُ الرَّجُلَ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهِ فَقَالَ سُنَّةٌ سَنَّهَا يُعْمَلُ بِهَا بَعْدَ مَوْتِهِ فَيَكُونُ لَهُ مِثْلُ أَجْرِ مَنْ عَمِلَ بِهَا مِنْ غَيْرِ أَنْ يَنْتَقِصَ مِنْ أُجُورِهِمْ شَيْءٌ وَالصَّدَقَةُ الْجَارِيَةُ تَجْرِي مِنْ بَعْدِهِ وَالْوَلَدُ الصَّالِحُ يَدْعُو لِوَالِدَيْهِ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهِمَا وَيَحُجُّ وَيَتَصَدَّقُ عَنْهُمَا وَيُعْتِقُ وَيَصُومُ وَيُصَلِّي عَنْهُمَا فَقُلْتُ أُشْرِكُهُمَا فِي حَجِّي قَالَ نَعَمْ.

"What reaches a person after his death?" He said: "A practice he began, which is acted on after his death, so that he has the like of the reward of everyone who acts on it, without their reward being reduced at all; flowing charity that keeps running after him; and a righteous child who prays for his parents after their death, and makes the pilgrimage, gives charity, frees slaves, fasts and prays on their behalf." I asked, "May I include them in my pilgrimage?" He said, "Yes."[40]

al-Kafi 7 · Wills · ch. 36 · no. 4 · **Reliable chain**

Another report adds a tree someone planted, a well they dug and a copy of the Qur'an they left behind.[41] Love still has somewhere to go.

Sa'id ibn Yasar watched a friend reach toward someone the room could not see. The Imam's threefold oath answers this chapter's question: the dying are not alone, and the dead are not gone. They have crossed a barrier we have yet to reach. Imam Ali's grandson prayed for deeds good enough that death would become "our familiar

friend, in whose company we are at ease."[42] The Qur'an calls the faithful soul home gently: "O self at peace, return to your Lord, pleased and pleasing. Enter among My servants. Enter My garden" (Qur'an 89:27–30). Pilgrims answer God's call with *Labbayk*, "Here I am." For the believer, death is the last *labbayk*: a call answered, a homecoming. Not an ending, but a return.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. In the Qur'an, death is a "taking in full": the self is received whole and returns to God.
2. The Imams teach that God eases the believer's death, and that the Prophet and Imam Ali come with good news.
3. Muslims wash, shroud, pray over and bury their dead as a shared duty, in three plain cloths.
4. The barzakh is the life between death and resurrection; only the wholly faithful or wholly defiant are questioned there.
5. Grief is honoured, the bereaved are fed, and prayers and charity still reach the dead.

NEXT TIME · GO FURTHER

Next time: *Understanding the Afterlife.* The barzakh does not last forever. One day, the Qur'an says, the dead will rise. How could dust stand up again, and what will be waiting on that Day?

Go further:

Course: Islamic Eschatology: Death to the Day of Judgement, a Level 1 course at Tasneem Institute (tasneeminstitute.org/courses/islamic-eschatology-death-to-the-day-of-judgement)

Read: "The Day of Judgment," a short introduction in Tasneem's *Discovering Islam* series (tasneeminstitute.org/blog/discovering-islam/the-day-of-judgment). For a deeper dive, *al-Kafi*, vol. 3, Book of Funerals, ch. 13, "What believers and unbelievers see at death": sixteen short reports of mixed strength.

Watch: Invitation to Islam, Episode 16, "What Happens When We Die?" (13 min).

In the circle

LOOK BACK

1. Chapter 11 said that grief is not a sign of weak faith. Whose tears did it point to?
2. Chapter 9 described three conditions of the self. Which one does the Qur'an invite to "return to your Lord"?
3. Part One asks, "Is it true?" What would make a belief about life after death reasonable, not just comforting?

TALK ABOUT IT

WARM-UP

1. When someone dies in your family or community, what happens in the first few days? Who does what?

UNDERSTAND

2. What does *barzakh* mean, and why does the chapter say it is more than a waiting room (Qur'an 23:100; 3:169–170; 40:46)?
3. According to Imam al-Sadiq (a), who is questioned in the grave (al-Kafi, vol. 3, ch. 88, no. 4)? What happens to everyone else?

REFLECT

4. Two people at death ask to be sent back: the believer, to tell his family what he sees, and the man of Qur'an 23:99, to make amends. What do their requests reveal?
5. A Muslim is buried in three plain pieces of cloth, the same for rich and poor. What does that say to you about what we really own?

APPLY

6. Is there someone you have lost whom you could honour this week, with a prayer, a gift in their name or a visit to their grave? You needn't say who.

GO DEEPER

7. Read Imam Ali's picture of a man dying among his family (Nahj al-Balagha, Sermon 109; compiled text, not graded). What does he see at the end that he missed before?
8. Read Supplication 40 of al-Sahifa al-Sajjadiyya, "When death was mentioned" (compiled text, not graded). What does Imam Zayn al-Abidin (a) ask for, and why might he want death to feel familiar?

CARRY IT HOME

Choose one way in this week:

☐ **Notice:** Imam Ali (a) said, "A person's every breath is a step toward his appointed time" (Nahj al-Balagha, Saying 74). Once a day, take three slow breaths and ask yourself where you are walking.

☐ **Do:** Do one thing for someone who has died: a prayer, a gift to charity in their name, or a visit to their grave. Or take a meal to a grieving family. If you join a funeral, try advice reported from Imam al-Sadiq (a) in al-Kafi (vol. 3, ch. 95, no. 29): as you help carry the coffin, imagine that you are the one being carried, sent back for one more chance. What would you begin again?

☐ **Learn:** Learn the greeting for a cemetery: "Peace be on the people of these homes… You have gone ahead of us, and we, God willing, will be joining you." Then read Qur'an 56:83–96, the close of Surat al-Waqi'a.

Aim. Help the circle see death as Islam does, as a return rather than an ending, and leave everyone a little better able to sit with the dying and the bereaved.

Protect this question. No. 4, the two requests to be sent back. Everyone can answer it, and no one has to speak about their own losses.

Answer notes.

- *Q2. Barzakh* means "barrier": the life between death and the Day of Resurrection (23:100). It is more than waiting. Martyrs are "alive with their Lord, provided for" (3:169–170), and Pharaoh's people are exposed to the Fire before the Hour (40:46).
- *Q3.* Only those whose faith, or whose rejection of faith, was pure through and through are questioned. Everyone else is "left alone" until the Day of Judgement (al-Kafi 3, ch. 88, nos. 1, 3 and 4; reliable chains).

Likely questions.

- *"Is the barzakh the same as purgatory?"* No. In Catholic teaching, purgatory purifies the saved before heaven. The barzakh is the in-between life of everyone, with real comfort or real distress. See "Where are the dead now?"
- *"Can my mother hear me at her grave?"* Reliable reports say the dead "take comfort" in visitors and see what they love in their families. See "What can we still do for those we love?" Promise nothing more.
- *"What about someone cremated or lost at sea?"* The barzakh is not the hole in the ground. See "Where are the dead now?"

Watch for. Read the care note aloud. Someone may be newly bereaved or caring for a dying parent. Never say where a particular person has gone, Muslim or not. Reverts may be mourning family who were not Muslim: point to the teaching that only the wholly faithful or wholly defiant are questioned in the grave, and leave judgement to God (Chapters 13 and 16). Do not dwell on frightening images of the grave. Keep the referral list to hand.

Bring. A plain white cloth, folded on the table. Or share a simple dish in memory of those the circle has lost.

MY THREAD · CHAPTER 12

If I were sent back for one more year, what would I begin again?

MY QUESTION FOR THE BOX

NOTES

13

Understanding the Afterlife

Where an atom's weight of good is never lost.

فَمَن يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ خَيْرًا يَرَهُۥ ﴿٧﴾ وَمَن يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ شَرًّا يَرَهُۥ ﴿٨﴾

Whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it. Whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it.

QUR'AN 99:7–8 · SURAT AL-ZALZALA

A NOTE OF CARE This chapter speaks about judgement and about hell. Some of us bring grief, worry for someone we love, or a fear of God learned in childhood; no one's fate is ours to judge here, and no one needs to share more than they wish.

WATCH · EPISODE 30 · 11:16

youtu.be/lFDmFE8WmqM

In the video: life as a train station, and what we can carry beyond it (3:05)

Reading time: about 15 minutes

Mecca, in the years before the emigration to Medina. A man walks up to the Prophet Muhammad (s) holding an old, decayed bone. He crumbles it in his hand and blows it away.

"Muhammad," he says, "do you claim that your Lord will bring this back to life, after what you see?"

Early sources, Shia and Sunni, name the man as Ubayy ibn Khalaf, a Meccan who opposed the Prophet.[1] He meant the question as mockery, and as proof. For years the Prophet had taught that every human being would rise from death and stand before God. Here, drifting away as dust, was the end of the argument.

The Qur'an did not look away. It recorded his challenge—"Who can give life to bones once they have crumbled?"—and answered it: "The One who first brought them into being will give them life" (Qur'an 36:78–79).

Ubayy's question has outlived him. If anything, it sounds more modern now. We know that after death a body comes apart, and its atoms drift into soil and rivers and other living things. Yet another question has outlived him too. Can a whole human life vanish without a trace: every kindness no one noticed, every cruelty no one punished?

Islam's answer is one of the foundations of its faith, the Return. What is it, why would a thinking person believe it, and what does Islam say will be waiting on that Day?

THE BIG QUESTION

Is there really a Day of Judgement, and what happens on it?

Have you ever wondered whether a body that has turned to dust could stand up again? Whether believing in a final reckoning makes people kinder, or only more anxious? Or, if you grew up hearing about *the scales* and *the bridge*, what those words actually mean?

This chapter looks at why Islam counts the Return among the foundations of faith, what the Qur'an and the Prophet's family say happens on that Day, and how God's justice and mercy meet there.

WORDS TO KNOW

maʿād (مَعاد) · *ma-AAD* · "the Return": resurrection and judgement, one of the five foundations of Shia belief.

yawm al-qiyāma (يَوم القِيامة) · *YOWM al-qi-YAA-ma* · the Day of Rising, when all people are raised, gathered and judged.

mīzān (مِيزان) · *mee-ZAAN* · the scale: God's exact justice in weighing every deed, however small.

ṣirāṭ (صِراط) · *si-RAAT* · "the path"; in the hereafter, the bridge over the Fire that every soul must cross.

shafāʿa (شَفاعة) · *sha-FAA-ʿa* · intercession: a plea to God for someone else, made only by His permission.

ḥaqq al-nās (حَقّ النّاس) · *HAQQ an-NAAS* · "the rights of people": what we owe others, which must be repaired, not just regretted.

◆

Why would there be a Day of Return?

Muslims believe that death closes a chapter, not the book. More than twenty times, the Qur'an mentions "God and the Last Day" in a single breath.[2] Shia Muslims count the Return, *maʿad*, among the five foundations of faith, alongside God's oneness, His justice, prophethood and the Imamate, the guidance of the Imams. The God who began everything is the God to whom everything returns.

Why believe it? The Qur'an argues the case in three strands: purpose, justice and power.

The first strand is purpose. Is a human life only a few decades of earning and spending, then the grave, and nothing? "Did you think We created you for nothing," God asks, "and that you would not be brought back to Us?" (Qur'an 23:115). He "created death and life to test you: which of you is best in deeds?" (Qur'an 67:2).

Imam Ali (a), the Prophet's cousin and the first Imam (d. 661 CE, 40 AH), explained that God knows people better than they know themselves. He tests them "so that the deeds that earn reward and punishment may come to light."[3] Life is where we show who we are, and become it.

The second strand is justice. Some people do terrible things and die comfortably in their beds, their victims never even named. The Qur'an refuses to let that be the end: "Shall We treat those who believe and do good like those who spread corruption in the land? Shall We treat the God-conscious like the shameless?" (Qur'an 38:28). Without a final reckoning, people could do as they liked, and greed, cruelty and prejudice would run wild. Sadly, they already do.

Wanting justice does not prove that justice will come. But Part One has made the case that God exists, is wise and just, and has spoken through prophets. If so, a history

whose worst wrongs stay unanswered forever cannot be the whole story.

The third strand is power, and it brings us back to Ubayy's bone.

وَضَرَبَ لَنَا مَثَلًا وَنَسِيَ خَلْقَهُۥ ۖ قَالَ مَن يُحْيِ ٱلْعِظَٰمَ وَهِيَ رَمِيمٌ ﴿٧٨﴾ قُلْ يُحْيِيهَا ٱلَّذِىٓ أَنشَأَهَآ أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ ۖ وَهُوَ بِكُلِّ خَلْقٍ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٧٩﴾

He makes up a comparison for Us and forgets his own creation. He says, "Who can give life to bones once they have crumbled?" Say: "The One who first brought them into being will give them life. He knows every creation through and through."

QUR'AN 36:78–79 · SURAT YA SIN

NOTICE The reply never argues about bones. It points to memory: the man "forgets his own creation." Whoever grants the first making has already granted that a second is possible.

The next verse adds an image its first hearers knew from their campfires: God "made fire for you out of the green tree" (Qur'an 36:80). Desert Arabs lit fires by rubbing together sticks from two green, sap-filled trees, *markh* and *'afar*. Fire from wet wood; life from dust. The twelfth-century Shia commentator al-Tabrisi drew the lesson: God answers the sceptic with an argument, and whoever accepts the first creation must accept the second.[4]

And the scattered atoms? To people who called a return from dust "far-fetched," the Qur'an replies: "We know exactly what the earth takes away from them, and with Us is a book that keeps it safe" (Qur'an 50:3–4). Muslims believe the whole person returns, body and soul. God is able to restore "even his fingertips" (Qur'an 75:4).

Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (a), the sixth Imam (d. 765 CE), was asked whether the bodies of the dead decay. "Yes," he said, "until neither flesh nor bone is left, except the clay from which he was created. That does not decay … until he is created from it as he was created the first time."[5] The point is continuity, not biology: something of each

person is kept safe. *How* God does it is beyond us; *that* He will do it rests on His power and promise.

◆

What will be waiting on that Day?

The Prophet (s) once put the heart of it to Qays ibn ʿAsim, who came with a delegation of his tribe, Banu Tamim. "Give us advice we can live by," Qays asked, "for we are a people of the open desert."

The Prophet answered: "Qays, you cannot avoid a companion who will be buried with you while it is alive, and you will be buried with it while you are dead. If it is noble, it will honour you; if it is base, it will abandon you. It will be gathered with no one but you, you will be raised with no one but it, and you will be asked about nothing but it. So make it good ... It is your deeds."[6]

Notice the verbs: buried, gathered, raised, asked. Our deeds are not a file kept about us somewhere; they travel with us. The Qur'an says the same: "Whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it. Whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it" (Qur'an 99:7–8). Many Shia scholars read this as seeing the deed itself, the embodiment of deeds (*tajassum al-aʿmal*): what we did is kept, not erased, and on that Day it is "brought present" (Qur'an 3:30).[7] Not even an atom's weight of good is lost. Neither is harm, until it is repaired or forgiven.

وَوُضِعَ ٱلْكِتَٰبُ فَتَرَى ٱلْمُجْرِمِينَ مُشْفِقِينَ مِمَّا فِيهِ وَيَقُولُونَ يَٰوَيْلَتَنَا
مَالِ هَٰذَا ٱلْكِتَٰبِ لَا يُغَادِرُ صَغِيرَةً وَلَا كَبِيرَةً إِلَّآ أَحْصَىٰهَا
وَوَجَدُوا۟ مَا عَمِلُوا۟ حَاضِرًا وَلَا يَظْلِمُ رَبُّكَ أَحَدًا ﴿٤٩﴾

The book will be set down, and you will see the guilty afraid of what is in it. They will say, "Woe to us! What kind of book is this? It leaves nothing out, small or great, without counting it." They will find everything they did present before them. Your Lord wrongs no one.

QUR'AN 18:49 · SURAT AL-KAHF

NOTICE The guilty are stunned not by the verdict but by the thoroughness: nothing "small or great" is missing. The last words reassure: your Lord wrongs no one.

Who bears witness? The earth itself "will tell its news" (Qur'an 99:4), and even a person's skin will say, "God, who gives speech to all things, made us speak" (Qur'an 41:21). The Prophet will be a witness over his community (Qur'an 4:41), and the Imams of his family taught that they are witnesses too. Of the verse that calls the believers "a middle community" (Qur'an 2:143), Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a), the fifth Imam (d. c. 733 CE), said: "We are the middle community, and we are God's witnesses over His creation."[8]

Then come the scales. "We will set up the scales of justice for the Day of Resurrection," God says, "and no soul will be wronged in the least. Even if it is the weight of a mustard seed, We will bring it" (Qur'an 21:47). How the scale works is beyond our present experience. What it means is not in doubt: nothing is lost, and nothing is inflated.

What weighs most? "Nothing on the scale is heavier than blessings on Muhammad and the family of Muhammad," said one of the two Imams, al-Baqir or al-Sadiq (a). A man's deeds are placed on the scale, and it tips against him. Then the Prophet lays on it the blessings the man had sent upon him, and it tips in his favour.[9] A weaker report adds good character.[10]

Last comes the bridge, the *sirat*. Every one of us "will come to" the Fire, the Qur'an says, and God will then rescue those who were mindful of Him (Qur'an 19:71–72).

Imam al-Sadiq described the path over it as "finer than a hair and sharper than a sword," crossed by some "like lightning" and by others crawling.[11] Its chain is weak; read it as a picture of difficulty.

Another weak report adds the key. There are two paths, he said. In this world the path is the Imam whom God has made it a duty to follow; whoever follows him will cross the bridge in the next.[12] The way we walk here is the way we cross there.

> **PAUSE AND RECALL**
>
> *Pause and recall: In your own words, what did the Prophet (s) mean by a "companion" buried with us? How do Qur'an 99:7–8 and 18:49 say the same thing?*

◆

Who will answer for the wronged?

Most of the harm in the world is done not to God but to people. It falls on the worker cheated of wages, the child mocked until she stops speaking in class, the neighbour whose name is dragged through gossip. Imam Ali (a) named three kinds of injustice. One of them, he said, is "not let go": the wrongs people do to one another. "The settlement there is severe," he warned, "not wounding with knives or striking with whips, but something beside which those seem small."[13]

Shia Muslims call what we owe one another *haqq al-nas*, "the rights of people." God forgives wrongs between us and Him when we repent, Imam al-Baqir (a) taught, but makes us answer for every wrong against another. "Your Lord is always on the watch" (Qur'an 89:14). In a report with an incomplete chain, Imam al-Sadiq (a) called this watch-post "a bridge on the path that no servant carrying a wrong against another can cross."[14]

How will such debts be paid when no one has money left? An answer comes from Imam Zayn al-Abidin (a), the fourth Imam (d. c. 713 CE). He had survived the killing of his father, Imam Husayn (a), and much of his family at Karbala, in Iraq, in 680 CE (61 AH). In a report weak in its chain, he passes on his grandfather Imam Ali's description of that Day.

God declares: "Today I take for the weak his right from the strong," settling each wrong "from good deeds and bad deeds." Then a palace of silver is brought into view, and a voice calls out: "This is for everyone who forgave a believer." And they all forgive, the report says, "except a few." Asked how the settling works, Imam Zayn al-Abidin explained that the wrongdoer pays his victim in good deeds, as much as he owes. If he has none, the victim's sins are loaded onto him.[15]

On that Day the only wealth anyone has is what they did. So the time to repay a debt, return what was taken or ask someone's pardon is now. Where people's rights are involved, remorse begins repentance but does not complete it. For a tangled case, such as a debt to someone who has died, check the rulings of the scholar you follow (your *marja'*). Judgement is also good news for victims. No wrong becomes small because its author escaped every court, and each injury that no one saw will be seen.

A FAIR QUESTION

If God is merciful, how can there be a hell?

"If God is love, how could He let anyone burn?" Many people ask this, believers among them. Start with the victims: a God who never answered the torturer would not be merciful to the tortured (Qur'an 38:28). Then notice how the scales are tilted. A good deed counts ten times, a bad deed once (Qur'an 6:160). Who stays in the Fire forever? Imam Musa al-Kazim (a), the seventh Imam (d. 799 CE), taught that God keeps no one there forever "except the people of disbelief and denial, and the people of misguidance and *shirk*," worshipping others besides God.[16] The Qur'an says, "We never punish until We have sent a messenger" (Qur'an 17:15), and the Prophet (s) taught that his community is not held to account for "what they do not know."[17] Chapter 16 takes up people the message never truly reached. And before the Qur'an mentions the fire, it names a different loss: on that Day the deniers will be "veiled from their Lord" (Qur'an 83:15–16).

◆

Where does mercy come in?

If justice were the whole story, few of us could face that Day. But in the Qur'an, justice never speaks alone.

إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يَظْلِمُ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ وَإِن تَكُ حَسَنَةً يُضَٰعِفْهَا وَيُؤْتِ مِن لَّدُنْهُ أَجْرًا عَظِيمًا ﴿٤٠﴾

God does not wrong anyone by so much as an atom's weight. If it is a good deed, He multiplies it, and from His own presence He gives a great reward.

QUR'AN 4:40 · SURAT AL-NISA'

NOTICE Justice is stated as a refusal: not an atom's weight of wrong. Mercy is stated as an overflow: the good deed multiplied, and then a reward "from His own presence."

When God loves a servant who does a small deed, Imam al-Sadiq (a) said, "He repays the little with much."[18] Deeds matter: "I will not let the work of any worker among you go to waste," God promises, "male or female" (Qur'an 3:195). But mercy is what makes the reward so much larger than the deed.

Mercy also shows in God's patience. "If God were to seize people at once for their wrongdoing, He would not leave a single creature on the earth. But He gives them time, until a term already set" (Qur'an 16:61). Every morning we wake is a deferral: one more chance to say sorry and mend what we broke. "Do not despair of God's mercy," He tells even those who have wronged themselves most. "God forgives all sins" (Qur'an 39:53). The Qur'an warns against putting off that turn until death is at the door (Qur'an 4:18).

And mercy reaches us through people God loves. This is *shafa'a*, intercession: a plea made for someone else. The Qur'an denies only intercession that God has not allowed: "On that Day intercession will be of no use, except from one whom the All-Merciful permits and whose word He accepts" (Qur'an 20:109). When Joseph's brothers owned their wrong, they begged their father, Jacob (a): "Ask forgiveness for our sins." He replied, "I will ask my Lord to forgive you" (Qur'an 12:97–98). This is not asking someone instead of God. It is asking God together with someone He loves.

Shia Muslims hope for the intercession of the Prophet (s) and his family, and the Prophet said, "My intercession is for those of my community who commit major sins." Is that a loophole? Muhammad ibn Abi 'Umayr, one of the most trusted students of Imam Musa al-Kazim (a), put exactly this to him. The intercessors plead only

"for one He approves" (Qur'an 21:28), he objected; how can a major sinner be approved?

The Imam answered that no believer sins without grieving over it, for the Prophet said, "Remorse is enough as repentance." Whoever feels no remorse "is not a believer, and intercession is not his due."[19] Ibn Abi 'Umayr pressed again: why would that make him no believer?

> **IMAM MUSA AL-KAZIM (A), THE SEVENTH IMAM**
>
> يا أبا أحمد ما من أحد يرتكب كبيرة من المعاصي و هو يعلم أنه سيعاقب عليها إلا ندم على ما ارتكب ومتى ندم كان تائبا مستحقا للشفاعة، ومتى لم يندم عليها كان مصرا والمصر لا يغفر له لأنه غير مؤمن بعقوبة ما ارتكب ولو كان مؤمنا بالعقوبة لندم
>
> Abu Ahmad, no one commits a major sin, knowing that he will be punished for it, without regretting what he has done. Once he regrets it, he has repented, and he has a claim to intercession. If he does not regret it, he is persisting in it, and one who persists is not forgiven, because he does not believe in the punishment for what he did. Had he believed in it, he would have regretted it.[20]
>
> al-Tawhid · ch. 63 · no. 6 · **Reliable chain**

The answer turns the loophole inside out. Intercession is not for the person who sins without a care, but for the one who is already sorry and fears that sorry is not enough. The Imam's great-grandfather, Imam Zayn al-Abidin (a), turned this teaching into prayer: "O God, if remorse is repentance to You, then I am the most remorseful of the remorseful" (see Chapter 26).[21]

A STORY FROM THE SOURCES

The Imam's deathbed words

After Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (a) died, his companion Abu Basir went to console Umm Hamida, who was mourning him. She wept, and he wept with her. Then she said: "If you had seen him at the moment of death, you would have seen something remarkable. He opened his eyes and said, 'Gather to me everyone who is related to me.'" They left no one out. "He looked at them," she said, "and then he said: 'Our intercession will not reach anyone who takes prayer lightly.'"

Look at who was in that room: his own family, the very people who might have assumed that being related to him was enough. As he lay dying, he told them it was not. His son, Imam Musa al-Kazim (a), heard the same words at that bedside.[22]

◆

How do we live toward that Day?

Students study differently when they know an exam is coming, and belief in the Return comes down to one word: accountability. This exam's questions have even been published in advance. "A servant's feet will not move on the Day of Resurrection," the Prophet (s) said, "until he is asked about four things: his life, and how he spent it; his youth, and how he wore it out; his wealth, where he earned it and how he spent it; and his love for us, the Ahl al-Bayt," the Prophet's family.[23] Every Friday in the Prophet's mosque, Imam Zayn al-Abidin (a) gave his listeners this advice: "Prepare the answer before the examination."[24]

Life, though, is loud. A thirty-second clip, then another, and an evening is gone: harmless, perhaps, but a distraction all the same. The Qur'an named the problem long before the phone: "The race for more distracts you, until you visit the graves" (Qur'an 102:1–2). This world is a train station. We pass through with our money, our home and our car, but none of them fits in our pocket for the next world. What we carry onward is what we did: our charity, our kindness to family, our help to those who have no one, our worship.

The Imams kept the end in view. Coming home from the battle of Siffin in 657 CE, Imam Ali (a) stopped above the graves outside Kufa, his capital in Iraq. He spoke to the dead: "You went ahead of us, and we are following. Your houses are lived in by others, your spouses have married again, your wealth has been divided. That is our news; what is yours?" Then he turned to his companions. "If they were allowed to speak," he said, "they would tell you that the best provision is mindfulness of God."[25]

Another time he put it in one line: "Today is action and no reckoning; tomorrow is reckoning and no action."[26] It is an invitation, not a threat. Remembering the Day does not mean withdrawing from life; work, rest, family and lawful joy all belong in a life lived toward God.

> *"Today is action and no reckoning; tomorrow is reckoning and no action.*
>
> IMAM ALI (A)

Fear has its place; it can stop us at the edge of a wrong. But the Imams ranked love higher: worship out of love, Imam al-Sadiq (a) taught, is "the worship of the free," as Chapter 14 explores.[27] The Qur'an paints the Fire as "blazing" (Qur'an 101:11) and the garden's fruit as hanging "within easy reach" (Qur'an 69:23), so that we can almost feel them. Yet in the prayers of the Prophet's family, the worst of the Fire is not its heat. It is being far from God.

FROM THE SUPPLICATION OF KUMAYL

IMAM ALI (A), AS HE TAUGHT IT TO HIS COMPANION KUMAYL IBN ZIYAD

فَهَبْنِي يا اِلهي وَسَيِّدِي وَمَوْلاَيَ وَرَبّي صَبَرْتُ عَلى عَذابِكَ فَكَيْفَ اَصْبِرُ عَلى فِراقِكَ، وَهَبْني (يا اِلهي) صَبَرْتُ عَلى حَرِّ نارِكَ فَكَيْفَ اَصْبِرُ عَنِ النَّظَرِ اِلى كَرامَتِكَ

My God, my Master, my Protector, my Lord: suppose I could bear Your punishment. How could I bear being parted from You? Suppose I could bear the heat of Your Fire. How could I bear not to look upon Your generosity?[28]

Du'a Kumayl · **Compiled text, not graded here**

Ubayy crushed a bone and thought he had ended the argument. The Qur'an pointed him back to his own beginning. The God who made us from almost nothing loses track of nothing we make of our lives. Not the coin slipped quietly into a stranger's hand, not the apology finally spoken, not the long night beside a sick child. Every atom's weight of good is kept, and every wrong can still be set right while there is time. The Prophet's counsel to Qays is ours too: what kind of companion are we making for the road?

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Shia Muslims count the Return (*maʿad*) among the five foundations of faith, beside God's oneness and justice.
2. The Qur'an argues for the Return from purpose, justice and power: the One who made us once can remake us.
3. On that Day deeds are found present, witnessed and weighed. No good, however small, is lost.
4. Wrongs against people must be repaired, or forgiven by those wronged; private regret alone does not settle them.
5. Mercy outweighs wrath. Intercession is real, but only by God's permission, and only for those who feel remorse.

NEXT TIME · GO FURTHER

Next time: *What Is Heaven?* The Qur'an promises gardens, rivers and peace, and then says that God's good pleasure is greater still. So what is paradise really for?

Go further:

Course: Islamic Eschatology: Death to the Day of Judgement, a Level 1 course at Tasneem Institute (tasneeminstitute.org/courses/islamic-eschatology-death-to-the-day-of-judgement)

Read: "The Day of Judgment," a short introduction in Tasneem's *Discovering Islam* series (tasneeminstitute.org/blog/discovering-islam/the-day-of-judgment). For a deeper dive, *al-Sahifa al-Sajjadiyya*, Supplication 31, "In mentioning and asking for repentance."

Watch: Invitation to Islam, Episode 30, "Understanding the Afterlife" (11 min).

In the circle

LOOK BACK

1. What does the Qur'an call the stage between death and the Day of Resurrection (Chapter 12)?
2. Chapter 8 described the "two weighty things" the Prophet (s) left behind. What were they?
3. Part One asks, "Is it true?" What would count, for you, as good evidence for something no one has yet seen?

TALK ABOUT IT

WARM-UP

1. Think of a small kindness someone did for you that no one else saw. Why do you still remember it? You needn't say who it was.

UNDERSTAND

2. What three reasons does the Qur'an give for expecting a Day of Return (Qur'an 23:115; 38:28; 36:79)? Put each in your own words.
3. According to Imam al-Kazim (a), why does intercession depend on remorse? What does that rule out?

REFLECT

4. The Qur'an says that even an atom's weight of good "will be seen" (99:7). Does that idea comfort you, unsettle you, or both? Why?
5. On his deathbed, Imam al-Sadiq (a) told his own family that being related to him was not enough. Why might he have chosen that message, at that moment?

APPLY

6. Is there something you owe someone, such as a debt, an apology or a borrowed thing, that you could begin to settle this week? You needn't say what it is.

GO DEEPER

7. Read Imam al-Kazim's full answer to Ibn Abi ʿUmayr (al-Tawhid, ch. 63, no. 6; reliable chain). Why does he say that someone without remorse does not truly believe in the reckoning?
8. Read Imam Ali's words at the graves outside Kufa (Nahj al-Balagha, Saying 130; compiled text). What does he think the dead would tell the living?

CARRY IT HOME

Choose one way in this week:

☐ **Notice:** Each evening, write down one small good thing you did or received that no one else saw. An atom's weight counts. At the end of the week, read your list back.

☐ **Do:** Settle one small thing you owe. Return something borrowed, repay a debt, or apologise to someone you hurt. If the case is complicated, ask a trusted scholar how to make it right.

☐ **Learn:** Read Sura 99, *al-Zalzala* ("The Earthquake"), in a translation. It is only eight verses long. What does the earth do on that Day, and why might it matter that the earth is the one speaking?

Aim. Help the circle see why Islam believes in a final reckoning, and how justice and mercy work together on that Day.

Protect this question. No. 4: "Does that idea comfort you, unsettle you, or both?" Guests, new Muslims and lifelong Muslims can all answer it honestly.

Answer notes.

- *Q2.* Purpose: we were not created "for nothing" (23:115). Justice: the corrupt and the good cannot end alike (38:28). Power: the One who made us once can remake us (36:79). The justice argument leans on what Part One said about God.
- *Q3.* For the Imam, remorse is already repentance. Someone untroubled by a major sin does not really believe in its consequence, so he is persisting, not repenting, and intercession has nothing to work on. It rules out intercession as a free pass.

Likely questions.

- *"Isn't bodily resurrection scientifically impossible?"* See "Why would there be a Day of Return?" (50:3–4 and the Imam's answer about the clay). The *how* is beyond us; the *that* rests on God's power.
- *"What about good people who aren't Muslim?"* See the "fair question" box; Chapter 16 treats it fully. Don't settle it tonight.
- *"Are the scales and the bridge literal?"* The tradition affirms them as real; how they work is beyond present experience. Teach their meaning (see "What will be waiting on that Day?").

Watch for. Read the care note aloud. Someone may be grieving, or anxious about a loved one who has died: never pronounce on anyone's fate, living or dead. Some carry a childhood fear of hell; let them speak or pass. Keep intercession from turning into a sectarian argument. Explain what Shia Muslims believe and why, without contempt for other views.

Bring. A small kitchen scale and a few mustard seeds (21:47), or a recording of the Duʿa Kumayl lines quoted in the chapter.

MY THREAD · CHAPTER 13

If every small deed is kept, which one am I most glad of, and what would I like to set right?

MY QUESTION FOR THE BOX

14

What Is Heaven?

More than a reward: the home we were made for.

يَٰٓأَيَّتُهَا ٱلنَّفْسُ ٱلْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ ﴿٢٧﴾ ٱرْجِعِىٓ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكِ رَاضِيَةً مَّرْضِيَّةً ﴿٢٨﴾ فَٱدْخُلِى فِى عِبَٰدِى ﴿٢٩﴾ وَٱدْخُلِى جَنَّتِى ﴿٣٠﴾

O self at peace, return to your Lord, pleased and pleasing. Enter among My servants. Enter My garden.

QUR'AN 89:27–30 · SURAT AL-FAJR

WATCH · EPISODE 28 · 10:32

youtu.be/ij-airvpnR0

In the video: a question put to a rabbi at an interfaith gathering (4:43)

Reading time: about 15 minutes

Two small boys lie sick in a house in Medina. Their grandfather, the Prophet Muhammad (s), comes to visit, and one of the men with him suggests a vow. So the boys' parents, Ali (a), the Prophet's cousin, and Fatima (a), the Prophet's daughter, promise God three days of fasting if their sons recover. The boys, al-Hasan and al-Husayn, who will one day be the second and third Imams, insist on fasting too. So does Fidda, the woman who helps in the house. The boys get well, and the vow begins.

There is no food in the house. Ali goes to a Jewish neighbour named Sham'un, who works with wool, and comes home with a fleece and three measures of barley. Fatima will pay for the grain by spinning the wool. She spins a third of it, grinds one measure and bakes five small loaves, one for each of them. At sunset they sit down to break their fast. Ali has torn off the first mouthful when a voice comes from the door: "Peace be upon you, family of Muhammad. I am one of the poor among the Muslims. Feed me from what you are eating, and God will feed you at the tables of paradise." They hand him all of it, and break their fast on water.

The next evening an orphan stands at the door. On the third, it is a prisoner of war from the enemy's side. Each time, the family gives away every loaf.

On the fourth morning Ali brings the boys to the Prophet. They are trembling, the report says, "like baby birds." The Prophet goes with them to his daughter and finds her in her place of prayer, so hungry that her stomach clings to her back. He gathers them to him and bends over them, weeping. Then, as Shia and Sunni commentators alike report, the angel Gabriel brings a new chapter of the Qur'an. It speaks of people who "give food, though they love it themselves, to the poor, the orphan and the captive," saying, "We feed you only for the sake of God. We want no reward from you, and no thanks" (Qur'an 76:8–9). Then it paints one of the Qur'an's richest pictures of paradise.[1]

A family that wanted no reward was given paradise. So what is paradise, if the people who most deserved it were not working for it?

THE BIG QUESTION

What is heaven really like, and who gets to go there?

Have you ever wondered whether heaven is just a story told to make people behave? Whether you will see the people you have lost, and what you will look like when you do? Or, if you grew up hearing about rivers of milk and honey, what those pictures really mean?

This chapter looks at how the Qur'an and the Prophet's family describe paradise, why they call it more than a reward, and how hoping for it can change a life now.

WORDS TO KNOW

janna (جنة) · *JAN-na* · garden; the Qur'an's usual word for paradise, a place of rivers, fruit and shade.

riḍwān (رضوان) · *rid-WAAN* · God's good pleasure, which the Qur'an calls greater than all the gardens (9:72).

salām (سلام) · *sa-LAAM* · peace; the greeting of paradise, and the air its people breathe.

darajāt (درجات) · *da-ra-JAAT* · ranks or levels; paradise has many, reached through faith, good deeds and a life lived with the Qur'an.

ru'ya (رؤية) · *ROO-ya* · "seeing" God; Shia teaching holds that no eye will ever see Him, though hearts perceive Him.

Tasnīm (تسنيم) · *tas-NEEM* · a spring of paradise; those brought nearest to God drink from it (83:27–28).

◆

Why call paradise a home?

Ask people what heaven is, and many will describe a prize: something handed out at the end for good behaviour. The Qur'an does speak of reward. Yet its pictures of paradise keep reaching past the prize toward a place to arrive, be welcomed and stay. Its people, the Qur'an says, will thank God "who in His grace has settled us in the Home that lasts, where no toil touches us, and no weariness" (Qur'an 35:35).

Muslims believe this home is real, and that its people will live there whole, body and soul. The Qur'an calls the resurrection "a new creation" (50:15), and it describes gardens and rivers, fruit within reach, cool shade and robes of green silk (47:15; 76:12–21). The body is not a cage the soul escapes; it is raised, renewed and brought home. Yet the Qur'an cares less about the furniture than about the people.

إِنَّ ٱلْمُتَّقِينَ فِى جَنَّٰتٍ وَعُيُونٍ ﴿٤٥﴾ ٱدْخُلُوهَا بِسَلَٰمٍ ءَامِنِينَ
﴿٤٦﴾ وَنَزَعْنَا مَا فِى صُدُورِهِم مِّنْ غِلٍّ إِخْوَٰنًا عَلَىٰ سُرُرٍ
مُّتَقَٰبِلِينَ ﴿٤٧﴾ لَا يَمَسُّهُمْ فِيهَا نَصَبٌ وَمَا هُم مِّنْهَا بِمُخْرَجِينَ
﴿٤٨﴾

The God-conscious will be among gardens and springs: "Enter here in peace, and safe." We will draw out whatever bitterness is in their hearts. As brothers and sisters, they will sit on couches, facing one another. No weariness will touch them there, and they will never be made to leave.

QUR'AN 15:45–48 · SURAT AL-HIJR

NOTICE Bitterness is drawn out of hearts first; only then are the couches set facing one another. And unlike Adam's garden, this one is never lost: no one is ever made to leave.

Think how much unhappiness enters through the ears: the cutting remark, the gossip, the accusation that cannot be answered. In paradise, the Qur'an says, people "will hear no idle talk there and no accusation, only the words, 'Peace! Peace!'" (56:25–26). They greet one another with *salam*, peace (10:10), and they hear the same word from God: "'Peace': a word from a merciful Lord" (36:58).

It is also a life set free from fragile need. Here, every meal depends on soil, rain and someone's labour, and every body depends on its health holding out. Al-Shaykh al-Saduq (d. 991 CE), a towering early Shia scholar, summed up the belief of his community. Paradise, he wrote, has "no death, no old age, no sickness," no lasting disability, "no grief, no worry, no need and no poverty." Its people are "God's neighbours, His friends and His beloved."[2]

Why call it home, when no one alive has lived there? Because, in the Qur'an's telling, the story begins with us and God together. Before any of us walked the earth, God asked all of Adam's children, "Am I not your Lord?" They answered, "Yes indeed!" (7:172). Chapter 1 called this the covenant. Imam Ali (a), the first Imam (d.

661 CE), pictured the people of paradise as travellers at the end of the road. They have "settled in the Home of Permanence, safe from ever moving on again."[3]

In between lies a life of choices. Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a), the fifth Imam (d. c. 733 CE), recalled what God said to the intellect when He created it: "It is you I command and you I forbid; you I punish and you I reward" (see Chapter 5).[4]

Paradise, then, is the reward of creatures who could understand and choose: the children of Adam, whom God has "honoured" (17:70). Its gentlest invitation is the chapter's key verse: "O self at peace, return to your Lord, pleased and pleasing. Enter among My servants. Enter My garden" (89:27–30).

◆

Can anyone picture it?

The Qur'an paints paradise in colours anyone can see. There are rivers of water that never goes stale, rivers of milk and of honey, and a wine that brings "no headache and no intoxication" (47:15; 56:19). Yet the same book warns that the reality outruns every picture.

تَتَجَافَىٰ جُنُوبُهُمْ عَنِ ٱلْمَضَاجِعِ يَدْعُونَ رَبَّهُمْ خَوْفًا وَطَمَعًا وَمِمَّا
رَزَقْنَٰهُمْ يُنفِقُونَ ﴿١٦﴾ فَلَا تَعْلَمُ نَفْسٌ مَّآ أُخْفِىَ لَهُم مِّن قُرَّةِ
أَعْيُنٍ جَزَآءًۢ بِمَا كَانُوا۟ يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٧﴾

Their sides leave their beds as they call on their Lord in fear and in hope, and they give from what We have provided for them. No soul knows what delight has been kept hidden for them, a reward for what they used to do.[5]

QUR'AN 32:16–17 · SURAT AL-SAJDA

NOTICE The joy is "hidden" for people whose goodness was hidden: they leave their beds to pray at night. The sixth Imam, al-Sadiq, called night prayer the one good deed whose reward the Qur'an leaves unnamed.

Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (a), the sixth Imam (d. 765 CE), linked this verse to a garden "that no eye has seen and no creature has glimpsed." Every morning, he said, God opens it and tells it, "Grow sweeter! Grow more fragrant!" The garden answers with a line of the Qur'an: "The believers have prospered" (23:1).[6]

Imam Ali (a) made it an invitation. "If you cast the eye of your heart toward what is described to you of paradise," he said, "your soul would turn away from the novelties of this world." Keep your heart on those scenes, he added, and "your soul would slip away out of longing for them."[7]

So the pictures are true promises, not a complete map. They give a firm basis for joy, purity and God's generosity. They do not license every detail added since, such as counts of palaces and pearls from weak reports. Hold the promise with confidence and the details with humility. As Chapter 10 put it, believing in the unseen does not mean believing everything.

What will its people be like? The Qur'an promises to remake human beings "in a form you do not know" (56:61). No weariness will touch them (15:48), and they will thank God "who has taken all sorrow from us" (35:34). From such verses Muslims draw a tender hope. The body bent by age, the legs that could not walk, the eyes that could not see: all will be made whole. In a mercy that restores, God puts back every broken piece.

Forever is harder to picture. Won't an endless paradise grow dull? Boredom comes when a good thing runs out of surprises. The Qur'an says the people of paradise will never "wish to move from it" (18:108). It gives the reason in one line: "They will have whatever they wish there, and with Us there is more" (50:35). What they receive is not a fixed store, slowly used up. It is the giving of a God whose generosity never ends.

A FAIR QUESTION

Isn't paradise just an appeal to appetite?

"Rivers of wine, beautiful companions, silk and couches. Isn't this a bribe aimed at the senses? And doesn't doing good for a bribe spoil the goodness?"

It is a fair challenge. The Qur'an does promise bodily joy, and Islam does not treat the body as shameful. But notice what it strips away. Its wine brings "no headache and no intoxication" (56:19), and around its cup there is "no idle talk and no sin" (52:23). Paradise is promised to "believing men and believing women" alike (9:72; 40:40), and spouses are welcomed in together: "Enter paradise, you and your spouses" (43:70). The Qur'an speaks only briefly of the *hur*, the companions of paradise, and the "seventy-two virgins" of popular talk appear nowhere in it. Al-Tabataba'i (d. 1981 CE), the great modern Shia commentator, noticed that Surat al-Insan, the chapter revealed about that household in Medina, never mentions the *hur* at all. Perhaps, he suggested, that is because a woman stood among the people it honoured.[8]

As for the bribe, the Imams agreed that doing good for a reward is not the highest motive. The last section of this chapter shows what is.

PAUSE AND RECALL

Pause and recall: The Qur'an describes paradise vividly, yet says that "no soul knows" the delight hidden there (32:17). How can both be true?

◆

What is its greatest joy?

One verse ranks the joys of paradise. It lists gardens, rivers and good homes, and then it names something greater.

وَعَدَ ٱللَّهُ ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَٱلْمُؤْمِنَٰتِ جَنَّٰتٍ تَجْرِى مِن تَحْتِهَا ٱلْأَنْهَٰرُ
خَٰلِدِينَ فِيهَا وَمَسَٰكِنَ طَيِّبَةً فِى جَنَّٰتِ عَدْنٍ وَرِضْوَٰنٌ مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ
أَكْبَرُ ذَٰلِكَ هُوَ ٱلْفَوْزُ ٱلْعَظِيمُ ﴿٧٢﴾

God has promised believing men and believing women gardens with rivers flowing beneath, to live in forever, and good homes in the Gardens of Eden. And greater still is good pleasure from God. That is the supreme triumph.[9]

QUR'AN 9:72 · SURAT AL-TAWBA

NOTICE In Arabic, "good pleasure" has no article. Al-Tabataba'i gives two readings: a pleasure beyond all measure, or any pleasure from God, however small, which still outweighs every garden the verse has just described.

To know that the one you love is pleased with you is the heart of every good relationship. Paradise, on this reading, is a relationship before it is a place. Will its people, then, see God?

Many Christians hope to see God "face to face," and many Sunni Muslims expect to see Him in paradise, as a well-known report in their collections promises.[10] The Imams of the Prophet's family taught otherwise, and firmly. One day in Kufa, in Iraq, as Imam Ali (a) spoke from the pulpit, a bold and eloquent man named Dhi'lib stood up. "Commander of the Faithful, have you seen your Lord?" Ali answered, "Would I worship what I do not see?" "Then how do you see Him?" Dhi'lib asked.

IMAM ALI (A), THE FIRST IMAM

لاَ تُدْرِكُهُ الْعُيُونُ بِمُشَاهَدَةِ الْعِيَانِ، وَلٰكِنْ تُدْرِكُهُ الْقُلُوبُ بِحَقَائِقِ الْاِيْمَانِ،
قَرِيبٌ مِنَ الْاَشْيَاءِ غَيْرُ مُلاَمِسٍ، بَعِيدٌ مِنْهَا غَيْرُ مُبَايِنٍ

Eyes do not see Him by direct sight, but hearts perceive Him through the realities of faith. He is near to things without touching them, and far from them without being apart.[11]

Nahj al-Balagha · Sermon 179 · **Compiled text, not graded here**

The Qur'an says the same: "Sight does not reach Him, but He reaches all sight" (6:103). God has no body and no place, and His "face" is not a face like ours. Abu al-Salt once brought two popular sayings to his teacher, Imam Ali al-Rida (a), the eighth Imam (d. 818 CE). One said that believers will "visit their Lord" in paradise. The other said that the reward of faith is "looking at the face of God." The Imam did not mock them. He explained them.

The Prophet's rank in paradise is the highest of all, he said, so whoever visits the Prophet (s) there has visited God. God's "face" means His prophets and guides, through whom people turn toward Him. Then he drew the line: "God is not described by place, and neither eyes nor imaginings reach Him." Asked whether paradise already exists, he said yes: the Prophet entered it on the night he was taken up into the heavens.[12] The Qur'an places that garden beside "the Lote Tree of the Furthest Boundary" (53:14–15).

The same Imam read the "radiant" faces "looking toward their Lord" (75:22–23) as faces shining as they await their Lord's reward.[13] So the deepest joy of paradise is not a sight but a closeness: knowing God, and knowing He is pleased. That closeness need not wait. God says, "We are nearer to him than his jugular vein" (50:16), and "in the remembrance of God hearts find rest" (13:28). Whoever is searching for God can begin with the heart.

In Surat al-Insan, after the silk and the silver, the last gift is the most intimate: "their Lord will give them a pure drink" (76:21). Al-Tabataba'i noticed that here the servants of the earlier verses fall away. God Himself is the host. He called this the finest blessing in the passage, perhaps part of the "more" God keeps in store.[14]

◆

Who will be there?

When people imagine paradise, many picture a face before a garden. The righteous, the Qur'an says, will enter the Gardens of Eden "with the righteous among their parents, spouses and children." And "the angels will come in to them from every gate: 'Peace be upon you for your patience. How excellent is the final home!'" (13:23–24). Children who followed their parents in faith will be joined to them (52:21). Notice the honest condition, "the righteous among" them. Reunion is a real hope within God's justice, not a promise to make for anyone else.

The tenderest texts in the tradition concern children who die young. Imam al-Sadiq (a) taught that God has placed believers' children in the care of Abraham (a) and Sarah, who nurture them in palaces of pearl. On the Day of Resurrection the chil-

dren are dressed, perfumed and given back to their parents.[15] Another report says that if a child has no believing relative waiting there, Lady Fatima (a), the Prophet's daughter (d. 632 CE), cares for it until its family comes.[16]

And the Prophet (s) spoke of a child lost before birth who stands at the gate of paradise, refusing to go in. God says, "Enter paradise." The child answers, "Not until my parents go in before me." God tells an angel to bring the parents, and says: "This is by the grace of My mercy to you."[17] For any parent who has lost a child, these are words to hold gently.

Then there is the question beneath many others: is this a Muslim heaven, with everyone else outside? At an interfaith gathering, a Muslim once turned to the rabbi beside her and asked, "Rabbi, am I allowed to go to your heaven?" He looked at her kindly, and a little sadly. "You can," he said, "but it is a Jewish heaven." It was a gracious answer.

The Qur'an never speaks of a Muslim, a Christian or a Jewish heaven. It even warns its own followers: "It will not be by your wishful thinking, nor by the wishful thinking of the People of the Book [Jews and Christians]" (4:123). It says of Jews, Christians and others that "whoever believes in God and the Last Day and does good" will have their reward (2:62). It also asks for wholehearted surrender to God, and says a religion other than *islam*, surrender, "will not be accepted" (3:85).

Shia scholars hold these together through God's justice: each person is judged by the truth that truly reached them. The Qur'an holds out hope for those who "can find no means and are shown no way" (4:98–99), and says, "We never punish until We have sent a messenger" (17:15). Those who knew the truth and turned away are another matter. Mercy does not require pretending every belief is equally true, nor does it let anyone pronounce the verdict on another soul. Chapter 16 takes up the question in full.

Each of us, in a phrase worth keeping, comes in our own little rowboat. None of us is carried in on another's goodness or held back by another's sin: "no one carries another's burden" (6:164). Islam teaches no inherited guilt; every child is born with the *fitra*, an inborn knowledge of its Creator.[18] That might sound frightening if the judge were harsh. But God "has written mercy upon Himself" (6:12), and He tells even the worst sinners, "Do not despair of God's mercy" (39:53).

The opposite of paradise is real, as Chapter 13 explained: those who harm others and knowingly reject their Lord will not end where their victims end. But for anyone turning toward God, paradise is something to long for, not to dread missing.

◆

What does hoping for it change?

Return now to the family who gave away their bread. If paradise is this good, isn't wanting it just a refined kind of selfishness? Imam al-Sadiq (a) answered directly.

> IMAM JA'FAR AL-SADIQ (A), THE SIXTH IMAM
>
> إِنَّ الْعُبَّادَ ثَلاثَةٌ قَوْمٌ عَبَدُوا اللهَ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ خَوْفاً فَتِلْكَ عِبَادَةُ الْعَبِيدِ وَقَوْمٌ عَبَدُوا اللهَ تَبَارَكَ وَتَعَالَى طَلَبَ الثَّوَابِ فَتِلْكَ عِبَادَةُ الأُجَرَاءِ وَقَوْمٌ عَبَدُوا اللهَ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ حُبّاً لَهُ فَتِلْكَ عِبَادَةُ الأَحْرَارِ وَهِيَ أَفْضَلُ الْعِبَادَةِ
>
> Worshippers are of three kinds. Some worship God, Mighty and Majestic, out of fear: that is the worship of slaves. Some worship God, Blessed and Exalted, seeking reward: that is the worship of hired workers. And some worship God, Mighty and Majestic, out of love for Him: that is the worship of the free, and it is the best worship.[19]
>
> al-Kafi 2 · Belief & Disbelief · ch. 42 · no. 5 · **Reliable chain**

Fear and hope are not condemned here. They are honest beginnings, and the Qur'an praises people who call on God "in fear and in hope" (32:16). But they are not the summit. Imam Ali (a) called worship out of gratitude "the worship of the free," and al-Tabataba'i wrote that for a lover, the greatest triumph is to please the beloved.[20] Al-Saduq drew the conclusion: in paradise each person "is given that for which he worshipped God."[21]

That was the family in Medina. A report from the Imams adds that they never said those words aloud; they kept them hidden in their hearts, and God made them known.[22] They wanted no reward and no thanks. God answered with a garden, and with thanks of His own: "This is your reward, and your striving has been thanked" (76:22).

Paradise also has ranks: "the hereafter is greater in ranks" (17:21). The Prophet (s) pictured how a rank is earned. On the Day of Resurrection, he said, the Qur'an will come to the person who lived with it, as a handsome, pale young man. It will say, "I am the one who kept you awake at night and thirsty in the midday heat." Then a voice says, "Recite, and rise!" With every verse they recite, they climb a rank. Their believing parents are robed too, "because you taught him the Qur'an."[23]

No one can say who will stand where. The prophets stand highest; beyond that, the person who seems least likely may be far above us. And no one is lonely there. The obedient will be "with those whom God has blessed: the prophets, the truthful, the martyrs and the righteous. What excellent companions they are!" (4:69).

This hope does not wait for the next life. If paradise is a place where no one hears a wounding word, we can be more careful with our words tonight. If no one there is humiliated, we can guard someone's dignity in an argument tomorrow. If its richest portrait belongs to a family that gave away its bread, we can practise generosity before it is easy. A person who longs for a home of peace slowly learns to carry peace. Hope is a seed God plants in the heart; tended, it grows into a character.

Imam Ali (a) put the stakes in one line: "Your souls have no price but paradise, so do not sell them for anything else."[24]

> *"Your souls have no price but paradise, so do not sell them for anything else.*
>
> IMAM ALI (A)

The Qur'an names one spring in paradise *Tasnim* (83:27–28). Ibn 'Abbas, the Prophet's cousin (d. c. 687 CE), was once asked what it was. He answered with the verse at the heart of this chapter: "No soul knows what delight has been kept hidden for them." Those brought nearest to God drink from it pure, the commentators explain. The cups of the other righteous are mixed with it, sweeter for a taste of what lies higher.[25] "For this," the Qur'an says, "let the strivers strive" (83:26).

The family in Medina went to sleep hungry three nights running, and God answered them with gardens, silk and a drink from their Lord Himself. The door they walked through stands open to every soul that turns toward it, and the welcome is already written: "Enter My garden."

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Paradise is a real home for the whole person, where bitterness is drawn out and peace is spoken.
2. Its pictures are true promises, but "no soul knows" the delight hidden there, so details call for humility.
3. Its greatest joy is God's good pleasure. No eye sees God, the Imams taught; hearts perceive Him.
4. Families may be reunited, lost children are cared for, and each person is judged by the truth that reached them.
5. Worship out of love is "the worship of the free," the Imams taught; hope trains us in paradise's peace now.

NEXT TIME · GO FURTHER

Next time: *Was Jesus More Merciful Than Muhammad?* Part Two begins, and the question changes from "Is it true?" to "Is it good?" What does mercy look like when revenge is finally possible?

Go further:

Course: Islamic Eschatology: Death to the Day of Judgement, a Level 1 course at Tasneem Institute (tasneeminstitute.org/courses/islamic-eschatology-death-to-the-day-of-judgement)

Read: Imam Ali's description of paradise, *Nahj al-Balagha*, Sermon 165, final section (numbering of Subhi al-Salih).

Watch: Invitation to Islam, Episode 28, "What Is Heaven?" (11 min).

In the circle

LOOK BACK

1. What does it mean that not even “an atom’s weight” of good is lost (Chapter 13)?
2. How did Chapter 10 suggest believing in the unseen without believing everything?
3. Part One has asked, “Is it true?” Which answer so far has stayed with you most?

TALK ABOUT IT

WARM-UP

1. As a child, how did you picture heaven, if you pictured it at all? Where did that picture come from, and has it changed?

UNDERSTAND

2. In Qur’an 15:45–48, what happens to people’s hearts, and how do they sit together? What does that suggest paradise is mainly about?
3. How did Imam al-Rida (a) explain the popular sayings about believers “visiting” God and seeing His “face”?

REFLECT

4. The family in Medina wanted “no reward and no thanks” (76:9). Is it possible to do good with no thought of reward at all? What makes it hard?
5. Which picture of paradise in this chapter speaks to you most: peace, reunion, nearness to God, or something else? Why?

APPLY

6. In paradise no one hears a wounding word (56:25–26). Where could you practise that kind of speech this week? You needn’t say where.

GO DEEPER

7. Read Imam Ali’s description of paradise at the end of the “peacock” sermon (Nahj al-Balagha, Sermon 165; compiled text, not graded here). Why might he ask listeners to use “the eye of the heart”?
8. Read Imam al-Sadiq (a) on the three kinds of worshippers (al-Kafi, vol. 2, Book of Belief and Disbelief, ch. 42, no. 5; reliable chain). Can fear or hope grow into love? How might that happen?

CARRY IT HOME

Choose one way in this week:

☐ **Notice:** For one ordinary day, listen for “idle talk and accusation” (56:25) around you: at work, at home or online. Each time, ask what a word of peace would have sounded like instead.

☐ **Do:** Do one good thing in secret, wanting “no reward and no thanks.” If you can, give away something you would rather keep, as the family in Medina did with their bread. Tell no one.

☐ **Learn:** Read Surat al-Insan (Qur’an 76) in a translation. Mark the verse where the picture of paradise begins, and list what the people in it did to deserve it.

Aim. Help the circle see paradise as more than a reward: a home of peace and nearness to God, whose hope begins to shape life now.

Protect this question. No. 5: "Which picture of paradise speaks to you most?" Everyone can answer it, whatever they believe.

Answer notes.

- *Q2.* Bitterness is drawn out of hearts, and the couches face one another. Paradise is first a healed community, free of weariness and of ever having to leave.
- *Q3.* Visiting the Prophet (s) in his high rank is "visiting God," and God's "face" means His prophets and guides. No eye sees God (6:103; Sermon 179).

Likely questions.

- *"What about the seventy-two virgins?"* See the "fair question" box: the number is not in the Qur'an.
- *"Will my non-Muslim relatives be in paradise?"* See "Who will be there?" Judgement is God's alone; Chapter 16 goes further. Don't settle it tonight.
- *"Won't forever be boring?"* See "Can anyone picture it?" (18:108; 50:35).

Watch for. Some may have lost a child or a parent. Read the passage on children gently, and never ask anyone about their loss. Never guess at anyone's place in paradise or hell.

Milestone: "Is it true?" This session closes Part One. If you can, run it long, about 105 minutes, with a shared meal. Read the circle agreements again. Invite each person to name one idea that changed for them, reread *My thread*, and try explaining one idea to a friend in two minutes. Stamp the journey map, and invite everyone to bring a friend to Part Two. In a Ramadan circle, join the celebration of Imam al-Hasan's birth on 15 Ramadan; he is one of the boys in tonight's opening story.

Bring. Bread and water on the table, and a recitation of 89:27–30.

MY THREAD · CHAPTER 14

Reread your first My thread page. What do you hope for now, in this life and the next?

MY QUESTION FOR THE BOX

NOTES

PART TWO

الأخلاق

Ethics

Is it good?

Move from what we believe to how we treat one another: mercy and justice, family and work, the earth, and the hardest questions people ask about Islam today.

Was Jesus More Merciful Than Muhammad?	15
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CHAPTER 15 · ETHICS

15

Was Jesus More Merciful Than Muhammad?

What mercy looks like when revenge is finally possible.

وَمَآ أَرۡسَلۡنَٰكَ إِلَّا رَحۡمَةٗ لِّلۡعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿١٠٧﴾

We sent you only as a mercy to all the worlds.

QUR'AN 21:107 · SURAT AL-ANBIYA'

WATCH · EPISODE 20 · 12:10

youtu.be/XB-Z8XA_jxM

In the video: a friend's half-joking reason for being a Christian (0:46)

Reading time: about 15 minutes

Twenty years after he first preached in its streets, Muhammad (s) rides back into Mecca. This is the city that mocked him, boycotted his clan until they nearly starved, and drove him out. When he made a new home in Medina, Mecca's armies came after him there too. Now, early in 630 CE (8 AH), after his enemies have broken a truce, he returns at the head of ten thousand men.[1]

He orders his soldiers to fight no one except those who fight them. Messengers carry his terms into the city. Whoever shuts his door and holds back his hand will be safe.[2]

The leaders of Quraysh, the tribe that rules Mecca, take refuge at the Kaʿba, the ancient cube-shaped shrine at the heart of the city. One account says they think the sword will not be lifted from them.[3]

The Prophet opens the door of the Kaʿba and has the images inside it effaced. Then he takes hold of the two doorposts and faces the men who have spent nearly twenty years trying to destroy him. "There is no god but God alone," he says. "He has kept His promise, helped His servant, and routed the allied armies by Himself." Then he puts a question to them.

"What do you say? And what do you expect of me?"[4]

They know what conquerors do. In their world, the defeated were killed or sold as slaves. Mercy is easy to praise when we have no power. The test comes when we do. So what will he do with his?

THE BIG QUESTION

Was Jesus really more merciful than Muhammad?

Have you ever wondered whether a prophet who led armies can teach anyone about mercy? Or what mercy even looks like when someone has wronged you and you finally hold the upper hand? Or, if you are Muslim, how to answer a Christian friend who says Jesus was gentler, without belittling Jesus?

This chapter listens to what the Qur'an says about Jesus, compares the two prophets fairly, and watches what Muhammad did when he could have taken revenge.

WORDS TO KNOW

raḥma (رحمة) · *RAH-ma* · mercy: compassion that acts. The Qur'an gives this word to both Jesus and Muhammad.

ʿafw (عفو) · *AFF-w* · pardon: letting go of a right you could have claimed, such as a debt or a penalty.

al-Masīḥ (المسيح) · *al-ma-SEEH* · the Messiah, the Qur'an's title for Jesus son of Mary (*ʿĪsā ibn Maryam*).

Injīl (إنجيل) · *in-JEEL* · the Gospel: the scripture that God gave to Jesus, according to the Qur'an.

qiṣāṣ (قصاص) · *qi-SAAS* · fair retaliation for an injury: a right that the victim may choose to waive.

ṭulaqāʾ (طلقاء) · *tu-la-QAA* · "the freed ones": the people of Mecca, whom the Prophet set free in 630 CE.

◆

What does the Qur'an say about Jesus?

Many Christians, and many others, sum up the difference in a sentence: Jesus (a) preached love, and Muhammad (s) led armies. A Christian friend might say it half in jest: *I'm a Christian because Jesus was more merciful.* In this picture Jesus is the gentle teacher on a Galilean hillside. Muhammad is a warlord in the trenches.

Muslims hear the comparison differently, for a reason that surprises many Christians. Islam has no quarrel with the first half of it. The Qur'an's Jesus is merciful, and Muslims love him. The Qur'an names Jesus twenty-five times, and Muhammad only four.[5]

It calls him the Messiah and "a Word from Him" (3:45), given to Mary (a). When the angel announces his birth, Mary asks how she can have a son when no man has touched her (19:20). It is easy for God, the angel replies, and He will make the child "a sign to people and a mercy from Us" (19:21). Then, when Mary's own people accuse her, the newborn speaks from the cradle in her defence.

قَالَ إِنِّي عَبْدُ اللَّهِ ءَاتَىٰنِيَ ٱلْكِتَٰبَ وَجَعَلَنِي نَبِيًّا ﴿٣٠﴾ وَجَعَلَنِي
مُبَارَكًا أَيْنَ مَا كُنتُ وَأَوْصَٰنِي بِٱلصَّلَوٰةِ وَٱلزَّكَوٰةِ مَا دُمْتُ حَيًّا
﴿٣١﴾ وَبَرًّا بِوَٰلِدَتِي وَلَمْ يَجْعَلْنِي جَبَّارًا شَقِيًّا ﴿٣٢﴾ وَٱلسَّلَٰمُ عَلَيَّ
يَوْمَ وُلِدتُّ وَيَوْمَ أَمُوتُ وَيَوْمَ أُبْعَثُ حَيًّا ﴿٣٣﴾

He said, "I am God's servant. He has given me the Scripture and made me a prophet. He has blessed me wherever I may be, and charged me with prayer and charity for as long as I live, and with kindness to my mother. He has not made me a tyrant or a wretch. Peace be on me the day I was born, the day I die, and the day I am raised to life again."

QUR'AN 19:30–33 · SURAT MARYAM

NOTICE His first words are "I am God's servant." Then he describes himself by what God did not make him: a *jabbar*, a tyrant who forces his will on others. Gentleness is part of his calling.

The Qur'an tells of his miracles, each one done "by God's leave": he heals the blind and the leper and raises the dead (5:110). It says God put "tenderness and mercy" into the hearts of those who followed him (57:27). Three of its chapters take their names from his family and his story. *The Family of 'Imran* is named for Mary's family (3:35; 66:12). *The Table* recalls the spread of food his disciples asked God to send down from heaven (5:112–115). And one bears the name *Mary*.

The Imams of the Prophet's family spoke of him with love. A student once asked Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (a), the sixth Imam (d. 765 CE), what brings a person closest to God. After knowing God, the Imam said, he knew of nothing better than prayer. Then he quoted "the righteous servant, Jesus son of Mary": *He has charged me with prayer and charity for as long as I live.*[6]

A report in al-Kafi, the most important Shia hadith collection, preserves a scene that Christians know from the Gospel of John. Its chain is weak, but its warmth is plain. Jesus asks his disciples for a favour. When they agree, he rises and washes their feet. They protest that they should be serving him. "The one who knows has the most

right to serve," he tells them. "I humbled myself like this only so that after me you would humble yourselves among people, as I have humbled myself before you."[7]

Love does not erase real differences, and friends owe each other the truth. In Islam, Jesus is a prophet and the Messiah, but not God and not God's son (5:116–117; 19:35). The Qur'an compares him to Adam (a), whom God created from dust with the word "Be!" (3:59). It also says that he was neither killed nor crucified: "it was made to appear so to them," and God raised him to Himself (4:157–158). It does not say how, and Muslim commentators, Shia ones included, have explained it in more than one way.[8]

For Christians, the cross is the heart of their faith. Chapter 7 looked at these differences more closely. They deserve to be stated plainly and gently, the way each of us would want our own faith described.

Here, then, is the surprise at the root of this chapter. The Qur'an gives both men the same word. Jesus is "a mercy from Us" (19:21). Muhammad is sent "only as a mercy to all the worlds" (21:107), a messenger who is pained by people's suffering (9:128). So the real question is not which of them was merciful. It is whether we have read both of them fairly.

◆

Is it a fair comparison?

The first mistake is to treat their missions as the same. In the Gospels, Jesus (a) says he is sent "unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 15:24).[9] The Qur'an calls him "a messenger to the Children of Israel" (3:49). He came to confirm the Torah and to make lawful some things that had been forbidden (3:50). In Matthew's Gospel he says he came "not to destroy, but to fulfil" the law, and he urges "the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith" (Matthew 5:17; 23:23).

He taught without any political office, in a land under Roman rule, when Pontius Pilate governed Judaea and Herod ruled Galilee (Luke 3:1). "My kingdom is not of this world," he told Pilate (John 18:36). He signed no treaties and commanded no army. His followers were a small band of disciples, not a town that looked to him for its safety.

Muhammad's (s) mission took a different shape. In Mecca his followers were beaten, and some were tortured. Men came to him with their heads split open, and he told them, "Be patient, for I have not been commanded to fight." That command came only after he left Mecca.[10] His clan was boycotted until they nearly starved. Then, within a short time, he lost his wife, Lady Khadija (a), and his uncle Abu Talib, his two great protectors.

When he migrated to Medina in 622 CE (1 AH), he became responsible for a whole community. He made treaties, settled disputes, faced betrayal and defended a town that its enemies attacked again and again. Only in Medina did the Qur'an give its first permission to fight, and it gave the reason in the same breath: "Permission is given to those who are being fought, because they have been wronged" (22:39). They had been "driven from their homes without any right, only for saying, 'Our Lord is God'" (22:40; see Chapter 24).

Even then the permission came with limits. "Fight in God's way those who fight you, and do not go beyond the bounds" (2:190). "If they lean toward peace, lean toward it too" (8:61). He was not a pacifist, and he never pretended to be. Had he answered invading armies by turning the other cheek, the people in his care would have been wiped out.

A private person may forgive an injury done to himself. A leader cannot forgive away other people's safety. The Prophet warned, "Beware of injustice, for on the Day of Resurrection it will be darkness upon darkness." Leaving the weak to an aggressor is injustice too.[11]

Christian scripture draws the same line. Paul tells believers, "Recompense to no man evil for evil" (Romans 12:17). A few lines later he says that the ruler "beareth not the sword in vain" (Romans 13:4). So it is unfair to set a teacher with no office beside the leader of a besieged community, and then call the difference a difference in mercy.

The second mistake is cherry-picking. Critics lift the Prophet's battles out of their setting. Read the same way, the Gospels would give us a very different Jesus. "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword" (Matthew 10:34).

Read on, and the sword turns out to be the division that faith can bring into a family: "a man's foes shall be they of his own household" (10:36). Luke's version says "division" (Luke 12:51). And when one of his disciples drew a real sword, Jesus told him to put it away, "for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword" (Matthew 26:52).

Other hard sayings yield to the same care. "Bring hither, and slay them before me" (Luke 19:27) is spoken by a nobleman in a story that Luke introduces as a parable (19:11–12). Mark 9:42 warns that it would be better to be drowned with a millstone round one's neck than to "offend" one of the little ones who believe. In the English of the King James Bible, to offend means to make someone stumble into sin.

Christians rightly read these lines in context. The same courtesy is owed to Muhammad: if Jesus' hard words can be read in their setting, why not his? Those words also show something true about Jesus. He had a firm side, and he showed it

when the vulnerable were in danger. Mercy does not only mean softness. A parent who shouts "Stop!" at a child running toward the road is not being unkind.

The same rule applies to verses of the Qur'an quoted online without their context. The verse after the much-quoted 9:5 orders that any enemy who asks for protection must be given it, and then escorted to a place of safety (9:6). Chapter 24 looks at the Qur'an's teaching on war in full.

A FAIR QUESTION

Doesn't "an eye for an eye" make Islam harsher than "turn the other cheek"?

The Qur'an quotes the old law, then points beyond it. It recalls the rule God gave in the Torah, "a life for a life, an eye for an eye" (compare Exodus 21:24). In the same breath it adds: "whoever waives it as charity, it will be an atonement for him" (Qur'an 5:45). Elsewhere it promises that whoever "pardons and makes amends" will find his reward with God (42:40).

After the Battle of Uhud, when the Prophet's uncle Hamza had been killed and mutilated, some Muslims swore to do worse to the enemy. The Qur'an answered: "If you retaliate, retaliate only to the extent you were wronged. But if you are patient, that is better for the patient" (16:126).[12] "Do not mutilate" was among the orders the Prophet (s) gave every army he sent out.[13]

So Islam keeps the victim's right to justice, and then invites the greater gift of letting it go. It never forces that gift, because no one should tell an injured person that their wound does not count. Many Christians read "turn the other cheek" in a similar way: as a call to personal forgiveness, not a ban on courts and police.

PAUSE AND RECALL

Name two ways in which the missions of Jesus and Muhammad differed. Then choose one hard saying of Jesus, and say what its context shows.

◆

What did he do when he could take revenge?

The truest test of mercy comes when retaliation is finally possible. The life of the Prophet (s) offers several such moments. At the Battle of Uhud in 625 CE (3 AH), the archers he had posted at a mountain pass left their places to gather spoils, against his orders. Enemy cavalry swept in behind them, and the Muslim army was routed. The

Prophet's tooth was broken and his face gashed. His uncle Hamza was killed and mutilated.[14] Afterward, the Qur'an spoke to him about the very followers who had failed him.

فَبِمَا رَحْمَةٍ مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ لِنتَ لَهُمْ وَلَوْ كُنتَ فَظًّا غَلِيظَ ٱلْقَلْبِ
لَٱنفَضُّوا۟ مِنْ حَوْلِكَ فَٱعْفُ عَنْهُمْ وَٱسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُمْ وَشَاوِرْهُمْ فِى
ٱلْأَمْرِ فَإِذَا عَزَمْتَ فَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يُحِبُّ ٱلْمُتَوَكِّلِينَ

﴿١٥٩﴾

It was by a mercy from God that you were gentle with them. Had you been rough and hard of heart, they would have scattered from around you. So pardon them, ask forgiveness for them, and take counsel with them in the conduct of affairs...[15]

QUR'AN 3:159 · SURAT AL 'IMRAN

NOTICE The verse credits his gentleness to God's mercy. Then, about people who had just deserted their posts, it asks three things of him: pardon them, pray for them, and keep consulting them.

Then there was the woman who tried to poison him. She served him a sheep laced with poison. When she was brought before him, he asked her, "What made you do what you did?" She answered, "I told myself: if he is a prophet, it will not harm him; and if he is a king, I will have rid the people of him." Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a), the fifth Imam (d. c. 733 CE), who told this story, ends it in a single line: "And the Messenger of God forgave her."[16]

Restraint governed his wars as well. His orders to every detachment, Imam al-Sadiq (a) recalled, forbade mutilation and the killing of frail old men, children or women (see Chapter 24).[17] His cousin Imam Ali (a), the first Imam (d. 661 CE), gave his own army orders in the same spirit before fighting Muslims in revolt at Siffin in 657 CE (37 AH).[18]

And so, back to Mecca. As the army entered the city, Sa'd ibn 'Ubada called out, "Today is the day of slaughter!" He carried the banner at the head of the Ansar, the Prophet's helpers from Medina. The Prophet would not let the words stand. He had the banner taken from Sa'd and given to Ali, and told him, in one account, to carry it in "gently."[19]

Mercy here meant restraining his own side, which is often the hardest kind. Then came the scene at the door of the Ka'ba, and the question he put to the leaders of Quraysh.

THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD (S) AT THE KA'BA, AS REPORTED BY IMAM AL-SADIQ (A)

مَا ذَا تَقُولُونَ وَمَا ذَا تَظُنُّونَ قَالُوا نَظُنُّ خَيْراً وَنَقُولُ خَيْراً أَخٌ كَرِيمٌ وَابْنُ أَخٍ كَرِيمٍ وَقَدْ قَدَرْتَ قَالَ فَإِنِّي أَقُولُ كَمَا قَالَ أَخِي يُوسُفُ لا تَثْرِيبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الْيَوْمَ يَغْفِرُ اللهُ لَكُمْ وَهُوَ أَرْحَمُ الرَّاحِمِينَ

"What do you say? And what do you expect of me?" They said, "We expect good, and we say good: a noble brother, and the son of a noble brother. And now the power is yours." He said, "Then I say what my brother Joseph said: 'No reproach upon you today. May God forgive you; He is the most merciful of all who show mercy.'"[20]

al-Kafi 4 · Pilgrimage · ch. 12 · no. 3 · **Reliable chain**

He reached for the words of another prophet. Joseph (a) had been thrown into a well by his own brothers, and he was sold as a slave. Years later, when they stood before him in Egypt, their fate was in his hands (12:92). His two sentences do two different jobs. "No reproach upon you today" lets go of his own claim against them. "May God forgive you" leaves their final account with God. The Prophet did not make the moment about himself.

A second report in al-Kafi mentions what came next almost in passing, in a discussion of land tax. The people of Mecca were captives in his hand, "and he set them free, saying, 'Go, you are the freed ones.'"[21]

The Shia commentator al-Tabrisi (d. 1154 CE) adds that before he let them go, he named the wrongs they had done him. They had called him a liar, driven him out and harmed him, and then they had come to fight him in his own land. Mercy did not pre-

tend that nothing had happened. They walked out, al-Tabrisi writes, "as if they had been raised from their graves."[22]

The historians do record exceptions: a few people, named for the harm they had done, whom the Prophet ordered killed "even if you find them clinging to the curtains of the Kaʿba." The lists differ. In al-Tabrisi's account of the conquest, four of the six named were killed. Others were pardoned, one of them after a companion interceded for him. Among them was ʿIkrima, son of Abu Jahl, the Prophet's bitterest enemy. He fled by sea, and when a storm struck, he vowed that if God saved him he would go to Muhammad and put his hand in his. "I will surely find him forgiving and generous," he said. He came back and became a Muslim.[23]

One of the Imams later put the lesson in a sentence: "Whenever two parties have met, the one greater in forgiveness has been given the victory."[24] Mecca bore that out. The victory that lasted was not the one won by ten thousand soldiers at the city's gates. It was the one won by a few words at the door of the Kaʿba.

◆

Rivals, or brothers?

Islam does not set Jesus (a) and Muhammad (s) against each other. It sees them as brothers who drank from the same spring of revelation, and their stories rhyme.

The Gospel of Luke tells of a Samaritan village that refused to receive Jesus. His disciples James and John asked, "Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias [Elijah] did?" But Jesus "turned, and rebuked them" (Luke 9:54–55).[25] About six centuries later, the Prophet (s) took his message to the chiefs of Ta'if, a town in the hills near Mecca, and they turned him away.

On the road home, he later told his wife ʿA'isha, the angel of the mountains came to him. The angel offered to bring two mountains crashing down on the people who had rejected him. He refused: "No. I hope that God will bring from their descendants people who worship God alone and associate nothing with Him." When ʿA'isha asked whether any day had been harder for him than Uhud, this was the day he named.[26]

Shia sources remember the prayer that rose from him in such moments. At Uhud, wiping the blood from his face, he prayed, "O God, guide my people, for they do not know." Imam Ali (a), recounting the angel's offer to a learned Jewish visitor, gave the Prophet's answer this way: "I was sent only as a mercy. Lord, guide my community, for they do not know."[27] Christians will hear an echo of Jesus on the cross: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).[28]

The same teaching runs through both of their lives. Jesus said, "Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you" (Luke 6:27–28). A few verses later he added, "Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful" (6:36). In a sermon, the Prophet said this:

> **THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD (S), IN A SERMON, AS REPORTED BY IMAM AL-SADIQ (A)**
>
> أَلا أُخْبِرُكُمْ بِخَيْرِ خَلائِقِ الدُّنْيا وَالآخِرَةِ الْعَفْوُ عَمَّنْ ظَلَمَكَ وَتَصِلُ مَنْ قَطَعَكَ وَالإِحْسانُ إِلَى مَنْ أَساءَ إِلَيْكَ وَإِعْطاءُ مَنْ حَرَمَكَ
>
> Shall I tell you which traits are best in this world and the next? Pardoning the one who wrongs you, reaching out to the one who cuts you off, doing good to the one who harms you, and giving to the one who refuses you.[29]
>
> al-Kafi 2 · Belief & Disbelief · ch. 53 · no. 1 · **Reliable chain**

The Qur'an even gives Jesus the last word of mercy at the Judgement. Asked whether he told people to worship him and his mother, he says he told them only to worship God, "my Lord and your Lord." Then he adds: "If You punish them, they are Your servants; and if You forgive them, You are the Mighty, the Wise" (5:117–118). He asks for nothing harsh. He leaves the door open.

Brothers is the right word. At the door of the Kaʿba, the Prophet called Joseph (a) "my brother." In a sound Sunni report he says, "Of all people, I am the closest to Jesus son of Mary, in this world and the next. The prophets are brothers... and their religion is one."[30] The Qur'an says that the same religion was entrusted to "Noah... Abraham, Moses and Jesus" (42:13). It teaches believers to say, "We make no distinction between any of His messengers" (2:285).

Each of them did what God asked of him in his own time and place, because their mission was one. Imam Ali, asked to compare the Prophet with the prophets before him, promised to do it "without belittling the prophets or diminishing them."[31] That is the spirit of this chapter.

> *"No reproach upon you today. May God forgive you.*
>
> THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD (S), QUOTING JOSEPH (A)

Most of us will never conquer a city. But nearly everyone holds power over someone: a child, an employee, a younger brother, a colleague who made a mistake, a friend who hurt us and now needs us. In those moments someone is waiting, as Quraysh once waited, to see what we will do with our power. Jesus gave his answer on the road to Jerusalem. Muhammad gave his at the door of the Kaʿba. It was the same answer.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. The Qur'an honours Jesus as the Messiah, a Word from God and "a mercy from Us," but not as God.
2. Jesus taught without political office; Muhammad had to protect a persecuted community, so their paths differed.
3. Fairness means one standard: read the hard sayings of every scripture, Gospel or Qur'an, in context.
4. The Prophet's mercy shone when he held power: toward his poisoner, his own deserters and the people of Mecca.
5. Islam sees Jesus and Muhammad as brothers in one mission, each praying for those who rejected him.

NEXT TIME · GO FURTHER

Next time: *Pluralism in Islam.* If Jesus and Muhammad are brothers, what about their followers, and everyone else? How does Islam see people of other faiths, or of none?

Go further:

Course: Introduction to Islamic Ethics, a Level 1 course at Tasneem Institute (tasneeminstitute.org/courses/introduction-to-islamic-ethics)

Read: the short chapter on forgiveness in *al-Kafi* (vol. 2, Book of Belief and Disbelief, ch. 53, *Bab al-ʿAfw*): ten reports, including the story of the poisoned sheep.

Watch: Invitation to Islam, Episode 20, "Was Jesus More Merciful Than Muhammad?" (12 min).

LOOK BACK

1. Chapter 14 named one joy of paradise greater than all its gardens. What was it?
2. In Chapter 11, how could Joseph (a) be free at the bottom of a well?
3. Part One asked whether Islam is true. Part Two asks whether it is good. What would make a faith good, for you?

TALK ABOUT IT

WARM-UP

1. Before reading this chapter, what picture did you have of Jesus (a), and of Muhammad (s)? Where did those pictures come from?

UNDERSTAND

2. What does the Qur'an affirm about Jesus, and where does it differ from Christian belief?
3. Why does the chapter call it unfair to compare Jesus and Muhammad without asking what each was sent to do?

REFLECT

4. At the Kaʿba, the Prophet answered with Joseph's words, "No reproach upon you today" (12:92). Why might he borrow another prophet's words instead of his own?
5. "Mercy does not only mean softness." When has firmness been the kind choice, in your life or someone else's? You needn't share the details.

APPLY

6. Where do you hold some power over another person, at home, at work or elsewhere? What would "no reproach" look like there this week? You needn't say who.

GO DEEPER

7. Read the Prophet's orders to his detachments in full (al-Kafi, vol. 5, Book of Jihad, ch. 8, no. 9; reliable chain). Whom do they protect, and what does that say about the "warlord" charge?
8. Read the Prophet's sermon on the best traits (al-Kafi, vol. 2, Book of Belief and Disbelief, ch. 53, no. 1; reliable chain) beside Luke 6:27–36. What does each passage add to the other?

CARRY IT HOME

Choose one way in this week:

☐ **Notice:** Each evening, recall one moment when you held the upper hand: in an argument, at work, as a parent or in traffic. What did you do with it?

☐ **Do:** Think of someone who owes you an apology. Without excusing the wrong, choose one small way to let go of part of your claim, as the Prophet did at Mecca. Do only what is safe and wise.

☐ **Learn:** Read Qur'an 19:16–36 and Luke 1:26–38, the two accounts of the angel's visit to Mary. Note one thing they share and one way they differ.

Aim. Help the circle compare Jesus (a) and Muhammad (s) fairly and with love for both, and see mercy as restraint at the moment of power.

Protect this question. No. 4: why the Prophet borrowed Joseph's words. It gathers the chapter's threads: power, forgiveness and the brotherhood of the prophets.

Answer notes.

- *Q2.* The Qur'an affirms Jesus as the Messiah, a Word from God, born of the virgin Mary (a), a worker of miracles by God's leave and "a mercy from Us" (19:21). It differs on his divinity (5:116–117; 19:35) and on the crucifixion (4:157–158).
- *Q3.* Jesus taught without office under Roman rule. Muhammad (s) led a persecuted community and had to defend it. A person may forgive an injury to himself; a leader must protect others.

Likely questions.

- *"Do Muslims believe Jesus died on the cross?"* See "What does the Qur'an say about Jesus?" and Chapter 7. State the difference calmly, and invite any Christians present to explain their own belief.
- *"Weren't some people excluded from the amnesty at Mecca?"* Yes, a few; see the end of "What did he do when he could take revenge?" and its notes.
- *"Wasn't Islam spread by the sword?"* Point to 22:39–40 and the rules of war in this chapter. Chapter 24 treats jihad in full.

Watch for. If Christians are present, the evening must never become a contest. Let them speak for their own faith. Keep the poisoning story about forgiveness, not about any people. Some in the room may have been told to "just forgive" someone who hurt them. Stress that Islam protects the victim's right: forgiveness is invited, never forced.

Bring. A Qur'an and a Bible on the table, open at Sura 19 and Luke 6.

MY THREAD · CHAPTER 15

Where do I hold power over someone, and what would mercy look like there?

MY QUESTION FOR THE BOX

NOTES

16

Pluralism in Islam

Your brother in faith, or your equal in creation.

لَّا يَنْهَىٰكُمُ ٱللَّهُ عَنِ ٱلَّذِينَ لَمْ يُقَٰتِلُوكُمْ فِى ٱلدِّينِ وَلَمْ يُخْرِجُوكُم مِّن دِيَٰرِكُمْ
أَن تَبَرُّوهُمْ وَتُقْسِطُوٓا۟ إِلَيْهِمْ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يُحِبُّ ٱلْمُقْسِطِينَ ﴿٨﴾

God does not forbid you to be kind and just to those who have not fought you over your faith or driven you from your homes. God loves the just.

QUR'AN 60:8 · SURAT AL-MUMTAHANA

WATCH · EPISODE 15 · 11:04

youtu.be/wasMM6Qywpk

In the video: why injustice against anyone is everyone's business (9:50)

Reading time: about 20 minutes

A delegation rides into Medina from Najran, a Christian town in the south of Arabia. Its members reach the mosque just after the afternoon prayer, in robes so fine that some of the Prophet's companions say they have never seen a delegation like it. Among the leaders is their bishop, Abu Haritha, a scholar so honoured that the Byzantine emperors have built churches for him.

When the time comes for their own prayer, the visitors strike their wooden clapper, the *naqus*, and stand to pray, there in the Prophet's mosque, facing east. Some of the companions object. "Messenger of God, this, in your mosque?"

"Leave them," the Prophet (s) says.

Then the talking begins, and it is not polite small talk. It is about Jesus (a). The Prophet calls him God's servant and messenger. The bishop insists he is more. Neither side gives way. At last the Qur'an proposes a solemn way to settle it: let both sides bring their sons, their women and themselves, and call down God's curse on whoever is lying (Qur'an 3:61). The Christians agree. "You have been fair," they say.

Back in their lodgings, their leaders reason it through. If he comes tomorrow with a crowd of followers, they will go ahead. If he brings his own family, they will not. A man does not put his own family forward unless he is telling the truth.

In the morning the Prophet walks out with four people: his cousin Ali, his daughter Fatima, and her two small sons, al-Hasan and al-Husayn (a). The bishop looks at them and draws back. "I fear that he is truthful," he tells his companions. Then he turns to the Prophet: "We will not hold the contest with you. We will make peace with you."

The Prophet agrees terms with them and puts them in writing. The Christians of Najran ride home under his protection, still Christians. They have not converted, and they have not been forced. Not long afterwards, two of their leaders return to the Prophet and become Muslims.[1]

Neither side ever said, "We are both right." They had argued over the thing that mattered most. So how did a morning set aside for a curse end in a written peace? And what would it take for people today to disagree that deeply and still live as neighbours?

THE BIG QUESTION

If Islam claims to be the truth, where does that leave everyone else?

Have you ever wondered whether any religion that claims to be true must end up intolerant? Whether a Muslim can share a table, a workplace or a family celebration with people of other faiths? Or, if you grew up Muslim, what really becomes of the kind neighbour who never became one?

This chapter pulls apart three questions that are easily tangled: what is true, who will be saved, and how we must treat one another. Then it listens to the Qur'an and the Prophet's family on each.

WORDS TO KNOW

ikrāh (إكراه) · *ik-RAAH* · compulsion. "There is no *ikrāh* in religion" (2:256): faith cannot be forced.

ahl al-kitāb (أهل الكتاب) · *AHL al-ki-TAAB* · "People of the Book", communities given an earlier scripture: Jews, Christians and, in Shia law, Zoroastrians.

mustaḍʿaf (مستضعَف) · *mus-TAD-af* · "one made weak": someone the truth never truly reached, whose case rests with God.

dhimma (ذمّة) · *DHIM-ma* · a covenant of protection between a Muslim state and a community of another faith.

mubāhala (مباهلة) · *mu-BAA-ha-la* · a solemn mutual prayer calling down God's curse on whoever is lying (3:61).

birr (برّ) · *BIRR* · devoted kindness; the word used for a child's goodness to parents, and in 60:8.

◆

Did God mean for us to differ?

Eight billion people share this planet. Could anyone expect them all to walk to God by exactly the same road? Every people has its own language, customs and memories, its own sense of what matters most. The Qur'an does not treat this variety as an accident. "Had your Lord willed," it says, "He would have made humanity one community" (Qur'an 11:118). He did not.

Nor did He leave any people without guidance. "There is no community but a warner has passed among it" (Qur'an 35:24). The Qur'an names some of these messengers and says others go unnamed (Qur'an 40:78). Muslim tradition speaks of 124,000 prophets in all.[2] Before Muhammad (s) came four great messengers: Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus (a). Each brought a law suited to his people and his time.

Muslims believe the religion itself never changed: it was always surrender to the one God. The laws changed, until a final message brought a final law, confirming the scriptures before it (Chapter 7 tells that story). The differences that remain, the Qur'an frames as a test.

"For each of you We have appointed a law and a way. Had God willed, He would have made you a single community, but He wanted to test you in what He has given you. So race one another in doing good. To God you will all return, and He will tell you about the things you differed over" (Qur'an 5:48). The verse does not ask anyone to settle every argument now. It asks people to compete in goodness, and it leaves the verdict to God.

What, then, may a believer do about people who see things differently? The first answer is: never force them.

وَلَوْ شَآءَ رَبُّكَ لَآمَنَ مَن فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ كُلُّهُمْ جَمِيعًا أَفَأَنتَ تُكْرِهُ ٱلنَّاسَ حَتَّىٰ يَكُونُوا۟ مُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٩٩﴾

Had your Lord willed, everyone on earth would have believed, all of them together. Will you then force people until they become believers?

QUR'AN 10:99 · SURAT YUNUS

NOTICE The question is put to the Prophet himself, and it expects the answer no. If God chose not to compel belief, no one else may.

"There is no compulsion in religion," another verse declares (Qur'an 2:256). The great Shia commentator al-'Allama al-Tabataba'i (d. 1981 CE) explained why. Compulsion can move bodies, but never the beliefs of the heart, for "ignorance cannot produce knowledge." He called the verse one of the proofs that Islam "was not built on the sword and blood", and held that later verses on fighting do not cancel it.[3] Chapter 24 looks at those verses.

So faith can only be invited, "with wisdom and good counsel", arguing "in the best way" (Qur'an 16:125). The Qur'an even forbids Muslims to insult what others worship, "lest they insult God in hostility, without knowledge" (Qur'an 6:108). Humiliation never persuaded anyone.

And yet Islam does not say that every road is equally true. "Whoever seeks a religion other than *islam*, surrender to God, it will not be accepted from him" (Qur'an 3:85). Murtada Mutahhari (d. 1979 CE), a leading Shia thinker of the last century, put it plainly. "There is only one true religion in each era," he wrote, "and all are obligated to believe in it."[4] Muslims believe that in this era it is the message brought by Muhammad (s).

So it helps to separate three words that are often blurred. *Pluralism*, in the strong sense some philosophers give it, means that all religions are equally true, or equally good roads to salvation.[5] *Tolerance* means not coercing or abusing people you believe are mistaken. *Coexistence* means building a shared life with them under agreed rights and duties. Islam says no to the first and yes to the other two.

That is not a weakness. Respect that depended on agreement would collapse at the first real disagreement. The Prophet's respect for Najran survived the deepest disagreement there is.

◆

What about everyone else?

This question is usually personal. *What about my grandmother? My best friend?* Salman the Persian asked it too. Before he found Islam, he had spent years serving devout Christian monks (Chapter 1 tells his story). Commentators report that he asked the Prophet (s) about the people he used to worship with, and that this verse came in answer.[6]

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ وَٱلَّذِينَ هَادُواْ وَٱلنَّصَٰرَىٰ وَٱلصَّٰبِـِٔينَ مَنْ ءَامَنَ بِٱللَّهِ وَٱلْيَوْمِ ٱلْءَاخِرِ وَعَمِلَ صَٰلِحًا فَلَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِندَ رَبِّهِمْ وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ ﴿٦٢﴾

Those who believe, and the Jews, the Christians and the Sabians: whoever believes in God and the Last Day and does good will have their reward with their Lord. They will have nothing to fear, and they will not grieve.

QUR'AN 2:62 · SURAT AL-BAQARA

NOTICE Four communities are named, the Muslims first. Then one test is applied to all of them: faith in God and the Last Day, and good deeds. The label alone, even "believer", earns nothing.

Al-Tabataba'i drew the lesson plainly: names count for nothing with God. Calling yourself a believer, a Jew, a Christian or a Sabian brings no reward by itself; real faith and good deeds do.[7] The verse warns Muslims not to trust a label, and it opens a door to sincere people beyond their community.

Yet it does not make every religion the same. The same Qur'an says that the final message, once it truly reaches a person, asks for an answer (Qur'an 3:85). So everything turns on one question: what does it mean for a message to *reach* someone?

Here the teaching of the Prophet's family is generous and exact. It begins from a promise God makes about Himself: "No one carries another's burden, and We never punish until We have sent a messenger" (Qur'an 17:15). Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (a), the sixth Imam (d. 765 CE), made it a principle: "God's case against people rests on what He has given them and made known to them."[8] He showed how it works while explaining the Qur'an to a student.

IMAM JA'FAR AL-SADIQ (A), THE SIXTH IMAM

فِي قَوْلِ اللهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ وَما كانَ اللهُ لِيُضِلَّ قَوْماً بَعْدَ إِذْ هَداهُمْ حَتَّى يُبَيِّنَ لَهُمْ ما يَتَّقُونَ قَالَ حَتَّى يُعَرِّفَهُمْ مَا يُرْضِيهِ وَمَا يُسْخِطُهُ ... وَعَنْ قَوْلِهِ وَأَمَّا ثَمُودُ فَهَدَيْناهُمْ فَاسْتَحَبُّوا الْعَمى عَلَى الْهُدى قَالَ عَرَّفْنَاهُمْ فَاسْتَحَبُّوا الْعَمَى عَلَى الْهُدَى وَهُمْ يَعْرِفُونَ

On God's words, "God would never lead a people astray after guiding them, until He has made clear to them what they should guard against" (9:115), he said: "Until He makes known to them what pleases Him and what angers Him." ... And on "As for Thamud, We guided them, but they preferred blindness to guidance" (41:17), he said: "We made it known to them, and they preferred blindness to guidance, knowing full well."[9]

al-Kafi 1 · Divine Unity · ch. 32 · no. 3 · **Reliable chain**

Two things follow. First, God asks of each person only what He has given them. The Qur'an speaks of "the helpless... who can find no means and are shown no way", and says, "God may yet pardon them" (Qur'an 4:98–99). The Imams called such people the *mustad'af*, "those made weak". Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a), the fifth Imam (d. c. 733 CE), described them as people who "have no means of reaching faith, yet do not disbelieve".[10] Shia scholars apply this to anyone the truth never reached in a form they could recognise.

Second, the unbelief the Qur'an condemns is not the same as not knowing. At its root it is refusing a truth one has recognised, like those who denied God's signs "though their own souls were sure of them" (Qur'an 27:14). So the category of the *mustad'af* has edges. "Whoever knows that people differ is not *mustad'af*," Imam al-Sadiq said.[11] Once you know there is a real question, you are responsible for looking into it honestly.

The jurists mark the difference with two words. The *qasir* falls short of the truth through no fault of their own; the *muqassir* could have reached it and did not care to look. People "who in some way were incapable and are not blameworthy", Mutahhari concluded, "will not be punished by God". Punishment falls on those who met the truth with prejudice or stubbornness.[12]

Who falls into which group? Only God knows what truly reached a child in a remote valley, or a woman who met Islam only as a caricature on a screen. "As a matter

of principle," Mutahhari wrote, "the status of individuals is in the hands of God."[13] No Muslim is appointed judge over a neighbour's soul.

So Islam holds two things at once, and waters down neither. Its truth-claim is real: the final message, once truly met, asks for an answer. Its openness is real too. No one is condemned for a truth that never reached them, and every case rests with a Judge who is both just and merciful.

> **PAUSE AND RECALL**
>
> *In your own words: why does believing that Islam is true not mean deciding that a particular person is lost?*

◆

What did living together look like?

The final verdict belongs to God. What belongs to us is how we treat one another, and here the Prophet (s) left a written agreement. In 622 CE (1 AH) he migrated from Mecca, where his followers had been persecuted, to the oasis town of Medina. Many of its Arab clans had embraced Islam, but the town was also home to Jewish tribes and to Arabs who kept the old religion.

Early in the Medina years, a document set out how these communities would live together. Its text survives in the earliest full biography of the Prophet. "The Jews of Banu ʿAwf are a community alongside the believers," it declares. "To the Jews their religion, and to the Muslims theirs." The parties owed each other "help against whoever wages war on the people of this document", and "goodness, not wrongdoing".[14]

In a report with a weak chain, Imam al-Baqir (a) said he had read it "in a book of Ali's", and quoted this line: "The protected neighbour is like one's own self, neither harmed nor doing wrong. The sanctity of a neighbour for his neighbour is like the sanctity of his mother and father."[15]

Each community kept its own worship and law. The Qur'an tells Christians to judge by their Gospel (Qur'an 5:47), and asks why Medina's Jews would bring a case to the Prophet "when they have the Torah" (Qur'an 5:43). When it lets persecuted believers defend themselves, it even gives a reason. Otherwise "monasteries, churches, synagogues and mosques, where God's name is remembered often, would have been torn down" (Qur'an 22:39–40).

The Christians of Najran left under the same kind of promise. Shia Muslims also remember the morning of the *mubahala*, the contest of prayer, for who stood beside

the Prophet. Imam Ali al-Rida (a), the eighth Imam (d. 818 CE), explained that the verse's "ourselves" meant Ali, whose self the Prophet joined to his own.[16]

A generation later, Imam Ali (a), the Prophet's cousin and the first Imam, ruled a realm with many non-Muslim subjects (656–661 CE, 35–40 AH). When the local landowners, the *dihqans*, complained that a governor treated them with harshness and contempt, Ali looked into it. They were not to be drawn close, he wrote, "because of their *shirk*", their worship of others besides God. Nor were they to be pushed away and treated harshly, "because of their covenant".[17]

The Imam keeps two questions apart. On truth, he does not pretend their religion is his. On treatment, their covenant decides, and it rules out contempt. His most famous letter goes further still. He wrote it for Malik al-Ashtar, the governor he sent to Egypt, a province where many of the people were Christians.[18]

IMAM ALI (A), TO MALIK AL-ASHTAR

وَأَشْعِرْ قَلْبَكَ الرَّحْمَةَ لِلرَّعِيَّةِ، وَالْمَحَبَّةَ لَهُمْ، وَاللُّطْفَ بِهِمْ، وَلَا تَكُونَنَّ عَلَيْهِمْ سَبُعاً ضَارِياً تَغْتَنِمُ أَكْلَهُمْ، فَإِنَّهُمْ صِنْفَانِ: إِمَّا أَخٌ لَكَ فِي الدِّينِ، وَإِمَّا نَظِيرٌ لَكَ فِي الْخَلْقِ، يَفْرُطُ مِنْهُمُ الزَّلَلُ، وَتَعْرِضُ لَهُمُ الْعِلَلُ، وَيُؤْتَى عَلَى أَيْدِيهِمْ فِي الْعَمْدِ وَالْخَطَإِ، فَأَعْطِهِمْ مِنْ عَفْوِكَ وَصَفْحِكَ مِثْلِ الَّذِي تُحِبُّ [وَتَرْضَى] أَنْ يُعْطِيَكَ اللهُ مِنْ عَفْوِهِ وَصَفْحِهِ

Wrap your heart in mercy for the people in your care, in love for them and kindness toward them. Do not stand over them like a ravenous beast, seizing the chance to devour them. For they are of two kinds: either your brother in faith, or your equal in creation. They slip, they fall into faults, and wrongs are done at their hands, on purpose and by mistake. So give them your pardon and forgiveness, as you would love God to give you His.[19]

Nahj al-Balagha · Letter 53 · **Compiled text, not graded here**

Equal in creation: made by the same Maker, with the same capacity to slip and to be forgiven. The governor owes mercy to the Christian who pays the land tax as much as to the Muslim soldier. The same letter tells Malik to keep every pledge, even to an enemy. "There is nothing among God's obligations," Ali writes, "on which people

agree more strongly, for all their scattered desires and opinions, than honouring their pledges."[20]

Ali's grandson, Imam Zayn al-Abidin (a), the fourth Imam (d. c. 713 CE), wrote a short treatise on the rights people have over one another. Its list runs from rulers, teachers and parents to neighbours and companions, and ends with those of other faiths living under your protection. Their right is "that you accept from them what God has accepted from them, and do them no wrong as long as they keep God's covenant."[21]

Behind all of this stands the chapter's key verse. God does not forbid kindness and justice toward those who have not fought you over your faith or driven you from your homes (Qur'an 60:8). The word for being kind, *tabarruhum*, comes from *birr*, the devoted goodness a child owes its parents (as in Qur'an 19:14). The kindness it permits goes far beyond correct manners.

A FAIR QUESTION

The Qur'an says, "Do not take the Jews and the Christians as allies" (5:51). Isn't the kindness just a front?

It is a fair challenge: the verse is real, and critics and extremists both quote it. But the Qur'an itself marks out what it forbids.

The verse warns that "whoever takes them as *awliya'* is one of them" (5:51). Al-Tabataba'i read this as an intimate allegiance: a love that draws hearts and loyalties together until one community's ways pull a person from their own faith. It cannot mean treaties, he noted: the Prophet (s) had treaties with Jewish tribes.

Sura 60 follows a similar warning (60:1) with the chapter's key verse: God does not forbid kindness and justice toward those who have not fought you over your faith (60:8). The warning, al-Tabataba'i explained, never forbade doing good to people at peace with you.[22] Deepest allegiance belongs to God; justice is owed to everyone (5:8), and kindness is open to every peaceful neighbour.

◆

How do you stay yourself among others?

Staying yourself is another challenge. A Muslim in a city with a dozen mosques faces different tests from one in a small town where the nearest mosque is hours away. Both meet the same question: how much of the culture around me can I make my own?

More than many people think. Islam does not ask a Muslim in Toronto to dress like a villager in seventh-century Arabia. A man once challenged Imam al-Sadiq (a) about his new clothes. "You told us that Ali wore rough clothes, a shirt worth four dirhams," he said, "yet we see new clothes on you." The Imam replied that Ali dressed for a time when no one found it strange. If Ali dressed that way today, people would point at him. "The best clothing of every age," he said, "is the clothing of its people."[23]

Food, language, sport, manners and citizenship can all become a Muslim's own, as long as they do not conflict with what God has asked. A custom is not wrong because it is Western, or right because it comes from Cairo. Courtesy across faiths belongs to the tradition too: Chapter 1 told how Imam Ali (a) walked a non-Muslim companion part of the way down that man's own road.

> *"They are of two kinds: either your brother in faith, or your equal in creation.*
>
> IMAM ALI (A)

What a Muslim must guard against is the surrounding culture quietly seeping into worship and belief themselves. The safeguard is knowledge. Know what you believe, down to the details, and how each belief becomes action: in prayer, in what you eat, in how you treat people. Someone who knows their faith this well can listen to every other view with respect, without being swept along.

So identities can be layered. A person can be Canadian and Muslim, British and Muslim, Nigerian or Malaysian and Muslim, at ease in every layer. When the layers pull apart, faith comes first.

A CLOSER LOOK

Who are the People of the Book?

Ahl al-kitab, "People of the Book", is the Qur'an's name for Jews and Christians, communities given an earlier scripture; Shia law counts Zoroastrians among them too.[24] It is a legal category for practical questions. It is not a verdict on anyone's salvation, which rests with God, and it does not limit the justice owed to every human being.

In pre-modern Muslim states the category shaped the *dhimma*, a covenant under which these communities kept their worship, law and places of prayer, paid a tax called the *jizya*, and were owed the state's protection. That system belonged to the empires of its age. Muslims living as minorities elsewhere are bound by a different covenant, a visa or an oath of citizenship, and Imam Ali's rule still holds: keep your word.

Ayatollah al-Sistani, a leading Shia authority today, rules that the People of the Book are ritually pure. Their food may be eaten even if they touched it with wet hands, though meat must be slaughtered by Islamic rules, and there is "no harm in greeting them on their occasions."[25] Some jurists are stricter. Check the rulings of the scholar you follow (your *marja'*).

◆

Where does tolerance end?

Tolerance has a limit, and Islam draws it at harm to others. In Medina each community kept its own worship and law, but the agreement bound them all to "goodness, not wrongdoing". Belief is free. Hurting people is not, whatever the reason given.

That limit protects everyone, not only Muslims. During Imam Ali's rule, raiders sent by his rival Mu'awiya (d. 680 CE), the governor of Syria who refused to accept him, struck the town of al-Anbar on the Euphrates. Ali (a) rose to speak, in grief and anger.

He had heard that a raider would burst in on a Muslim woman, "and on another woman living under our covenant", and tear off her anklets, bracelets, necklaces and earrings. She could stop him only by crying, "We belong to God, and to Him we are returning," and pleading for mercy. "If a Muslim were to die of grief after this," Ali said, "he would not be blamed. To me, he would be right."[26]

Notice whose loss he grieves. A woman of another faith is robbed, and the Imam counts it a wound worth dying of. Chapter 20 tells how he also provided for an old

Christian beggar from the public treasury. The Qur'an sets the rule for every such moment.

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ كُونُواْ قَوَّٰمِينَ لِلَّهِ شُهَدَآءَ بِٱلْقِسْطِ وَلَا
يَجْرِمَنَّكُمْ شَنَـَٔانُ قَوْمٍ عَلَىٰٓ أَلَّا تَعْدِلُواْ ٱعْدِلُواْ هُوَ أَقْرَبُ لِلتَّقْوَىٰ
وَٱتَّقُواْ ٱللَّهَ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ خَبِيرٌۢ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٨﴾

O you who believe, stand firm for God, bearing witness with fairness, and do not let hatred of a people lead you to be unjust. Be just: that is nearer to God-consciousness. Be mindful of God; God is aware of all you do.

QUR'AN 5:8 · SURAT AL-MA'IDA

NOTICE The verse does not pretend hatred never happens. It forbids hatred to decide the verdict, and the command "be just" comes straight after the warning, in the very same word.

Injustice is never only someone else's problem. It starts small, with one group nobody defends, and spreads until it reaches everyone, Muslim and non-Muslim, young and old. Resisting it falls to every citizen and neighbour. It is true that each of us will answer to God for our own deeds (Qur'an 17:15). It is not true that a neighbour's suffering is none of our business. Tolerating injustice is a tolerance Islam does not allow.

The Christians of Najran rode home still holding their own faith, with a written promise of protection. They had even prayed in the Prophet's mosque. Islam does not pretend that every road leads to the same place. It leaves the verdict to God, invites without forcing, and treats every person as Imam Ali told his governor to: as a brother in faith, or an equal in creation. The test it sets Muslims in a mixed society is not whether everyone agrees with them. It is whether everyone is safe with them.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. The Qur'an treats human difference as part of God's plan: a test in which people race to do good.
2. Islam claims to be true, yet forbids forcing belief. Faith can be invited, never compelled.
3. God holds people to account by what reached them; no one is condemned for a truth they never truly met.
4. Justice is owed to everyone, and kindness may be shown to every peaceful neighbour, "your equal in creation."
5. Muslims may make local culture their own while putting faith first, and must resist injustice against anyone.

NEXT TIME · GO FURTHER

Next time: *Women in Islam.* The Qur'an speaks to women directly, in their own name. What does it actually say to them, and about them?

Go further:

Course: Introduction to Islamic Ethics, a Level 1 course at Tasneem Institute (tasneeminstitute.org/courses/introduction-to-islamic-ethics)

Read: "Islam in everyday life," a short introduction in Tasneem's *Discovering Islam* series (tasneeminstitute.org/blog/discovering-islam/living-islam-in-society). For a deeper dive, Imam Ali's instructions to Malik al-Ashtar, *Nahj al-Balagha*, Letter 53 (compiled text; thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/2/53/278).

Watch: Invitation to Islam, Episode 15, "Pluralism in Islam" (11 min).

In the circle

LOOK BACK

1. When Mecca lay at his mercy, what did the Prophet (s) say to its people? (Chapter 15)
2. What does Qur'an 99:7–8 promise about an atom's weight of good? (Chapter 13)
3. Part Two asks whether Islam is good. Which story so far has answered that best for you?

TALK ABOUT IT

WARM-UP

1. Think of someone whose beliefs differ from yours: a neighbour, a colleague or a relative. What is one thing you have learned from them? You needn't say who.

UNDERSTAND

2. How does the chapter tell apart pluralism, tolerance and coexistence? Which does Islam accept, and why not the first?
3. According to Qur'an 17:15 and the Imams' teaching on the *mustadʿaf*, how does God judge someone the message never truly reached?

REFLECT

4. Imam Ali (a) said people are "either your brother in faith, or your equal in creation." Which do you find harder to treat well, and why?
5. The Christians of Najran prayed in the Prophet's mosque, kept their own faith and left under his protection. What surprises you most in that story?

APPLY

6. Qur'an 60:8 opens the door to *birr*, devoted kindness, toward peaceful neighbours of other faiths. What is one act of it you could offer this week? You needn't say for whom.

GO DEEPER

7. Read Imam Ali's Letter 19 (*Nahj al-Balagha*; compiled text, not graded). How does he keep the question of belief apart from the question of treatment? Compare Qur'an 60:8–9.
8. Read al-Kafi, vol. 2, Book of Belief and Disbelief, ch. 172, nos. 2 and 7 (reliable chains). Who counts as *mustadʿaf*, and who does not?

CARRY IT HOME

Choose one way in this week:

☐ **Notice:** When you hear people of another faith spoken of as "they", picture one real person instead. What changes in how the sentence sounds?

☐ **Do:** Share something across faith lines: a meal, a greeting on a neighbour's festival, or a few extra steps walking a guest on their way, as Imam Ali did. If food is involved, ask first what your guests or hosts can eat.

☐ **Learn:** Read the whole of Imam Ali's letter to Malik al-Ashtar (*Nahj al-Balagha*, Letter 53). Copy out one line about how to treat people, and keep it where you will see it.

Aim. Help the circle see that Islam holds a firm claim to truth and a demanding ethic of respect together, without diluting either.

Protect this question. No. 4, on Imam Ali's "two kinds". Guests, reverts and life-long Muslims can all answer it from experience.

Answer notes.

- *Q2.* Pluralism in the strong sense: all religions equally true or equally saving. Tolerance: no coercion or abuse. Coexistence: a shared life under agreed rights. Islam rejects the first (3:85) and accepts the other two: no compulsion (2:256), justice toward all (5:8), and kindness permitted toward peaceful neighbours (60:8).
- *Q3.* No punishment before a messenger (17:15). God's case rests on what He gave and made known (al-Kafi). Those who could find no way are left to His mercy (4:98–99); culpable unbelief is knowing denial. The fate of individuals belongs to God.

Likely questions.

- *"So is my non-Muslim grandmother in hell?"* See "What about everyone else?" Say plainly that no Muslim may pronounce on any individual.
- *"Doesn't the Qur'an say not to befriend Jews and Christians?"* See the "fair question" box (5:51 beside 60:8).
- *"Can I eat at a Christian friend's home, or wish them a happy Christmas?"* See "A closer look"; send detailed questions to a scholar.

Watch for. Some people may be grieving relatives who died outside Islam, and reverts may have non-Muslim families. Never let the salvation question become a verdict on anyone's family. Don't ask a guest to speak for their religion. If someone asks what became of Medina's Jewish tribes, don't improvise: the chapter does not cover it, so put it in the question box for a scholar.

Bring. A printed copy of Letter 53 with the "two kinds" passage marked. Or bring a dish to share, and invite a neighbour of another faith to your next open session, if your centre welcomes guests.

MY THREAD · CHAPTER 16

Who is my "equal in creation" whom I have never really tried to know?

MY QUESTION FOR THE BOX

NOTES

CHAPTER 17 · ETHICS

17

Women in Islam

Addressed by God in her own name.

مَنْ عَمِلَ صَٰلِحًا مِّن ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنثَىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَلَنُحْيِيَنَّهُۥ حَيَوٰةً طَيِّبَةً وَلَنَجْزِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْرَهُم بِأَحْسَنِ مَا كَانُوا۟ يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٩٧﴾

Whoever does good, male or female, and is a believer, We will give a good life, and reward them for the best of what they did.

QUR'AN 16:97 · SURAT AL-NAHL

A NOTE OF CARE This chapter touches texts and laws that have sometimes been used to hurt women, and some of us carry that hurt. No one will be asked to share their own story; speak from the texts, listen generously, and know that you may pass at any time.

WATCH · EPISODE 13 · 10:55

youtu.be/Ol2k7j82E_s

In the video: why shutting away half of humanity's gifts would wound us all (3:39)

Reading time: about 20 minutes

A woman has come home to a city she has never lived in. Years ago Asma' bint 'Umays left Mecca with her husband, Ja'far ibn Abi Talib, the Prophet's cousin and Imam Ali's brother. They were among the first Muslims to escape persecution by crossing the sea to Abyssinia. Now, in 628 CE (7 AH), the exiles have come back. The Prophet (s) is so glad to hear that Ja'far has come that he cannot say which makes him happier, his cousin's return or the victory just won at Khaybar.[1]

While Asma' was away, the Qur'an kept coming, verse by verse. She goes to the Prophet's wives. "Has anything of the Qur'an come down about us?"

"No," they tell her.

So she goes to the Prophet himself. "Messenger of God, women are failing and losing."

"Why is that?"

"Because they are not mentioned for good, the way men are."

According to an early report preserved by the Shia commentator al-Tabrisi (d. 1154 CE), God answered her with a verse.[2] It names women not once but ten times: men who surrender and women who surrender, men who believe and women who believe, men who are truthful and women who are truthful, and on through ten pairs of virtues, to forgiveness and a great reward for them all (Qur'an 33:35).

Asma' did not ask whether women were loved, protected or useful. She asked whether God spoke to them by name. Many people still ask a sharper version of her question. Does Islam see a woman as a full person, answerable to God for herself? Or does it fold her into the men around her?

THE BIG QUESTION

Does Islam see a woman as a full person?

Have you ever wondered whether the headlines are right, and Islam keeps women small? Or what rights a Muslim woman actually has: to learn, to earn, to choose a husband, to leave a bad marriage? Or, if you grew up Muslim, which of the things you were told about women came from God, and which from custom?

> This chapter listens to the women of the Qur'an and of the Prophet's family, and it reads the hardest verses and sayings in the open.

WORDS TO KNOW

nafs wāḥida (نفس واحدة) · *NAFS WAA-hi-da* · "a single soul": the Qur'an's phrase for the one shared origin of women and men (4:1).

mahr (مهر) · *MAHR* · the marriage gift a husband owes his wife. It belongs to her alone, to keep or to give.

qiwāma (قوامة) · *qi-WAA-ma* · a husband's responsibility to provide for and take charge of his household (4:34).

nushūz (نشوز) · *nu-SHOOZ* · serious defiance of the marriage bond, by a wife or by a husband (4:34; 4:128).

khulʿ (خلع) · *KHUL'* · a divorce a wife asks for, returning her marriage gift or other property.

mujtahida (مجتهدة) · *muj-TA-hi-da* · a woman qualified to derive Islamic law herself, directly from its sources.

◆

Whom does God speak to?

Asma' was not the only woman who asked. Umm Salama, one of the Prophet's wives, asked why the Qur'an praised the men who emigrated for their faith but not the women. Another woman came to the Prophet (s) on behalf of the women: "Is God not the Lord of men and women, and are you not His messenger to us all? Then why does God mention the men and not us?"[3]

Each time, commentators report, a verse came in reply. Umm Salama's answer was this: "I will not let the work of any worker among you go to waste, male or female. You are of one another" (Qur'an 3:195).

"You are of one another" is where the Qur'an begins. The chapter called *The Women* opens: "Humankind, be mindful of your Lord, who created you from a single soul, created its mate from it, and from the two of them spread out many men and women" (Qur'an 4:1). The Qur'an never mentions a rib. The great modern Shia commentator al-Tabataba'i (d. 1981 CE) read "from it" as "of the same kind," and found nothing in the verse about a woman cut from a man.[4]

The garden story agrees. Satan whispers to both of them; both eat from the tree; both feel their shame. Then both turn back together: "Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves. If You do not forgive us and have mercy on us, we will surely be among the lost" (Qur'an 7:23). When the Qur'an names one of them for the slip, it names Adam (20:121). Jews and Christians have read the story in Genesis in many ways. The

Qur'an's telling leaves no room for blaming Eve, or for passing any guilt to her daughters.

Here is the answer Asma' received.

إِنَّ ٱلْمُسْلِمِينَ وَٱلْمُسْلِمَٰتِ وَٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَٱلْمُؤْمِنَٰتِ وَٱلْقَٰنِتِينَ
وَٱلْقَٰنِتَٰتِ وَٱلصَّٰدِقِينَ وَٱلصَّٰدِقَٰتِ وَٱلصَّٰبِرِينَ وَٱلصَّٰبِرَٰتِ وَٱلْخَٰشِعِينَ
وَٱلْخَٰشِعَٰتِ وَٱلْمُتَصَدِّقِينَ وَٱلْمُتَصَدِّقَٰتِ وَٱلصَّٰٓئِمِينَ وَٱلصَّٰٓئِمَٰتِ
وَٱلْحَٰفِظِينَ فُرُوجَهُمْ وَٱلْحَٰفِظَٰتِ وَٱلذَّٰكِرِينَ ٱللَّهَ كَثِيرًا وَٱلذَّٰكِرَٰتِ
أَعَدَّ ٱللَّهُ لَهُم مَّغْفِرَةً وَأَجْرًا عَظِيمًا ﴿٣٥﴾

Muslim men and Muslim women, believing men and believing women, devout men and devout women, truthful men and truthful women, patient men and patient women, humble men and humble women, charitable men and charitable women, fasting men and fasting women, men who guard their chastity and women who guard theirs, men who remember God often and women who remember Him: for them God has prepared forgiveness and a great reward.

QUR'AN 33:35 · SURAT AL-AHZAB

NOTICE Arabic usually lets one masculine plural cover a mixed group. This verse refuses the shortcut. It names every quality twice, once for men and once for women: ten pairs, and a single reward.

Notice what is shared. Not one of these virtues belongs to one sex alone, and neither does the reward (see also 16:97). Every soul, the Qur'an says, once answered God's question "Am I not your Lord?" with the same "Yes" (7:172). The same prayer, fast, alms (*zakat*) and pilgrimage fall on women and men alike, and each answers for their own. A God who asks the same of both does not see one of them as half a person.

Shutting away the gifts of half of humanity would leave all of us poorer.

Who are the women God spoke to?

The Qur'an calls only one woman by her name: Mary (a), Maryam in Arabic. It names her thirty-four times and gives her a sura, a chapter, of her own.[5] Her mother had promised her unborn child to God's service, expecting a son. "My Lord," she said, "I have given birth to a girl." The Qur'an adds: "God knew best what she had borne, and the male is not like the female" (Qur'an 3:36). Al-Tabataba'i read the last words as God's own comment: the boy she had hoped for could never have become what this girl would be.[6]

Mary grew up in a place of prayer, in the prophet Zechariah's care. Whenever he came in, he found food beside her. "Mary, where does this come from?" "It is from God," she said. "God provides for whomever He wills, beyond all reckoning" (3:37). Moved by her words, the old prophet prayed then and there for a child of his own (3:38). Later the angels came to her.

وَإِذْ قَالَتِ ٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ يَٰمَرْيَمُ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ ٱصْطَفَىٰكِ وَطَهَّرَكِ وَٱصْطَفَىٰكِ عَلَىٰ نِسَآءِ ٱلْعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿٤٢﴾ يَٰمَرْيَمُ ٱقْنُتِى لِرَبِّكِ وَٱسْجُدِى وَٱرْكَعِى مَعَ ٱلرَّٰكِعِينَ ﴿٤٣﴾

And when the angels said, "Mary, God has chosen you and purified you. He has chosen you above the women of all the worlds. Mary, be devoted to your Lord, bow down in prostration, and bow with those who bow."[7]

QUR'AN 3:42–43 · SURAT AL 'IMRAN

NOTICE Here the angels call her by name twice. Al-Tabataba'i heard two messages in the double call: first, what God has given her; then, what she gives back to Him in worship.

She was not the only woman God addressed. He inspired the mother of Moses: "Nurse him, and when you fear for him, cast him into the river. Do not fear and do not grieve" (28:7). He also holds up Pharaoh's wife, who begged to be saved from Pharaoh, as an example "for those who believe" (66:11), men included.

The Prophet (s) once drew four lines on the ground and explained them: the best women of paradise are four, Khadija daughter of Khuwaylid, Fatima daughter of Muhammad, Mary daughter of ʿImran, and Asiya daughter of Muzahim, the wife of Pharaoh.[8]

A report in al-Kafi, the great Shia hadith collection, has Lady Khadija (a), a woman of means in Mecca, speak for herself at her own wedding. Its chain is weak; read it as a story. When her uncle stumbled over his reply, she spoke instead: "Uncle, you may stand for me before witnesses, but you have no more right over me than I have over myself. Muhammad, I give myself to you in marriage, and the dowry is on me, from my own wealth."[9]

She was among the first to believe in him. Imam Ali (a), the first Imam (d. 661 CE), remembered those days: "Islam gathered no household then except the Messenger of God and Khadija, and I was the third of them."[10]

Their daughter, Lady Fatima (a), was the one her father called "a part of me: whoever gladdens her gladdens me, and whoever grieves her grieves me."[11] Like Mary, she was spoken to by an angel. She lived only seventy-five days after her father died in 632 CE (11 AH). Imam Jaʿfar al-Sadiq (a), the sixth Imam (d. 765 CE), taught that in those days of grief the angel Gabriel came to console her. He told her of her father and his place with God, and of what would befall her children, while Ali wrote it down.[12]

Fatima also spoke in public. After her father's death she pressed her claim to Fadak, an estate she held to be hers, in an open address. One passage, on why God gave His laws, survives in one of the four great Shia collections, compiled by al-Saduq (d. 991 CE).

LADY FATIMA (A), DAUGHTER OF THE PROPHET (S)

فَفَرَضَ اَللَّهُ اَلْإِيمَانَ تَطْهِيراً مِنَ اَلشِّرْكِ وَ اَلصَّلاَةَ تَنْزِيهاً عَنِ اَلْكِبْرِ وَ اَلزَّكَاةَ زِيَادَةً فِي اَلرِّزْقِ وَ اَلصِّيَامَ تَبْيِيناً لِلْإِخْلاَصِ وَ اَلْحَجَّ تَسْنِيَةً لِلدِّينِ وَ اَلْعَدْلَ تَسْكِيناً لِلْقُلُوبِ وَ اَلطَّاعَةَ نِظَاماً لِلْمِلَّةِ وَ اَلْإِمَامَةَ لَمّاً مِنَ اَلْفُرْقَةِ ... وَ بِرَّ اَلْوَالِدَيْنِ وِقَايَةً عَنِ اَلسَّخَطِ وَ صِلَةَ اَلْأَرْحَامِ مَنْمَاةً لِلْعَدَدِ وَ اَلْقِصَاصَ حَقْناً لِلدِّمَاءِ

God made faith a duty, to cleanse you of idolatry; prayer, to lift you above arrogance; zakat, to increase your provision; fasting, to make sincerity plain; the pilgrimage, to raise the religion high; justice, to bring hearts to rest; obedience, to give the community order; and the Imamate, to gather it from division... kindness to parents, as a shield from God's anger; ties of kinship, to make you many; and just retribution, to spare lives.[13]

al-Faqih 3 · Divorce · ch. 26 · no. 10 · **Unverified chain**

A report, with an unverified chain, says who carried these words: "from Zaynab, daughter of the Commander of the Faithful [Imam Ali], from Fatima." If so, one woman's theology survived in her daughter's memory, and that daughter, Lady Zaynab (a), would need every word.

A STORY FROM THE SOURCES

"Being killed was written for them"

Kufa, 680 CE (61 AH). Days after the massacre at Karbala, the survivors of the Prophet's family stand as captives before the governor, 'Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad. Among them is Zaynab (a), daughter of Ali and Fatima, whose brother Imam Husayn (a) has been killed.

The governor gloats: "Praise be to God, who has disgraced you, killed you and shown your stories to be lies."

Zaynab answers: "Praise be to God, who honoured us with Muhammad and purified us thoroughly. It is only the corrupt whom God disgraces, and the wicked whom He shows to be liars."

"How did you find what God did to your family?"

"Being killed was written for them, so they went out to their resting places (Qur'an 3:154). God will bring you and them together, and you will argue your cases before Him."

The man who remembered her words was the governor's own doorkeeper.[14]

> PAUSE AND RECALL
>
> *What did Asma' ask, and how did Qur'an 33:35 answer her? Name two women from this chapter, and one thing each of them did.*

◆

Daughter, sister, mother, and more?

Every woman is someone's daughter, and that is where Arabia before Islam could fail her. The Qur'an describes a man who hears that he has a daughter: "his face darkens, and he chokes back his grief." He hides from people, wondering whether to keep her in disgrace "or bury her in the dust" (16:58–59). On the Last Day, it warns, the buried girl herself will be asked "for what sin she was killed" (81:8–9). God takes up her case in her own name.

The Prophet (s), Imam al-Sadiq (a) said, "was a father of daughters." In a less securely transmitted report, the Imam scolds a companion who sulked over a newborn daughter: "A fragrant flower for you to smell, whose provision is already guaranteed." The Prophet promised paradise to anyone who supported three daughters or three sisters. "And two?" someone asked. "And two." "And one?" "And one."[15]

Then there is Moses' sister. When their mother cast the baby into the river, she sent the girl after him. Unseen, she followed, then walked up to Pharaoh's household

with an offer: "Shall I show you a family who will care for him?" Through her nerve, God brought her brother home (28:11–13).

A mother is owed a debt no child can repay. The Qur'an remembers that "his mother carried him, weakness upon weakness" (31:14). A young man told the Prophet (s) he longed to fight, but his mother objected. "Go back and stay with your mother," the Prophet replied, in a report with a weak chain. "Her comfort in you for one night is better than a year of your fighting in God's way."[16]

Yet no single role contains a whole person. The Prophet (s) said, "Seeking knowledge is a duty for every Muslim," and "Muslim" there means women and men alike.[17] Nusrat Amin (1886–1983 CE) of Isfahan was recognised by senior scholars as a *mujtahida*, a woman qualified to derive Islamic law herself. She wrote a fifteen-volume commentary on the Qur'an and founded a school in her city.[18]

What a woman owns is hers. The Qur'an tells husbands to give women their marriage gifts outright (4:4), and says, "Men have a share of what they earn, and women have a share of what they earn" (4:32). Al-Sistani, a leading Shia authority today, rules that a working wife need not hand her wages to her husband, and that he has no right to make her. If she chooses to help, that is her generosity. A husband also "has no right to compel his wife to do housework."[19]

Her consent is hers too: no marriage is valid without it. Al-Sistani adds that a virgin bride also needs her father's or paternal grandfather's consent, unless he blocks every suitable match or cannot give it.[20]

The Qur'an also gives women a public voice. Believing women and men are "allies of one another: they urge what is right and forbid what is wrong" (9:71). Women gave the Prophet their own pledge of allegiance (60:12). And the Qur'an's portrait of a woman ruler, the Queen of Sheba, shows her consulting her counsellors ("I decide nothing unless you are present") and choosing a gift over war (27:32–35). In the end she submits not to Solomon (a) but "with Solomon, to God" (27:44).

Today's jurists draw some lines. Al-Sistani holds that a *marja'*, the senior scholar whom others follow in religious law, must be a man, and that men must be led in prayer by a man. His rulings also envisage a woman leading other women in prayer.[21] On questions like these, check the rulings of the scholar you follow (your *marja'*).

> *"I will not let the work of any worker among you go to waste, male or female.*
>
> QUR'AN 3:195

What about the hard texts?

Some texts trouble many readers, Muslim and not. They deserve to be read whole. The hardest concerns a marriage in crisis.

ٱلرِّجَالُ قَوَّٰمُونَ عَلَى ٱلنِّسَآءِ بِمَا فَضَّلَ ٱللَّهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَىٰ بَعْضٍ وَبِمَآ
أَنفَقُوا۟ مِنْ أَمْوَٰلِهِمْ ۚ فَٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتُ قَٰنِتَٰتٌ حَٰفِظَٰتٌ لِّلْغَيْبِ بِمَا حَفِظَ
ٱللَّهُ ۚ وَٱلَّٰتِى تَخَافُونَ نُشُوزَهُنَّ فَعِظُوهُنَّ وَٱهْجُرُوهُنَّ فِى ٱلْمَضَاجِعِ
وَٱضْرِبُوهُنَّ ۖ فَإِنْ أَطَعْنَكُمْ فَلَا تَبْغُوا۟ عَلَيْهِنَّ سَبِيلًا ۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ
عَلِيًّا كَبِيرًا ﴿٣٤﴾

Men are in charge of women, because God has given some of them an advantage over others, and because they spend from their wealth. So righteous women are devout, guarding in their husbands' absence what God has guarded. As for those whose defiance you fear: counsel them, leave them alone in bed, and strike them. If they obey you, seek no way against them. God is most high, most great.[22]

QUR'AN 4:34 · SURAT AL-NISA'

NOTICE The verse ends with two names of God. Two great Shia commentators heard in them a warning to husbands: God stands above them, and takes a wife's part when she is too weak to take her own.

The verse puts husbands in charge of the household, *qiwama*, and ties this to their duty to pay its costs. It does not say what the "advantage" is. Classical commentators, al-Tabrisi among them, took it to mean men's greater knowledge, reason, judgement and resolve. Al-Tabataba'i agreed, but insisted in the same breath that a husband's charge gives him no say over his wife's property, and no power to stop her defending

her rights. He read men's charge beyond the household, to cover government, judging and war.[23]

Nushuz is not ordinary disagreement. It is serious defiance of the marriage bond, and the Qur'an uses the same word for a husband who turns against his wife (4:128). The steps are graded: counsel first, then distance, and only then the last step. The next verse calls for an arbiter from his family and one from hers, to try to reconcile the couple (4:35). Al-Tabrisi records that Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a), the fifth Imam (d. c. 733 CE), explained the second step as a husband turning his back in bed, and the third as a blow "with the *siwak*," a tooth-cleaning twig.[24]

The Prophet (s) put his view of men who hit their wives into one question.

> **THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD (S), AS REPORTED BY IMAM AL-BAQIR (A)**
>
> أَيَضْرِبُ أَحَدُكُمُ الْمَرْأَةَ ثُمَّ يَظَلُّ مُعَانِقَهَا
>
> Would one of you strike his wife, and then go on holding her in his arms?[25]
>
> al-Kafi 5 · Marriage · ch. 151 · no. 1 · **Reliable chain**

The Imams held up a different picture of a husband. Asked what a wife is owed, Imam al-Sadiq (a) said: "He feeds her well, clothes her, and if she acts foolishly, he forgives her." He added: "My father had a wife who used to hurt him, and he would forgive her."[26]

Imam Zayn al-Abidin (a), the fourth Imam (d. c. 713 CE), wrote in his *Treatise on Rights*: "Your wife's right is that you know God made her a place of rest and companionship for you, a blessing from God to you, so honour her and be gentle with her. Even if your right over her is the weightier, she has a claim on you: your mercy, because she is your captive."[27] He turns her dependence into a reason for mercy, not a licence for power. The Qur'an strikes that balance: "Women have rights like the duties upon them, according to what is right, and men have a degree above them" (2:228). Al-Tabrisi called its first half one of the Qur'an's wondrous phrases.[28]

Al-Sistani rules that a husband must provide his wife with food, clothing and housing. Any shortfall becomes a debt he owes her. He adds that "one of the rights of a wife is that her husband must not subject her to harassment or abuse."[29] A wife who dislikes her husband can seek a *khul'* divorce, giving back her marriage gift. If a husband will neither maintain her nor release her, the *marja'* or his deputy can end the marriage for her.[30] Imam al-Baqir (a) said the same long ago: if a man fails to clothe and feed his wife, "it is the duty of the Imam to separate them."[31]

A son inherits twice a daughter's share (4:11). A well-known sceptic asked why "the poor, weak woman" takes one share and the man two. Imam al-Sadiq replied that a woman owes no military service, no maintenance and no share of blood-money: those fall on men.[32] The ratio is not universal. Alongside children, each parent takes a sixth (4:11). In Shia law, if a man leaves one daughter and one parent, the daughter takes three-quarters, and nothing goes to his brothers or uncles. One Shia rule cuts the other way: a widow inherits from the value of buildings and trees, but not from the land itself.[33]

Testimony depends on the matter. For written debts, the Qur'an asks for two men, or a man and two women, "so that if one of them errs, the other can remind her" (2:282). In matters men do not see, Imam al-Sadiq (a) accepted women as witnesses on their own, and a midwife's word alone about a birth.[34]

A FAIR QUESTION

Didn't Imam Ali call women "deficient"?

"Nahj al-Balagha has Imam Ali call women deficient in faith, in shares and in reason. How can that sit beside 33:35?"

The words are there, and they should be read, not hidden. The compiler places them just after the Battle of the Camel in 656 CE (36 AH), when an army that followed 'A'isha, a widow of the Prophet, fought Imam Ali (a). The sermon explains each "deficiency" by a rule of law: no prayer or fasting during menstruation, the testimony rule of 2:282, and inheritance shares. Yet even then, Imam al-Baqir (a) taught, a woman sits at each prayer time and remembers God for as long as her prayer would take. The sermon ends by warning men against wicked women, and telling them to be wary even of good ones and not to obey them "in what is right, so that they do not covet what is wrong."[35]

A letter to his son in the same book warns against consulting women, "for their opinion tends to weakness and their resolve to feebleness," and calls a woman "a flower, not a steward." Al-Kafi, compiled earlier, preserves part of this passage without the line on consulting, and explains the flower: sparing her such burdens is "more comfortable for her condition."[36]

Nahj al-Balagha was compiled some 350 years after Imam Ali, without chains of narrators. The Imams' own rule for any report is: "Whatever agrees with the Book of God, take it; whatever contradicts it, leave it."[37] By that rule, no reading of these lines can make a woman's faith count for less with God. The Qur'an settled that in 33:35.

◆

Beauty for sale, or dignity within?

Today's world has its own ways of making a woman small. It sells cars, perfume and phones with her hair, her body, her eyes and her face. Her beauty becomes the product, and her worth rises and falls with it. Islam stands against that trade. It honours a woman from the inside out.

Modesty in the Qur'an begins with men: "Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and guard their chastity" (24:30). Only then does it turn to women, asking the same of them and adding that they draw their head-coverings over their chests (24:31). In al-Sistani's rulings, "it is unlawful for a man to look at the body or hair of non-maḥram [Muslim] women, be it with lust or without lust," that is, outside his close

family. A woman covers her hair and body, apart from face and hands, before men outside hers.[38]

The duty is hers before God. It gives no one a licence to harm her: the Qur'an warns that those who hurt believing women or men without cause "bear slander and a flagrant sin" (33:58).

Asma' asked whether women were mentioned for good. Her answer still stands in every copy of the Qur'an: women named beside men, quality by quality, with one reward. Mary (a) was called by her name. Fatima (a) was consoled by an angel. Zaynab (a) spoke, and her enemy's own doorkeeper remembered it. A woman reading these pages, Muslim or not, is invited to hear the same address. Here is a faith in which she may grow, think, act, love and worship, and in the end return to God, answerable for herself and welcomed for herself.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. When Asma' asked about women, the Qur'an answered by naming women beside men, virtue by virtue (33:35).
2. Women and men come from one soul; the Qur'an never blames Eve, and both repented together.
3. Mary, Khadija, Fatima and Zaynab believed, spoke, owned, taught and stood up to power.
4. Women own their dowry and earnings, must consent to marriage, and may request divorce or seek it through the *marjaʿ*.
5. Hard texts are read openly: the Prophet rebuked striking a wife, and today's law forbids abuse.

NEXT TIME · GO FURTHER

Next time: *The Family Unit in Islam.* Love is a feeling. Family is a promise kept. What holds a family together when the feeling fades?

Go further:

Courses: Introduction to Islamic Ethics and Fiqh Made Easy: Practical Principles, Level 1 courses at Tasneem Institute (tasneeminstitute.org/courses/introduction-to-islamic-ethics; tasneeminstitute.org/courses/fiqh-made-easy-practical-principles)
Read: Imam Zayn al-Abidin's *Treatise on Rights* (*Risalat al-huquq*), especially the rights of the mother and the wife; and Sura 19, *Maryam*.
Watch: Invitation to Islam, Episode 13, "Women in Islam" (11 min).

In the circle

LOOK BACK

1. In Chapter 16, Imam Ali said every person is one of two kinds. What were they?
2. Chapter 13 said no atom's weight of good is ever lost (Qur'an 99:7–8). Whom does that include?
3. Part Two asks whether Islam is good. What would it need to say about women to convince you?

TALK ABOUT IT

WARM-UP

1. Which woman, in your family or beyond, first showed you what faith or courage looks like? What did she do? You needn't say more than you wish.

UNDERSTAND

2. What did Asma' bint 'Umays ask the Prophet, and how does Qur'an 33:35 answer her? Why might it name women separately?
3. How does the chapter read Qur'an 4:34 alongside 4:35, 4:128, Imam al-Baqir's explanation and the Prophet's question about striking a wife?

REFLECT

4. Zaynab answered a governor in his own court, days after Karbala. What do you think gave her the words, and where do you see that courage today?
5. Which line in this chapter was hardest for you to read, and which was most freeing? You needn't say why.

APPLY

6. Think of one place you belong to: a mosque, a workplace or a family table. What one change would let women's knowledge and experience be heard there more fully?

GO DEEPER

7. Read Imam al-Sadiq's answer about a wife's rights and his father's marriage (al-Kafi, vol. 5, Book of Marriage, ch. 152, no. 1; reliable chain). What kind of husband does it hold up?
8. Read Qur'an 19:16–34, the story of Mary and the angel. Who speaks to Mary, what does she say back, and who speaks for her when she is accused?

CARRY IT HOME

Choose one way in this week:

☐ **Notice:** As you scroll, shop or walk past billboards, notice how women appear in advertising. What is being sold, and what is she being used to sell?

☐ **Do:** Thank a woman whose care or teaching you have taken for granted: a mother, a sister, a teacher or a colleague. Tell her one specific thing she gave you, in person, by message or in a letter.

☐ **Learn:** Read Sura 19, *Maryam*, the only sura that bears a woman's name, in a translation. Mark every time someone speaks to Mary, and every time she speaks. What does she say?

Aim. Help the circle hear the Qur'an and the Prophet's family addressing women as full persons, and face the hard texts together, honestly and without fear.

Protect this question. No. 5: "Which line was hardest to read, and which was most freeing?" It lets every reader name their own response without having to defend it.

Answer notes.

- *Q2.* She asked whether anything had been revealed about women, since they were "not mentioned for good" like men. 33:35 names women beside men in ten virtues, with one reward.
- *Q3.* Graded steps (counsel, distance, a last step), family arbitration (4:35), the same word *nushuz* used of husbands (4:128), Imam al-Baqir's *siwak*, the Prophet's rebuke (reliable chain), and al-Sistani's ban on abuse, with routes to divorce.

Likely questions.

- *"Why does a daughter inherit half?"* See "What about the hard texts?"
- *"Can women be scholars, or lead prayer?"* See "Daughter, sister, mother, and more?"
- *"Isn't there a hadith against teaching women to write?"* A report in al-Faqih (vol. 3, ch. 32, no. 11) says so. It is outside al-Bihbudi's selection of sound reports and clashes with the duty to seek knowledge.

Watch for. Read the care note aloud. Some people present may have lived through coercion or abuse, sometimes justified in religion's name. Never ask anyone to share, never debate anyone's experience, and never make one woman speak for all women. Keep Fadak and the Camel historical, not sectarian.

Bring. A Qur'an open at Sura 19, and the contact details of a local family-support or domestic-violence service, left on the table for anyone to take.

MY THREAD · CHAPTER 17

Which woman's voice in this chapter do I most need to hear, and why?

MY QUESTION FOR THE BOX

NOTES

CHAPTER 18 · ETHICS

18

The Family Unit in Islam

Love is a feeling. Family is a promise kept.

وَمِنْ ءَايَٰتِهِۦٓ أَنْ خَلَقَ لَكُم مِّنْ أَنفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَٰجًا لِّتَسْكُنُوٓا۟ إِلَيْهَا وَجَعَلَ بَيْنَكُم مَّوَدَّةً وَرَحْمَةً إِنَّ فِى ذَٰلِكَ لَءَايَٰتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ ﴿٢١﴾

Among His signs is this: He created for you spouses from among yourselves, so that you might find rest in them, and He placed between you love and mercy. In that there are signs for people who reflect.

QUR'AN 30:21 · SURAT AL-RUM

A NOTE OF CARE Families hold deep love and, for some of us, deep hurt: homes that broke or were not safe, and people we have lost. No one needs to describe their own family tonight or share more than they choose; safety comes first, and whoever is leading knows where to find local support.

WATCH · EPISODE 22 · 12:59

youtu.be/EO3M2nLLdDM

In the video: the circle of life, from a newborn's night feeds to an ageing parent's care (6:52)

Reading time: about 15 minutes

It is evening in Medina, and two men of the Prophet's family are quarrelling. One is Ja'far al-Sadiq (a), a descendant of the Prophet, whom Shia Muslims follow as their sixth Imam (d. 765 CE). The other is his cousin 'Abd Allah, from the line of Imam Hasan (a), the Prophet's elder grandson. Words fly. Voices rise until a crowd gathers to watch. When the two men part for the night, the anger is still between them.

Early the next morning Safwan, a camel-hirer and one of the Imam's companions, sets out on an errand. As he passes 'Abd Allah's house, he is surprised. The Imam is standing at the door, asking the maid to call her master out.

'Abd Allah appears in the doorway. "What brings you here so early?"

"Last night I was reciting the Book of God," the Imam says, "and I came to a verse that would not let me rest."

"Which verse?"

The Imam recites it. It praises "those who join what God has commanded to be joined, who stand in awe of their Lord and fear a hard reckoning" (Qur'an 13:21).

"You are right," 'Abd Allah says. "It is as if I had never read that verse before." The two men embrace, and they weep.[1]

The report never says who won the argument. By nightfall the feeling between the two men had soured. By dawn something stronger than feeling had brought one of them back to the other's door. Most families know nights like that one. Love rises and falls with tiredness, money, illness and old wounds. So what holds a family together on the morning after?

THE BIG QUESTION

What holds a family together, and what do we owe one another inside it?

Have you ever wondered whether a faith born in seventh-century Arabia has anything to say to families with two jobs, long commutes and parents who live into their nineties? How anyone is meant to raise children, keep a marriage warm and care for an ageing parent, all in the same week? Or, if you grew up Muslim, whether Islam really asks you to obey your parents in everything?

This chapter looks at what the Qur'an and the Prophet's family teach about marriage, children, parents and kin, and at what they say when a family breaks.

WORDS TO KNOW

mawadda wa raḥma (مودة ورحمة) · *ma-WAD-da wa RAH-ma* · love and mercy: the bond God places between spouses, love that acts and mercy that meets need (Qur'an 30:21).

mīthāq (ميثاق) · *mee-THAAQ* · a binding covenant. The Qur'an calls marriage "a solid pledge" (4:21), words it also uses for God's covenants.

amāna (أمانة) · *a-MAA-na* · a trust held on someone else's behalf and answered for later; parents hold their children as one.

birr al-wālidayn (بر الوالدين) · *BIRR al-waa-li-DAYN* · generous, devoted kindness to one's parents, in their lifetime and after their death.

ʿuqūq (عقوق) · *ʿu-QOOQ* · wounding, neglecting or disowning one's parents, counted among the major sins.

ṣilat al-raḥim (صلة الرحم) · *SI-lat ar-RA-him* · keeping the ties of kinship with the wider family; literally, "joining the womb."

◆

Why call a marriage a promise?

The Qur'an counts marriage among God's signs, alongside the rain that revives dead land. "Among His signs is this," it says: "He created for you spouses from among yourselves, so that you might find rest in them, and He placed between you love and mercy" (Qur'an 30:21). Rest comes first: the calm of coming home to someone. Then it uses two words for love.

The Shia commentator al-Tabataba'i (d. 1981 CE) explained the difference. *Mawadda*, he wrote, is love that shows itself in action. *Rahma*, mercy, is what stirs in us when we see someone in need, and it moves us to help.[2] Romance can carry a couple through a honeymoon. Mercy carries them through a hospital waiting room. The household, al-Tabataba'i added, is one of the great homes of both. On a larger scale, the same love and mercy are at work across a whole society.

Feelings rise and fall, and the Qur'an knows it. So it adds a harder word. A husband who wants to replace his wife, it says, may not take back the dowry he gave her, even a heap of gold. Then it asks:

وَكَيْفَ تَأْخُذُونَهُۥ وَقَدْ أَفْضَىٰ بَعْضُكُمْ إِلَىٰ بَعْضٍ وَأَخَذْنَ مِنكُم مِّيثَٰقًا غَلِيظًا ﴿٢١﴾

How could you take it back, when you have come so close to each other, and they have taken from you a solid pledge?

QUR'AN 4:21 · SURAT AL-NISA'

NOTICE Look at who holds the pledge: "they have taken from you." The Qur'an uses "a solid pledge" only three times: here, for God's covenant with His prophets (33:7), and for the covenant at Sinai (4:154).

That phrase, "a solid pledge" (*mithaq ghaliz*), is what this book means by calling family a promise kept. A marriage begins with a spoken contract, but the Qur'an describes it in the language of covenant, the language it uses for God's pact with His prophets (Qur'an 33:7). Love is a feeling, and feelings change. A promise made before God can be kept on the days when the feeling runs thin. Often, in the keeping, the feeling comes back.

Within that covenant, each spouse has rights and duties: a shared trust, not a ranking of worth. The husband carries the duty of care for the household (*qiwama*). In the rulings of Ayatollah al-Sistani, a leading Shia legal authority today, he must provide his wife's food, clothing and housing. Unpaid support becomes a debt he owes her, and he must never harass or abuse her.[3] Chapter 17 looks honestly at the verse most often quoted on this subject (Qur'an 4:34).

Raising children is shared work too. The Qur'an pictures a mother and father deciding when to wean their baby "by mutual consent and consultation" (Qur'an 2:233). Couples who talk before the wedding about how they hope to raise their children are following its lead.

Shia Muslims look to one home above all as a model. It is the household of Imam Ali (a), the Prophet's cousin and the first Imam (d. 661 CE), and Lady Fatima (a), the Prophet's daughter (d. 632 CE). Their descendant Imam al-Sadiq (a) described its daily work in a single sentence.

IMAM JA'FAR AL-SADIQ (A), THE SIXTH IMAM

كَانَ أَمِيرُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ صَلَوَاتُ اللهِ عَلَيْهِ يَحْتَطِبُ وَيَسْتَقِي وَيَكْنُسُ وَكَانَتْ فَاطِمَةُ سَلامُ اللهِ عَلَيْهَا تَطْحَنُ وَتَعْجِنُ وَتَخْبِزُ.

The Commander of the Faithful [Imam Ali] (a) used to gather firewood, draw water and sweep, and Fatima (a) used to grind the grain, knead the dough and bake.[4]

al-Kafi 5 · Livelihood · ch. 11 · no. 1 · **Reliable chain**

Al-Kulayni (d. 941 CE) placed this report in *al-Kafi*, the best-known Shia collection of hadith (reports of the Prophet and Imams), under the heading "A man's work in his house." A weaker report adds that the Prophet (s) milked his family's goat himself.[5] The picture is not of a man who rules while a woman serves. It is of two people sharing hard work in a house with very little, and meeting the hardest days with prayer.

A STORY FROM THE SOURCES

Better than a servant

In a report preserved by the scholar al-Saduq (d. 991 CE), Imam Ali (a) describes the same house. Fatima drew water until the waterskin marked her chest, turned the hand mill until her hands blistered, and swept until her clothes were grey with dust. Ali urged her to ask her father for a servant.

She went, but found the Prophet (s) with visitors and was too shy to ask. Early next morning he came to their door while they were still under their blanket. He greeted them three times before they answered, embarrassed. He sat by their heads and asked what she had needed.

Ali explained. "Shall I not teach you both something better for you than a servant?" the Prophet said. At bedtime, say *Allahu akbar* (God is greater) thirty-four times, *subhan Allah* (glory be to God) thirty-three times and *al-hamdu lillah* (praise be to God) thirty-three times. Fatima lifted her head: "I am content with God and His Messenger."[6]

In this report Fatima draws the water; in the one above, Ali does. Together they sketch a home where everyone carried the load. Shia Muslims still recite this "glorification of Fatima" after their daily prayers.

◆

What does a child have a right to?

People often call children a trust (*amana*): something placed in our hands that is not finally ours. The Lebanese-American poet Kahlil Gibran (d. 1931 CE) put it memorably. Children, he wrote, "come through you but not from you, / And though they are with you yet they belong not to you."[7] Islam agrees that no child is a parent's property. Every child belongs to God.

Imam Zayn al-Abidin (a), the Prophet's great-grandson and the fourth Imam (d. c. 713 CE), puts it differently, and more demandingly. His *Treatise on Rights* (*Risalat al-Huquq*) sets out what each person owes to God, to themselves and to others. Of children, he writes:

> **IMAM ZAYN AL-ABIDIN (A), THE FOURTH IMAM**
>
> وَأَمَّا حَقُّ وَلَدِكَ فَأَن تَعْلَمَ أَنَّهُ مِنْكَ وَمُضَافٌ إِلَيْكَ فِي عَاجِلِ الدُّنْيَا بِخَيْرِهِ وَشَرِّهِ، وَأَنَّكَ مَسْئُولٌ عَمَّا وَلَّيْتَهُ بِهِ مِنْ حُسْنِ الأَدَبِ وَالدَّلالَةِ عَلَى رَبِّهِ وَالْمَعُونَةِ لَهُ عَلَى طَاعَتِهِ فَاعْمَلْ فِي أَمْرِهِ عَمَلَ من يعلم أنه مثاب على الإحسان إليه مُعاقب على الإساءة إليه.
>
> The right of your child is that you know your child comes from you, and in this passing world is linked to you in all their good and all their bad; and that you are answerable for what you were given charge of: raising them well, guiding them to their Lord and helping them to obey Him. So deal with your child as one who knows that kindness to them will be rewarded, and harm to them will be punished.[8]
>
> Risalat al-Huquq · The right of the child · **Compiled text, not graded here**

The child is "from you," and the parent will be asked about the trust. The Qur'an states the goal without softening it: "Protect yourselves and your families from a Fire" (Qur'an 66:6). Good parenting aims at a child who does well in this world, and at a child who reaches God.

In many homes today, both parents work long hours to pay for good schools and the things their children need. Those are real gifts. But a child is more than a report card. The aim is an education of mind, heart and soul, in a home where worship is

part of ordinary days. Then the child can grow into an adult who lives their faith and shares their gifts with the world.

Children also have a right to safety, and the Imams spoke about it with force. A report attributed to Imam Musa al-Kazim (a), the seventh Imam (d. 799 CE), says: "When you make a promise to children, keep it, for they see you as the ones who provide for them. God is not angered by anything as He is angered on behalf of women and children."[9] A home of shouting, humiliation or blows betrays the trust at its root.

Discipline has its place; cruelty has none. The Prophet (s) said, "God have mercy on whoever helps his child to be good to him." Asked how, Imam al-Sadiq (a) explained: "He accepts what the child can manage and lets go of what is too hard for him. He does not overburden him, and he is not harsh with him."[10] If you grew up without these things, the failure was not yours. They were your rights.

The Prophet set the tone himself. Once, leading the noon prayer, he shortened its last two units. Afterwards people asked whether something had gone wrong. "Did you not hear the child crying?" he said.[11] In a mosque full of adults at worship, one child's cry still counted.

Rights in a family run in both directions. Imam Ali (a) put both halves into a single saying: "The child has a right over the father, and the father has a right over the child. The father's right is that the child obey him in everything except disobedience to God, the Glorified. The child's right is that the father give him a good name, raise him well and teach him the Qur'an."[12]

> **PAUSE AND RECALL**
>
> *Name two rights of a child, from Imam Zayn al-Abidin or Imam Ali. What limit does Imam Ali set on a parent's right to obedience?*

◆

What do we owe the people who raised us?

The Qur'an's great passage on parents begins with God:

وَقَضَىٰ رَبُّكَ أَلَّا تَعْبُدُوٓا۟ إِلَّآ إِيَّاهُ وَبِٱلْوَٰلِدَيْنِ إِحْسَٰنًا إِمَّا يَبْلُغَنَّ
عِندَكَ ٱلْكِبَرَ أَحَدُهُمَآ أَوْ كِلَاهُمَا فَلَا تَقُل لَّهُمَآ أُفٍّ وَلَا تَنْهَرْهُمَا
وَقُل لَّهُمَا قَوْلًا كَرِيمًا ﴿٢٣﴾ وَٱخْفِضْ لَهُمَا جَنَاحَ ٱلذُّلِّ مِنَ
ٱلرَّحْمَةِ وَقُل رَّبِّ ٱرْحَمْهُمَا كَمَا رَبَّيَانِى صَغِيرًا ﴿٢٤﴾

Your Lord has decreed that you worship no one but Him, and that you treat your parents with goodness. If old age comes to one or both of them in your keeping, do not say "uff" to them, and do not snap at them, but speak to them with honour. Lower for them the wing of humility that comes from mercy, and say: "My Lord, have mercy on the two of them, as they raised me when I was little."

QUR'AN 17:23–24 · SURAT AL-ISRA

NOTICE Goodness to parents shares a sentence with the worship of God. Then the verse narrows to "uff," the smallest sound of impatience, and ends by remembering childhood.

A student once asked Imam al-Sadiq (a) what this goodness (*ihsan*) involves. "It is that you keep them good company," he said, "and that you do not make them ask you for anything they need, even if they could manage without you." Then comes everyday tact: "Do not fill your eyes looking at them except with mercy and tenderness. Do not raise your voice above theirs, or your hand above theirs, and do not walk ahead of them."[13]

Even a sigh counts. "The least form of *'uquq*," the Imam said, "is 'uff.' Had God known anything slighter, He would have forbidden it."[14] He named *'uquq*, wounding or disowning one's parents, among the major sins.[15]

The mother comes first. The Qur'an remembers that she carried her child "in weakness upon weakness" (Qur'an 31:14). Asked to whom a man owed the most devotion, the Prophet (s) answered: "Your mother." "Then who?" "Your mother." "Then who?" "Your mother." "Then who?" "Your father."[16] Imam Zayn al-Abidin (a) writes

that she "did not mind going hungry while she fed you, or thirsty while she gave you drink." The father, he adds, "is your root; without him you would not be."[17]

A FAIR QUESTION

Do I have to obey my parents in everything?

"I'm an adult. Do my parents really get the last word on my marriage, my career, even my faith?"

Obedience is the default, and it has a limit. In the saying of Imam Ali (a) quoted above, a child obeys "in everything except disobedience to God." Elsewhere he made it a rule: "No creature is to be obeyed in disobedience to the Creator."[18] The Qur'an takes the hardest case, parents who push their child away from God: "Do not obey them. Yet keep them company in this world with kindness" (Qur'an 31:15). Refusal and kindness share one verse.

Asked about a mother who demanded that her son divorce his wife, al-Sistani answered that he need not obey her, and that her threat to call him undutiful "has no effect whatsoever." He must still never insult her, and must work to save his marriage.[19] None of this licenses brushing parents aside: their experience deserves a real hearing. On particular cases, check the rulings of the scholar you follow (your *marja'*).

New Muslims often ask whether they still owe all this to parents who do not share their faith. The Qur'an has already answered in 31:15, and so did the Imams. Asked whether a man might pray for parents who did not know the truth, Imam Ali al-Rida (a), the eighth Imam (d. 818 CE), said: "Pray for them and give charity on their behalf. If they are alive, be gentle with them, for the Messenger of God said: 'God sent me with mercy, not with disowning parents.'"[20]

Then the circle turns. A parent who once rose at night for a crying baby, changed nappies and spooned food into a small mouth may one day need the same care. Dementia, Alzheimer's disease and long illness come to many families. A man told Imam al-Sadiq that his father had grown so frail that the family carried him to the toilet. The Imam replied: "If you can see to that for him yourself, do it, and feed him with your own hand, for it will be a shield for you tomorrow."[21]

Islamic law backs that tenderness with duty: a son must provide for parents in need, as a father must for his children.[22] Such care is heavy, especially alongside raising

children, and no one should carry it alone. Siblings can share it, and outside help can keep love from burning out.

◆

How far does a family reach?

The Qur'an names kinship in the same breath as God: "Be mindful of God, in whose name you ask things of one another, and of the ties of kinship" (Qur'an 4:1). God, said Imam al-Sadiq (a), commanded that kinship be kept and gave it great weight: "Do you not see that He placed it with Himself?"[23] The Arabic for kinship, *rahim*, also means womb; it shares a root with *rahma*, mercy.

Keeping that tie (*silat al-rahim*) need not be grand. "Keep the tie with your kin, even with a drink of water," Imam al-Sadiq said. "The best way to keep it is to keep harm away from them. Keeping the tie lengthens life and makes you loved by your family."[24]

> *"Keep the tie with your kin, even with a drink of water.*
>
> IMAM JA'FAR AL-SADIQ (A)

Sometimes it costs more. A man complained to the Prophet (s) that his relatives did nothing but attack him, cut him off and insult him. Should he abandon them? Keep ties with whoever cuts you off, the Prophet told him, give to whoever deprives you and forgive whoever wrongs you.[25] That is what Imam al-Sadiq did at his cousin's door.

From kindergarten on, many children in the West learn that the goal is independence: stand on your own, need no one. The Qur'an answers: "O people, it is you who are in need of God, and God is the Self-Sufficient, the Praiseworthy" (Qur'an 35:15). Only God is truly independent. Human beings are interdependent, leaning on one another, on the earth that feeds them and on their Lord.

A family is where that lesson is learned first, and it is a school of joy as well as duty: private jokes, shared meals, laughter and tears no outsider sees. The Qur'an teaches believers to pray for exactly this: "Our Lord, grant us in our spouses and our children the comfort of our eyes" (Qur'an 25:74).

Every culture prizes family; Islam asks it to face outward. Lessons learned at a parent's knee flow into the street, the neighbourhood and the nation. Imam al-Sadiq

said that kindness and good character "make homes flourish and lengthen lives."[26] In words reported from both the Prophet (s) and Imam al-Sadiq: "He is not one of us who does not show mercy to our young and honour our elders."[27]

The tie does not end at the grave. "No reward follows a person after death except three things," Imam al-Sadiq taught: "a charity he set flowing in his lifetime, which flows on after his death; a practice of guidance he began, which is followed after his death; or a righteous child who prays for him."[28] Children can pray and give charity for parents who have died. The Qur'an even promises that believers will be joined in Paradise by their children who followed them in faith (Qur'an 52:21).

Yet the same verse adds that every person is held by what they have earned. Another passage pictures a Day when people flee from their brothers, their mothers and fathers, their spouses and their children (Qur'an 80:34–36). A family is a gift and a charge, not a guarantee.

◆

What if the promise breaks?

Not every family looks like the ones described here, and the Qur'an never pretends otherwise. In its pages, brothers throw a younger brother into a well (Qur'an 12:15). Abraham's father, in the Shia reading an uncle or guardian, threatens to stone him for his faith (Qur'an 19:46). A prophet's son refuses the ark (Qur'an 11:42–43). And one of its models for every believer is a woman married to Pharaoh (Qur'an 66:11).

The Prophet (s) himself never knew his father, and he lost his mother when he was small. After his grandfather died, he grew up in the home of his uncle Abu Talib and his aunt Fatima bint Asad.[29] God reminded him of it tenderly: "Did He not find you an orphan, and give you shelter?" Then He turned the memory into a command: "So do not crush the orphan" (Qur'an 93:6, 9). Families are made by those who take a child in, as well as by birth.

Islam permits divorce, though it never treats it lightly. Imam al-Sadiq (a) said: "There is nothing God has made lawful that is more hateful to Him than divorce." God hates the man, he added, who keeps marrying and divorcing, "tasting" one wife after another.[30] Al-Kulayni placed the saying in a chapter on divorcing a wife with whom one gets along. When a marriage cannot be kept with dignity, the Qur'an asks for dignity in the parting.

"Either keep her on fair terms or release her with kindness" (Qur'an 2:229). "Do not hold them back to harm them" (Qur'an 2:231). "Do not forget graciousness between you" (Qur'an 2:237). The word for "kindness" in the first verse, *ihsan*, is the

same word the Qur'an uses for goodness to parents. Even a parting can keep a promise. Divorced men and women, and their children, deserve a community's support, not its whispers.

Children must never become weapons. In al-Sistani's rulings, a father may not separate a young child from its mother before the age of two. He is advised not to before seven, and may never do so if it would harm the child.[31] The ruling echoes a maxim the Prophet (s) spoke to protect a family's privacy: "There is to be no harm and no harming."[32]

Harm is the line no family claim may cross. If a home is not safe, kinship does not require anyone to stay within its reach. Recall Imam al-Sadiq's words: the best way to keep a tie is "to keep harm away." For some, that means distance kept with dignity, and prayers offered from afar. It also means asking for help from people trained to give it.

Which brings us back to a doorway in Medina at dawn. The Imam did not wait until he felt warmly toward his cousin. He went because a verse had reminded him of a promise. Love is a feeling, and it will come and go. Family is a promise kept: a call you would rather not make, a meal carried to an ageing parent, a cup of water offered across an old quarrel. As one father told his daughter, the home that raises you never leaves you.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. The Qur'an calls marriage "a solid pledge" (4:21): a family rests on promises kept before God, not on feelings alone.
2. Spouses are meant to give each other rest, love that acts, and mercy that answers need (30:21).
3. Children are a trust. They are owed a good name, a good upbringing, guidance toward God and safety from harm.
4. Goodness to parents follows the worship of God. Honour them with kindness, and never follow them into wrong.
5. Kinship reaches outward and beyond death. When a home breaks, the Qur'an asks for dignity and forbids harm.

NEXT TIME · GO FURTHER

Next time: *Work, Wealth & Economic Justice.* A family needs bread as well as love. How should it be earned, spent and shared, and how much is enough?

Go further:

Course: Introduction to Islamic Ethics, a Level 1 course at Tasneem Institute (tasneeminstitute.org/courses/introduction-to-islamic-ethics)

Read: the chapters on keeping ties of kinship and on kindness to parents in *al-Kafi*, vol. 2, Book of Belief and Disbelief, chs. 68–69 (thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/68/1).

Watch: Invitation to Islam, Episode 22, "The Family Unit in Islam" (13 min).

In the circle

LOOK BACK

1. Chapter 17 described a woman as "addressed by God in her own name." What did that mean?
2. In Chapter 15, what did the Prophet do when revenge on Mecca was finally in his power?
3. Part Two asks, "Is it good?" In your view, what makes a home good?

TALK ABOUT IT

WARM-UP

1. What small habit, saying or joke made a home feel like home to you, whether one you grew up in or one you found later?

UNDERSTAND

2. How does al-Tabataba'i tell *mawadda* and *rahma* apart in Qur'an 30:21? Why might a marriage need both?
3. What limit does Imam Ali place on obeying parents, and what does Qur'an 31:15 still ask of a child?

REFLECT

4. Imam al-Sadiq knocked on his cousin's door after their quarrel. Why is it so hard to be the first to go back? You needn't share whom you have in mind.
5. Imam Zayn al-Abidin says a parent is "answerable" for a child. What valuable thing did a parent or elder teach you without meaning to?

APPLY

6. "Keep the tie, even with a drink of water." What small, safe step could you take this week toward one relative or elder? If contact isn't safe, a prayer counts.

GO DEEPER

7. Read Imam al-Sadiq's explanation of "be good to your parents" (al-Kafi, vol. 2, Book of Belief and Disbelief, ch. 69, no. 1; reliable chain). Which instruction would be easiest for you, and which hardest?
8. In the *Treatise on Rights*, the rights of mother, father and child each begin, "that you know..." (thaqalayn.net/hadith/33/1/6/1; compiled text, not graded here). Why might knowing come before doing?

CARRY IT HOME

Choose one way in this week:

☐ **Notice:** Watch for the unseen work in your home, or among the people you live with: who cooks, cleans, remembers birthdays, sits with the sick. Thank one of them by name, and say exactly what you noticed.

☐ **Do:** Keep a tie "even with a drink of water." Call, message or visit one relative or elder you rarely see. If contact isn't safe, pray for them instead.

☐ **Learn:** Read Sura Yusuf (Qur'an 12) in a translation: a family story of favouritism, jealousy, grief and forgiveness. Where does the family begin to heal, and who takes the first step?

Aim. Help the circle see the family in Islam as a web of promises kept before God, with rights running in every direction and room for those whose families have broken.

Protect this question. No. 4, on being the first to go back after a quarrel. Everyone has a version of it, and it ties the discussion to the opening story.

Answer notes.

- *Q2. Mawadda* is love that shows itself in action; *rahma* is the response to another's need that moves us to help (al-Tabataba'i on 30:21). Romance fades; mercy carries a marriage through illness and age.
- *Q3.* Obey parents in everything except disobedience to God (Nahj al-Balagha, Saying 399). Even then, 31:15 asks the child to keep them company with kindness.

Likely questions.

- *"Must I divorce if my parents insist?"* See the "fair question" box (al-Sistani, Q&A 15455).
- *"My parents aren't Muslim. What do I owe them?"* See Imam al-Rida's answer in "What do we owe the people who raised us?"
- *"Isn't divorce shameful?"* See "What if the promise breaks?"

Watch for. Some people in the room may be divorced, widowed, single, childless, estranged or carrying memories of an unsafe home. Never ask anyone to describe their family. Do not let 17:23, or Q7's full report (see note 13), be used to silence someone who was harmed; the last section of the chapter speaks to them. If someone discloses abuse, listen, thank them, and afterwards point them to trained help. Know your local services before the session.

Bring. A jug of water and cups. Pour for one another before you begin, as a small act of *silat al-rahim*.

MY THREAD · CHAPTER 18

Which promise to my family, the one I was born into or the one I have found, do I most want to keep this year?

MY QUESTION FOR THE BOX

19

Work, Wealth & Economic Justice

The rare art of knowing what is enough.

وَٱلَّذِينَ إِذَآ أَنفَقُوا۟ لَمْ يُسْرِفُوا۟ وَلَمْ يَقْتُرُوا۟ وَكَانَ بَيْنَ ذَٰلِكَ قَوَامًا ﴿٦٧﴾

Those who, when they spend, neither squander nor scrimp, but keep a steady course between the two.

QUR'AN 25:67 · SURAT AL-FURQAN

WATCH · EPISODE 06 · 11:32

youtu.be/ozycDwda2n8

In the video: a two-word test for every purchase: need, or want? (7:31)

Reading time: about 15 minutes

It is a hot hour on the edge of Medina. Muhammad ibn al-Munkadir, a man known across the city for his devotion, is out on the road.

Coming toward him is Muhammad al-Baqir, son of Ali ibn al-Husayn and great-great-grandson of the Prophet (s), whom Shia Muslims honour as their fifth Imam (d. c. 733 CE). Like the Prophet, he belongs to Quraysh, the leading tribe of Mecca. He is heavy and no longer young, and he leans on two servants for support. Sweat is pouring off him. He has been out seeing to his livelihood.

Glory be to God, Ibn al-Munkadir thinks. *One of the elders of Quraysh, at this hour, in this state, chasing the things of this world. I will give him some advice.*

He greets the Imam, and the Imam returns the greeting.

"God keep you," Ibn al-Munkadir begins. "An elder of Quraysh, out at this hour, in this state, chasing the world. Tell me: if death came for you right now, like this, what would you do?"

"If death came to me now," the Imam answers, "it would find me obeying God. With this work I keep myself and my family from needing you, or anyone else. What I would fear is death finding me in the middle of a sin."

"You are right," Ibn al-Munkadir says. "God have mercy on you. I meant to preach to you, and you have preached to me."[1]

The would-be preacher had assumed what many sincere people still assume: that the spiritual life happens somewhere other than at work, and that holiness keeps its distance from money. The Imam turned that upside down. Yet money is not holy in itself either. It can feed a family, and it can swallow a soul. So when does earning a living become worship, and when does it become a trap?

THE BIG QUESTION

What does God have to do with my paycheck?

Have you ever wondered whether religion should have any say in how people make and spend their money? How much of what you earn you are actually supposed to give away, and to whom? Or, if you grew up with Islam, why a faith that praises simple living also praises hard work, honest profit and beautiful things?

> This chapter follows money through its whole life: how it is earned, how it is spent, whose right is folded into it, and what a just economy might look like.

WORDS TO KNOW

rizq (رزق) · *RIZQ* · provision: all that God gives to sustain a life, which people still seek through honest effort.

istikhlāf (استخلاف) · *is-tikh-LAAF* · stewardship: holding wealth as God's trustee rather than its absolute owner (Qur'an 57:7).

ribā (ربا) · *RI-baa* · an increase fixed in advance on a loan; Islamic law forbids taking or paying it.

zakāt (زَكاة) · *za-KAAT* · obligatory alms due on specified kinds of wealth, such as crops, livestock, gold and silver.

khums (خمس) · *KHUMS* · "the fifth": in Shia law, a fifth of what remains of a year's income after living costs.

iḥtikār (احتكار) · *ih-ti-KAAR* · hoarding staple food to push its price up; forbidden in Islamic law.

◆

Can a day's work be worship?

Why do people work? Most of us would say: to eat, to keep a roof overhead, to feed the people we love. Islam honours that answer. Imam Jaʿfar al-Sadiq (a), the sixth Imam (d. 765 CE), put it in words that still surprise: "Someone who wears himself out providing for his family is like one who strives in the way of God."[2] His word for "one who strives" is *mujahid*, used for someone who risks everything in God's cause. A tired parent home from a double shift stands in that company.

The reverse also holds. A man once told the Imam about someone who had resolved to stay at home, pray, fast and worship, and wait for his provision to arrive. The Imam was not impressed: "He is one of the three whose prayers go unanswered."[3] God provides, but He provides through means, and He gave people hands.

The Prophet's family lived this out. Imam Ali (a), the Prophet's cousin and the first Imam (d. 661 CE), bought the freedom of a thousand enslaved people "from the toil of his own hand."[4] When a man complained to Imam al-Sadiq that he was no good with his hands, no good at trade, unlucky and poor, the Imam told him: "Work. Carry loads on your head, and free yourself from needing people."[5]

Imam Zayn al-Abidin (a), the fourth Imam (d. c. 713 CE), went out early every morning to earn. Asked where he was going, he answered, "To give charity to my family."[6] That one sentence turns a daily commute into devotion.

Nor does the job need to be grand. An engineer, a lawyer, a cook, a social worker caring for the poor: anyone who earns a lawful living has dignity in God's sight. On Friday the Qur'an tells believers to leave their trading and hurry to the congregational prayer (Qur'an 62:9). Then it sends them straight back to work.

فَإِذَا قُضِيَتِ ٱلصَّلَوٰةُ فَٱنتَشِرُواْ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ وَٱبْتَغُواْ مِن فَضْلِ ٱللَّهِ وَٱذْكُرُواْ ٱللَّهَ كَثِيرًا لَّعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ ﴿١٠﴾

Then, when the prayer is over, spread out through the land and seek God's bounty, and remember God again and again, so that you may thrive.

QUR'AN 62:10 · SURAT AL-JUMU'A

NOTICE Earning a living is "seeking God's bounty" (*fadl*), the Qur'an's word for His gifts. And remembering God comes in the same breath as the marketplace.

What makes money clean?

The Qur'an tells of the prophet Shu'ayb (a), sent to Midian, a prosperous trading people in the habit of short-changing their customers. "Give full measure, weigh with an even hand, and do not short-change people in what is theirs," he told them (Qur'an 11:85). Their reply is an ancient version of a modern objection: "Shu'ayb, does your prayer instruct you that we must give up … doing as we like with our own wealth?" (Qur'an 11:87). *What has religion got to do with business?*

The Qur'an's answer is that no corner of life sits outside God's concern. Faith honours God's rights, our own and other people's, and a sale is where they meet. "Woe to those who cheat on the scales," one chapter begins (Qur'an 83:1). Islamic law forbids trade in what God has forbidden, such as alcohol and pork, and deceit of every kind. Ayatollah al-Sistani, a leading Shia authority today, gives examples any trader would know: watering down milk, spraying old vegetables to look fresh, hiding a defect from a trusting buyer.[7]

Honesty is also good business. A perfume-seller named Zaynab used to visit the Prophet's household. Finding her there one day, the Prophet (s) told her that her visits

made their houses smell sweet. "Your houses smell sweeter with your own fragrance," she replied. Then he gave her one piece of business advice: "When you sell, sell well, and do not cheat. That is more mindful of God, and it keeps your wealth longer."[8]

None of this makes profit suspect. Imam Ali (a) told one of his governors to look after merchants and craftsmen, "sources of benefit" who carry goods across land and sea. He wanted trade to be generous, "with just scales, and prices that wrong neither side, the seller or the buyer."[9]

Islamic law sets no general cap on prices and does not forbid honest competition. But a buyer charged a drastically inflated price may cancel the sale, and stepping into someone else's deal to snatch the goods is discouraged.[10] The reason is easy to say and hard to live by: *somebody else also has mouths to feed, and a house to pay for.*

Hoarding is another matter. A grain merchant named Salim told Imam al-Sadiq (a) that people called him a hoarder, since he held his stock back when the market was slow. But he sold barely a thousandth of the town's wheat, so the Imam saw no harm in it. The real hoarder was Hakim ibn Hizam, a man of Quraysh who bought up all the food that came into Medina; the Prophet (s) warned him, "Beware of hoarding." Holding back staple food for a higher price, while people need it, remains forbidden.[11]

Workers have rights too. Imam Ali al-Rida (a), the eighth Imam (d. 818 CE), once found a stranger working beside his servants with no agreed wage, and was furious. "Whoever works for you without an agreed wage will think you short-changed him, even if you pay him three times over," he said. "Agree his wage and pay it, and he will thank you for keeping your word. Give him a single grain more, and he will know you added it."[12]

His grandfather, Imam al-Sadiq, gave the rule for porters and hired hands in one line: "Do not let his sweat dry before you pay him." He lived by it, telling his servant to pay the men who had worked his orchard "before their sweat dries."[13]

One way of earning needs a closer look: lending at interest, which the Qur'an calls *riba*.

A FAIR QUESTION

Isn't interest just the price of borrowing money?

"A lender gives up the use of his money and takes a risk. Why shouldn't he charge for it? Modern economies run on interest."

The Qur'an heard this objection long ago: "Trading is no different from *riba*." Its reply: "God has permitted trade and forbidden *riba*" (Qur'an 2:275). Trade earns profit through goods, work or a shared venture that can gain or lose. In *riba* the lender fixes in advance that he will take back more than he lent, whatever befalls the borrower; al-Sistani's rulings forbid both taking and paying it.[14] The Qur'an's measure is justice both ways: "your capital is yours: you do no wrong, and no wrong is done to you" (Qur'an 2:279).

Imam al-Sadiq (a) named the deeper reason: "God forbade *riba* only so that people would not give up doing kindnesses."[15] If every loan must earn, who lends to see a neighbour through a bad month? The Qur'an adds, "If a debtor is struggling, wait until things ease for him; and to let it go as charity is better for you" (Qur'an 2:280). A lender may not force a debtor to give up his home and basic belongings.[16]

On mortgages, savings and modern banking, where jurists differ, check the rulings of the scholar you follow (your *marja'*).

◆

How much is enough?

Earning cleanly is half the story; the other half is spending. The Qur'an describes good people as those who, "when they spend, neither squander nor scrimp, but keep a steady course between the two" (Qur'an 25:67). It paints the same advice as a picture: "Do not shackle your hand to your neck, nor open it as wide as it will go, or you will sit down blamed and stripped bare" (Qur'an 17:29).

This is no glorification of poverty. The Qur'an asks, "Who has forbidden the finery God has brought forth for His servants, and the good things He provides?" (Qur'an 7:32). A man once admitted to Imam al-Sadiq (a), "By God, we chase after this world, and we love to be given it." "What do you want to do with it?" "Provide for myself and my family, help my relatives, give in charity, go on pilgrimage." "That is not chasing this world," said the Imam. "That is chasing the next."[17]

The real question is the one any shopper can ask at the checkout: *Is this a need, or a want?* Trouble starts when the house, the car and the lifestyle become a scoreboard.

The Qur'an tells of Korah (Qarun), one of the people of Moses (a), whose treasure-keys alone would have strained a band of strong men (Qur'an 28:76). His people pleaded: "With what God has given you, seek the final home, and do not forget your portion of this world. Treat others well, as God has treated you well" (Qur'an 28:77). He answered, "It was given to me only because of what I know" (Qur'an 28:78), and paraded his wealth until the earth swallowed him and his house (Qur'an 28:79–81).

No one had asked Korah to give up his portion of this world, only not to forget everything else. The Imams named the cure for an appetite that never says "enough." Imam Ali (a) used to say:

> IMAM ALI (A), AS REPORTED BY IMAM JA'FAR AL-SADIQ (A)
>
> ابْنَ آدَمَ إِنْ كُنْتَ تُرِيدُ مِنَ الدُّنْيَا مَا يَكْفِيكَ فَإِنَّ أَيْسَرَ مَا فِيهَا يَكْفِيكَ وَإِنْ كُنْتَ إِنَّمَا تُرِيدُ مَا لا يَكْفِيكَ فَإِنَّ كُلَّ مَا فِيهَا لا يَكْفِيكَ
>
> Child of Adam, if what you want from the world is what is enough for you, the least of what it holds will be enough. But if what you want is what can never be enough, then everything it holds will not be enough for you.[18]
>
> al-Kafi 2 · Belief & Disbelief · ch. 63 · no. 6 · **Reliable chain**

That is the rare art at the heart of this chapter. Knowing what is enough is not a vow of poverty but a kind of freedom. A person who knows it can rest, can give, and can walk away from a deal that would cost them their honesty.

> PAUSE AND RECALL
>
> *In your own words: why did Imam al-Baqir (a) call his work in the heat "obedience to God"? What makes a way of earning clean?*

◆

Whose money is it, really?

Even money we earn by hard work is, in the Qur'an's eyes, a gift. The health to work, the mind that learned the skill, the job that was there when we needed one: we made none of these. So the Qur'an asks believers to "give from what He has left in your keeping as stewards" (Qur'an 57:7).

Its word for stewards, *mustakhlafin*, means people placed in someone else's stead. The great Shia commentator al-'Allama al-Tabataba'i (d. 1981 CE) read it two ways.

The wealth is God's, and we hold it as His agents. And it belonged to others before it reached us, and will belong to others after we are gone. Either way, it is easier to give what was never quite ours.[19]

That is why the Qur'an speaks of the poor as having a *right*, not a favour (Chapter 29). The good are "those in whose wealth there is a known right, for the one who asks and the one who is deprived" (Qur'an 70:24–25). The deprived (*mahrum*), a report from the Imams explains, is a capable person who works and trades and still comes home with too little.[20]

And the known right? Some wealthy men once discussed *zakat*, the obligatory alms, with Imam al-Sadiq (a). Paying it earns no special praise, he told them; it is the outward duty that marks a person as a Muslim. The known right lies beyond it: something a person gives "every day, or every week, or every month, little or much, as long as he keeps it up."[21] For many, payday is the natural moment to begin.

The Qur'an tells a story about that right. An early commentator recorded its background: a good man owned a garden, kept from its harvest what was enough for himself and his family, and gave the rest away. After his death his sons decided that their own large families came first.[22] They swore to harvest at dawn, before anyone could come, and in the night a visitation from God swept over the garden (Qur'an 68:17–20).

فَٱنطَلَقُواْ وَهُمۡ يَتَخَٰفَتُونَ ﴿٢٣﴾ أَن لَّا يَدۡخُلَنَّهَا ٱلۡيَوۡمَ عَلَيۡكُم
مِّسۡكِينٞ ﴿٢٤﴾ وَغَدَوۡاْ عَلَىٰ حَرۡدٖ قَٰدِرِينَ ﴿٢٥﴾ فَلَمَّا رَأَوۡهَا قَالُوٓاْ
إِنَّا لَضَآلُّونَ ﴿٢٦﴾ بَلۡ نَحۡنُ مَحۡرُومُونَ ﴿٢٧﴾

They set off, whispering together, "Not one poor man is to get in on you today." Early they went, sure of their power to keep it from them. But when they saw it, they said, "We have come the wrong way. No. We are the deprived ones."

QUR'AN 68:23–27 · SURAT AL-QALAM

NOTICE Watch the word "deprived" (*mahrum*), the word 70:25 uses for those who hold a right in our wealth. The owners set out to deprive the poor, and end the morning calling themselves the deprived.

Imam al-Sadiq explained what happens when that right is withheld:

> **IMAM JA'FAR AL-SADIQ (A), THE SIXTH IMAM**
>
> إِنَّ اللهَ فَرَضَ لِلْفُقَرَاءِ فِي مَالِ الأَغْنِيَاءِ مَا يَسَعُهُمْ وَلَوْ عَلِمَ أَنَّ ذَلِكَ لاَ يَسَعُهُمْ لَزَادَهُمْ إِنَّهُمْ لَمْ يُؤْتَوْا مِنْ قِبَلِ فَرِيضَةِ اللهِ وَلَكِنْ أُتُوا مِنْ مَنْعِ مَنْ مَنَعَهُمْ حَقَّهُمْ لاَ مِمَّا فَرَضَ اللهُ لَهُمْ وَلَوْ أَنَّ النَّاسَ أَدَّوْا حُقُوقَهُمْ لَكَانُوا عَائِشِينَ بِخَيْرٍ
>
> God has set aside for the poor, in the wealth of the rich, enough to provide for them. Had He known it would not be enough, He would have given them more. When the poor are failed, it is not because of what God required. It is because people withheld what was theirs by right. If people paid what they owe, the poor would be living well.[23]
>
> al-Kafi 3 · Zakat · ch. 1 · no. 1 · **Reliable chain**

Imam Ali (a) said it in one sentence: "No poor person goes hungry but by what some rich person holds back."[24]

But the circle of giving starts at home. Spending, the Qur'an says, is first "for parents and the nearest kin," then for orphans, the poor and the stranded traveller (Qur'an 2:215). Imam al-Sadiq warned that it is sin enough to neglect those who depend on you. Imam Zayn al-Abidin (a) said that buying meat for his family when they craved it was dearer to him than freeing a slave.

A man once told Imam al-Baqir (a) that his estate earned three thousand dirhams (silver coins) a year: two thousand went on his family, and one thousand on charity. If the two thousand met all his family's needs, the Imam said, he had chosen wisely, and was already doing in his lifetime what most people leave to their wills.[25] Family first, then the surplus, and keep sharing, because what happens outside our doors reaches us in the end.

Islamic law turns some of this sharing into fixed duties. *Zakat* falls on specified wealth: in al-Sistani's rulings, wheat, barley, dates, raisins, gold, silver, camels, cattle, sheep and goats, and, by precaution, business stock.[26] Shia Muslims also pay *khums*, "the fifth" (Qur'an 8:41), on what is left of a year's income after living costs. Half goes to needy descendants of the Prophet (s), who may not normally receive *zakat*. The

Imam's half goes to a qualified jurist, or is spent with his permission, on religious and social needs.[27] Chapter 29 explains *zakat* in full.

◆

Can a whole economy be just?

Societies have tried capitalism, socialism, communism and other systems, in Muslim countries as elsewhere. Muslims believe Islam belongs to none of them, with its own rules for trade, ownership and contracts, meant for every age. The Iraqi scholar Sayyid Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr (d. 1980 CE) made this case in his classic *Iqtisaduna*, "Our Economics."[28] His three pillars are mixed ownership, economic freedom within limits, and social justice. First, private property is protected: "Do not devour one another's wealth by falsehood, unless it is trade you agree on freely" (Qur'an 4:29).

Second, freedom stops where harm to others begins. Samura ibn Jundab owned a palm tree inside another man's walled garden, and walked in to it whenever he liked, past the door of the man's house. Asked by the Prophet (s) to seek permission, he refused. He refused to sell the tree, and refused a tree in Paradise in exchange. So the Prophet told the garden's owner, "Go, pull it up and throw it to him, for there is to be no harm and no harming."[29]

Third, wealth must keep moving. The Qur'an directs certain public funds to orphans, the needy and travellers, "so that it does not become a thing passed hand to hand among your rich alone" (Qur'an 59:7). It condemns those who hoard gold and silver instead of spending in God's way (Qur'an 9:34).

Shia Muslims see these principles at work when Imam Ali (a) ruled from 656 to 661 CE (35–40 AH), mostly from Kufa, in Iraq. Criticised for paying everyone the same stipend, without favouring nobles or early converts, and urged to buy the support of powerful men, he refused: "If this wealth were my own, I would still divide it equally among them. How much more, when the wealth is God's?"[30] He took back lands handed out as private estates, saying, "In justice there is room enough. Whoever finds justice too narrow will find injustice narrower still."[31]

When his governor in Basra, 'Uthman ibn Hunayf, hurried to a young man's lavish banquet, Ali wrote in dismay. He had never imagined his governor would sit at the table of "a people whose poor are turned away and whose rich are invited." He himself could have had pure honey, fine wheat and silk, he wrote: "But far be it from me to let greed choose my food, when perhaps in the Hijaz or in Yamama there is someone who cannot even hope for a loaf ...; or to sleep with a full belly while around me are empty stomachs and burning thirst."[32]

In his famous charter for Malik al-Ashtar, his governor of Egypt, he pleaded: "Then God, God, for the lowest class, those who have no means ... Set aside for them a share of your treasury."[33]

> *"If this wealth were my own, I would still divide it equally among them. How much more, when the wealth is God's?*
>
> IMAM ALI (A)

A STORY FROM THE SOURCES

The heated iron

Imam Ali (a) told this story himself. His older brother ʿAqil, fallen into poverty, asked him, now the ruler, for a single *saʿ* (about three kilograms) of the people's wheat. "I saw his children," Ali said, "their hair matted, their faces grey with poverty." ʿAqil asked again and again, "and he thought I would sell him my religion."

So Ali heated a piece of iron and brought it near ʿAqil's body, "so that he might take a lesson from it." ʿAqil cried out at the heat and all but burned. "Do you groan at a piece of iron that a man heated in play," Ali asked, "while you drag me toward a fire the Almighty has lit in His anger?"

Later in the same sermon he said: "By God, if I were given the seven realms and all beneath their skies to disobey God by snatching the husk of a barley grain from an ant, I would not do it."[34]

The story of ʿAqil is not about coldness toward a brother. It is about whose wheat it was. By refusing his own hungry nephews one extra measure, Ali taught that public money is a trust, never a family perk; today we call what he refused corruption. Muslims believe such principles can make any economy more humane: wealth serving people, instead of piling up at the cost of everything and everyone else.

Most of us will never govern a city or own an orchard. But all of us earn, spend and give, and every payday quietly asks this chapter's questions. Was it earned cleanly? Is this a need, or a want? Whose right is folded into it? Picture again the Imam on the road outside Medina, soaked with sweat in the heat and at peace with God. He was not chasing the world. He knew what was enough, worked hard for it, and knew who else had a share in it.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Earning a lawful living for yourself and others is worship, and the Imams worked with their own hands.
2. Islam forbids deceit, hoarding staple food and *riba*, but welcomes honest trade, fair profit and competition.
3. Good spending avoids both waste and stinginess; good things are allowed, and knowing what is enough is freedom.
4. Wealth is a trust from God; others hold a known right in it, beginning with one's own family.
5. Imam Ali (a) treated public money as God's, sharing it equally and refusing even his own brother extra.

NEXT TIME · GO FURTHER

Next time: *Islam's Vision of Justice.* This chapter watched a ruler refuse his own brother a measure of wheat. What is justice, and why would anyone choose it when it costs them dearly?

Go further:

Courses: Introduction to Islamic Ethics and Fiqh Made Easy: Practical Principles, Level 1 courses at Tasneem Institute (tasneeminstitute.org/courses/introduction-to-islamic-ethics; tasneeminstitute.org/courses/fiqh-made-easy-practical-principles)

Read: *Nahj al-Balagha*, Letter 53, Imam Ali's charter for Malik al-Ashtar: the passages on merchants, craftsmen and "the lowest class."

Watch: Invitation to Islam, Episode 6, "Work, Wealth & Economic Justice" (12 min).

In the circle

LOOK BACK

1. What did Chapter 18 mean by calling family "a promise kept"?
2. Chapter 16 called every person "your brother in faith, or your equal in creation." What does that ask of us?
3. Part Two asks, "Is it good?" What would make an economy good, in your view?

TALK ABOUT IT

WARM-UP

1. Think back to the first money you ever earned. What did you do with it, and how did it feel?

UNDERSTAND

2. Why did Imam al-Baqir (a) call his work in the heat "obedience to God"? What had Ibn al-Munkadir assumed?
3. How does the chapter tell trade apart from *riba* (Qur'an 2:275)? What reason did Imam al-Sadiq (a) give for the ban?

REFLECT

4. Imam Ali (a) refused his brother ʿAqil one extra measure of public wheat. Do you find that admirable, harsh, or both? Why?
5. Imam Ali (a) said the least of the world suffices whoever wants only enough. Where is "enough" hardest to recognise in your life? You needn't say.

APPLY

6. Choose one payment you will make this week: a bill, a wage, a debt or a gift. How could you make that payment fairer, faster or kinder?

GO DEEPER

7. Read Imam Ali's letter to his governor of Basra (Nahj al-Balagha, Letter 45; compiled text, not graded here). Why might one dinner trouble him so much? What might it ask of leaders today?
8. Read Imam Ali's instructions on merchants and craftsmen in his letter to Malik al-Ashtar (Nahj al-Balagha, Letter 53; compiled text, not graded here). Why does he both protect traders and watch them closely?

CARRY IT HOME

Choose one way in this week:

☐ **Notice:** Before each purchase, ask the two-word question: need, or want? Keep a tally for seven days, and notice which answers surprised you.

☐ **Do:** Pay someone "before their sweat dries." Settle a bill, an invoice, a wage or a small debt early, and add a word of thanks, or a little extra, if you can.

☐ **Learn:** Read the Qur'an's story of the garden owners (Qur'an 68:17–33) and ask what the father knew that his sons forgot. Then find out how *zakat* and *khums* are worked out, from your *marjaʿ*'s published rulings or a local scholar.

Aim. Help the circle see earning, spending and sharing as one moral whole: honest work is worship, wealth is a trust, and others hold a right in it.

Protect this question. No. 4, on ʿAqil and the heated iron. It opens the deepest conversation here: what we owe our families, and what we owe the public.

Answer notes.

- *Q2.* He was supporting his family and keeping them from depending on others, which the Imams count as obedience to God (al-Kafi 5, Book of Commerce, ch. 4, no. 1; ch. 13, no. 1). Ibn al-Munkadir assumed that holiness meant keeping away from earning.
- *Q3.* Trade earns profit through goods, work and shared risk; *riba* is an increase fixed in advance on a loan (2:275; al-Sistani, *Islamic Laws* 2301). The Imam's reason: so that people keep lending as a kindness (al-Kafi 5, ch. 51, no. 8).

Likely questions.

- *"Is my mortgage, or my savings account, haram?"* See the "fair question" box. Point to the *marjaʿ*; don't rule tonight.
- *"Do I owe khums on my salary?"* See "Whose money is it, really?" *Khums* falls on what remains of a year's income after living costs (al-Sistani, 1769). A *marjaʿ*'s office can help work it out.
- *"Isn't Islam against being rich?"* See "How much is enough?" and the man who loved wealth.

Watch for. Money is personal and can be painful: debt, unemployment, supporting relatives, receiving help. Never ask about anyone's income, debts or giving. Speak of the poor as neighbours, never as "them"; someone in the room may be one. Keep the circle from turning into a fatwa clinic.

Bring. A kitchen scale and a bag of wheat or dates. Weigh out a *saʿ*, about three kilograms, and pass it round: the measure Imam Ali (a) would not give away.

MY THREAD · CHAPTER 19

What would "enough" look like in my life, and what would I do with the rest?

MY QUESTION FOR THE BOX

NOTES

20

Islam’s Vision of Justice

Sweeter than honey, even when it costs you.

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ كُونُواْ قَوَّٰمِينَ لِلَّهِ شُهَدَآءَ بِٱلْقِسْطِ وَلَا يَجْرِمَنَّكُمْ شَنَـَٔانُ قَوْمٍ عَلَىٰٓ أَلَّا تَعْدِلُواْ ٱعْدِلُواْ هُوَ أَقْرَبُ لِلتَّقْوَىٰ وَٱتَّقُواْ ٱللَّهَ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ خَبِيرٌۢ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٨﴾

O you who believe, stand firm for God, bearing witness with fairness, and do not let hatred of a people lead you to be unjust. Be just: that is nearer to God-consciousness. Be mindful of God; God is aware of all you do.

QUR’AN 5:8 · SURAT AL-MA’IDA

WATCH · EPISODE 27 · 12:33

youtu.be/92vDbc7m65A

In the video: two Qur’anic words for justice, and a lost thing returned to its owner (3:55)

Reading time: about 15 minutes

A man comes to the Prophet Muhammad (s) to collect a debt. He is Jewish, and the Prophet owes him some gold coins.

"I have nothing to give you," the Prophet tells him.

"Then I will not leave you, Muhammad, until you pay me."

"In that case," says the Prophet, "I will sit with you."

And he does. When the time for the noon prayer comes, he prays it there, beside his creditor. Then the afternoon prayer, the sunset prayer and the prayer of the night. He does not go home. His companions begin to threaten the man. The Prophet looks at them. "What are you doing to him?"

"Messenger of God, a Jew is holding you prisoner."

"My Lord did not send me to wrong a person under treaty with us," he answers, "or anyone else."

He prays the dawn prayer in the same spot. When the sun is high, the creditor finally speaks. He declares his faith in God and in Muhammad as God's messenger, and he gives half of his considerable wealth to God's cause. Then he explains. He had read a description in the Torah, he says: Muhammad son of ʿAbd Allah, born in Mecca, emigrating to Tayba (an old name for Medina), "not harsh, not coarse, not loud." He had wanted to see it for himself.[1]

The creditor was testing a prophet. His test works on us too. The Prophet led his community, and a single word from him would have sent the man away. Instead he let himself be held from noon until the next morning rather than let anyone be wronged in his name. What kind of justice would rather lose a day than win an unfair advantage? And why would anyone call it sweet?

THE BIG QUESTION

What does Islam mean by justice, and why hold on to it when it costs you?

Have you ever wondered whether a religion can be fair to people who do not share it? Whether being fair at work, online or at the family table asks more of you than you want to give? Or why Shia Muslims count God's justice among the foundations of their faith?

> This chapter looks at what justice is, where it begins, and what it cost the Prophet's family to live by it.

WORDS TO KNOW

ʿadl (عدل) · *ADL* · justice: putting each thing in its rightful place and giving everyone their due. Also one of God's attributes and a foundation of Shia belief.

qisṭ (قسط) · *QIST* · equity: the fair share and the honest measure, applied to everyone alike, friend or stranger.

inṣāf (إنصاف) · *in-SAAF* · fairness that begins with yourself: giving others their due from your own side.

ẓulm (ظلم) · *ZULM* · wrongdoing; literally, putting something where it does not belong. The opposite of *ʿadl*.

karāma (كرامة) · *ka-RAA-ma* · the dignity God has given every human being (Qur'an 17:70).

ziyāra (زيارة) · *zi-YAA-ra* · a visit to the grave of a prophet or Imam, and the greeting recited there.

◆

What does every human being deserve?

Islam's vision of justice does not begin with courts or kings. It begins with a person, any person, and with a verse about the whole human family.

وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِيٓ ءَادَمَ وَحَمَلْنَٰهُمْ فِى ٱلْبَرِّ وَٱلْبَحْرِ وَرَزَقْنَٰهُم مِّنَ ٱلطَّيِّبَٰتِ وَفَضَّلْنَٰهُمْ عَلَىٰ كَثِيرٍ مِّمَّنْ خَلَقْنَا تَفْضِيلًا ﴿٧٠﴾

We have honoured the children of Adam. We have carried them over land and sea, provided them with good things, and favoured them far above many of those We created.

QUR'AN 17:70 · SURAT AL-ISRA

NOTICE The verse honours "the children of Adam," not "the believers." Dignity comes with being human. No one earns it by belief or success, and no one else can take it away.

"The children of Adam" means everyone: men and women, young and old, believers and unbelievers, the powerful and the forgotten. Muslims call this God-given dignity *karama*, and two protections follow from it: a person's life is sacred, and so is what they own. Among his own followers, the Prophet (s) made these protections unforgettable. On his last pilgrimage, he stood before the Muslim pilgrims at Mina, near Mecca. He told them he did not know whether he would meet them there again. "Which day is most sacred?" he asked. "This day," they answered. "Which month?" "This month." "Which land?" "This land." "Then your blood and your property are as sacred to one another," he told them, "as this day, in this month, in this land."[2]

Only a just cause, as the law defines it, can set that protection aside. No one may harm another person, or take what is theirs, because it happens to suit them. Why does this matter so much? Because Islam sees in every newborn someone who could grow in goodness and come close to God, in this life and the next. Protect a person's life and livelihood, and you protect that possibility. A child who is safe today can become the nurse, the teacher or the scholar a whole town needs tomorrow. As people grow, their society rises with them, step by step.

That is also why justice cannot run in one direction. Most of us are eloquent about our own rights. Islam asks us to bring the same energy to other people's rights, especially the rights of those who cannot speak up for themselves. Imam Jaʿfar al-Sadiq (a), the sixth Imam (d. 765 CE), put *insaf*, giving people their due from yourself, first among the three "masters of deeds." It means, he explained, that whatever you would accept for yourself, you accept for them too.[3] If you would fight for your own child's safety at school, the same fight is owed to the child nobody stands up for.

◆

What is justice, exactly?

The Qur'an has two main words for justice. *ʿAdl* is usually translated "justice," and *qist* "equity" or "fairness." They overlap, but each has its own flavour.

Imam Ali (a), the Prophet's cousin and the first Imam (d. 661 CE), defined the first in four Arabic words: "Justice puts things in their places." Generosity, he added, takes things out of their course, so justice is the nobler of the two.[4] Muslim scholars turned this into a formula: justice is giving everyone their due. The Qur'an puts it as a command: "God commands you to return trusts to their owners, and when you judge between people, to judge with justice" (Qur'an 4:58).

The easiest picture is a lost thing returned. Suppose you leave your phone on a train and a stranger finds it. If they know it is yours, justice asks one thing of them:

give it back. The phone has a rightful place, and that place is with you. The opposite of justice, *zulm*, carries the sense of putting something where it does not belong: in the wrong pocket, the wrong hands, the wrong place.

Qist is the honest measure, the same scales for everyone. Two people stand in front of you with different accents, different skin and different bank balances. In their basic rights, you may not tell them apart. Islam's rejection of racism and favouritism starts here. When a manager promotes a friend over a better candidate, nothing has been stolen in the usual sense, but the scales have been bent. The Qur'an even says that this is why prophets were sent.

لَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلَنَا بِٱلْبَيِّنَٰتِ وَأَنزَلْنَا مَعَهُمُ ٱلْكِتَٰبَ وَٱلْمِيزَانَ لِيَقُومَ
ٱلنَّاسُ بِٱلْقِسْطِ وَأَنزَلْنَا ٱلْحَدِيدَ فِيهِ بَأْسٌ شَدِيدٌ وَمَنَٰفِعُ لِلنَّاسِ
وَلِيَعْلَمَ ٱللَّهُ مَن يَنصُرُهُۥ وَرُسُلَهُۥ بِٱلْغَيْبِ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ قَوِىٌّ عَزِيزٌ

﴿٢٥﴾

We sent Our messengers with clear signs, and sent down with them the Book and the Balance, so that people might uphold justice. And We sent down iron, which holds great strength and benefits for people, so that God may know who helps Him and His messengers, unseen. God is strong, mighty.

QUR'AN 57:25 · SURAT AL-HADID

NOTICE Three things are "sent down": the Book, the Balance and iron. Iron's "great strength" is tied to helping God's messengers. Justice needs a standard, a fair measure, and the strength to protect them.

Fair does not always mean identical. Sometimes justice means equal shares, as Chapter 19 shows in Imam Ali's handling of the public treasury. Sometimes it means looking harder for those in greatest need. Imam Ali told Malik al-Ashtar, his governor of Egypt, to seek out people who could not reach his door, those "whom eyes pass over and men look down on." "Of all the people in your care," he wrote, "these are more in

need of fairness than the rest."[5] What justice never allows is a difference built on rank or connections.

Justice can be demanding, but the Imams of the Prophet's family insisted that it is also beautiful.

> IMAM JA'FAR AL-SADIQ (A), THE SIXTH IMAM
>
> الْعَدْلُ أَحْلَى مِنَ الشَّهْدِ وَأَلْيَنُ مِنَ الزُّبْدِ وَأَطْيَبُ رِيحاً مِنَ الْمِسْكِ
>
> Justice is sweeter than honey, softer than butter and more fragrant than musk.[6]
>
> al-Kafi 2 · Belief & Disbelief · ch. 66 · no. 15 · **Reliable chain**

Notice the senses: taste, touch, smell. The Imam does not describe justice as a weight to be carried. He describes it as a pleasure, something you would want more of. In the same chapter of al-Kafi he offers another image: "Justice is sweeter than water to the thirsty. How wide justice is when it is practised, even in a small matter."[7] Anyone who has been wronged and then set right knows that taste.

◆

What if justice costs me?

It is easy to love justice when it is on our side. The Qur'an tests it where it hurts.

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ كُونُواْ قَوَّٰمِينَ بِٱلْقِسْطِ شُهَدَآءَ لِلَّهِ وَلَوْ عَلَىٰٓ
أَنفُسِكُمْ أَوِ ٱلْوَٰلِدَيْنِ وَٱلْأَقْرَبِينَ إِن يَكُنْ غَنِيًّا أَوْ فَقِيرًا فَٱللَّهُ أَوْلَىٰ
بِهِمَا فَلَا تَتَّبِعُواْ ٱلْهَوَىٰٓ أَن تَعْدِلُواْ وَإِن تَلْوُۥٓاْ أَوْ تُعْرِضُواْ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ
كَانَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرًا ﴿١٣٥﴾

O you who believe, be steadfast in upholding justice, as witnesses for God, even against yourselves, your parents or your relatives. Rich or poor, God has the better claim on both. So do not follow your desires and swerve from justice. If you twist your testimony or turn away, God is aware of all you do.

QUR'AN 4:135 · SURAT AL-NISA'

NOTICE The verse names the hardest cases first: yourself, then your parents, then your relatives. It adds "rich or poor," so that neither money nor pity may tilt the scale.

The chapter's key verse goes further still: "Do not let hatred of a people lead you to be unjust. Be just: that is nearer to God-consciousness" (Qur'an 5:8). Fairness toward people we love is hard. Fairness toward people we dislike can feel impossible: the relative who wronged us, the rival at work, the community that hurt ours. The Qur'an does not ask us to feel warmly toward them. It asks us to judge them fairly, whatever we feel.

Most of us run a double standard without noticing. We want careful evidence before we believe a charge against a friend, yet we swallow a rumour about someone we dislike. Imam al-Sadiq (a) caught the habit in one line: "Fear God and be just, for you yourselves find fault with people who are not just."[8] Imam Ali (a) made it a rule for anyone in charge. "Give God His due," he wrote to his governor, "and give people their due from yourself, from your own family and from those you favour. If you do not, you will be a wrongdoer."[9] He held himself to that rule; Chapter 19 tells how he refused his own brother one extra measure of public wheat. A quick test helps: swap the names. If the person in front of you were your brother, or your rival, would you decide the same way?

Why hold to this when it costs you? For Shia Muslims the answer begins with God. After God's oneness (*tawhid*), the next foundation of their faith is God's justice: God never does wrong, "not even an atom's weight" (Qur'an 4:40). Chapter 11 quoted half of Imam Ali's definition of the two. Here is all of it, built on two Arabic verbs that sound almost alike: "*Tawhid* is that you do not confine Him to your imagination (*tatawahhamahu*). Justice is that you do not accuse Him (*tattahimahu*)."[10]

This conviction earned Shia theologians, along with the rationalist Mu'tazila, the name *'Adliyya*, "the people of justice." Many Sunni theologians, especially the Ash'aris, held that whatever God does is just by definition, since right and wrong are set by His command. Their concern was to protect His absolute sovereignty. The *'Adliyya* replied that reason can recognise some things as good or evil in themselves, and that God, being perfect, never does evil.[11] This does not mean every life looks the same. It means the injustice people do is not God's doing: "God does not wrong people at all; it is people who wrong themselves" (Qur'an 10:44). And it leaves a believer no excuse. A God who does no injustice asks the same of everyone who calls on Him.

> **PAUSE AND RECALL**
>
> *In your own words, what is the difference between 'adl and qist? When the Prophet (s) sat with his creditor, which of the two was he protecting?*

◆

Is this justice for everyone?

In 1258 CE (656 AH) the Mongol ruler Hulagu captured Baghdad. He had a question put to the scholars of its great college, the Mustansiriyya. Which is better, a just ruler who is not a Muslim, or a Muslim ruler who is unjust? The scholars hesitated. Then the Shia scholar Radi al-Din Ali ibn Tawus (d. 1266 CE) signed his answer first: the just unbeliever is better. The others followed, and the historian Ibn al-Tiqtaqa (d. 1309 CE) recorded the scene in his book *al-Fakhri*.[12] It was a conqueror's question, put at a frightening hour, but the answer reflects a deep conviction: what counts in a ruler is justice, not a label.

Imam Ali (a) had put the same conviction into words six centuries earlier. On the march to Basra, his cousin 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abbas found him mending his own sandal. "What is this sandal worth?" the Imam asked. "Nothing," said Ibn 'Abbas. "By God," he replied, "it is dearer to me than ruling over you, unless I can establish a right or push back a wrong."[13] Rule, for him, was a two-way trust: he called the rights of ruler

and ruled "an obligation God laid on each toward the other."[14] He told Malik al-Ashtar to hold open sessions for anyone who needed him, and to send the guards away. He had heard the Prophet (s) say, more than once: "A community will never be made holy in which the right of the weak is not secured from the strong without stammering."[15]

The same conviction shapes how Islam treats people of other faiths. Human dignity includes the freedom to choose one's beliefs: "There is no compulsion in religion" (Qur'an 2:256). That verse is about faith, not a licence to ignore the law, as Chapter 22 explains. Within the law, a person's life, property and conscience are to be respected as long as they harm no one. God alone will judge what each of us makes of our dignity. It is not for me to force you, and it is not for you to force me.

Some people squander their dignity on greed or cruelty. Others let it grow until their goodness spills over onto everyone around them. Whatever others make of their dignity, the Qur'an sets the rule for how believers treat them. "God does not forbid you to be kind and just to those who have not fought you over your faith or driven you from your homes. God loves the just" (Qur'an 60:8). The Prophet's words to his companions say the same thing more briefly.

> *"My Lord did not send me to wrong a person under treaty with us, or anyone else.*
>
> THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD (S)

Imam Ali applied the rule to a beggar. One day, it is reported, an old blind man passed by, asking for alms. "What is this?" the Imam asked. People answered with his title: "Commander of the Faithful, he is a Christian." The Imam replied: "You made use of him until he grew old and helpless, and now you refuse him? Provide for him from the public treasury."[16] His question, "What is this?", was not answered by the man's religion. It was answered by his years of work. A society that had used his strength owed him his bread.

A FAIR QUESTION

If God's law comes first, can a Muslim be a loyal citizen?

"If Muslims put God's law above every other law, can they really be trusted as citizens?" It is a fair worry. The answer depends on what God's law actually says, and it says a great deal about trust. Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, a senior Shia jurist based in Najaf, Iraq, rules that "treachery and breach of trust directed against anybody is haram," that is, forbidden. He applies this to stealing public property and to lying on visa or residence applications, in non-Muslim countries as much as anywhere. Giving false information to government offices to claim benefits is forbidden too, "because it is lying"; so are breaking a visa's conditions and tampering with an electricity meter.[17] The Qur'an says, "Fulfil your agreements" (5:1), and "Keep your pledges: every pledge will be asked about" (17:34). "God first" means something narrower. If a law ever commanded a real wrong, a believer could not obey that one command, and many people of conscience would agree. For any particular case, check the rulings of the scholar you follow (your *marja'*).

◆

What does justice ask when power goes wrong?

Justice asks one more thing, and it is the hardest. Silence before injustice is never neutral. "Do not lean toward those who do wrong," the Qur'an warns, "or the Fire will touch you" (Qur'an 11:113). Imam Ali (a) gave several reasons for accepting power. One was a pledge God takes from people of knowledge: they must not make peace with "the gluttony of the oppressor and the hunger of the oppressed."[18]

Nearly twenty years after Imam Ali's death, the same pledge fell to his son. In 680 CE (60 AH), Yazid ibn Mu'awiya succeeded his father as ruler and demanded the allegiance of Imam al-Husayn (a), the Prophet's grandson and the third Imam. Al-Husayn refused to lend his name to Yazid's rule. Before he left Medina, it is reported, he gave his brother Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyya a written statement. "I did not set out in arrogance or insolence," it reads, "nor to spread corruption or to do wrong. I set out only to seek reform in the community of my grandfather (s). I want to enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong, and to follow the way of my grandfather and of my father, Ali ibn Abi Talib."[19] His key word, *islah* (reform), was his father's word too. "O God," Imam Ali had prayed, "You know that what we did was not a contest for power." It was, he said, to "make reform appear in Your lands, so that the wronged among Your servants may be safe."[20]

In October 680 CE (Muharram 61 AH), al-Husayn's small company of family and companions was stopped at Karbala, in Iraq. The army sent against them was led by ʿUmar ibn Saʿd, on the orders of Yazid's governor of Kufa, ʿUbayd Allah ibn Ziyad. On the tenth day of the month, al-Husayn was killed together with members of his family and his companions.[21] The sources remember a camp cut off from the waters of the Euphrates. Generations later, Imam al-Sadiq (a), who called justice "sweeter than water to the thirsty," told pilgrims to visit al-Husayn's grave "hungry and thirsty." Al-Husayn, he said, was killed hungry and thirsty.[22]

The women of the household were brought to Kufa under armed guard. An eyewitness remembered the women of Kufa weeping in the streets. He also remembered al-Husayn's son Ali, later the fourth Imam, sick and in chains, saying in a faint voice: "These women are weeping. Then who killed us?"[23] Tears are not justice. Neither is silence.

Every year, in the month of Muharram, Shia communities around the world gather to remember Karbala. At al-Husayn's grave, pilgrims greet him in words taught by Imam al-Sadiq.

FROM A ZIYARA OF IMAM AL-HUSAYN, TAUGHT BY IMAM AL-SADIQ (A)

أَشْهَدُ أَنَّكَ عَبْدُ اللَّهِ وَ أَمِينُهُ بَلَّغْتَ نَاصِحاً وَ أَدَّيْتَ أَمِيناً وَ قُتِلْتَ صِدِّيقاً وَ مَضَيْتَ عَلَى يَقِينٍ- لَمْ تُؤْثِرْ عَمًى عَلَى هُدًى وَ لَمْ تَمِلْ مِنْ حَقٍّ إِلَى بَاطِلٍ أَشْهَدُ أَنَّكَ قَدْ أَقَمْتَ الصَّلَاةَ وَ آتَيْتَ الزَّكَاةَ وَ أَمَرْتَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَ نَهَيْتَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ

I bear witness that you are God's servant and His trusted one. You delivered His message with sincerity and fulfilled your trust. You were killed a man of truth, and you passed on in certainty. You did not prefer blindness to guidance, or turn from truth to falsehood. I bear witness that you established the prayer, gave the alms, enjoined what is right and forbade what is wrong.[24]

Kamil al-ziyarat · ch. 79 · no. 3 · **Unverified chain**

Notice what the pilgrim praises. Not victory, which al-Husayn did not win, but faithfulness: he never turned from truth to falsehood.

The Prophet (s) once sat from noon to the next morning beside a man he could have sent away with a word. His grandson gave his life rather than call injustice by

another name. Between those two scenes lies Islam's vision of justice: dignity for every person, the same scales for friend and stranger, and a refusal to bless what is wrong. Few of us will ever face a Karbala. Our tests are smaller: a debt we could quietly forget, a colleague we could quietly blame, a story we could tell to our own advantage. "How wide justice is," said Imam al-Sadiq, "when it is practised, even in a small matter." Justice may cost you something. The family that paid the most for it still called it sweeter than honey.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Islam's justice begins with dignity: God honoured every child of Adam, so every life and livelihood is sacred.
2. *ʿAdl* puts things in their places and gives each their due; *qist* keeps the same scales for everyone.
3. The Qur'an demands justice even against yourself and your family, and toward people you dislike.
4. Shia Muslims count God's justice among the foundations of faith: God wrongs no one, and asks the same of us.
5. Imam al-Husayn's stand at Karbala shows that justice may mean refusing to bless injustice, whatever it costs.

NEXT TIME · GO FURTHER

Next time: *Islam & the Environment.* If justice means giving everything its due, what do we owe a field, a river or a thirsty donkey?

Go further:

Courses: Introduction to Islamic Ethics and God and His Attributes, Level 1 courses at Tasneem Institute (tasneeminstitute.org/courses/introduction-to-islamic-ethics; tasneeminstitute.org/courses/god-and-his-attributes)
Read: Imam Ali's sermon on the rights that rulers and citizens owe each other, *Nahj al-Balagha*, Sermon 216 (numbering of Subhi al-Salih).
Watch: Invitation to Islam, Episode 27, "Islam's Vision of Justice" (13 min).

In the circle

LOOK BACK

1. Chapter 19 called wealth a trust. A trust held for whom?
2. Who called people "your brother in faith, or your equal in creation" (Chapter 16), and to whom?
3. Part Two asks, "Is it good?" What would make a teaching on justice good, in your eyes?

TALK ABOUT IT

WARM-UP

1. Think of a time someone was fair to you when it cost them something. What did they do, and how did it feel? You needn't say who it was.

UNDERSTAND

2. In your own words, what is the difference between *ʿadl* and *qist*? Try the lost-phone example, or one of your own.
3. Qur'an 4:135 names "yourselves, your parents or your relatives" first. Why might those be the hardest people to be fair about?

REFLECT

4. The Prophet (s) sat with his creditor from noon to the next morning rather than let him be wronged. What does that say about how power should behave?
5. Imam al-Sadiq (a) called justice "sweeter than honey." When has doing the fair thing cost you something, yet felt right afterwards? You needn't share what it was.

APPLY

6. Choose one small act of fairness for this week: a debt repaid, a fair hearing, credit given where it is due. What will yours be, and when?

GO DEEPER

7. Read Imam Ali's instructions on people "whom eyes pass over" (*Nahj al-Balagha*, Letter 53; compiled text, not graded here). Who are they in your town today?
8. Read the ziyara in *Kamil al-ziyarat*, ch. 79, no. 3 (unverified chain). Why might pilgrims honour al-Husayn for faithfulness rather than for victory?

CARRY IT HOME

Choose one way in this week:

☐ **Notice:** When you catch yourself judging someone this week, run the swap test from this chapter. Would you decide the same way if they were your brother, or your rival? (Qur'an 5:8)

☐ **Do:** Return something that is not yours: a borrowed book, an overdue debt, the credit for someone else's idea. Do it before anyone has to ask, and notice how it tastes.

☐ **Learn:** Read the chapter "Fairness and Justice" in al-Kafi (vol. 2, Book of Belief and Disbelief, ch. 66) at thaqalayn.net: twenty short sayings, including "sweeter than honey." Copy one where you will see it every day.

Aim. Help the circle see justice as giving each person their due, beginning with ourselves, and as something Islam roots in God's own justice.

Protect this question. No. 4, on the Prophet (s) and his creditor. Guests, new Muslims and lifelong Muslims can all answer it, and it opens up power, patience and fairness to outsiders.

Answer notes.

- *Q2. ʿAdl* gives each right to its owner, like a lost phone handed back. *Qist* applies the same scales to everyone, with no favouritism or prejudice.
- *Q3.* We are most tempted to bend the truth for ourselves and those we love, so the verse closes that door first. "Rich or poor" rules out both flattery of the rich and pity for the poor.

Likely questions.

- *"If God is just, why is the world so unequal?"* See "What if justice costs me?" (God wrongs no one; the injustice people do is not His doing, 10:44). Chapter 11 gives the full answer.
- *"Can Muslims put God's law first and still be good citizens?"* See the "fair question" box.
- *"Was al-Husayn just fighting for power?"* See the last section: his reported aims and his father's prayer. Be honest that the statement is a report without a chain.

Watch for. Some people carry real experiences of injustice, such as racism, a court case or an exploitative employer. Don't ask anyone to tell their story, and steer away from current politics toward principles. The Karbala passage can move people deeply; let silence be.

Bring. A small jar of honey and a jug of water. Read Imam al-Sadiq's saying aloud, then pass them round.

MY THREAD · CHAPTER 20

Where is it easiest for me to demand justice, and where is it hardest for me to give it?

MY QUESTION FOR THE BOX

NOTES

CHAPTER 21 · ETHICS

21

Islam & the Environment

The earth is a trust, not a storehouse.

وَمَا مِن دَآبَّةٍ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ وَلَا طَٰٓئِرٍ يَطِيرُ بِجَنَاحَيْهِ إِلَّآ أُمَمٌ أَمْثَالُكُم مَّا فَرَّطْنَا فِى ٱلْكِتَٰبِ مِن شَىْءٍ ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ يُحْشَرُونَ ﴿٣٨﴾

No creature moves on the earth, and no bird flies on its two wings, but they are communities like you. We have overlooked nothing in the Book. Then they will be brought together before their Lord.

QUR'AN 6:38 · SURAT AL-AN'AM

WATCH · EPISODE 23 · 10:38

youtu.be/MahH0kdgnVc

In the video: a birthday barbecue, a beehive and a grandfather's verse (4:43)

Reading time: about 15 minutes

Al-Rabadha is a stopping place in the open desert. In the last years of his life, one of the companions of the Prophet Muhammad (s) lives here in exile. His name is Abu Dharr al-Ghifari, and he has been sent away from Medina for speaking his mind.[1]

One day somebody finds Abu Dharr giving his donkey a drink with his own hands, and is puzzled. Abu Dharr is a respected elder who knew the Prophet personally. Surely another pair of hands could do this job for him.

"Abu Dharr," he asks, "haven't you got anyone to water your donkey for you?"

Abu Dharr answers with words he heard from the Prophet: "There is no animal that does not ask God every morning, 'O God, give me a good master, one who feeds me until I am full, gives me water until my thirst is gone, and does not load me beyond my strength.'" Then he adds, "So I like to give him his water myself."[2]

It is a small scene, easy to miss. An old man in exile has every reason to feel sorry for himself. Instead he is thinking about a donkey's morning prayer, and he wants to be the answer to it.

Most of us will never keep a donkey. But we drink the same water and eat what grows from the same soil. We share the earth with creatures beyond counting: birds at the window, bees in the garden, fish in seas we will never see. Do they have a claim on us too? Does faith in God say anything about the land, the rivers and the trees? Or is caring for the environment a modern idea that religion has only lately borrowed?

THE BIG QUESTION

Does Islam care about the environment, or is that a modern idea?

Have you ever wondered whether a religion that says the earth was made "for us" has given people permission to use it up? Whether faith has anything practical to say about a dripping tap, a stray cat or a felled tree? Or, if you grew up Muslim, whether caring for the earth is part of your faith or something you do on the side?

> This chapter looks at what the Qur'an and the Prophet's family taught about land, water, animals and trees, and why their answer comes down to one word: trust.

WORDS TO KNOW

khalīfa (خليفة) · *kha-LEE-fa* · a deputy who acts in another's name; the Qur'an's word for humanity's role on earth (2:30).

amāna (أمانة) · *a-MAA-na* · a trust: something placed in your care that is not yours, and that you must one day account for.

ʿimāra (عمارة) · *ʿi-MAA-ra* · making land flourish by farming, planting and building; the task God gives people in 11:61.

mīzān (ميزان) · *mee-ZAAN* · the balance: the measure God set in creation, and the honest scale people must keep (55:7–9).

isrāf (إسراف) · *is-RAAF* · waste: using more than is needed, or throwing away what still has a use.

fasād (فساد) · *fa-SAAD* · corruption or ruin: anything that spoils the good order of life (30:41).

◆

Whose earth is it?

The Qur'an's answer begins with a statement about ownership: "To God belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth" (Qur'an 2:284). When Pharaoh threatened the Israelites, Moses (a) steadied his people with the same truth: "The earth belongs to God" (Qur'an 7:128). If that is so, nothing we hold is ours in the final sense. A title deed records who may use a field for now. It does not record who made it.

How did human beings come to hold it at all? The Qur'an tells the story as a conversation in heaven.

وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةِ إِنِّى جَاعِلٌ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً قَالُوٓا۟
أَتَجْعَلُ فِيهَا مَن يُفْسِدُ فِيهَا وَيَسْفِكُ ٱلدِّمَآءَ وَنَحْنُ نُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِكَ
وَنُقَدِّسُ لَكَ قَالَ إِنِّىٓ أَعْلَمُ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾

Remember when your Lord said to the angels, "I am placing a deputy on the earth." They said, "Will You put on it someone who will corrupt it and spill blood, while we exalt You with praise and declare You holy?" He said, "I know what you do not know."

QUR'AN 2:30 · SURAT AL-BAQARA

NOTICE The angels name the danger before the first human is made: corruption and bloodshed. God does not deny it. He answers only that He knows what they do not.

A *khalifa* is a deputy: someone who stands in another's place and acts in his name. The great Shia commentator al-ʿAllama al-Tabataba'i (d. 1981 CE) drew out what that means. A deputy is only worthy of the title if he reflects the one he represents, in character and in the way he handles what he has been given. That is why the angels were puzzled. How could a creature of dust, pulled by desire and anger, stand in for the All-Merciful? In al-Tabataba'i's words: "What has dust to do with the Lord of lords?"

He also points out that God did not tell the angels they were wrong. The risk was real. And the role was not Adam's alone. It passes to all his children: "It is He who made you successors on the earth... to test you in what He has given you" (Qur'an 6:165).[3]

Picture someone house-sitting for a friend. They may use the kitchen and enjoy the garden; that is the point. But when the owner comes home, there will be a question about how it was left. That is the shape of the human role on earth. The Qur'an even names the task: God "brought you into being from the earth and settled you in it to make it flourish" (Qur'an 11:61). The verb comes from the same root as *ʿimara*: farming, planting, building up, keeping the land alive.

The Imams gave that idea legal shape. Suppose a man lets his land fall to ruin and walks away, and someone else clears its water channels and farms it. When the first man comes back to claim it, Imam Jaʿfar al-Sadiq (a), the sixth Imam (d. 765 CE),

ruled: "The land belongs to God and to whoever makes it flourish."[4] Ownership, on this view, is no licence to neglect. Care is part of what gives a person a claim.

Arabic has a word for anything held like this: *amana*, a trust. A trust is placed in your hands, but it never becomes yours, and one day you will be asked what you did with it. Imam Ali (a), the Prophet's cousin and the first Imam (d. 661 CE), put the idea in a single sentence. Early in his caliphate, when he led the Muslim community, he told the people:

> IMAM ALI (A), THE FIRST IMAM
>
> اتَّقُوا اللهَ فِي عِبَادِهِ وَبِلَادِهِ، فَإِنَّكُمْ مَسْؤُولُونَ حَتَّى عَنِ الْبِقَاعِ وَالْبَهَائِمِ
>
> Be mindful of God in His servants and His lands, for you will be questioned even about patches of ground and about animals.[5]
>
> Nahj al-Balagha · Sermon 167 · **Compiled text, not graded here**

Notice the word *even*. Imam Ali takes it for granted that we will answer for how we treat people. The questioning goes further: to the empty lot, the riverbank, the field at the edge of town and the animals in our care.

A FAIR QUESTION

Didn't God make the earth for us?

"The Qur'an says God created everything on earth for us (Qur'an 2:29) and made it all serve us (Qur'an 45:13). Doesn't that give us a green light to use it however we like?"

It gives a green light to use it, and the Qur'an means that warmly. It counts the warmth, food and carrying strength of livestock among God's gifts (Qur'an 16:5–7). Nothing in it asks people to stop farming, building or eating meat. But three details keep "for you" from meaning "do as you please." First, the gift comes "all of it from Him" (Qur'an 45:13), and a Giver still sees how His gifts are used. He made people successors on the earth "to see how you would act" (Qur'an 10:14). Second, "for you" does not mean "only for you." The earth was laid out "for *al-anam*" (Qur'an 55:10), a word some early commentators read as every living creature, and animals are "communities like you" (Qur'an 6:38).[6] Third, use is not waste or ruin: "Eat and drink, but do not waste" (Qur'an 7:31); "Do not spread corruption on the earth after it has been set right" (Qur'an 7:56). The green light is real. It is the kind given to a trustee.

◆

Do animals matter to God?

The Qur'an pictures a world alive with worship. "The seven heavens and the earth, and all who are in them, glorify Him. There is not a thing that does not celebrate His praise, but you do not understand their praise" (Qur'an 17:44). Birds glide "with wings outspread: each one knows its prayer and its praise" (Qur'an 24:41). The sun and moon, the mountains, "the trees and the animals" bow down to God, the Qur'an says, "and many people" (Qur'an 22:18). Many people, not all.

None of this makes creation divine; Islam worships no river or tree. These verses say something humbler and stranger: every creature is a worshipper of God and a sign pointing to Him. So a sparrow on a fence is at prayer, perhaps more faithfully than we are. To destroy a creature for no good reason is to silence one voice in a choir we cannot hear.

A boy once lifted the lid of the barbecue in his family's backyard on his birthday and found that bees had built a hive inside. His plan was quick: destroy it and light the grill. His grandfather asked what he was doing. Then he recited a verse the boy never forgot: "No creature moves on the earth, and no bird flies on its two wings, but they are communities like you" (Qur'an 6:38).

Communities like you. Bees are not scenery. Like us, they seek safety, guard their young and do not want to die for nothing. The verse does not cancel the party. It asks us to pause before treating another community's life as worthless because it is in the way. Could a beekeeper move the hive? Respect begins with the question.

The Prophet (s) and the Imams turned that respect into duties. A saying of Imam al-Sadiq (a), recorded in several Shia collections though its chain is weak, lists an animal's rights over its owner. Feed it before yourself when you stop. Offer it water whenever you pass water. Do not overload it, or sit chatting on its back. And do not strike its face, "for it glorifies God."[7]

A reliable report confirms the face's special dignity. Asked about branding livestock, Imam al-Sadiq said: "There is no harm in it, except on the face."[8] Cruelty has a price. Imam al-Sadiq told of a woman who was punished because of a cat she tied up until it died of thirst.[9]

Shia law today gives that story legal force. Ayatollah al-Sistani, a leading Shia authority of our time, rules that "it is not permissible to confine an animal, whether owned or not, and leave it without food and drink until it dies." An owner, he adds as a precaution, must provide for the animal's upkeep or hand it to someone who will.[10] As with all practical law, check the rulings of the scholar you follow (your *marja'*).

Kindness reaches further than most people expect. Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a), the fifth Imam (d. c. 733 CE), taught:

> **IMAM MUHAMMAD AL-BAQIR (A), THE FIFTH IMAM**
>
> إِنَّ اللهَ تَبَارَكَ وَتَعَالَى يُحِبُّ إِبْرَادَ الْكَبِدِ الْحَرَّى وَمَنْ سَقَى كَبِداً حَرَّى مِنْ بَهِيمَةٍ أَوْ غَيْرِهَا أَظَلَّهُ اللهُ يَوْمَ لا ظِلَّ إِلاَّ ظِلُّهُ
>
> God, Blessed and Exalted, loves the cooling of a burning liver. Whoever gives water to a burning liver, whether of an animal or of anything else, God will shade him on the day when there is no shade but His.[11]
>
> al-Kafi 4 · Zakat · ch. 41 · no. 6 · **Reliable chain**

In Arabic, a "burning liver" is a creature parched with thirst. The reward is startling: the shade of God on the Day of Judgement, for a bowl of water set down in the heat.

Imam Ali (a) carried the same care into government. The alms tax could be paid in livestock, and his standing orders to its collectors said: "Do not startle any animal or frighten it." Once the herd was in their charge, no one was to separate a she-camel from her calf or milk her so hard that her young went hungry. Nor was anyone to wear her out with riding.

"Let him rest the weary one," the orders go on, "go gently with the one whose hoof is worn and the one that limps, lead them down to the pools they pass, and not turn them off the green land onto the bare roads."[12] Here is a head of state, worrying about the pace of a lame camel.

> **PAUSE AND RECALL**
>
> *In your own words: what is a khalifa? And what, according to Imam Ali (a), will we be questioned about?*

◆

Who owns the water?

In the Qur'an, water is where life begins: "We made every living thing from water" (Qur'an 21:30). Rain is God's mercy, sent down after people have lost hope (Qur'an 42:28). And sharing water is a test of fairness. When Moses (a) prayed for water for his people, God told him to strike a rock with his staff. "Twelve springs gushed out of it, and every people knew its drinking place." Then came the command: "Eat and drink

from God's provision, and do not go about the earth spreading corruption" (Qur'an 2:60; 7:160). Twelve springs, twelve tribes, and no one taking another's share.

The Prophet (s) built the same fairness into farming law. If a man had dammed water to irrigate his land, or held a share of a water channel, and no longer needed it, the Prophet told him: "Do not sell it. Lend it to your neighbour."[13]

When floodwater came down the valley of Mahzur, he ruled that the higher farms could hold it first, but only up to a limit: to the ankles in a palm grove, to the sandal straps in a field of crops. Then the water had to be let go to the farm below, and the one below that.[14]

Judging between the people of Medina over watering their palms, he ruled that the benefit of a thing must not be withheld from others. Among the desert people, he ruled that no one may hold back spare water to keep others off the pasture around it. He added words that became a pillar of Islamic law: "There is no harm and no harming" (*la darar wa-la dirar*).[15] A share of water is a real right. It never includes the right to let a neighbour's field die of thirst.

His family lived by the same rule. Imam Ali (a) once received a piece of land when the Prophet divided some lands among the Muslims. He dug a spring in it, and the water burst out toward the sky "like the neck of a camel," so he named the place Yanbuʿ, "the gusher."

When a messenger arrived with the good news, Ali declared the spring a charity forever, for pilgrims to God's House and travellers on God's road. "It shall not be sold," he said, "nor given away, nor inherited."[16] He gave the spring away the moment he heard it was flowing.

When drought struck, Imam Ali led the people out to pray for rain. His prayer is full of animals: "O God, our mountains have cracked and our land is covered in dust. Our animals are thirsty, wandering bewildered in their pens, crying out like mothers grieving for their young... O God, have mercy on the moaning of those that moan." He asked for rain on "Your untended wild beasts" too.[17]

He also ordered his governor of Egypt, Malik al-Ashtar, to lighten the tax on farmers whose water had failed or whose land had been flooded or parched.[18] He prayed, and he governed. Behind all these rulings stands one of the Qur'an's great pictures: a creation built on balance.

وَٱلسَّمَآءَ رَفَعَهَا وَوَضَعَ ٱلْمِيزَانَ ﴿٧﴾ أَلَّا تَطْغَوْا۟ فِى ٱلْمِيزَانِ ﴿٨﴾ وَأَقِيمُوا۟ ٱلْوَزْنَ بِٱلْقِسْطِ وَلَا تُخْسِرُوا۟ ٱلْمِيزَانَ ﴿٩﴾

And the sky He raised high, and He set the balance: do not overstep the balance. Keep the weights with justice, and do not cut the balance short.

QUR'AN 55:7–9 · SURAT AL-RAHMAN

NOTICE "Balance" (*mizan*) comes three times in three verses. It starts as something God set in place with the sky and ends on the trader's scale.

Al-Tabataba'i read the "balance" God set in place as every measure by which right is told from wrong, in what we believe, say and do. The next verses bring it down to the market scale: weigh honestly.[19] This is not a lesson in modern ecology. It teaches a habit of mind: in a world made with measure, do not take more than your share. The Qur'an's word for overstepping the measure in what we use up is *israf*, waste. "Eat and drink, but do not waste. He does not love the wasteful" (Qur'an 7:31).

How small can waste be? Imam al-Baqir (a) recalled that the Prophet made his ablution for prayer (*wudu*) with a single *mudd* of water, a quarter of what he used for a full bath.[20] Imam al-Sadiq (a) went further: "The least of waste is pouring away what is left in the cup, wearing your best clothes for every day, and throwing away date stones."[21] None of these would make the news. That is the point. Waste begins in the hand, long before it shows up in a landfill or a dried-out river.

◆

Who are we planting for?

If waste begins small, so does its cure. A man once told Imam al-Sadiq (a) that people were calling farming a disliked trade. The Imam answered: "Farm and plant! By God, people have done no work more lawful or more wholesome. By God, they will still be sowing crops and planting palms after the Dajjal appears."[22] The Dajjal is the great deceiver whom Muslims expect near the end of time. The Imam's point is hope: even when the world seems to be ending, keep planting.

Remember the date stones Imam al-Sadiq would not see thrown away? His great-great-grandfather once sat on a whole camel-load of them.

A STORY FROM THE SOURCES

A hundred thousand palm trees

One day a man came upon Imam Ali (a) sitting on top of a camel-load of date stones.

"Abu al-Hasan," the man said, calling him by his familiar name, "what is that you are sitting on?"

"A hundred thousand palm trees," Ali replied, "God willing."

He planted them, the report says, and not a single stone was lost.[23]

In his last years, Ali wrote a will for his estates. His son al-Hasan (a), the second Imam, was to manage them, and after him al-Husayn (a), the third. They were to keep the land itself intact, spend its fruit where he had directed, and not sell a single palm seedling "until the land is so thick with young palms that it cannot be recognised." The scholar who compiled his words explained the phrase: anyone who had known the land before would think it was another place.[24]

Planting outlives the planter. Imam al-Sadiq named six things that go on benefiting a believer after death. Three belong to family and faith: a righteous child who prays for his forgiveness, a copy of the Qur'an that people read, and a good practice that others carry on. The other three belong to the earth: a well he dug, a tree he planted, and water he set flowing for others.[25] Muslims call such gifts *sadaqa jariya*, "flowing charity," because their good keeps running. A sapling planted today may shade a child not yet born.

> *"The land belongs to God and to whoever makes it flourish.*
>
> IMAM JA'FAR AL-SADIQ (A)

The same care holds even where destruction is easiest to excuse. Whenever the Prophet (s) sent out a small expedition, he gave its soldiers their orders, among them: "Do not cut down a tree unless you are forced to."[26] (Chapter 24 quotes the whole briefing.) A weaker report extends the ban to palm trees, fruit trees, crops, and animals killed for anything but food. The firm rule is the one about trees. Still, the Qur'an itself pictures corruption as a man who "strives in the land to spread corruption in it and to destroy crops and livestock" (Qur'an 2:205).

Why does ruin on that scale happen at all? The Qur'an answers with a verse about human hands.

ظَهَرَ ٱلْفَسَادُ فِى ٱلْبَرِّ وَٱلْبَحْرِ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ أَيْدِى ٱلنَّاسِ لِيُذِيقَهُم
بَعْضَ ٱلَّذِى عَمِلُوا۟ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ ﴿٤١﴾

Corruption has appeared on land and sea because of what people's own hands have earned, so that He may let them taste something of what they have done, and perhaps they will turn back.

QUR'AN 30:41 · SURAT AL-RUM

NOTICE The verse does not end in doom. Its last words, "perhaps they will turn back," make the damage a warning while the door is still open.

Al-Tabataba'i read "corruption" here broadly: earthquakes, drought, epidemics, war, the loss of safety, anything that spoils the good order of life on earth. People's deeds and the events of the world, he argued, are bound together.[27] That is a moral teaching, not a scientific forecast. Not every flood is a punishment, and no one should point at a disaster and name the sin behind it. But the verse does insist that greed has consequences beyond the greedy.

Imam Ali (a) said the same in the language of government. He told Malik al-Ashtar to care more about making the land flourish than about collecting its tax. "Tax can only be had through cultivation," he wrote, "and whoever demands tax without cultivation ruins the land and destroys the people." The land is ruined, he added, when its people are impoverished, and "its people are impoverished only when those who govern them are set on amassing."[28] When the heart grows greedy, the earth pays.

So the earth is not a storehouse, stocked for us to empty. It is a trust. The Prophet's family spelled out what that means on an ordinary day: a bowl of water for a thirsty animal, a share of water passed down the valley, a cup not poured away, a tree planted for someone not yet born.

In the same sermon as his warning about patches of ground and animals, Imam Ali gave advice for the journey every soul is making: "Travel light, and you will catch up."[29] He meant the soul's baggage on its way to God. It is good advice for life on

earth too. And somewhere, every morning, the animals are still asking God for a good master. Each of us can decide whether to be the answer.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. The Qur'an makes human beings God's deputies (*khalifa*) on earth: trustees who answer for it, not owners.
2. Every creature glorifies God, and animals are "communities like you," with rights the Imams spelled out.
3. Water is a shared trust: lend what you do not need, and let it flow on downstream.
4. Waste begins small, like pouring away the water left in a cup, and oversteps the balance God set.
5. Planting, sharing water and sparing trees, even in war, hand the earth on to those who come after.

NEXT TIME · GO FURTHER

Next time: *Apostasy in Islam.* The Qur'an says there is "no compulsion in religion" (Qur'an 2:256). So what does Islamic law say about leaving Islam, and why?

Go further:

Course: Introduction to Islamic Ethics, a Level 1 course at Tasneem Institute (tasneeminstitute.org/courses/introduction-to-islamic-ethics)

Read: *Nahj al-Balagha*, Letter 25, Imam Ali's standing orders to his alms collectors, with its rules for the care of animals (numbering of Subhi al-Salih).

Watch: Invitation to Islam, Episode 23, "Islam & the Environment" (11 min).

In the circle

LOOK BACK

1. The last chapter defined justice as giving everyone their due. What is one example?
2. Chapter 16 quoted Imam Ali: every person is "your brother in faith, or your equal in creation." What did he mean?
3. Part Two asks, "Is it good?" Which teaching so far would you defend to a sceptic?

TALK ABOUT IT

WARM-UP

1. What is one outdoor place you have loved, such as a garden, a park, a river or a single tree? What made it matter to you?

UNDERSTAND

2. What is the difference between an owner and a *khalifa*, as this chapter describes it (Qur'an 2:30; Imam Ali's words in Sermon 167)?
3. What did the Prophet (s) rule about water a farmer no longer needed, and about flood-water coming down a valley?

REFLECT

4. Every morning, the Prophet said, each animal asks God for a good master. Which creatures depend on the way you live? What might they ask of you?
5. Qur'an 30:41 links "corruption on land and sea" to what people's hands have earned. Where do you see that link today, and where would you hesitate to draw it?

APPLY

6. Imam al-Sadiq called pouring away the water left in a cup "the least of waste." What small waste could you stop this week? (If you make *wudu*, include it.)

GO DEEPER

7. Read Imam Ali's orders to his alms collectors (Nahj al-Balagha, Letter 25; compiled text, not graded here). What do his rules about camels show about how he saw power?
8. Read Imam Ali's prayer for rain (Nahj al-Balagha, Sermon 115; compiled text, not graded here). What does it ask on behalf of animals, and why might that matter?

CARRY IT HOME

Choose one way in this week:

☐ **Notice:** Spend ten minutes outdoors at dawn or dusk and count the creatures you hear. The Qur'an says each one "knows its prayer and its praise" (Qur'an 24:41).

☐ **Do:** Set out a shallow dish of water for birds or animals, and keep it filled all week, especially on hot days. Imam al-Baqir (a) promised God's shade to anyone who waters "a burning liver." Or plant one seed in a pot as a small *sadaqa jariya*.

☐ **Learn:** Find out where your tap water comes from, and who else depends on the same source, upstream and down, as in the valley of Mahzur.

Aim. Help the circle see care for the earth and its creatures as part of faith: a trust held for God, not a modern add-on.

Protect this question. No. 4, on the animals' morning prayer. Guests, new Muslims and lifelong Muslims can all answer it from their own lives.

Answer notes.

- *Q2.* An owner may please himself. A *khalifa* acts in someone else's name and answers for what he holds (2:30). Imam Ali says we will be questioned "even about patches of ground and about animals."
- *Q3.* Lend surplus water to your neighbour rather than selling it. Once your farm has had its share of a flood, let the water flow on to the farm below. Never hold back spare water to keep others off the pasture.

Likely questions.

- *"So should Muslims be vegetarian?"* Islam permits eating meat and using animals, within the animals' rights. See the "fair question" box and "Do animals matter to God?"
- *"Is climate change God's punishment?"* See the discussion of 30:41: a moral link, not a forecast, and never a verdict on particular victims.
- *"What can our circle actually do?"* See "Carry it home." A planting day or a clean-up could become the circle's Part Two service project.

Watch for. Some people carry real anxiety about the climate, so keep the tone hopeful and practical. Steer clear of party politics. Don't shame anyone's diet, car or job; farmers and commuters may be in the room. Pet owners may want to share stories: give them a minute, not the evening.

Bring. A jug of water and cups for everyone. Or a handful of date stones and a pot of soil, and plant one together.

MY THREAD · CHAPTER 21

What has been placed in my care, and what would I like to hand on?

MY QUESTION FOR THE BOX

NOTES

22

Apostasy in Islam

A hard teaching, stated plainly and explained with care.

لَآ إِكْرَاهَ فِى ٱلدِّينِ قَد تَّبَيَّنَ ٱلرُّشْدُ مِنَ ٱلْغَىِّ فَمَن يَكْفُرْ بِٱلطَّٰغُوتِ وَيُؤْمِنۢ بِٱللَّهِ فَقَدِ ٱسْتَمْسَكَ بِٱلْعُرْوَةِ ٱلْوُثْقَىٰ لَا ٱنفِصَامَ لَهَا وَٱللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٥٦﴾

There is no compulsion in religion. The right course now stands apart from error.

QUR'AN 2:256 · SURAT AL-BAQARA

A NOTE OF CARE This chapter touches people who have left Islam, people living with doubt, and the families who love them. No one here will be asked what they believe or no longer believe, and anyone may pass at any time.

WATCH · EPISODE 14 · 12:42

youtu.be/v16AjDz6jRM

In the video: why walking away from faith cannot harm God, from Qur'an 5:54 (9:43)

Reading time: about 20 minutes

Mecca, in the early years of the mission of the Prophet Muhammad (s). A group of believers has been seized and tortured to make them give up their faith. Among them are ʻAmmar ibn Yasir and his parents, Yasir and Sumayya, along with Bilal, Suhayb and Khabbab. Yasir and Sumayya die under the torture. Tradition remembers them as the first martyrs of Islam.

ʻAmmar breaks. He gives his tormentors, with his tongue, what they want to hear. He speaks against the Prophet, and he speaks well of their gods. Then they let him go.

God makes it known to the Prophet, and some people are quick with a verdict: ʻAmmar has disbelieved. The Prophet will not hear it. "No," he says. "ʻAmmar is filled with faith from the top of his head to his feet. Faith is mixed into his flesh and blood."

Then ʻAmmar himself comes to him, weeping.

"What news?" the Prophet asks.

"Bad news, Messenger of God. They would not let me go until I had insulted you and praised their gods."

The Prophet wipes the tears from ʻAmmar's eyes. "If they do it again," he tells him, "say again what you said." Then a verse of the Qur'an comes down. Whoever disbelieves after believing faces God's anger, it says, "except one who is forced while his heart rests secure in faith" (Qur'an 16:106).[1]

ʻAmmar's words were dragged out of a body in pain, and God looked at his heart. But the same verse speaks of someone else: a person who "opens his heart to disbelief," with no one forcing him. What does Islam say about that person? Its answer includes one of the hardest teachings in its law. This chapter states that teaching plainly, and then asks what it does, and does not, mean.

THE BIG QUESTION

Does Islam really punish people for leaving it?

Have you ever wondered how a faith that says "there is no compulsion in religion" can also have a death penalty for apostasy? Or what would actually happen if someone you love walked away from Islam? Or, if you are Muslim, whether your own unanswered questions put your faith, or you, in danger?

> This chapter sets out what the Qur'an says, what classical Shia law teaches and the strict limits that surround it, without softening any of it.

WORDS TO KNOW

irtidād (اِرتِداد) · *ir-ti-DAAD* · apostasy: turning away from Islam after having been a Muslim. Such a person is a *murtadd*.

fiṭrī (فِطرِيّ) · *FIT-ree* · in Shia law, an apostate who was born to at least one Muslim parent.

millī (مِلّيّ) · *MIL-lee* · in Shia law, an apostate who had first converted to Islam from another faith.

ḥadd, plural **ḥudūd** (حَدّ / حُدود) · *HADD, hu-DOOD* · a fixed penalty of Islamic law, for a lawful judge to apply.

juḥūd (جُحود) · *ju-HOOD* · knowing denial: rejecting what one has recognised as true. Doubt is not *juḥūd*.

takfīr (تَكفير) · *tak-FEER* · declaring a Muslim to be an unbeliever; al-Sistani condemns its use to justify violence.

◆

Can anyone be forced to believe?

People who meet Islam for the first time often hear two things in the same week. Islam calls itself a religion of mercy. And Islamic law, they are told, puts people to death for leaving it. Side by side, the two claims sound like a contradiction, and some critics stop there and call the whole faith barbaric. The fair way forward is slower: to ask what the Qur'an says, what the law says, and what each requires.

Start with the Qur'an. Its best-known sentence on the subject is blunt: "There is no compulsion in religion" (Qur'an 2:256). It asks the Prophet (s) himself, "Will you then force people until they become believers?" (10:99). And it tells him to announce: "The truth is from your Lord. So let whoever wills believe, and whoever wills disbelieve" (18:29). That verse goes straight on to warn of the Fire. Belief is free, but in the Qur'an's eyes the choice still matters before God.

The great Shia commentator al-Sayyid Muhammad Husayn al-Tabataba'i (d. 1981) explained why force cannot work. Compulsion, he wrote, reaches only the body and its outward actions. Belief has causes of its own, in understanding and perception, and ignorance can never give birth to knowledge. You can force a hand to sign a paper. You cannot force a mind to agree with it. Nor, he added, did the later verses on fighting cancel "no compulsion," because the verse's own reason never expires: the right course now stands apart from error.[2]

The Qur'an speaks about leaving faith more often than many people realise, and the verse revealed about ʿAmmar is among the most striking.

مَن كَفَرَ بِٱللَّهِ مِنۢ بَعۡدِ إِيمَٰنِهِۦٓ إِلَّا مَنۡ أُكۡرِهَ وَقَلۡبُهُۥ مُطۡمَئِنُّۢ
بِٱلۡإِيمَٰنِ وَلَٰكِن مَّن شَرَحَ بِٱلۡكُفۡرِ صَدۡرٗا فَعَلَيۡهِمۡ غَضَبٞ مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ
وَلَهُمۡ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٞ ﴿١٠٦﴾

Whoever disbelieves in God after having believed (not one who is forced while his heart rests secure in faith, but one who opens his heart wide to disbelief): upon such people falls anger from God, and theirs is a terrible punishment.

QUR'AN 16:106 · SURAT AL-NAHL

NOTICE Two people say the same words. One is forced, his heart "secure in faith"; the other "opens his heart to disbelief." The verse weighs the heart, and names God's penalty, not a court's.

Other verses speak with the same gravity. Whoever turns from their religion and dies a disbeliever, the Qur'an warns, has seen their deeds "come to nothing in this world and the hereafter" (2:217). People who disbelieve after believing are under God's curse, "except those who repent afterwards and put things right, for God is forgiving and merciful" (3:86–89). One verse even pictures someone who believes, disbelieves, believes again and disbelieves again (4:137): a whole life of turning, and turning back. And to the believers it says this:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ مَن يَرْتَدَّ مِنكُمْ عَن دِينِهِۦ فَسَوْفَ يَأْتِى ٱللَّهُ
بِقَوْمٍ يُحِبُّهُمْ وَيُحِبُّونَهُۥٓ أَذِلَّةٍ عَلَى ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ أَعِزَّةٍ عَلَى ٱلْكَٰفِرِينَ
يُجَٰهِدُونَ فِى سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ وَلَا يَخَافُونَ لَوْمَةَ لَآئِمٍ ذَٰلِكَ فَضْلُ ٱللَّهِ
يُؤْتِيهِ مَن يَشَآءُ وَٱللَّهُ وَٰسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٥٤﴾

You who believe: if any of you turns back from his religion, God will bring a people whom He loves and who love Him, humble towards the believers, unyielding towards the deniers, striving in God's way and fearing no one's blame. That is God's favour, which He gives to whomever He wills. God is boundless and all-knowing.

QUR'AN 5:54 · SURAT AL-MA'IDA

NOTICE Speaking to believers about those who leave, the verse answers with a promise, not a penalty: God will bring "a people whom He loves and who love Him."

Notice what these verses do, and what they leave undone. They treat leaving faith as one of the gravest choices a person can make, and they place its consequences in God's hands. Someone who walks away harms himself, not God.

One verse does speak of this world. It warns certain hypocrites, who "disbelieved after their Islam" and schemed at what they could not achieve, of "a painful punishment in this world and the hereafter" (9:74). Even so, the Qur'an prescribes no legal penalty for apostasy: no sentence for a court to carry out. The classical law that does exist comes from another source, the teachings of the Prophet's family. Before we look at it, we need to know whom it concerns.

◆

Is doubting the same as leaving?

Many people, especially the young, carry a quiet fear. They have questions about God or about Islam that will not go away, and they wonder whether the questions themselves have made them apostates. The Imams of the Prophet's family met this fear

head-on. One day Imam Jaʿfar al-Sadiq (a), the sixth Imam (d. 765 CE), was sitting with two of his leading students, Muhammad ibn Muslim and Zurara ibn Aʿyan. A third, Abu Basir, came in with a question.

IMAM JAʿFAR AL-SADIQ (A), THE SIXTH IMAM, AS TOLD BY MUHAMMAD IBN MUSLIM

كُنْتُ عِنْدَ أَبِي عَبْدِ اللهِ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلام) جَالِساً عَنْ يَسَارِهِ وَزُرَارَةُ عَنْ يَمِينِهِ فَدَخَلَ عَلَيْهِ أَبُو بَصِيرٍ فَقَالَ يَا أَبَا عَبْدِ اللهِ مَا تَقُولُ فِيمَنْ شَكَّ فِي اللهِ فَقَالَ كَافِرٌ يَا أَبَا مُحَمَّدٍ قَالَ فَشَكَّ فِي رَسُولِ اللهِ فَقَالَ كَافِرٌ قَالَ ثُمَّ الْتَفَتَ إِلَى زُرَارَةَ فَقَالَ إِنَّمَا يَكْفُرُ إِذَا جَحَدَ

I was sitting with Abu ʿAbd Allah [Imam al-Sadiq], on his left, and Zurara was on his right. Abu Basir came in and asked, "Abu ʿAbd Allah, what do you say about someone who doubts God?" He said, "A disbeliever, Abu Muhammad." "And if he doubts the Messenger of God?" "A disbeliever." Then he turned to Zurara and said: "He becomes a disbeliever only when he denies."[3]

al-Kafi 2 · Belief & Disbelief · ch. 170 · no. 3 · **Reliable chain**

The Imam's last sentence corrects anyone who heard only the first two. The word he uses for "denies," *jahada*, means rejecting what you know. The Qur'an uses it of people who denied God's signs "though their own souls were sure of them" (27:14). Doubt that stays a question, and keeps looking, is not that. Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a), the fifth Imam (d. c. 733 CE), put it as a rule. Whatever grows out of acknowledging and accepting is faith, he said, and whatever grows out of rejecting and denying is disbelief.[4]

The Prophet (s) himself once met a frightened believer. A man came to him and said, "Messenger of God, I am ruined!" The Prophet named the thought before the man could. "Did the Wicked One come to you and ask, 'Who created you?' And you said, 'God.' And he said, 'Then who created God?'" The man said, "Yes, by Him who sent you with the truth, that is exactly what happened." The Prophet said: "That, by God, is pure faith."

Imam al-Sadiq later explained the words. It was the man's fear that he was ruined, when that thought crossed his heart, that showed his faith.[5] The Prophet also taught that some things are "lifted" from his community: they are not held against anyone.

Among them are what people are forced into, what they do not know, and brooding over intrusive thoughts about creation, "so long as the lips do not utter it."[6]

Far from forbidding questions, Shia teaching requires them. Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani (b. 1930) is a leading Shia authority of our time. His book of rulings opens by saying that belief in the foundations of the faith must rest on a person's own insight, never on someone else's say-so.[7]

Al-Tabataba'i went further. Muslims must think about the truths of their faith, he wrote, and if a doubt arises, "there is no harm in it." Its owner should take it to the Qur'an, and then to someone who can answer it, until the doubt is resolved or shown to be mistaken.[8]

Imam al-Sadiq put the whole matter in a single line: "People are ruined only because they do not ask."[9] The man who said "I am ruined!" was not ruined. He asked.

Doubt, then, is not apostasy. Neither is a question, a struggle, or a long season of feeling far from God. The law that follows concerns something much narrower.

> **PAUSE AND RECALL**
>
> *In your own words, what is the difference between doubting and denying? Which story in this chapter shows it best for you?*

◆

What does the law actually say?

Now the hard part, stated plainly. Classical Shia law does prescribe death for some apostates. The jurists draw it not from the Qur'an but from the reports of the Prophet's family. Its strongest basis is a report with a sound chain in *al-Kafi*, the most important collection of Shia hadith, in which a student asked Imam al-Baqir (a) directly.

IMAM MUHAMMAD AL-BAQIR (A), THE FIFTH IMAM, AS TOLD BY MUHAMMAD IBN MUSLIM

سَأَلْتُ أَبَا جَعْفَرٍ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلام) عَنِ الْمُرْتَدِّ فَقَالَ مَنْ رَغِبَ عَنْ دِينِ الإِسْلامِ وَكَفَرَ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ اللهُ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وآلِه) بَعْدَ إِسْلامِهِ فَلا تَوْبَةَ لَهُ وَقَدْ وَجَبَ قَتْلُهُ وَبَانَتِ امْرَأَتُهُ مِنْهُ فَلْيَقْسَمْ مَا تَرَكَ عَلَى وُلْدِهِ

I asked Abu Ja'far [Imam al-Baqir] about the apostate. He said: "Whoever turns away from the religion of Islam and disbelieves in what God sent down to Muhammad (s), after having been a Muslim: there is no repentance for him, his execution has become due, his wife is separated from him, and what he leaves is to be divided among his children."[10]

al-Kafi 7 · Inheritance · ch. 46 · no. 4 · **Reliable chain**

The words "there is no repentance for him" sound as if God shuts His door. The jurists do not read them that way. The well-known view takes them to mean that repentance does not cancel the legal penalty. Before God the door stays open until death (3:89; 4:18). Al-Sistani goes further. He rules that such a person's repentance is accepted "inwardly and outwardly": he is ritually pure again, his worship is valid, and he may marry. And he calls the well-known view, that repentance leaves the penalty in place, "problematic," requiring caution.[11]

The law distinguishes two cases. A report preserved by the early compiler al-Saduq (d. 991 CE) has Imam Ali (a) replying to a letter from one of his agents. A Muslim "born upon the *fitra*," that is, born into Islam, who renounces it is not offered repentance; a convert is invited to repent first.[12] The report has no chain, but its phrase "born upon the *fitra*" gave the first case its name.

The *fitri* apostate was born to at least one Muslim parent; al-Sistani adds that he must also have been a Muslim himself after reaching the age of discernment. The *milli* apostate is a convert who leaves. He is asked to repent, and one report allows three days.[13] A woman, in either case, is not executed. The law confines her under hard conditions until she repents, and accepts her repentance whenever it comes.[14]

Then come the conditions, and they are strict. The person must be adult, sane, and acting intentionally and by free choice. Words forced out by coercion, like 'Ammar's, count for nothing. So do words spoken heedlessly, in jest, by a slip of the tongue, in an anger that takes away self-control, or without knowing what they mean.[15]

The renunciation must be proven, by the person's own confession or by two just witnesses. If someone says he spoke by mistake, or was forced and the circumstances bear him out, the classical jurists accept his word.[16] Over all of it stands a maxim the jurists apply to every fixed penalty: "Avert the fixed penalties by means of doubts." It has no chain, but the principle governs the whole field.[17]

There is no inquisition in any of this. The law reaches only what a person openly says or does, and no court may search a heart. The Qur'an told the first believers, "Do not say to someone who offers you peace, 'You are not a believer'" (4:94). In 2015, in guidance written for fighters on the battlefield, al-Sistani condemned questioning people's faith in order to target them. "Whosoever bears testimony that there is only one God and that Muhammad is His messenger is indeed a Muslim," he wrote. "That person's life and property must be safeguarded."[18]

Who may carry out the penalty? Under al-Sistani's rulings, never a private person. A report in al-Saduq's collection contains two phrases. The first says that the apostate's blood is "lawful to whoever hears it from him." The second follows in the same breath: "It is upon the Imam to execute him, if he is brought before him."[19] Some classical scholars read the first phrase as a permission for anyone who hears. Others, from al-Shaykh al-Mufid (d. 1022) to al-Khu'i (d. 1992), gave the penalty to the Imam or his deputy alone.[20]

No one, al-Sistani rules, may go as far as wounding or killing in the name of forbidding wrong. Only the Imam or his deputy may, and only to prevent a greater harm.[21] Under his rulings, no private person anywhere may take this law into his own hands. Where Muslims live as minorities, there is no such court at all.

Is any of this more than theory? Honesty requires a mixed answer. Reports in the Shia collections describe Imam Ali executing men who renounced Islam during his rule, though their chains are weak or missing.[22] A saying often quoted online, "Whoever changes his religion, kill him," comes from Sunni collections. It does not appear in the major Shia collections, and Shia law does not rest on it.[23]

It is often said that no authentic report shows the Prophet (s) executing anyone merely for changing his religion in private. That is true, and to be expected: private belief was never the law's business.

A CLOSER LOOK

Who may apply it today?

Asked whether the ruler or the judge should carry out the fixed penalties, Imam al-Sadiq (a) said they belong "to the one who holds the authority to judge."[24] Who holds it while the twelfth Imam is in occultation, hidden from public view? Jurists have long disagreed. Ibn Idris al-Hilli (d. c. 1202) reserved the penalties to the Imam or his appointee, claiming the scholars agreed. Al-Muhaqqiq al-Hilli (d. 1277), author of the standard classical manual, recorded the view that qualified jurists may apply them, without settling it. Others allow a fully qualified jurist who can act safely.[25]

Today's authorities differ too. The senior jurist (*marja'*) Muhammad Ishaq al-Fayyad and 'Abd al-Karim Musawi Ardabili (d. 2016) spare even a man born Muslim if he repents. 'Abd Allah Jawadi Amuli (b. 1933) exempts someone who loses faith through honest research, since doubt averts the penalty. Sayyid Muhammad Sa'id al-Hakim (d. 2021) was reported as saying that punishing apostates "is not our duty." Most jurists keep the traditional ruling, hedged with its conditions.[26] For practical questions, check the rulings of the scholar you follow (your *marja'*).

◆

Why would a merciful faith keep such a law?

Muslim teachers often explain the law with an analogy: apostasy is a kind of treason. Even secular states punish treason harshly. Under United States law, anyone who owes the country allegiance and wages war against it, or gives its enemies aid and comfort, may be sentenced to death.[27]

The analogy points to something real. In Medina the community of faith was also the political community, and the Qur'an was its highest law. Al-Tabataba'i put it in a phrase: in Islam, "the frontier" of the realm "is belief," not geography.[28] To renounce that belief in public could mean renouncing your place in the community, and sometimes going over to its enemies.

The Qur'an records one way a public renunciation could be used as a weapon, by a party of the "People of the Book," its name for Jews and Christians. They urged one another to believe "at the start of the day, and disbelieve at its end, so that they may turn back" (3:72). The commentators describe a small group who agreed to try this.[29] Its target was the believers' confidence, not anyone's private conscience.

Notice how the Qur'an answers in the very next verse. It sets no penalty. It gives the Prophet (s) a sentence to say: "Guidance is God's guidance" (3:73). Even a hostile campaign is met with an argument.

So the treason analogy helps explain why the law existed. It does not define the law. Neither the classical manuals nor al-Sistani's rulings make rebellion, conspiracy or treason a condition of apostasy. Someone who openly and freely renounces Islam, under the conditions above, falls within the classical definition even if he harms no one.

Some modern researchers argue that the penalty is a governmental measure rather than a fixed one: a discretionary punishment that a ruler may apply or set aside as circumstances require.[30] That is a modern reading, and a minority one. It deserves a hearing, but it should not be passed off as the classical law.

Islam is not the only faith with hard texts on this subject. The Torah, which Jews and Christians both read as scripture, orders death for anyone who secretly entices a relative to "go and serve other gods" (Deuteronomy 13:6–10). The enticer is not to be spared, even if it is "the wife of thy bosom." The Torah orders the same for anyone who "blasphemeth the name of the LORD" (Leviticus 24:16).[31] These laws concern enticing others to idolatry, and blasphemy, not private doubt.

What matters is what Jewish tradition did with them. The Torah itself demands at least two witnesses for any death sentence (Deuteronomy 17:6). The rabbis then wrapped capital cases in so much procedure that the Mishnah, the early code of Jewish law, calls a court that executes once in seven years "destructive." Two great rabbis of the early second century, Tarfon and Akiva, said that had they sat on the court, no one would ever have been executed. Another, Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel, replied that they would only have multiplied murderers.[32]

The point is not that other faiths have hard texts too. It is that serious traditions keep their scriptures and surround the hardest texts with law. Islamic law did the same, and its scholars still argue, in good faith, about how far those limits reach.

A FAIR QUESTION

If there is "no compulsion in religion," isn't a death penalty for leaving just compulsion by another name?

The classical jurists saw no contradiction, and many people today still feel one. Both deserve a fair hearing. For the jurists, "no compulsion" means that belief cannot and must not be forced into anyone. The penalty, in their view, punishes not a belief but a public act: a free, informed and proven renunciation, with consequences for the whole community. Al-Tabataba'i draws the line sharply. Belief itself, he says, is not a voluntary act that law can forbid or permit; law can govern only acting on it, such as calling others to it and spreading it.[33]

Many people, Muslims among them, find the distinction hard: a penalty on expressing a belief still weighs on the believer. Some contemporary Shia scholars have narrowed the ruling sharply (see "Who may apply it today?"), and a minority of researchers treat it as a discretionary measure. The mainstream manuals, al-Sistani's among them, keep the ruling and hedge it with conditions, and his rulings forbid private enforcement. Honesty means showing the whole range, not pretending the question is settled.

For believers, the deepest question about any law is not whether it feels familiar, but whether God gave it, and exactly what He gave. That is why the jurists' care matters. A law that claims divine authority binds only as far as its evidence reaches, and here the evidence comes wrapped in conditions, doubts and a judge. A faith confident in its foundations can state its hardest teaching without dressing it up, and then insist on every limit its sources draw around it.

◆

What if someone you love walks away?

For most families, apostasy is not a question about courts. It arrives at the kitchen table: a son who says he no longer believes, a sister who has stopped praying, a friend who has joined another faith. What then?

First, no one may harm them. Al-Sistani's rulings leave no room for vigilantes. His 2015 guidance traced the habit of declaring Muslims unbelievers back to the Kharijites, the early zealots who did exactly that.[34]

Imam Ali (a), the first Imam (d. 661 CE), knew them well. They had pressed him to accept an arbitration, then turned on him for accepting it, and demanded that he

confess himself an unbeliever.[35] One day, as he sat with his companions and gave them some advice, a Kharijite who heard him burst out: "God curse him, the unbeliever! How learned he is!" The companions leapt up to kill the man.

"Easy," said Ali. "It is only an insult for an insult, or else pardon for an offence."[36]

The man had called the Imam of the Muslims a disbeliever to his face, and the Imam would not let anyone touch him for it. Ali did, in the end, meet the Kharijites in battle. Yet he left his followers this instruction: "Do not kill the Kharijites after me. One who sought the truth and missed it is not like one who sought falsehood and found it."[37]

> *"One who sought the truth and missed it is not like one who sought falsehood and found it.*
>
> IMAM ALI (A)

Second, love and duty continue. The Qur'an speaks of parents who press their child to worship other gods: "Do not obey them, yet keep them company in this world with kindness" (31:15). A report from Imam al-Sadiq (a), with a weak chain, puts the same spirit in a sentence. A follower asked whether relatives who did not share his beliefs had any claim on him. "Yes," said the Imam. "The right of kinship is cut by nothing."[38]

Leaving Islam does have legal effects within a family, on a marriage and on inheritance. Al-Sistani, for example, rules that a wife's apostasy ends the marriage unless she returns to Islam before her waiting period ends.[39] These are matters for a quiet conversation with a scholar, not for anger. Al-Tabataba'i named the wrong way plainly. He rejected every attempt to press belief on souls by force, "with the whip or the sword, or with *takfir*, shunning and refusing to mix." Truth and the upright religion, he wrote, could never approve of it.[40]

This chapter began with a man in tears, and with people too quick to call him an apostate. The Prophet (s) refused the verdict and wiped away the tears. Years later, mourning the companions he had lost, Imam Ali would cry out, "Where is 'Ammar?"[41] The man some had called an apostate was remembered among those who "went forward on the truth."

The law of apostasy is real, and this book will not pretend otherwise. But its own sources hedge it with free choice, sound mind, clear proof, a lawful judge and the benefit of every doubt. For most of us, its first lesson is restraint. God weighs the heart.

The rest of us are asked to keep our hands still, our questions honest and our doors open.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. The Qur'an forbids forcing belief and treats leaving faith as a grave matter between a person and God.
2. Doubt is not apostasy. In Shia teaching, a person disbelieves only by knowingly denying what they recognise.
3. Classical Shia law, drawn from the hadith, prescribes death for some male apostates. Women are never executed.
4. The law reaches only a free, proven, outward renunciation. Under al-Sistani's rulings, no private person may act.
5. Jurists still debate its application today, and families keep every duty of kindness to relatives who leave.

NEXT TIME · GO FURTHER

Next time: *Why Did Islam Allow Slavery?* The Qur'an calls freeing a slave "the steep road" (90:11–13). So why did Islamic law not end slavery at a stroke?

Go further:

Course: Fiqh Made Easy: Practical Principles, a Level 1 course at Tasneem Institute (tasneeminstitute.org/courses/fiqh-made-easy-practical-principles)

Read: two short chapters of *al-Kafi*, vol. 2, Book of Belief and Disbelief: "Doubt" (ch. 170) and "Whispering" (ch. 187), where the Imams answer believers who fear their own thoughts.

Watch: Invitation to Islam, Episode 14, "Apostasy in Islam" (13 min).

In the circle

LOOK BACK

1. Chapter 21 quoted Imam al-Baqir (a) on giving water to a thirsty animal. What reward did he name?
2. In Chapter 16, Imam Ali told his governor that every person is one of two things. What were they?
3. Part Two asks, "Is it good?" Can a severe law still be just? What would it need?

TALK ABOUT IT

WARM-UP

1. Have you ever changed your mind about something that mattered to the people around you? How did they respond? You needn't share what it was.

UNDERSTAND

2. In the story of Abu Basir and Zurara, what is the difference between doubting and denying, and why does it matter here?
3. What conditions does classical Shia law set before the penalty for apostasy can even be considered, and who may apply it under al-Sistani's rulings?

REFLECT

4. The Prophet refused to call ʿAmmar an apostate and wiped his tears. What does this scene suggest about how Islam pictures God's judgement?
5. Do you find the classical line between private belief and public renunciation convincing? What would you still want to ask a scholar?

APPLY

6. Chapter 18 called family "a promise kept." If someone you love said they no longer believed, what would keeping that promise look like? You needn't say who.

GO DEEPER

7. Read Imam Ali's words on the Kharijites (Nahj al-Balagha, Sermon 61; compiled text, not graded here). How does he separate sincere error from deliberate falsehood?
8. Read the report of the man who said "I am ruined!" (al-Kafi, vol. 2, Book of Belief and Disbelief, ch. 187, no. 3; reliable chain). Why might fear for one's faith be a sign of having it?

CARRY IT HOME

Choose one way in this week:

☐ **Notice:** Watch how quickly people, online or in person, label others "unbelievers," "heretics" or "traitors." Each time, ask yourself what the label does to the conversation that follows.

☐ **Do:** Write down one question about faith that you have never dared to ask. Take it to someone who welcomes questions, or drop it in the circle's question box. "People are ruined only because they do not ask."

☐ **Learn:** Read Qur'an 16:106 and 3:86–89 slowly, side by side. Note what each passage says about the heart, and what each says about the way back to God.

Aim. Help the circle understand the classical law honestly, and the real limits on it, while keeping the room safe for anyone who doubts.

Protect this question. No. 5: whether the line between private belief and public renunciation convinces. It lets guests voice real discomfort, and shows that scholars still debate it.

Answer notes.

- *Q2.* Doubt is not disbelief; disbelief is *juhud*, knowing denial. The Imam corrected the impression his first answers gave, the frightened man's fear was "pure faith," and what people do not know is "lifted."
- *Q3.* Adult, sane, intending and free; an outward act, proven by confession or two just witnesses; doubts avert it. Under al-Sistani's rulings only lawful authority may act: no private person may wound or kill in the name of forbidding wrong (masʾala 1273). Some classical scholars read one report as allowing anyone who hears.

Likely questions.

- *"So does Islam have a death penalty for apostasy or not?"* Classical law does, for some cases, under strict conditions; al-Sistani's rulings leave it to lawful authority alone, and its application today is debated. See "What does the law actually say?" and the box.
- *"What if my child or spouse leaves Islam?"* See "What if someone you love walks away?" Legal effects belong in a private conversation with a scholar.
- *"What about the fatwa against Salman Rushdie?"* On 14 February 1989 Ayatollah Khomeini, then Iran's leader, called on Muslims everywhere to kill Rushdie over a novel judged insulting to the Prophet; Rushdie survived a stabbing in 2022. Classical law treats insulting the Prophet separately from apostasy, under its own rules. Don't settle it tonight; refer it to a scholar.

Watch for. Read the care note aloud. Someone present may have left Islam, may be doubting, or may love someone who has. Never ask where anyone stands, and never let the group discuss whether a named person is an apostate. If anyone discloses fear for their safety, follow the centre's safeguarding policy.

Bring. The question box and plenty of slips: a night for anonymous questions.

MY THREAD · CHAPTER 22

What question about faith have I been afraid to ask, and whom could I ask?

MY QUESTION FOR THE BOX

NOTES

23

Why Did Islam Allow Slavery?

What the law allowed, and the freedom it kept calling for.

فَلَا ٱقْتَحَمَ ٱلْعَقَبَةَ ﴿١١﴾ وَمَآ أَدْرَىٰكَ مَا ٱلْعَقَبَةُ ﴿١٢﴾ فَكُّ رَقَبَةٍ ﴿١٣﴾

Yet he has not taken on the steep ascent. And what will make you understand what the steep ascent is? It is freeing a slave.

QUR'AN 90:11–13 · SURAT AL-BALAD

A NOTE OF CARE For some in this room, slavery is family history, and for others it still happens in places they know. Speak about it honestly and gently; no one needs to share their own family's story.

WATCH · EPISODE 17 · 9:46

youtu.be/Q0aUg1GSuuw

In the video: freedom written into the penalties for sin (5:13)

Reading time: about 20 minutes

Ishaq ibn ʻAmmar has news, and he brings it to Imam Jaʻfar al-Sadiq (a), the sixth Imam (d. 765 CE). A son has been born to him.

"Why not name him Muhammad?" the Imam asks.

"I already have."

"Then do not strike Muhammad, and do not insult him. May God make him the delight of your eyes while you live, and a true successor after you."

Ishaq has a father's practical question too. What trade should the boy learn? Keep him from five, the Imam replies, and put him wherever you like. Not with a money-changer, who will not stay clear of usury. Not with a seller of shrouds, who is glad when plague comes. Not with a grain dealer, who will not stay clear of hoarding. Not with a butcher, because the work strips away mercy. "And do not apprentice him to a slave-dealer," the Imam says, "for the Messenger of God said: 'The worst of people is the one who sells people.'"[1]

Four of the warnings are about what a trade does to the person who practises it. The fifth is about what it does to other human beings. Yet in Ishaq's world, selling people was legal. The law Ishaq lived by recognised slavery, and the Imams themselves had enslaved people in their households.

So how could a law permit a trade that its own Prophet called the worst? Why did the Prophet's own family keep slaves at all? What did Islam actually do about slavery, and what should anyone say about it now?

THE BIG QUESTION

If Islam stands for justice and human dignity, why did it allow slavery at all?

Have you ever wondered whether a faith that permitted slavery can still guide anyone toward what is good? What to say when someone quotes the Qur'an's phrase "those your right hands possess"? Or, if you grew up hearing that Islam ended slavery, whether that is the whole truth?

This chapter sets out plainly what the law allowed, the many doors it opened toward freedom, and what Muslims should say about slavery today.

WORDS TO KNOW

mā malakat aymānukum (ما ملكت أيمانكم) · *maa MA-la-kat ay-MAA-nu-kum* · "what your right hands possess": the Qur'an's phrase for enslaved people.

ʿitq (عتق) · *ITQ* · setting an enslaved person free. Done for God's sake, it counted as worship.

fakk raqaba (فكّ رقبة) · *FAKK RA-qa-ba* · "untying a neck": the Qur'an's image for freeing a person from bondage (90:13).

kaffāra (كفّارة) · *kaf-FAA-ra* · an expiation: a penalty that makes amends for a broken oath, a broken fast or another wrong.

mukātaba (مكاتبة) · *mu-KAA-ta-ba* · a written contract by which enslaved people buy their own freedom in instalments.

umm walad (أمّ ولد) · *UMM WA-lad* · "mother of a child": an enslaved woman who bore her master's child, and could go free through that child.

◆

What did Islam inherit?

Slavery is older than every scripture. Ancient India, Greece, Rome and Persia all practised it, and so did the Arabs before Islam. The Torah had already set limits on it. A Hebrew slave went free in the seventh year (Exodus 21:2). A slave whose master knocked out an eye or a tooth went free (Exodus 21:26–27). A runaway was not to be handed back to his master (Deuteronomy 23:15–16). When Islam arrived, wrote the Shia commentator al-Tabataba'i (d. 1981 CE) in *al-Mizan*, it "kept its root, while narrowing its scope and reforming its rules."[2]

That sentence refuses two easy stories. One says that Islam abolished slavery. It did not; the law kept it for centuries. The other says that Islam blessed whatever it found. It did not do that either.

Many readers in the West picture slavery through the transatlantic trade. They see Africans chained in the holds of ships and families sold apart at auction, a cruelty tied to the colour of a person's skin. It remains one of the darkest chapters in human history.

Slavery in early Muslim societies differed in important ways. The law did not tie it to race, and a child born to an enslaved woman by her master was born free. But it was still slavery. Human beings were owned, bought and sold, and were not free to walk away. Neither picture should be used to excuse the other.

How did people become slaves? In the ancient world, al-Tabataba'i observed, there were three main roads: war, the strong seizing the weak, and parents selling their children. Islam, he argued, closed the last two and kept only war. He also defended the classical law of captivity in war.[3] Classical Shia law recognised just two ways into slavery: capture in war and birth to enslaved parents. A free person could never lawfully

be sold. Al-Shaykh al-Saduq (d. 991 CE) preserves a ruling of Imam al-Sadiq (a) on a man who kidnapped a free woman and sold her: he was to be punished as a thief.[4]

Even in war, the Qur'an names only two fates for captives once the fighting is over: release "as a favour, or for ransom" (Qur'an 47:4). It praises those who feed a captive for the sake of God (76:8–9; see Chapter 14). Classical law added a third, enslavement. Chapter 24 looks at the law of war in full.[5] The Qur'an never commands anyone to enslave anyone. It speaks to an institution already standing, which it calls "those your right hands possess." And what it says about that institution begins with a challenge to the owner.

◆

Why call freedom "the steep ascent"?

فَلَا ٱقْتَحَمَ ٱلْعَقَبَةَ ﴿١١﴾ وَمَآ أَدْرَىٰكَ مَا ٱلْعَقَبَةُ ﴿١٢﴾ فَكُّ رَقَبَةٍ ﴿١٣﴾

Yet he has not taken on the steep ascent. And what will make you understand what the steep ascent is? It is freeing a slave.

QUR'AN 90:11–13 · SURAT AL-BALAD

NOTICE The Qur'an asks a question and answers it itself. Its first answer is not prayer or fasting but freeing a slave, literally "untying a neck." The next verses add feeding a hungry orphan or a destitute person.

The image is honest about the cost. An enslaved person was wealth, often a great deal of it. To free one meant climbing against your own interest, and the Qur'an calls that climb the road to God. True goodness, the Qur'an says elsewhere, is not turning your face east or west in prayer. It includes giving your wealth, though you love it, to relatives, orphans, the poor and the traveller, "and for freeing necks" (Qur'an 2:177). Imam al-Sadiq (a) taught: "There is no freeing except what is done for the sake of God."[6] To set someone free was an act of worship.

Then freedom was written into the law, in four places.

In the penalties for wrongdoing. Someone who killed a believer by accident had to free a believing slave and pay compensation to the family (Qur'an 4:92). A man

who renounced his wife with an old pagan oath, likening her to his mother's back, had to free a slave before they could be intimate again (58:3). A broken oath could be made good by feeding or clothing ten poor people, or by freeing a slave (5:89). Imam al-Sadiq taught that whoever deliberately broke a fast of Ramadan without excuse should "free a person, or fast two consecutive months, or feed sixty poor people."[7]

Why should freeing a slave make amends for an accidental death? Al-Tabataba'i's answer: the community has lost one free person, so it gains one back. "Islam regards freedom as life," he wrote, "and enslavement as a kind of killing."[8] It is as if God were saying: if you want Me to release you from what you owe, release someone from bondage.

In the alms tax. The Qur'an lists eight uses for *zakat*, the yearly alms owed on certain kinds of wealth. One of them is "for necks," that is, for freeing slaves (9:60). A man once asked Imam al-Sadiq about someone who had set aside a thousand silver coins of zakat but found no one to give them to. So he bought a slave who was for sale and freed him. Was that allowed? "Yes," said the Imam, "there is no harm in it." Later the freedman went into trade, prospered and died without heirs. Who inherits from him? "The poor believers who are owed zakat," the Imam replied, "because he was bought with their money."[9]

In a contract the enslaved could ask for.

وَلْيَسْتَعْفِفِ ٱلَّذِينَ لَا يَجِدُونَ نِكَاحًا حَتَّىٰ يُغْنِيَهُمُ ٱللَّهُ مِن فَضْلِهِۦ
وَٱلَّذِينَ يَبْتَغُونَ ٱلْكِتَٰبَ مِمَّا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَٰنُكُمْ فَكَاتِبُوهُمْ إِنْ عَلِمْتُمْ
فِيهِمْ خَيْرًا وَءَاتُوهُم مِّن مَّالِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلَّذِىٓ ءَاتَىٰكُمْ وَلَا تُكْرِهُوا۟
فَتَيَٰتِكُمْ عَلَى ٱلْبِغَآءِ إِنْ أَرَدْنَ تَحَصُّنًا لِّتَبْتَغُوا۟ عَرَضَ ٱلْحَيَوٰةِ ٱلدُّنْيَا
وَمَن يُكْرِههُّنَّ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ مِنۢ بَعْدِ إِكْرَٰهِهِنَّ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ ﴿٣٣﴾

Let those who cannot find the means to marry keep chaste until God enriches them from His bounty. As for those in your possession who seek a contract of freedom, write it for them if you know some good in them, and give them from the wealth of God that He has given you. Do not force your slave-women into prostitution when they wish to stay chaste, so that you can pursue the passing goods of this world. If anyone forces them, God, after their being forced, is forgiving and merciful.

QUR'AN 24:33 · SURAT AL-NUR

NOTICE Two commands about the enslaved stand side by side: grant the contract of freedom when it is sought, and never force a slave-woman into prostitution. Both put the owner's profit second.

What is the "good" the verse looks for? Imam al-Sadiq answered: faith, and "work in his hands by which he can earn, or a trade."[10] Freedom, on this reading, came with a way to stand on one's own feet. "Give them from the wealth of God" meant writing off part of the price. It is reported that Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a), the fifth Imam (d. c. 733 CE), waived a thousand of the six thousand that one of his slaves owed him.[11]

In the rules of the household. A man who came to own a parent, a child, a sister, an aunt or a niece found that the person went free at once.[12] If one co-owner freed his share of a slave, the slave became partly free. If half of him was free, he worked one day for his remaining owners and the next for himself.[13]

And an enslaved woman who bore her master's child became an *umm walad*, "the mother of a child." Imam Ali (a), the Prophet's cousin and the first Imam (d. 661 CE),

made provision in his will for his own slave-women. Any who had borne him a child, or was carrying one, was to stay with her child and count as part of the child's inheritance. Since no one may own his own mother, that made her free. If her child died first, Ali wrote, she was free all the same: "bondage has let her go, and emancipation has set her free."[14]

A man once told Ali that he meant to sell the slave-woman who had nursed his child. "Take her by the hand," Ali said, "and call out: Who will buy from me the mother of my child?"[15] She had become family.

Count the doors: worship, penance, public money, a contract, kinship, motherhood. None of them asked the enslaved to earn their dignity. Most of them asked the owner to give something up. And the Prophet's own family set the pace.

> **IMAM JA'FAR AL-SADIQ (A), SPEAKING OF IMAM ALI (A)**
>
> وَ اللَّهِ إِنْ كَانَ لَيَعْرِضُ لَهُ الْأَمْرَانِ كِلَاهُمَا لِلَّهِ عَزَّ وَ جَلَّ طَاعَةً فَيَأْخُذُ بِأَشَدِّهِمَا عَلَى بَدَنِهِ وَ اللَّهِ لَقَدْ أَعْتَقَ أَلْفَ مَمْلُوكٍ لِوَجْهِ اللَّهِ عَزَّ وَ جَلَّ دَبِرَتْ فِيهِمْ يَدَاهُ
>
> By God, whenever two paths lay before him, both of them obedience to God, he would take the one harder on his body. By God, he freed a thousand slaves for the sake of God, and his hands were blistered for them.[16]
>
> al-Kafi 8 · al-Rawda · no. 175 · **Reliable chain**

Another report says he paid for them "from the toil of his own hand." A third, from Imam al-Baqir, says that his hands were caked with earth and his face ran with sweat for it.[17] Ali did not wait for the law to change. He spent what his own hands earned buying people out of bondage. That is the steep ascent in a human life.

> **PAUSE AND RECALL**
>
> *In your own words, what does "the steep ascent" (Qur'an 90:11–13) have to do with freeing a slave? Why might the Qur'an call it steep?*

How were the enslaved to be treated?

Until freedom came, if it came, the enslaved had rights. The Qur'an names them among those owed kindness, with parents, orphans, the poor and neighbours (4:36), and the Imams insisted on it. Imam Zayn al-Abidin (a), the fourth Imam (d. c. 713 CE), also called al-Sajjad, "the one who prostrates in prayer," wrote a treatise on the rights people owe one another. One of them is the right of the person you own.

IMAM ZAYN AL-ABIDIN (A), THE FOURTH IMAM

وأما حق مملوكك فأن تعلم أنه خلق ربك وابن أبيك وأمك ولحمك ودمك تملكه،لا أنت صنعته من دون الله ولا خلقت شيئا من جوارحه، ولا أخرجت له رزقا ولكن الله عز وجل كفاك ذلك ثم سخره لك وائتمنك عليه واستودعك إياه، ليحفظ لك ما تأتيه من خير إليه فأحسن إليه كما أحسن الله إليك، وإن كرهته استبدلت به، ولم تعذب خلق الله عز وجل

The right of the one you own is that you know he is your Lord's creation, the son of your own father and mother, your flesh and blood. You own him, but you did not make him; God did. You did not create a single limb of his, and you do not bring forth his daily bread; God spared you that. Then He placed him in your service, entrusted him to you and left him in your keeping, so that the good you do him might be kept safe for you. So be good to him, as God has been good to you. If you dislike him, exchange him, but do not torment a creature of God.[18]

Risalat al-huquq · the right of the slave · **Compiled text, not graded here**

Notice what the text still assumes: he can be exchanged. The Imam does not abolish ownership. He drains it of pride. The owner is not a maker but a trustee, holding one of God's creatures in his keeping, and he will answer for how he kept him. The same treatise describes freedom itself. The one who frees you, he writes, "brought you out of the humiliation and loneliness of bondage into the dignity and warmth of freedom." He released you "from the captivity of being owned" and "made you the owner of yourself."[19] That is not how anyone describes a blessing.

"In the book of the Messenger of God," Imam al-Sadiq (a) said, it is written: "When you set those in your possession to work that is hard for them, work alongside them." His father, Imam al-Baqir (a), would tell his slaves to wait while he came to look. If the load was heavy, he said *bismillah*, "in the name of God," and set to work beside them.[20] Imam al-Baqir also said that Imam Ali (a) ate as a slave eats and sat as a slave sits. When Ali bought two shirts, he gave his servant the better one.[21]

The Imams defended the enslaved in public. One day in the mosque of Kufa, Ali saw a man carrying a coat of mail. He recognised it as armour stolen from the spoils of the Battle of the Camel at Basra, in 656 CE (36 AH). The two took the case to Shurayh, the judge Ali himself had appointed, and Shurayh asked for witnesses.

Ali brought his son al-Hasan (a), and then Qanbar, the enslaved man who served him. Shurayh turned Qanbar away: "He is a slave, and I do not judge by a slave's testimony." Ali was angry. Among the three injustices he named to the judge's face was this one: "There is no harm in the testimony of a slave, if he is upright."[22]

A weak report with a broken chain has Ali tell a crowd: "Adam did not father a slave or a slave-woman. All people are free." He then gave a black man, freed only the day before, the same three gold coins as the Ansari who had freed him. When the Ansari protested, Ali said he had found no lineage preferred over another in the Book of God.[23]

The Prophet (s) taught the same lesson with a sharper edge. An early collection, al-Ahwazi's *Kitab al-Zuhd*, reports that he came upon a man beating his slave. The slave cried, "I seek refuge in God!", and the blows went on. Then he saw the Prophet and cried, "I seek refuge in Muhammad!", and the man stopped.

"He sought refuge in God and you would not spare him," the Prophet said, "yet you spared him for Muhammad? God has more right to protect whoever seeks refuge in Him." The man said, "He is free, for the sake of God." Had you not done that, the Prophet told him, the heat of the Fire would have struck your face.[24]

A STORY FROM THE SOURCES

"Whip Ali ibn al-Husayn"

Imam al-Baqir (a) remembered the day his father, Imam Zayn al-Abidin, struck a servant boy once with a whip for being slow on an errand. The boy burst into tears. "God! Ali ibn al-Husayn, you send me on your errand and then you strike me?"

The Imam wept. He sent his son to pray two units of prayer at the Prophet's grave and to say: "O God, forgive Ali ibn al-Husayn his wrong on the Day of Judgement." Then he said to the boy: "Go. You are free, for the sake of God." When Abu Basir later asked whether the freeing had been an atonement for the blow, Imam al-Baqir did not answer.

Another report tells a different story. Zayn al-Abidin struck a slave, then went into his house, came back with the whip, bared his own back and said: "Whip Ali ibn al-Husayn." The man refused. So the Imam gave him fifty gold coins.[25]

These stories come from the same early collection, with ungraded chains, so they illustrate rather than prove. But they fit everything above: an owner answers to the person in front of him, and to God. In Shia belief the Imams are protected from sin, so the Imam's plea for forgiveness is read as humility and teaching by example.

The enslaved were also part of the Prophet's family in the closest way, as mothers. The Prophet's son Ibrahim was born to Mariya, a Coptic woman who was an *umm walad*.[26] At least five of the twelve Imams, by the notes of al-Kafi's own compiler, al-Kulayni (d. 941 CE), were born to an *umm walad*. Those five were the seventh to eleventh Imams (a), and their mothers were Hamida, of Musa al-Kazim; Umm al-Banin, of Ali al-Rida; Sabika, a Nubian, of Muhammad al-Jawad; Samana, of Ali al-Hadi; and Hudayth, of al-Hasan al-ʿAskari.[27] The line of the Imams runs through women who had once been enslaved.

Freedom could also lead to marriage. When Imam Zayn al-Abidin freed a slave-woman and married her, the Umayyad caliph ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwan (r. 685–705 CE) wrote to shame him. He could have married a noblewoman of his own tribe, the caliph said. The Imam replied that God "has raised up the lowly by Islam.... There is no disgrace for a Muslim. The only disgrace is the disgrace of the Age of Ignorance." The caliph, it is said, told his son that Ali ibn al-Husayn "rises where people fall."[28]

◆

Why didn't the law abolish slavery outright?

Here the honest answer has two halves.

Muslim thinkers have offered serious reasons for a gradual path. Slavery was woven into the households, farms and markets of the ancient world, and freeing everyone overnight might have left many with no land, no trade and no protector. The Imams' reading of Qur'an 24:33 tied freedom to having "a trade" for a reason.

War captives posed a hard problem too. Al-Tabataba'i cites historians who held that in the earliest wars captives were killed to the last, and that enslavement began as the alternative. Above all, the law could raise the cost of owning people and lower the cost of freeing them, until bondage shrank. Al-Tabataba'i described this as Islam's method: encouragement in some cases, obligation in others, and contracts the courts would enforce.[29]

These are arguments, not proofs. The Qur'an ended other deep-rooted practices outright. It told lenders to give up what remained of usury, on pain of "war from God and His Messenger" (Qur'an 2:278–279). It condemned the burial of infant daughters: "when the girl buried alive is asked for what sin she was killed" (81:8–9). So "it was impossible" cannot be the whole answer. Nor did the classical jurists plan for slavery to end. Their books kept it as a legal category for more than a thousand years, including concubinage (see the box below).

The protections were real, but not absolute. In Shia law an *umm walad* could not be sold for her master's debts, with one exception. If he died without having paid for her, and left nothing to pay the debt, she could be sold to pay it, and her child was taken from her.[30] Shia law held that captives seized in wars fought without an Imam's permission belonged to the Imam alone. That rule might have closed the market to Shia buyers. Instead, the Imams let their followers acquire such captives, so that the children born to them would be of lawful birth.[31]

And Muslim societies, like many others, ran slave trades. In Iran, a royal decree banned bringing enslaved Africans by sea only in 1848. A ban on the trade by land or sea followed in 1890. The constitution of 1906 recognised no one as a slave, and by 1910 the trade had all but stopped.[32] There, as in much of the world, the end came through rulers' decrees and international treaties.

So what is the honest answer? The law did not abolish slavery, but it set a direction. It met the world where it was, and its teaching kept pointing past it: "The worst of people is the one who sells people." "You own him, but you did not make him." "The dignity and warmth of freedom." Muslims who welcome the end of slavery are not leaving their tradition behind. They are following its own verdict to the place its law had not yet reached.

A FAIR QUESTION

Didn't the law let masters take enslaved women as concubines?

"Classical Islamic law let a master have sex with a woman he owned. How can anyone defend that?"

It did, and it should be said plainly. Classical law read the Qur'an's permission of "their wives or those their right hands possess" (Qur'an 23:6) as allowing a man relations with a woman he owned. It set limits. No owner could force her into prostitution (24:33). A child she bore him was born free and was his lawful heir, and she became an *umm walad*, who in Shia law could not be sold while her child lived, save for the one exception above, and went free through that child when her master died.

A modern reader asks a different question: did she consent? Classical law did not make her consent the test, and no one needs to pretend that it did. What matters now is that the category is closed. No lawful slavery exists anywhere, and al-Sistani's manual of law does not even set out its rules. Kidnapping was a crime even in the age of slavery: in a report preserved by al-Saduq, a man who kidnaps a free woman and sells her is punished as a thief, and flogged if he has had relations with her.[33]

◆

What should anyone say about slavery now?

Two things, plainly.

First, nothing in Islam requires slavery to return. The manual of Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani (b. 1930), a leading Shia jurist in Najaf, Iraq, has no book on freeing slaves. In its book on inheritance, slavery comes up in a single ruling, "with details that need not be addressed." His list of expiations still begins with "freeing a slave"; since there is no one to free, those who owe such an expiation now fast or feed the poor instead.[34] For your own case, check the rulings of the scholar you follow (your *marja'*).

Second, slavery is not over. The International Labour Organization, Walk Free and the International Organization for Migration estimate that on any given day in 2021, 49.6 million people were living in modern slavery, about ten million more than five years before. Of these, 27.6 million were in forced labour and 22 million in forced marriages. More than twelve million were children.[35] They dig in mines, work on fishing boats and in garment workshops, keep house behind closed doors, and are married off against their will. Every one of them is a free person held as if owned, which is exactly what Islamic law always forbade.

> *“The worst of people is the one who sells people.*
>
> THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD (S), QUOTED BY IMAM AL-SADIQ (A)

The agent who takes a worker’s passport and the broker who traps a family in endless debt are selling people, in the Prophet’s sense. The rest of us can ask more often who made what we buy. Zakat still has a share “for necks” (9:60). Whether that share may now go to freeing victims of trafficking is a question for your *marja‘*; this book has found no ruling to cite.

Ishaq ibn ‘Ammar had a son named Muhammad and a list of five trades to avoid. We do not know which trade the boy learned. We do know what the Imam would not let him become. “Do not be another’s slave,” Imam Ali (a) once wrote to his own son, “when God has made you free.”[36] Freedom, in the Qur’an’s picture, is a steep road, and it has always cost the people who climb it. Ali climbed it with blistered hands. The road is still there, and so are the people waiting for someone to climb it.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Islam inherited slavery. The Qur’an regulated it but never commanded anyone to enslave anyone.
2. The Qur’an made freeing a slave “the steep ascent”: worship, expiation, a use of zakat and a contract.
3. The Imams freed slaves, defended their rights and taught that whoever sells people is the worst of people.
4. Classical law still kept slavery, including concubinage, and Muslim lands ended it only in modern times.
5. Nothing in Islam requires slavery’s return, and the Imams’ verdict condemns the trafficking that enslaves millions today.

NEXT TIME · GO FURTHER

Next time: *What Does Jihad Mean?* The word fills headlines, yet it also names a believer’s struggle with the self. Which is it, and what lines may no cause ever cross?

Go further:

Course: Introduction to Islamic Ethics, a Level 1 course at Tasneem Institute (tasneeminstitute.org/courses/introduction-to-islamic-ethics)

Read: Imam Zayn al-Abidin’s *Risalat al-huquq* (Treatise on Rights), especially the rights of the one you own, the one who freed you and the one you freed.

Watch: Invitation to Islam, Episode 17, “Why Did Islam Allow Slavery?” (10 min).

In the circle

LOOK BACK

1. What does "There is no compulsion in religion" (Qur'an 2:256) say about faith, according to Chapter 22?
2. Chapter 20's account of justice began with Qur'an 17:70: "We have honoured the children of Adam." Whom does that honour include?
3. Part Two asks, "Is it good?" Can a law be good if it allows something it hopes will end?

TALK ABOUT IT

WARM-UP

1. When you hear the word "slavery," what picture comes to mind first? Where do you think that picture came from?

UNDERSTAND

2. Name three doors to freedom that the Qur'an and the Imams opened. Which of them cost the owner something, and what did it cost?
3. The Qur'an ended usury and condemned the burial of infant daughters outright (2:278–279; 81:8–9). Why does the chapter say "it was impossible" cannot fully explain slavery's slow end?

REFLECT

4. Imam Zayn al-Abidin bared his back and said, "Whip Ali ibn al-Husayn." What does that scene say about power and accountability?
5. The law permitted a trade that the Prophet called "the worst." Can something be legal and still wrong? Where do you see that today?

APPLY

6. Choose one everyday thing you buy, such as coffee, chocolate or a T-shirt. What is one step you could take this week to learn who made it?

GO DEEPER

7. Read three rights in Imam Zayn al-Abidin's *Risalat al-huquq*: the slave's, the freer's and the freed person's (compiled text, not graded here). What do they reveal about bondage?
8. Read the Imam's advice to Ishaq ibn ʿAmmar in full (al-Kafi, vol. 5, Book of Livelihood, ch. 33, no. 4; reliable chain). What do the five trades have in common?

CARRY IT HOME

Choose one way in this week:

☐ **Notice:** Look at the labels of three things you use every day. For each, ask: who made this, and were they free to walk away?

☐ **Do:** Lift a burden that is yours to lift: pay a worker promptly, forgive part of a debt ("give them from the wealth of God," Qur'an 24:33), or give to a charity that frees people from trafficking. If you pay zakat, ask your *marjaʿ* whether some may go "for necks" (9:60).

☐ **Learn:** Find out what modern slavery looks like where you live. Read the summary of the 2022 *Global Estimates of Modern Slavery* (walkfree.org), then share one thing you learned.

Aim. Help the circle face honestly what Islamic law allowed, trace the sources' steady pressure toward freedom, and connect the Imams' verdict to slavery today.

Protect this question. No. 5: "Can something be legal and still wrong?" Guests, new Muslims and lifelong Muslims can all answer it without defending or attacking anyone.

Answer notes.

- *Q2.* Any three: worship (90:13; 2:177), expiation (4:92; 58:3; 5:89; the Ramadan fast), zakat "for necks" (9:60), the contract (24:33), kinship, partial freedom, the *umm walad*. Most cost the owner money, labour or a slave's value.
- *Q3.* The Qur'an ended other entrenched practices outright, so impossibility alone cannot explain it. The honest answer joins real reasons (livelihood, war captives, reform by incentives) to the admission that classical law kept slavery.

Likely questions.

- *"Did the Prophet and the Imams own slaves?"* Yes. See "How were the enslaved to be treated?": Imam Ali's will, the Imams' mothers, Zayn al-Abidin's household.
- *"Did masters have sex with enslaved women?"* See the box "Didn't the law let masters take enslaved women as concubines?" Answer plainly and calmly; don't go beyond it.
- *"Isn't 'gradual abolition' just an excuse?"* See "Why didn't the law abolish slavery outright?", which separates reasons, limits and history.

Watch for. Read the care note aloud first. Some in the circle may descend from enslaved people, in the Americas, Africa or the Middle East, or know places where slavery continues. Never ask anyone to speak for their ancestors or their country. Don't let the conversation become a contest over whose history was worse: neither picture excuses the other. Keep the concubinage question sober and brief.

Bring. A pair of worn work gloves, for Imam Ali's blistered hands, and the label from one everyday product for question 6.

MY THREAD · CHAPTER 23

Where am I less free than God made me, and whom could I help toward freedom?

MY QUESTION FOR THE BOX

CHAPTER 24 · ETHICS

24

What Does Jihad Mean?

Striving, fighting, and the lines no cause may cross.

وَٱلَّذِينَ جَٰهَدُوا۟ فِينَا لَنَهْدِيَنَّهُمْ سُبُلَنَا ۚ وَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَمَعَ ٱلْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿٦٩﴾

Those who strive for Our sake, We will surely guide them along Our paths. God is with those who do good.

QUR'AN 29:69 · SURAT AL-ʿANKABUT

A NOTE OF CARE This chapter speaks about war and terrorism, and some of us have lived through them or lost someone to them. No one will be asked to share their own story, no one here answers for what others have done in a religion's name, and anyone may listen, pass or step out at any time.

WATCH · EPISODE 29 · 11:34

youtu.be/Bbqt8yutsLM

In the video: why the struggle with the self is never won once and for all (4:11)

Reading time: about 20 minutes

Kufa, Iraq, late in Ramadan, 661 CE (40 AH). Imam Ali (a), the Prophet's cousin and the first Imam, lies wounded. A man named Ibn Muljam has struck him with a sword, and the wound will prove fatal.[1] Ali fought beside the Prophet (s) in his battles and later led armies of his own. Now he turns to his sons, al-Hasan and al-Husayn (a), with his last instructions.

Much of what he says is what you would expect from a dying man of God. Fear God. Look after the orphans and the neighbours. Hold on to the Qur'an and the prayer. And keep God before your eyes "in jihad with your wealth, your lives and your tongues, in the way of God."

Then he turns to the matter of his killer.

"Sons of 'Abd al-Muttalib," he tells his clan, "I do not want to find you wading through the blood of Muslims, saying, 'The Commander of the Faithful has been killed!' No one is to be killed for me except my killer." And of the killer himself: "If I die of this blow of his, strike him one blow for his blow. Do not mutilate the man. I heard the Messenger of God say: 'Beware of mutilation, even of a rabid dog.'"[2]

One blow for one blow. No revenge on a tribe, no massacre in his name, no mutilated body. A man who had spent much of his life on battlefields used some of his last breaths to draw lines around his own murderer.

The word on his lips, *jihad*, now makes many people flinch. For some it brings to mind news of bombings and grieving families. For others it is a word from their own scripture that they hesitate to say aloud. What does it actually mean? When, if ever, does Islam allow fighting, and who decides? And what are the lines that no cause, however righteous it feels, may cross?

THE BIG QUESTION

Is jihad a call to holy war?

Have you ever wondered whether a faith that honours its fighters can really be a faith of peace? What you would say if a colleague asked you what "jihad" means? Or, if you grew up Muslim, why the same word can describe a soldier on a frontier and a tired believer getting out of bed before dawn?

> This chapter looks at what jihad means, when Shia Islam permits fighting and under whose authority, the lines no cause may cross, and why terrorism crosses every one of them.

WORDS TO KNOW

jihād (جهاد) · *ji-HAAD* · striving in God's way, from a root meaning "effort"; in law, also armed struggle under strict conditions.

jihād al-nafs (جهاد النفس) · *ji-HAAD an-NAFS* · the struggle with one's own self, which a well-known report calls "the greater jihad."

qitāl (قتال) · *qi-TAAL* · fighting, combat: the Qur'an's plain word for armed battle.

bayḍat al-Islām (بيضة الإسلام) · *BAY-dat al-is-LAAM* · literally "the egg of Islam": the community's very survival, which may always be defended.

amān (أمان) · *a-MAAN* · a pledge of safety given to an enemy, binding on the whole army.

takfīr (تكفير) · *tak-FEER* · declaring other Muslims unbelievers, often as an excuse to shed their blood.

◆

What does "jihad" actually mean?

Jihad may be the most misunderstood word in Islam, both among people who fear it and among people raised with it. Yet its first meaning is almost ordinary. The Arabic root *j-h-d* means effort: straining, exerting yourself, giving a task everything you have. The same root gives *ijtihad*, the hard intellectual labour by which a jurist works out God's law. *Jihad* is effort of that kind, directed toward God. The phrase "holy war" appears nowhere in the Qur'an.

Look at how the Qur'an uses the word. One call to jihad came in Mecca.

فَلَا تُطِعِ ٱلْكَٰفِرِينَ وَجَٰهِدْهُم بِهِۦ جِهَادًا كَبِيرًا ﴿٥٢﴾

So do not obey those who deny the truth. Strive against them with it, a great striving.

QUR'AN 25:52 · SURAT AL-FURQAN

NOTICE This verse came in Mecca, years before any permission to fight. Its only weapon is "it": the Qur'an itself. Yet it calls this effort "a great jihad."

The classical Shia commentator al-Tabrisi (d. 1154 CE) explains "with it" as "with the Qur'an." He draws a lesson too: among the greatest kinds of jihad is the work of those who answer the doubts raised by the faith's opponents.[3] Another verse from Mecca makes striving a road to God Himself: "Those who strive for Our sake, We will surely guide them along Our paths" (Qur'an 29:69).

None of this means jihad never involves fighting. The Qur'an ranks those who strive "in God's way with their wealth and their lives" above able-bodied believers who stay at home (Qur'an 4:95). In al-Kafi, the great early collection of Shia hadith, the Book of Jihad deals mainly with war. So it is wrong to say that jihad means only war, and just as wrong to say it never does.

When the Qur'an commands combat itself, it usually reaches for a plainer word, *qital*, fighting, as in Qur'an 2:190. *Jihad* is the wider word. Whether the effort is made with a pen, a tongue or a sword depends on what the moment demands.

Imam Ali (a) named three means of jihad on his deathbed: wealth, lives and tongues. Elsewhere he ranked one act of courage above every other good deed, jihad included: "a word of justice spoken before a tyrant."[4] In ordinary life, jihad can look like writing something that helps people, standing up to oppression, or giving to those the world forgets.

Sometimes it even looks like staying home. A weak report tells how a man came to the Prophet (s), eager and fit to fight. The Prophet urged him on and promised him God's reward. Then the man said that his elderly parents took comfort in his company and hated to see him go. "Stay with your parents," the Prophet told him. "By the One who holds my soul, the comfort they find in you for a day and a night is better than a year of jihad."[5]

◆

Why is the struggle with the self the greater one?

A report in al-Kafi tells how the companions of the Prophet (s) learned this lesson.

THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD (S), AS RECALLED BY IMAM JA'FAR AL-SADIQ (A)

أَنَّ النَّبِيَّ (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِه) بَعَثَ بِسَرِيَّةٍ فَلَمَّا رَجَعُوا قَالَ مَرْحَباً بِقَوْمٍ قَضَوُا الْجِهَادَ الأَصْغَرَ وَبَقِيَ الْجِهَادُ الأَكْبَرُ قِيلَ يَا رَسُولَ اللهِ (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِه) وَمَا الْجِهَادُ الأَكْبَرُ قَالَ جِهَادُ النَّفْسِ

The Prophet (s) sent out a company of fighters. When they came back, he said: "Welcome to a people who have completed the lesser jihad, while the greater jihad remains." Someone asked, "Messenger of God, what is the greater jihad?" He said: "The struggle with the self."[6]

al-Kafi 5 · Jihad · ch. 3 · no. 3 · **Weak chain**

Picture the moment. These men had just risked their lives, and they came home to be told that the harder struggle still lay ahead. Why call it greater? An enemy on a battlefield can be beaten once. The self has to be faced again every morning.

It is there when you swallow the cutting reply in an argument, and when the alarm goes off in the dark. If you pray, you know the struggle to leave a warm bed for the dawn prayer. If you don't, you know your own version: the promise you keep postponing, the habit you keep meaning to break. The Qur'an promises the Garden to whoever "feared standing before his Lord and held the self back from its cravings" (Qur'an 79:40–41).

This report needs careful handling. It reaches us by two separate chains of narrators. One runs through Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (a), the sixth Imam (d. 765 CE), and is preserved in al-Kafi. The other runs through his son, Imam Musa al-Kazim (a), the seventh Imam (d. 799 CE), then back through al-Sadiq to Imam Ali (a). It appears in two books by al-Shaykh al-Saduq (d. 991 CE). That version adds: "The best jihad is that of the one who struggles against the self between his own two sides."

Neither route is strong on its own. The scholar al-Majlisi (d. 1699 CE), who graded the reports of al-Kafi, judged the first weak. But the two routes do not depend on each other, and the teaching itself stands on the verse above. The inner struggle does not

replace the struggle in the world. It is what makes a person safe to trust in that struggle.

The Imams made the connection plain.

A STORY FROM THE SOURCES

"Finish the verse"

On the road to Mecca, Imam Ali Zayn al-Abidin (a), the fourth Imam (d. c. 713 CE), met a man from Basra named ʿAbbad, who reproached him. "Ali son of al-Husayn," he said, "you have left jihad and its hardship for the pilgrimage and its comforts." Then he recited: "God has bought from the believers their lives and their wealth, in return for the Garden. They fight in God's way; they kill and are killed..." (Qur'an 9:111).

"Finish the verse," said the Imam.

So ʿAbbad went on: "Those who turn to God in repentance, who worship, who praise Him, who fast, who bow and prostrate themselves, who command what is right and forbid what is wrong, and who keep God's limits" (Qur'an 9:112).[8]

"When we see people with these qualities," the Imam said, "jihad alongside them is better than the pilgrimage."[7]

The Imam was not refusing jihad. He was refusing to treat an army as holy because it marched under a Muslim banner. The verse goes on to describe the people God's promise covers, not only their battles. A fighter who has not begun the greater jihad cannot be trusted with the lesser.

> PAUSE AND RECALL
>
> *In your own words, why might the struggle with the self be called "greater" than a battle? What did Imam Zayn al-Abidin's "Finish the verse" add?*

◆

When may Muslims fight, and who decides?

For some thirteen years in Mecca, the Prophet (s) and his followers were a persecuted minority, mocked and beaten for their faith. According to the commentator al-Tabrisi, Muslims kept coming to the Prophet with head wounds and bruises, and he told them each time, "Be patient. I have not been commanded to fight." In 622 CE he

and his followers emigrated to Medina. Only there, al-Tabrisi records, did the first verse about fighting come down.[9]

أُذِنَ لِلَّذِينَ يُقَٰتَلُونَ بِأَنَّهُمْ ظُلِمُوا۟ وَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَلَىٰ نَصْرِهِمْ لَقَدِيرٌ
﴿٣٩﴾ ٱلَّذِينَ أُخْرِجُوا۟ مِن دِيَٰرِهِم بِغَيْرِ حَقٍّ إِلَّآ أَن يَقُولُوا۟ رَبُّنَا
ٱللَّهُ وَلَوْلَا دَفْعُ ٱللَّهِ ٱلنَّاسَ بَعْضَهُم بِبَعْضٍ لَّهُدِّمَتْ صَوَٰمِعُ وَبِيَعٌ
وَصَلَوَٰتٌ وَمَسَٰجِدُ يُذْكَرُ فِيهَا ٱسْمُ ٱللَّهِ كَثِيرًا وَلَيَنصُرَنَّ ٱللَّهُ مَن
يَنصُرُهُۥٓ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَقَوِىٌّ عَزِيزٌ ﴿٤٠﴾

Permission is given to those who are being fought, because they have been wronged, and God is well able to help them: those driven from their homes without any right, only for saying, "Our Lord is God." Had God not held some people back by means of others, monasteries, churches, synagogues and mosques, where God's name is remembered often, would have been torn down. God will surely help whoever helps Him. God is strong, mighty.

QUR'AN 22:39–40 · SURAT AL-HAJJ

NOTICE "Permission is given": the verse allows rather than commands, and it gives its reason first, "because they have been wronged." Then it names four houses of worship. Mosques come last.

The danger was real. Within a few years an alliance led by Mecca's Quraysh would march on Medina itself, and the Muslims would dig a trench around the city to hold them off.[10] The permission protects people who have been attacked and driven from their homes. It also protects worship, including the worship of Christians and Jews.

Other verses set the frame for everything after: "Fight in God's way those who fight you, and do not go beyond the bounds. God does not love those who go beyond them" (Qur'an 2:190). "If they stop, God is forgiving, merciful" (Qur'an 2:192). Another verse asks why believers would not fight for "the oppressed men, women and children" who cry out to be rescued (Qur'an 4:75).

A FAIR QUESTION

Doesn't the Qur'an say "kill them wherever you find them"?

"The Qur'an says, 'Kill the polytheists wherever you find them' (9:5), and 'Fight those who do not believe... until they pay the *jizya*' (9:29). Don't those verses cancel the peaceful ones?" Read 9:5 in its passage. The sura opens by ending pacts with Arabia's polytheists after four months' grace (9:1–3), but it exempts every tribe that kept its treaty: honour it "until its term" (9:4). The verse after 9:5 grants asylum to any polytheist who asks, then safe escort "to his place of safety" (9:6), with no demand that he convert. The passage also recalls polytheists who "broke their oaths... and attacked you first" (9:13). Even so, honesty requires the rest. The Shia commentator al-Tabataba'i (d. 1981 CE) reads 9:5 as a general command to fight Arabia's polytheists once the four months were over, wherever they were found, unless they repented, prayed and paid zakat. Classical law read 9:29 as allowing a war against communities of earlier scripture, ending when they agreed to pay the *jizya*, a tax on non-Muslims under Muslim rule. On this classical reading the two verses belong together, in a war that most Shia jurists reserve to the infallible Imam, as the next paragraphs explain. Al-Tabataba'i also held that "There is no compulsion in religion" (2:256) was never cancelled by "the verse of the sword."[11]

Islamic law came to distinguish two kinds of jihad. Defensive jihad (*jihad difa'i*) answers an attack. Initiatory jihad (*jihad ibtida'i*) carries war to an enemy who has not attacked, and classical law knew this kind too. Most Shia jurists attach a condition to it that changes everything.[12] Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, a leading Shia jurist in Najaf, Iraq, was once asked whether jihad in God's way is obligatory. His answer was one line: "Jihad with the Infallible (a), or with his special deputy, is obligatory."[13]

The Infallible means the Prophet or one of the twelve Imams. A special deputy is someone the Imam has appointed by name. Shia Muslims believe that the twelfth Imam has been hidden from public view since the ninth century, and that no one has held such an appointment since 941 CE.[14] On their view, until he returns, no one may begin an offensive war. Al-Sistani's manual of Islamic law has no chapter on jihad at all.[15] On any particular question, check the rulings of the scholar you follow, your *marja'*.

The Imams' own choices show what this meant. A follower of Imam Ali al-Rida (a), the eighth Imam (d. 818 CE), heard of a man who was handing out a sword and a horse. They were for fighting "in the way of God" under the rulers of the day. He

took them, not knowing what that "way" involved. Then his friends told him that fighting under those rulers was not allowed. He went to give them back, but the man had left. What now?

The Imam's answer is careful. He may stand guard on the frontier, but not fight. "If he fears for the core of Islam and the Muslims, he fights, and his fighting is for himself, not for the ruler." And if the enemy reaches the post he is guarding? "He fights for the core of Islam, not for these people, because if Islam is wiped out, the religion of Muhammad is wiped out."[16]

"The core of Islam" translates *baydat al-Islam*, literally "the egg of Islam": the community's very life, as fragile and as precious as an egg in its shell. Defending it needs no infallible Imam. It is a duty whoever happens to rule.

Imam Zayn al-Abidin (a) lived most of his life as Imam under the dynasty whose soldiers had killed his father. Yet he prayed for the Muslim soldiers guarding its frontiers. "Fortify the frontiers of the Muslims by Your might," he prays. Later he asks for each soldier: "Make his thinking and his remembrance, his setting out and his staying, all in You and for You."[17]

In June 2014 the group calling itself the Islamic State was seizing vast areas of Iraq.[18] Al-Sistani's representative stood in the courtyard of the shrine of Imam al-Husayn (a) in Karbala and read out a call to defend the country. Citizens able to carry arms, he said, must volunteer to join the security forces. This was a *wajib kifa'i*, a collective duty fulfilled for everyone once enough people take it up. It was a "sacred defence," and it was "not limited to one sect."[19]

Volunteers were to enlist under the state, not form private bands. The place itself spoke. Imam al-Husayn, the Prophet's grandson, refused to give his allegiance to an unjust ruler and was killed at Karbala in 680 CE (61 AH). For Shia Muslims he remains the model of principled resistance (Chapter 20 tells his story).

◆

What lines may no cause cross?

Permission to fight came with orders about how to fight. Imam al-Sadiq (a) described what the Prophet (s) did whenever he sent out a detachment. He would seat its commander beside him and the soldiers in front of him, and then give his orders:

THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD (S), AS RECALLED BY IMAM JA'FAR AL-SADIQ (A)

سِيرُوا بِسْمِ اللهِ وَبِاللهِ وَفِي سَبِيلِ اللهِ وَعَلَى مِلَّةِ رَسُولِ اللهِ (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِه) لا تَغْدِرُوا وَلا تَغُلُّوا وَلا تُمَثِّلُوا وَلا تَقْطَعُوا شَجَرَةً إِلا أَنْ تُضْطَرُّوا إِلَيْهَا وَلا تَقْتُلُوا شَيْخاً فَانِياً وَلا صَبِيّاً وَلا امْرَأَةً

Go in the name of God, by God, in the way of God and in the faith of the Messenger of God. Do not betray. Do not steal from the spoils. Do not mutilate. Do not cut down a tree unless you are forced to. Do not kill a frail old man, a child or a woman.[20]

al-Kafi 5 · Jihad · ch. 8 · no. 9 · **Reliable chain**

The same briefing made every soldier a keeper of safe conduct. If any Muslim, from the lowliest to the best, so much as looked toward an enemy polytheist, that man came under his protection until he had heard the word of God. If he accepted it, he was their brother in religion. If he refused it, they were to seek God's help against him and escort him "to his place of safety," as Qur'an 9:6 also commands. Imam al-Sadiq also recalled that the Prophet "never attacked an enemy by night."[21] A weaker report adds hermits on their mountaintops, palm and fruit trees, crops and grazing animals to the list of the protected.[22]

Imam Ali (a) kept these rules even against Muslims in arms against him. Before the Battle of Siffin in 657 CE (37 AH), he told his army: "Do not fight them until they start." And when, by God's leave, the enemy was routed: "Do not kill anyone running away, do not strike anyone defenceless, and do not finish off the wounded." Nor were they to harm the women, "even if they insult your honour and curse your commanders."[23]

He would not begin a battle until the sun had passed its height. "It is nearer to nightfall," he explained, "so fewer will be killed, the pursuer will turn back, and the one who is routed will get away."[24] Picture a commander who times his battle so that fewer men will die.

Even a misunderstanding could bind an army. One of the Imams described a hard case. Townspeople under siege call out for safety. The besiegers answer no, but the people hear yes and come down. "They are safe," the Imam ruled.[25] Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a), the fifth Imam (d. c. 733 CE), gave a warning too. Anyone who grants a man safety and then kills him "will come on the Day of Resurrection carrying the banner of treachery."[26]

The Qur'an is just as firm about peace.

وَإِن جَنَحُوا۟ لِلسَّلْمِ فَٱجْنَحْ لَهَا وَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ ۚ إِنَّهُۥ هُوَ ٱلسَّمِيعُ ٱلْعَلِيمُ ﴿٦١﴾ وَإِن يُرِيدُوٓا۟ أَن يَخْدَعُوكَ فَإِنَّ حَسْبَكَ ٱللَّهُ ۚ هُوَ ٱلَّذِىٓ أَيَّدَكَ بِنَصْرِهِۦ وَبِٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٦٢﴾

If they lean toward peace, lean toward it too, and put your trust in God. He is the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing. And if they mean to deceive you, God is enough for you. It is He who strengthened you with His help and with the believers.

QUR'AN 8:61–62 · SURAT AL-ANFAL

NOTICE The same verb appears twice: if they lean toward peace, lean toward it. The next verse then imagines the worst, a peace offered in bad faith, and still does not take the command back.

This is a command, not a suggestion. Imam Ali gave Malik al-Ashtar, his governor of Egypt, the same advice: "Never refuse a peace your enemy calls you to in which God is pleased." Peace, he explained, "brings rest to your soldiers, relief from your worries and safety to your land." He was no dreamer. In the same breath he told Malik to stay alert after the treaty, because an enemy sometimes draws close only to catch you off guard.[27]

The Qur'an also tells believers not to beg for peace out of weakness when they have the upper hand (Qur'an 47:35). Peace must be real, and leaders must judge it. But the Qur'an would rather risk a deceitful peace than refuse a sincere one.

Captives had rights too. "Feeding the captive is a duty on whoever captured him," Imam al-Sadiq taught, "even if he is to be executed tomorrow. He should be fed, given water and shade, and treated gently, unbeliever or not."[28] The Qur'an allows captives to be released "as a favour, or for ransom" (Qur'an 47:4).

After the Battle of Badr in 624 CE (2 AH), the Prophet's own uncle al-'Abbas was among the prisoners, and he was told to pay his ransom. According to Imam al-Sadiq,

all the captives went home still polytheists, except al-ʿAbbas and two others.[29] No one was made to convert.

Honesty requires the harder texts as well. A weak report in al-Kafi preserves the classical law of the Imam's war. A captive taken while the fighting still raged was to be put to death, in a manner the Imam chose. Once the war was over, captives could be freed, ransomed or enslaved (Chapter 23 follows that last thread).[30]

Another weak report allows a besieged enemy city to be flooded, burned or bombarded even with women, children, old men, Muslim prisoners and merchants inside. The same report recalls that the Prophet forbade fighting women and children unless they fought. If a woman did fight, his soldiers were to hold back from her as far as they could, so long as they feared no breach.[31] These texts belong to the classical law of war. The guidance Shia authorities give fighters today runs the other way, as the next section shows.

Above all, Imam Ali warned his governor about blood. "Beware of blood and of shedding it unlawfully," he wrote. "Nothing invites retribution more... God will begin His judgement between His servants on the Day of Resurrection with the blood they have shed. So do not strengthen your rule by shedding forbidden blood."[32]

◆

Why is terrorism not jihad?

Terrorism means deliberately killing or terrifying people who are not fighting, in order to frighten a wider public into giving way. Measured against everything above, it fails every test.

It has no authority. Most Shia jurists reserve offensive war to an infallible Imam, and even the 2014 call to defence sent volunteers into the security forces, not into private bands. Al-Sistani rules that a person trying to stop a wrong may never go as far as wounding or killing. Only the Imam or his deputy may do that, and only to prevent a greater harm.[33] A group that appoints itself has no standing at all.

It strikes the very people whom the Prophet (s) ordered his soldiers to spare. In February 2015, as Iraqi volunteers fought the same group, al-Sistani's office issued twenty instructions to the fighters. "God, God," the fifth reads, "in the sanctity of ordinary people who have not fought you, especially the most vulnerable: the old, the children and the women." That holds even for relatives of the men fighting you.[34]

It betrays trust. The seventh instruction forbids harming non-Muslims, "whatever their religion and sect," because they live under the Muslims' protection. Whoever violates them is "a traitor and a betrayer." It also feeds on *takfir*, declaring other

Muslims unbelievers so that killing them seems allowed. The sixth instruction answers: "Whoever bears witness to the two testimonies is a Muslim; his blood and his property are protected."[35] The two testimonies are that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is His messenger.

And it imagines that cruelty can win what justice could not. "Let no one think," the twelfth instruction says, "that injustice can cure what justice cannot."[36] The Qur'an recalls a law God gave the Children of Israel. "Whoever kills a soul, unless it is for murder or for spreading corruption in the land, it is as though he had killed all humanity. And whoever saves a life, it is as though he had saved all humanity" (Qur'an 5:32).

The Qur'an says that those killed in God's way are "alive with their Lord" (Qur'an 3:169). But no promise of the Garden can cover what God has forbidden, and unlawful bloodshed, Imam Ali (a) warned, is the first case God will judge.

When terrorists bombed a mosque full of worshippers in Peshawar, Pakistan, in March 2022, al-Sistani's office condemned it as a "horrific crime." It used the same words in November 2024, when armed men attacked travellers from Parachinar.[37] When Pope Francis travelled to Najaf to visit him in March 2021, al-Sistani spoke of Iraq's Christians. They should live, like all Iraqis, "in peace and security," with "all their constitutional rights."[38] A slogan cannot turn a crime into worship.

> *"No one is to be killed for me except my killer.*
>
> IMAM ALI (A)

Go back to Kufa, to the dying man who could have let his clan loose on a city and asked instead for one blow, and no mutilation. That is what jihad looked like in the hands of someone who had fought the greater battle first.

Most of us will never stand on a battlefield. Our jihad will look smaller: a cruel word swallowed, an early alarm obeyed, an elderly parent visited, the truth told to someone with power over us. Every one of those efforts counts. "Those who strive for Our sake," God promises, "We will surely guide them along Our paths" (Qur'an 29:69).

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. *Jihad* means striving in God's way: against the self, with words and wealth, and only when lawful, with arms.
2. A well-known report calls the struggle with the self "the greater jihad," which remains after the battle.
3. The Qur'an permits fighting those who attack and expel, and forbids overstepping limits even in war.
4. Most Shia jurists reserve offensive war to an infallible Imam; defending people and Islam's core remains a duty.
5. Terrorism breaks every line, killing without authority, striking the innocent and betraying trust, so it is never jihad.

NEXT TIME · GO FURTHER

Next time: *The Legacy of Islamic Civilization.* The first word revealed to the Prophet (s) was "Read." How did a faith that began with a book become a household of teachers and then a civilisation of libraries, and what does that inheritance ask of us?

Go further:

Course: Introduction to Islamic Ethics, a Level 1 course at Tasneem Institute (tasneeminstitute.org/courses/introduction-to-islamic-ethics)

Read: Imam Ali's letter to Malik al-Ashtar (*Nahj al-Balagha*, Letter 53), especially its lines on peace, pledges and blood.

Watch: Invitation to Islam, Episode 29, "What Does Jihad Mean?" (12 min).

In the circle

LOOK BACK

1. Chapter 23 traced the exits from slavery that Islam built into its law. Can you name two?
2. Chapter 21 found a rule about trees in the orders the Prophet (s) gave his soldiers. What was it?
3. Part Two asks, "Is it good?" What would a good teaching about war need to include?

TALK ABOUT IT

WARM-UP

1. Before today, what did the word "jihad" bring to mind for you, and where do you think you first picked that up?

UNDERSTAND

2. Why does the chapter say jihad means neither "holy war" nor only an "inner struggle"? Use Qur'an 25:52 and 4:95.
3. Who do most Shia jurists say may begin an offensive war, and what may people do when they are attacked?

REFLECT

4. Chapter 15 asked what mercy looks like when revenge becomes possible. Dying, Imam Ali said, "No one is to be killed for me except my killer." What does his answer add?
5. What is one "greater jihad" in your own life, a struggle you have to win again every day? You needn't share what it is.

APPLY

6. If someone asked you this week, "Doesn't jihad mean holy war?", what would you say in three sentences, and which text would you point to?

GO DEEPER

7. Read Imam Ali's orders to his army before Siffin (*Nahj al-Balagha*, Letter 14; compiled text, not graded here). Which order would be hardest to keep in battle, and why?
8. Read Imam al-Rida's answer about the sword and the horse (al-Kafi, vol. 5, Book of Jihad, ch. 5, no. 2; reliable chain). What does "for himself, not for the ruler" mean, in your own words?

CARRY IT HOME

Choose one way in this week:

☐ **Notice:** Each evening, note one moment when you held back a sharp word, kept a promise you wanted to drop, or got up when you wanted to stay down. That is the greater jihad at work.

☐ **Do:** Take up one "jihad of the tongue": write something that helps someone, speak up for a person treated unfairly, or call an older relative who would love to hear from you.

☐ **Learn:** Read Qur'an 9:1–15 as one passage. Mark the verses about treaties kept (9:4), asylum and safe passage (9:6), and who attacked first (9:13). What does the whole passage add to the one verse people quote?

Aim. Help the circle see jihad as striving in God's way, and understand the strict limits that Islam, and Shia law in particular, places on fighting.

Protect this question. No. 4, on Imam Ali's deathbed instructions. Guests, new Muslims and lifelong Muslims can all talk about restraint and revenge without debating any current war.

Answer notes.

- *Q2.* The root means effort. The Qur'an calls arguing with the Qur'an in Mecca "a great jihad" (25:52), yet also uses jihad for fighting (4:95). Its plain word for combat is *qital*.
- *Q3.* Most Shia jurists hold that offensive war needs an infallible Imam or his named deputy, so it waits for the twelfth Imam; a minority, al-Khuʾi among them, disagree. Defending people and "the core of Islam" needs no Imam (Imam al-Rida in al-Kafi; reliable chain), and al-Sistani forbids private persons to wound or kill in the name of forbidding wrong (masʾala 1273).

Likely questions.

- *"Doesn't 9:5 say 'kill them wherever you find them'?"* See the "fair question" box.
- *"Wasn't Islam spread by the sword?"* The same box, with al-Tabataba'i on 2:256; Chapter 16 on pluralism.
- *"What about attackers who call themselves martyrs?"* See "Why is terrorism not jihad?": Qur'an 3:169 with 5:32, and Imam Ali on forbidden blood.

Watch for. Read the care note aloud first. Some people may have lived through war or terrorism, or lost someone to it; never ask anyone to describe it. Muslims may feel accused and guests may feel wary. Keep the talk on texts and principles, not on current conflicts, states or parties. If someone raises a current war, acknowledge it gently and return to the texts.

Bring. Printed copies of Qur'an 9:1–15, so the circle can read 9:5 in its setting together.

MY THREAD · CHAPTER 24

What struggle in myself do I most need to win, and what would winning it look like tomorrow morning?

MY QUESTION FOR THE BOX

NOTES

25

The Legacy of Islamic Civilization

Taught by the pen: an inheritance that is also a duty.

اقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ ﴿٣﴾ الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ ﴿٤﴾ عَلَّمَ الْإِنسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ ﴿٥﴾

Read, for your Lord is the Most Generous, who taught by the pen, taught the human being what he did not know.

QUR'AN 96:3–5 · SURAT AL-ʿALAQ

WATCH · EPISODE 21 · 10:30

youtu.be/pZnDQraEGgA

In the video: rivers, wind, seasons and bees: how reading the Qur'an sent scholars out to study the world (2:49)

Reading time: about 15 minutes

An old man sits in the Prophet's mosque in Medina, a black turban wound about his head. Again and again he calls out the same strange words: "Ya Baqir al-ʿilm! Ya Baqir al-ʿilm!" *O you who split knowledge open.*

The people of Medina have an explanation: *Jabir is raving.* They know who he is. Jabir ibn ʿAbd Allah al-Ansari knew the Prophet Muhammad (s) in person, and he is one of the last of the Prophet's Companions still alive. Now, they think, his mind is going.

"No, by God, I am not raving," Jabir answers. "I heard the Messenger of God say: *You will live to meet a man descended from me. His name will be my name, and his bearing my bearing. He will split knowledge wide open.* That is what makes me say what I say."

One day, walking the lanes of the city, Jabir passes a Qur'an school, a *kuttab*. A boy named Muhammad is there. Jabir looks at him. "Come here, boy," he says, and the boy walks toward him. "Now turn back," and the boy walks away. "By the One who holds my soul," says Jabir, "that is the bearing of the Messenger of God. What is your name?"

"Muhammad, son of Ali, son of al-Husayn."

The old man comes forward and kisses the boy's head. "May my father and mother be your ransom," he says. "Your forefather, the Messenger of God, sends you his greeting of peace."

From then on Jabir visits the boy every morning and every evening, and Medina can hardly believe it. Later, when the young man begins to teach, the people of Medina doubt him, until he quotes Jabir. Then they listen. Yet all the while, it is Jabir who keeps coming to him to learn.[1]

History remembers the boy as Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a), the fifth Imam (d. c. 733 CE): *al-Baqir*, the one who splits knowledge open. A greeting crossed the generations, and it came with a promise about knowledge. How did a faith that began with the word *Read* become a household of teachers, and then a civilisation of libraries, hospitals and observatories? And what does an inheritance like that ask of the people who receive it?

THE BIG QUESTION

Did Islam really build a great civilisation of learning, and does any of it matter now?

Have you ever wondered whether the "golden age" of Islam is history, or a story people tell to feel better? What a thousand-year-old library could have to do with your phone, your work or your children? Or, if you grew up hearing about Muslim scientists, why a faith that prized knowledge so highly now sees so many of its communities struggling?

This chapter follows one word, *Read*, from the first revelation into the Prophet's household, out to the libraries, hospitals and observatories it inspired, and back to us.

WORDS TO KNOW

ʿilm (عِلْم) · *ILM* · knowledge. In hadith it often means knowing one's faith; the Qur'an uses the word much more widely.

ḥikma (حِكْمَة) · *HIK-ma* · wisdom: knowledge put to right use.

kuttāb (كُتّاب) · *kut-TAAB* · an elementary school where children learned to read and write, starting with the Qur'an.

waqf (وَقْف) · *WAKF* · an endowment: property given for good causes for ever, such as a school, a library or a hospital.

ḥawza (حَوْزَة) · *HAW-za* · a Shia seminary for training scholars, such as those of Najaf and Qum.

wājib kifāʾī (واجِب كِفائِيّ) · *WAA-jib ki-FAA-ee* · a communal duty: once enough people take it on, the rest are released.

◆

Why would a faith begin with "Read"?

Muslims remember the first revelation as a command. It came to the Prophet Muhammad (s) around 610 CE on Mount Hira, above Mecca, where he went into retreat every year. Most commentators, Shia and Sunni, hold that the first words revealed were the opening of chapter (*sura*) 96. The very first was *iqraʾ*: "Read," or "Recite."[2]

اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ ﴿١﴾ خَلَقَ الْإِنسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ ﴿٢﴾
اقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ ﴿٣﴾ الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ ﴿٤﴾ عَلَّمَ الْإِنسَانَ
مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ ﴿٥﴾

Read in the name of your Lord who created: created the human being from something that clings. Read, for your Lord is the Most Generous, who taught by the pen, taught the human being what he did not know.

QUR'AN 96:1–5 · SURAT AL-ʿALAQ

NOTICE "Read" comes twice, and so does "taught." God is named first as the One who creates, then as the One who teaches. The only man-made thing in the whole passage is a pen.

Two things stand out. The generosity that made a human being from almost nothing goes on to fill that being with knowledge. And there is the pen. A pen lets knowing be written down, copied, carried and handed on, so that it outlives the person who knew it. A pen, in other words, makes knowledge something you can inherit.

The rest of the Qur'an keeps that pen in view. It asks, "Can those who know and those who do not know be equal?" (Qur'an 39:9). It promises that God "will raise by degrees those of you who believe and those who have been given knowledge" (Qur'an 58:11). And it gives the Prophet a short prayer for himself: "My Lord, increase me in knowledge" (Qur'an 20:114).

Learning was never meant to travel alone. The Qur'an describes the Prophet's mission among an unlettered people as "purifying them, and teaching them the Book and wisdom" (Qur'an 62:2). Imam Jaʿfar al-Sadiq (a), the sixth Imam (d. 765 CE), put it this way: "Seek knowledge, and with it adorn yourselves with forbearance and dignity. Be humble toward those you teach and toward those you learn from. Do not be overbearing scholars, or your falsehood will sweep away your truth."[3]

The Imams treated learning as a duty. The most important Shia collection of hadith, the Prophet's and Imams' recorded words, is *al-Kafi*, compiled by al-Kulayni (d. 941 CE). It does not open with prayer or law, but with a book on intellect and ignorance, then a book on the excellence of knowledge. That second book begins with

the Prophet's words: "Seeking knowledge is an obligation on every Muslim. God loves those who seek knowledge."[4]

The saying reaches us by several routes, and later Shia scholars count it reliable. In its first setting, knowledge (*ʿilm*) meant above all knowing your faith well enough to live it. Later scholars widened the duty. And not all knowing counts the same. The mind is a tool, and a tool can be wasted. Imam al-Baqir (a) gave the measure: "A scholar whose knowledge people benefit from is better than seventy thousand worshippers."[5]

Worship is precious in Islam, so the comparison is startling. The point is benefit. Knowledge that feeds, heals, guides or teaches other people, and draws its owner closer to God, outweighs a great deal of private devotion.

◆

How did a household become a school?

Jabir's greeting makes sense once you know how Shia Muslims see the Prophet's family. In Shia belief the Imams are the heirs of the Prophet's knowledge, each receiving it from the one before. Imam al-Baqir (a) said: "The knowledge that came down with Adam (a) was never taken away. Knowledge is inherited. Ali (a) was the scholar of this community, and no scholar of ours has ever died without leaving, from his own family, someone who knew as he knew."[6]

That household had been a school from the start. Imam Ali (a) remembered following the Prophet (s) as a boy "the way a young camel follows its mother's tracks. Every day he would raise for me a banner of his character, and tell me to follow it."[7] Character first, then knowledge: the pattern ran on.

In the time of al-Baqir's son, Imam al-Sadiq (a), students came to Medina from Kufa and beyond. Al-Shaykh al-Mufid (d. 1022 CE), a great Shia scholar of Baghdad, reports that hadith experts listed the trustworthy people who passed on al-Sadiq's teaching. Whatever their own views, they numbered 4,000.[8]

His learning was honoured far beyond his followers. Abu Hanifa (d. 767), founder of one of the four great Sunni schools of law, was once asked who was the most learned person he had seen. He named Jaʿfar ibn Muhammad. Then he told a story, preserved in Sunni sources. The caliph al-Mansur (r. 754–775), worried that people were captivated by the Imam, had told him to prepare his forty hardest questions.

In the caliph's presence Abu Hanifa put them one by one. For each, the Imam gave the view of Abu Hanifa's own school, the view of the scholars of Medina, and his own. Sometimes he agreed with one, sometimes with the other, sometimes with nei-

ther. When all forty were done, Abu Hanifa said, "Is not the most learned of people the one who knows best how people differ?"[9]

Two great Sunni hadith collections carry his teaching. Malik ibn Anas (d. 795), founder of another school of law, included his reports in the *Muwatta'*. And in the *Sahih* of Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj (d. 875), one of the fullest accounts of the Prophet's farewell pilgrimage comes from Ja'far, from his father al-Baqir. Its source is Jabir, the old man in the mosque.[10]

Behind all this teaching stood a conviction the Prophet (s) had put into words.

THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD (S), NARRATED BY IMAM JA'FAR AL-SADIQ (A)

مَنْ سَلَكَ طَرِيقاً يَطْلُبُ فِيهِ عِلْماً سَلَكَ اللهُ بِهِ طَرِيقاً إِلَى الْجَنَّةِ وَإِنَّ الْمَلائِكَةَ لَتَضَعُ أَجْنِحَتَهَا لِطَالِبِ الْعِلْمِ رِضًا بِهِ وَإِنَّهُ يَسْتَغْفِرُ لِطَالِبِ الْعِلْمِ مَنْ فِي السَّمَاءِ وَمَنْ فِي الارْضِ حَتَّى الْحُوتِ فِي الْبَحْرِ وَفَضْلُ الْعَالِمِ عَلَى الْعَابِدِ كَفَضْلِ الْقَمَرِ عَلَى سَائِرِ النُّجُومِ لَيْلَةَ الْبَدْرِ وَإِنَّ الْعُلَمَاءَ وَرَثَةُ الانْبِيَاءِ إِنَّ الانْبِيَاءَ لَمْ يُوَرِّثُوا دِينَاراً وَلا دِرْهَماً وَلَكِنْ وَرَّثُوا الْعِلْمَ فَمَنْ أَخَذَ مِنْهُ أَخَذَ بِحَظٍّ وَافِرٍ

Whoever sets out on a road in search of knowledge, God sets him on a road to Paradise. The angels lower their wings for the seeker of knowledge, pleased with him. All who are in the heavens and on the earth ask forgiveness for him, even the fish in the sea. The scholar outshines the worshipper as the full moon outshines the stars. The scholars are the heirs of the prophets. The prophets left no dinar and no dirham. They left knowledge, and whoever takes from it takes an abundant share.[11]

al-Kafi 1 · Excellence of Knowledge · ch. 4 · no. 1 · **Reliable chain**

The most valuable thing a prophet leaves behind is knowledge, and anyone who learns takes a share. Shia Muslims hold that the Imams inherited it in a unique way, but the share is open to all. And an inheritance that sharing does not use up asks to be passed on.

"Whoever among you teaches knowledge," Imam al-Baqir said, "has a reward like the learner's, and more besides. So learn from those who carry knowledge, and teach it to your brothers and sisters as the scholars taught you."[12] That is how a household became a school, and a school became a civilisation.

PAUSE AND RECALL

Pause and recall: According to the Prophet (s), what did the prophets leave as their inheritance? Who can take a share of it?

> *"The prophets left no dinar and no dirham. They left knowledge.*
>
> THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD (S)

◆

What did a civilisation of learning look like?

Picture a *kuttab* like the one Jabir passed: children with a teacher, learning their letters from the Qur'an. For centuries, across the Muslim world, that is where learning began. The Qur'an was the text people set out to memorise, understand, take apart and live by: a first reader and a blueprint for life. Not everyone could read; mass literacy is modern. But schools and libraries multiplied, often paid for by a *waqf*, an endowment given for good causes for ever.[13]

The Qur'an also sent its readers outdoors. Again and again it points to the sky, the rain and the turning of night into day, and calls them signs. It tells them to travel and look.

قُلْ سِيرُوا۟ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ فَٱنظُرُوا۟ كَيْفَ بَدَأَ ٱلْخَلْقَ ثُمَّ ٱللَّهُ يُنشِئُ ٱلنَّشْأَةَ ٱلْـَٔاخِرَةَ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَىْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٢٠﴾

Say: Travel through the earth and see how He began creation. Then God will produce the second creation. God has power over everything.

QUR'AN 29:20 · SURAT AL-ʿANKABUT

NOTICE *Travel… and see*: two commands, to go out and to look. How creation began is offered as the evidence for the creation still to come.

So Muslim scholars studied the world around them: the flow of rivers, the winds, the seasons, the habits of animals. The Qur'an even describes the bee, which God inspired

to build homes and feed on every kind of fruit. "A drink of many colours comes from their bellies, with healing in it for people. In that is a sign for people who reflect" (Qur'an 16:68–69).

Practical needs pushed the same way. Muslims had to find the direction of Mecca from distant cities, time the five daily prayers, keep a lunar calendar and divide inheritances into the shares the Qur'an sets out. Astronomy and mathematics served all of these.[14]

They learned from everyone, too. Imam Ali (a) had told his followers, "Take wisdom wherever it is," and, "Wisdom is the believer's lost property, so take it, even from the hypocrites."[15] In eighth- and ninth-century Baghdad, Greek, Persian and Indian science and philosophy were translated into Arabic on a grand scale. Much of the work was done by Christians, such as the physician Hunayn ibn Ishaq (d. 873). Sabians, an ancient faith community of Harran, took part too, among them the mathematician Thabit ibn Qurra (d. 901).[16]

They did not only preserve what they received; they tested and corrected it. In Cairo, Ibn al-Haytham (d. c. 1040) used experiments to rebuild the science of optics. Two centuries later, Nasir al-Din al-Tusi (1201–1274) designed a geometrical model to repair a flaw in Ptolemy's astronomy. A strikingly similar device appears in Copernicus nearly three centuries later. Whether and how it reached Copernicus is still debated.[17]

The same devotion shaped beauty. Much of the earliest Muslim art is the art of writing the Qur'an. Calligraphers spent their lives perfecting the proportions of letters, and illuminators framed the verses in gold and colour. Imam Ali (a) once gave his secretary, 'Ubayd Allah ibn Abi Rafi', a lesson in penmanship.

"Put a tuft of fibre in your inkwell," he said, "and cut a long nib. Leave space between the lines and set the letters close together. That is best for the beauty of the script."[18] Craft, on this view, is a form of care. "Each person's worth," Imam Ali also said, "lies in what they do well."[19] Faith can show in the work of a doctor, a builder or a calligrapher, in a hobby as much as a profession.

◆

Whose achievement was it?

Some of these scholars were Shia, some were not, and some are claimed by several groups. Precision matters more than a list of heroes. Shia rulers were among the great patrons. In tenth-century Iraq and Iran the Buyids, a Shia dynasty, held power. 'Adud al-Dawla (r. 949–983) founded hospitals in Baghdad and Shiraz, and the physician Ali

ibn al-ʿAbbas al-Majusi dedicated to him a great medical encyclopedia, later translated into Latin.

Around 991–993 a Buyid minister, Sabur ibn Ardashir, opened a "House of Knowledge" (*dar al-ʿilm*) in Baghdad with some 10,000 books.[20] In Egypt the Fatimids founded al-Azhar in Cairo in 970–972, and a public House of Knowledge there in 1005. The Fatimids were Ismaili Shia, a branch that follows a different line of Imams after Imam al-Sadiq (a) from the Twelver Shia this book describes.

Al-Azhar later became a great centre of Sunni learning. It is one of the oldest centres of learning still active in the world. In the late 1950s its rector, Shaykh Mahmud Shaltut, ruled that Muslims may follow the Jaʿfari school of law, the Twelver Shia school named after Imam al-Sadiq.[21]

Al-Tusi was Shia beyond doubt. He spent some twenty years in the mountain fortresses of the Ismailis. Then he entered the service of the Mongol conqueror Hulagu, and was with him at the siege of Baghdad in 1258, a part that historians still argue over. From that unlikely position he persuaded Hulagu to fund an observatory and centre of learning at Maragha, in north-western Iran.

Scholars came from afar to work there, among them the Syriac Christian Bar Hebraeus. Its astronomical tables stayed in use for two centuries. Al-Tusi's short handbook of Shia theology drew more than 400 commentaries and glosses. He is buried near the shrine of Imam Musa al-Kazim (a) in Baghdad.[22]

Ibn Sina (c. 970–1037), known in Europe as Avicenna, wrote the *Canon of Medicine*, in Latin the basis of medical teaching in European universities until the seventeenth century. His own affiliation is debated, but his philosophy found a long home in Shia thought, beginning with al-Tusi's defence of it.[23] Tradition remembers the alchemist Jabir ibn Hayyan as a student of Imam al-Sadiq. But the huge body of writing under his name grew over generations, and historians debate how much goes back to one man.[24]

In Isfahan, Shaykh Baha'i (1547–1621), born near Baalbek in today's Lebanon, became the city's chief religious authority under Shah ʿAbbas I. He wrote on law, astronomy and arithmetic, and his arithmetic handbook was still being translated into German in 1843. He also turned his home into a refuge for orphans, widows and the poor.[25]

None of these people worked alone. Sunni and Shia, Christian, Jewish and Sabian scholars built this civilisation together. That takes nothing away from Shia history. It makes the history true, and it is what Imam Ali (a) asked: take wisdom wherever it is.

A STORY FROM THE SOURCES

The library that burned

In the eleventh century the leading Shia scholar in Baghdad was Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Tusi (995–1067), known as Shaykh al-Tusi. Like Nasir al-Din after him, he came from Tus in north-eastern Iran. He had studied with al-Shaykh al-Mufid and al-Sharif al-Murtada. He compiled two of the four great Shia collections of hadith.

In 1057 CE (449 AH), in the sectarian violence that followed the takeover of Baghdad by the Seljuk Turks, his house and his library were burned.

He was past sixty. He moved to Najaf, the small town around the shrine of Imam Ali (a), and taught there for the rest of his life, more than a decade. The circle of students that gathered around him grew into the seminary (*hawza*) of Najaf, still one of the great centres of Shia learning nearly a thousand years later.[26]

The books burned. What was in them survived, because it was also in people.

◆

What does the inheritance ask of us now?

Muslims believe the Qur'an's guidance was given for every people and every age. If so, its legacy is not a trophy to polish but a toolbox to use. A trophy tells you what someone else once did; a toolbox asks what you will build next. And for a believer the discovering never ends: each new layer of detail in creation says something more about its Maker.

A FAIR QUESTION

If Islam inspired all this, why are so many Muslim societies behind today?

Maybe the golden age happened in spite of the religion.

No civilisation's record can prove a religion true, or prove it false. Gifted people and great institutions have flourished in many cultures, and every culture has had its long winters. Neither the libraries of Baghdad nor today's literacy tables can settle the question.

The decline had many causes: invasions, including the Mongol sack of Baghdad in 1258, shifting trade routes, broken-up states, colonial rule and the choices of institutions. Tidy stories fail the evidence. If Muslim science stopped in the twelfth century, as people sometimes claim, how was the Maragha observatory founded in 1259? And "in spite of the religion" fits the people badly. Al-Tusi wrote theology as well as astronomy, and Shaykh Baha'i was a jurist as well as a mathematician.[27]

The duty to learn never depended on a golden age. The Prophet (s) first gave it to a people the Qur'an calls "unlettered" (Qur'an 62:2). It falls on us just as much.

Not everyone can learn everything, and the Qur'an does not ask them to. "It is not right for the believers to go out all together," it says. "Why should a group from each community not go out to gain a deep understanding of the faith, and warn their people when they return?" (Qur'an 9:122). Jurists call this a *wajib kifa'i*, a communal duty. Once enough people take it on, the rest are released. If no one does, everyone has failed.

The Iranian scholar Murtada Mutahhari (1919–1979) argued that the duty to seek knowledge depends on what the community needs. If it needs doctors, learning medicine becomes a shared duty, and the same holds for farming, industry and trade, so that the community can rely on itself.[28] Pride in a famous ancestor has never made anyone a doctor.

For most of history the problem was too little information. Now it sits at our fingertips, more of it every second. But how much of it is useful, and how much does us harm? Imam Ali (a) gave his son al-Hasan (a) a rule worth taping to a screen: "There is no good in knowledge that does not benefit."[29]

He also described the alternative to his companion Kumayl ibn Ziyad (d. c. 701). Once, after the night prayer in the mosque of Kufa, Ali took Kumayl by the hand and walked him out of the city without a word. When they reached the open desert, he

sighed deeply. “Kumayl,” he said, “these hearts are vessels, and the best of them is the one that holds the most. So keep what I tell you.”[30]

> **IMAM ALI (A), TO HIS COMPANION KUMAYL IBN ZIYAD**
>
> النَّاسُ ثَلاثَةٌ: فَعَالِمٌ رَبَّانِيٌّ وَمُتَعَلِّمٌ عَلَى سَبِيلِ نَجَاةٍ، وَهَمَجٌ رَعَاعٌ أَتْبَاعُ كُلِّ نَاعِقٍ يَمِيلُونَ مَعَ كُلِّ رِيحٍ، لَمْ يَسْتَضِيئُوا بِنُورِ الْعِلْمِ، وَلَمْ يَلْجَؤُوا إِلَى رُكْنٍ وَثِيقٍ
>
> People are of three kinds: a scholar devoted to his Lord, a learner on the road to rescue, and a drifting swarm who follow every shouter and bend with every wind. They have sought no light from knowledge, and taken shelter in nothing firm.[31]
>
> Nahj al-Balagha · Saying 147 · **Compiled text, not graded here**

It is hard to read that today without thinking of a social media feed: a thousand shouters, and a wind that changes hourly. Ali’s answer was not less information but more light. “Knowledge is better than wealth,” he went on. “Knowledge guards you, while you have to guard wealth. Wealth shrinks when it is spent, but knowledge grows when it is spent.”[32] A library can burn. Knowledge that has been taught keeps growing.

The same discernment reaches the planet. Look at climate change, and at how unevenly its burdens fall. The Qur’an’s instruction is plain: “Eat and drink, but do not waste. He does not love the wasteful” (Qur’an 7:31). Chapters 19 and 21 applied it to wealth and the earth. Here the point is time. The knowledge Muslims inherit should help build a way of life that can last, not for fifty years but for 300, or 500.

Go back to the old man in the mosque. Jabir had known the Prophet (s), yet in old age he came to learn from the Prophet’s great-great-grandson. The greeting he carried was about knowledge, and so is the inheritance it began. Part Two has asked whether Islam is good. Its last answer is an invitation any circle can accept: learn something well, use it to serve, and teach it to someone else. That inheritance is also a duty, and it leaves the one who carries it richer.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. The first revealed words of the Qur'an command "Read" and praise God as the One "who taught by the pen."
2. The Prophet (s) made seeking knowledge a duty, and the Imams measured knowledge by how much it benefits others.
3. Shia Muslims see the Imams as heirs of the Prophet's knowledge, and scholars of other schools learned from them.
4. Muslim civilisation learned from many peoples and faiths, then tested, corrected and extended what it received.
5. The inheritance is a duty: learn with discernment, teach what you know, and use it to serve people and the earth.

NEXT TIME · GO FURTHER

Next time: *How Does Islam Explain Sin?* Part Three turns from "Is it good?" to "What would it mean to live it?" It begins where every honest person must: with the times we fall short. Is there a way back?

Go further:

Course: The Miraculous Qur'an, a Level 1 course at Tasneem Institute (tasneeminstitute.org/courses/the-miraculous-quran)

Read: Imam Ali's night conversation with Kumayl, *Nahj al-Balagha*, Saying 147; then *al-Kafi*, vol. 1, the Book of the Excellence of Knowledge (*Kitab Fadl al-'Ilm*).

Watch: Invitation to Islam, Episode 21, "The Legacy of Islamic Civilization" (11 min).

In the circle

LOOK BACK

1. Chapter 24: As he lay dying, what did Imam Ali (a) order for the man who had struck him?
2. Chapter 21: What did Imam Ali's will for his estates forbid his sons to sell, and until when?
3. Part Two has asked, "Is it good?" Which chapter so far has most shaped your answer?

TALK ABOUT IT

WARM-UP

1. Who taught you something you still use almost every day: a parent, a teacher, a friend? What made it stick?

UNDERSTAND

2. The first revealed verses (Qur'an 96:1–5) describe God as the One "who taught by the pen." Why might a pen matter for the idea of a legacy?
3. Imam al-Baqir (a) said a scholar whose knowledge benefits people is better than seventy thousand worshippers. What does that say about how knowledge is measured?

REFLECT

4. Imam Ali (a) said, "Take wisdom wherever it is." When have you learned something true from a person or place you didn't expect?
5. Imam Ali described people who "follow every shouter and bend with every wind." In a world of endless feeds, what helps you tell real knowledge from noise?

APPLY

6. Imam al-Baqir (a) taught that the teacher shares the learner's reward. What is one thing you know well that you could teach someone this week? Who might it be?

GO DEEPER

7. Read Imam Ali's whole conversation with Kumayl (Nahj al-Balagha, Saying 147; compiled text, not graded here). He says hoarders of wealth are dead while alive, but scholars live on in hearts. What does he mean?
8. Read the full story of Jabir and the young al-Baqir (al-Kafi, vol. 1, Book of Divine Authority, ch. 118, no. 2; al-Majlisi: weak by the usual standard, sound in his view). Why might Medina have trusted the Imam only when he quoted Jabir?

CARRY IT HOME

Choose one way in this week:

☐ **Notice:** For one day, notice what you read, watch and scroll. Ask of each thing: did it leave me wiser, kinder or more capable? ("There is no good in knowledge that does not benefit.")

☐ **Do:** Teach one person one thing you know well: a recipe, a repair, a verse, a skill from your work. Imam al-Baqir (a) promised the teacher a reward like the learner's.

☐ **Learn:** Read Qur'an 3:190–191 (Chapter 5) slowly. Then spend ten minutes outdoors watching one thing closely, such as clouds, a tree, a line of ants or bees at work. What do you see that you hadn't noticed before?

Aim. Help the circle see learning as part of faith, and leave with one thing each person can pass on.

Protect this question. No. 6: "What is one thing you know well that you could teach someone this week?" Everyone has an answer, whatever they believe, and it turns the chapter into action.

Answer notes.

- *Q2.* A pen lets knowledge be written, copied and handed on, so it can outlive its author and be inherited. The passage names God as Creator, then Teacher.
- *Q3.* Knowledge is measured by its benefit to others (al-Kafi, vol. 1, Book of the Excellence of Knowledge, ch. 2, no. 8; reliable chain). Learning that helps no one misses the point.

Likely questions.

- *"Were these scientists Shia?"* Some were, some weren't, some are disputed. See "Whose achievement was it?"
- *"Why are Muslim countries behind today?"* See the "fair question" box.
- *"Is al-Azhar Shia?"* Founded by the Ismaili Fatimids; Sunni for centuries since. Same section.

Watch for. Two opposite temptations: boasting ("we invented everything") and shame about the present. Keep claims precise and generous; this was a shared civilisation. Some members may have had little schooling, so honour every kind of learning, including crafts and skills.

Milestone: "Is it good?" This session closes Part Two. Read the circle agreements aloud. If you planned a service project during Chapters 19–21, carry it out this week or report back over a shared meal. Allow 105 minutes; in the Ramadan format, make tonight the service night. Ask each person to reread *My thread* and name one idea from Part Two that changed how they see what is good.

Bring. Honey for the table (Qur'an 16:69), and if you can, a reed pen or a print of a page of Qur'an calligraphy.

MY THREAD · CHAPTER 25

What have I inherited, from family, teachers or faith, that I want to pass on, and to whom?

MY QUESTION FOR THE BOX

NOTES

PART THREE

العبادات

Practices

What would it mean to live it?

End with the practices that turn belief into a life: returning to God after failure, prayer, fasting, giving, and the great pilgrimage.

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How Does Islam Explain Sin?

No inherited guilt. No closed door.

قُلْ يَٰعِبَادِيَ ٱلَّذِينَ أَسْرَفُوا۟ عَلَىٰٓ أَنفُسِهِمْ لَا تَقْنَطُوا۟ مِن رَّحْمَةِ ٱللَّهِ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَغْفِرُ ٱلذُّنُوبَ جَمِيعًا إِنَّهُۥ هُوَ ٱلْغَفُورُ ٱلرَّحِيمُ ﴿٥٣﴾

Say: "My servants who have gone too far against yourselves, do not despair of God's mercy. God forgives all sins. He is the All-Forgiving, the All-Merciful."

QUR'AN 39:53 · SURAT AL-ZUMAR

A NOTE OF CARE This conversation is about falling short and coming back, not about anyone's private life. No one will be asked what they have done, and anyone may pass at any time.

WATCH · EPISODE 05 · 11:15

youtu.be/oOmQ9-LIzEA

In the video: why feeling guilty can be a good sign (6:01)

Reading time: about 15 minutes

A man and a woman stand in a garden that has given them everything, except one tree. God has warned them away from it, and warned them about the enemy who will tempt them toward it. But Satan whispers that the tree is the secret of becoming angels, or of never dying. They eat. At once they feel exposed, and they reach for the garden's leaves to cover themselves (Qur'an 7:19–22).

What they say next is the hinge of the whole story. They do not blame the tempter. They do not blame each other. Together they say, "Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves" (Qur'an 7:23).

A report from the Imams of the Prophet's family, preserved in al-Kafi, the great Shia collection of their sayings, tells what Adam (a) asks for next.

"Lord," he says, "You have set Satan over me and made him run through me like blood. Give me something."

"Adam," God answers, "if any of your children intends a wrong and does not do it, nothing is written against them. If they do it, one wrong is written. If they intend a good deed and do not do it, one good deed is written for them. If they do it, ten."

"Lord, give me more."

"Whoever does wrong and then asks forgiveness, I will forgive."

"Lord, give me more."

"I have laid repentance open for them until the soul reaches here." *Here* is the throat, where the last breath leaves the body.

"Lord," says Adam, "that is enough for me."[1]

Many people picture the first wrong as a curse passed down the generations. In this telling, the first father goes out into the world carrying gifts for his children: a ledger tilted toward mercy, and a door left open until the final breath. So what, in Islam, is sin? And with no inherited guilt, no priest and no confession booth, how does anyone come back from it?

THE BIG QUESTION

If no one is born guilty, and no priest can forgive me, what is sin, and how do I come back from it?

Have you ever wondered whether "sin" is just an old-fashioned word for breaking rules? Whether someone who keeps falling into the same mistake can really be forgiven? Or, if you grew up saying *astaghfirullah*, "I ask God's forgiveness," whether those words are all that repentance asks?

This chapter looks at what Islam says sin is, what it does to a person, and why Muslims believe the door back to God stays open while there is breath.

WORDS TO KNOW

tawba (تَوْبَة) · *TAW-ba* · repentance; literally "turning back." When God "turns" (*tāba*), He turns to us in mercy.

istighfār (اِسْتِغْفار) · *is-tigh-FAAR* · asking God's forgiveness; literally, asking Him to cover a wrong, as a helmet covers the head.

astaghfiru-llāh (أَسْتَغْفِرُ اللهَ) · *as-TAGH-fi-rul-LAAH* · "I ask God's forgiveness," a phrase many Muslims say every day.

dhanb (ذَنْب) · *THANB* (*th* as in "this") · a sin; a wrong that leaves consequences behind it. Its plural, *dhunūb*, appears in Qur'an 39:53.

fiṭra (فِطْرَة) · *FIT-ra* · the inborn human nature that knows God and leans toward Him (Qur'an 30:30).

ʿiṣma (عِصْمَة) · *IS-ma* · God-given protection of the prophets and Imams from sin and error.

Are we born guilty?

Many people grow up hearing that humanity fell with Adam (a), and that every child is born carrying something of that fall. Christians understand this in different ways. The Catholic Catechism, for example, teaches that Adam's descendants do not share his personal fault. What they receive is a human nature "deprived of original holiness and justice." Original sin, it says, is a sin "contracted" and not "committed," "a state and not an act," and baptism erases it.[2]

The Qur'an tells the story differently. It never makes Adam's wife, whom tradition names Eve (Hawwa), the villain. Satan "made them both slip" (Qur'an 2:36), and both of them turned back to God with a prayer short enough to learn by heart.

قَالَا رَبَّنَا ظَلَمْنَآ أَنفُسَنَا وَإِن لَّمْ تَغْفِرْ لَنَا وَتَرْحَمْنَا لَنَكُونَنَّ مِنَ ٱلْخَٰسِرِينَ ﴿٢٣﴾

The two of them said, "Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves. If You do not forgive us and have mercy on us, we will surely be among the lost."

QUR'AN 7:23 · SURAT AL-AʿRAF

NOTICE The verb is dual: the two of them speak as one. Compare Iblis, the Qur'an's name for Satan, a few verses earlier: "Because You led me astray..." (7:16). He blames God. They blame no one but themselves.

God "turned to" Adam (Qur'an 2:37), and the matter was closed. Elsewhere the Qur'an states the principle outright: "No one carries another's burden" (Qur'an 6:164). The book of Ezekiel, in the Hebrew Bible, says the same: "The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father" (Ezekiel 18:20, KJV).

So in Islam no one is born in debt. The Prophet Muhammad (s) taught that "every child is born upon the *fitra*," the inborn nature. Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a), the fifth Imam (d. c. 733 CE), explained what that nature holds: "the knowledge that God is his Creator."[3]

A newborn arrives facing God, like a compass needle that already knows north. That is not the same as running on autopilot: a compass can be ignored, or knocked off true. But nothing has to be undone before a child can turn to God, because nothing was inherited that needs undoing.

But didn't Adam sin? The Qur'an's own words are strong: "Adam disobeyed his Lord and went astray. Then his Lord chose him, turned to him and guided him" (Qur'an 20:121–122). Shia Muslims hold that God protects His prophets from sin, a gift called *ʿisma* (Chapter 3).

A well-known report, though its chain is unverified, sets the question at the court of the caliph al-Ma'mun (r. 813–833 CE). There a scholar named Ibn al-Jahm put this very verse to Imam Ali al-Rida (a), the eighth Imam (d. 818 CE). God "created Adam as His proof on His earth and His deputy in His lands," the Imam replied. "He did not create him for the Garden." The slip happened in the Garden, not on the earth that Adam was made for.[4]

Shia theologians often describe that slip as "leaving the better course," not as breaking a binding law. The great commentator 'Allama al-Tabataba'i (d. 1981 CE) read God's command about the tree as advice rather than law. Picture a doctor who tells a patient not to eat a certain food. If the patient eats it anyway, he harms himself, not the doctor. His way back is to return to the doctor and follow the treatment, however demanding. It may even leave him healthier than before.[5]

Imam Ali (a), the Prophet's cousin and the first Imam (d. 661 CE), adds that God sent Adam down "after the repentance," to fill His earth with Adam's children.[6] Earth was always the plan: before Adam was made, God told the angels, "I am placing a deputy on the earth" (Qur'an 2:30). Adam's descent was less a sentence than a posting.

Why could Adam slip at all? Because he was free. "We have honoured the children of Adam," God says (Qur'an 17:70), and part of that honour is the power to choose. A creature that could never say no to God could never truly say yes. Freedom makes wrongdoing possible, but it also makes the way back possible.

◆

What is sin, then?

If no one is born guilty, then sin is something we do, not something we are. So what does it do? A natural guess is that sin injures God, the way a theft injures its victim, but Imam Ali (a) rejected that picture.

God created people, he said, "with no need of their obedience and no fear of their disobedience." Why? "Because the disobedience of one who disobeys Him does not harm Him, and the obedience of one who obeys Him does not benefit Him."[7] If every person on earth rebelled tomorrow, God's rule would not shrink by an inch.

So whom does sin harm? The answer is in a phrase the Qur'an returns to again and again: "wronging oneself." Adam (a) and his wife used it in their prayer. The verse that opens this chapter speaks to people "who have gone too far against yourselves" (Qur'an 39:53).

Sin, on this view, is a kind of self-harm, and often harm to others too. A lie wears away the liar's own trust in words, and cruelty hardens the one who is cruel. God forbids such things for the reason a doctor forbids poison: He knows what He made, and what will damage it.

Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (a), the sixth Imam, who died in 765 CE (148 AH), described the damage from the inside. "When a person sins, a black spot appears on his heart. If

he repents, it is wiped away. If he goes on, it grows until it covers his heart, and after that he never thrives."[8]

In another report, Imam al-Baqir (a) tied the image to a verse: "No! What they used to earn has rusted over their hearts" (Qur'an 83:14).[9] The danger is not one dark spot but the slow tarnish that comes from never wiping any of them away.

That is why the Imams warned against shrugging off "little" sins. "Beware of the sins you think nothing of," Imam al-Sadiq told a student, "for they are not forgiven." Asked what he meant, he described a man who sins and says, "How lucky I'd be if this were my only one."[10] A sin shrugged off is a sin never repented of.

Another report, with a less certain chain, has the Prophet (s) make the point with firewood. Camped on bare ground, he asked his companions to gather wood. There was none, they said. "Let each of you bring what he can," he replied. They brought what they could find and piled it in front of him, piece on piece. "This," he said, "is how sins gather."[11]

Here the pain has a purpose: guilt is the heart's pain signal, like the jolt that pulls a hand back from a hot stove. A heart that still stings after a wrong is a living heart, and that is good news. The real danger would be a heart that no longer felt anything at all.

The prayer known as Du'a Kumayl, which Imam Ali taught his companion Kumayl ibn Ziyad, puts sin's effects into words. It asks God to forgive "the sins that tear away protections... the sins that change blessings... the sins that hold back prayer."[12] On Thursday nights, many Shia communities gather to recite it. They are not wallowing but reading the warning lights, so that they can turn back in time.

> **PAUSE AND RECALL**
>
> *In your own words, why does this chapter call sin a kind of self-harm? What does the image of the black spot add?*

◆

Who do you confess to?

Islam has no priesthood, no confession booth and no cleric who can absolve. So where does a person take their wrongs? Commentators, among them the Shia scholar al-Tabrisi (d. 1154 CE), record a report about exactly this. Someone asked the Prophet (s), "Is our Lord near, so that we may whisper to Him, or far, so that we must call out?"[13] The report's chain is weak, but most of us have wondered the same thing. The Qur'an's answer to that question breaks its own pattern.

وَإِذَا سَأَلَكَ عِبَادِى عَنِّى فَإِنِّى قَرِيبٌ أُجِيبُ دَعْوَةَ ٱلدَّاعِ إِذَا دَعَانِ فَلْيَسْتَجِيبُواْ لِى وَلْيُؤْمِنُواْ بِى لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْشُدُونَ ﴿١٨٦﴾

When My servants ask you about Me, I am near. I answer the call of the caller when they call Me. So let them answer Me, and believe in Me, so that they may be rightly guided.[14]

QUR'AN 2:186 · SURAT AL-BAQARA

NOTICE Elsewhere, when people question the Prophet, the Qur'an usually hands him the reply: "Say..." Here there is no "Say." God answers directly, speaking of Himself seven times in one verse. Al-Tabataba'i called it unique in the Qur'an.

So a Muslim confesses to God, directly. God already knows, so the confession is for the one who makes it: naming a wrong is how the heart takes hold of it. The prayer of Adam (a) is the model, with no excuses, no one else blamed and no audience. No audience, because God Himself covers the one who comes back.

IMAM JA'FAR AL-SADIQ (A), THE SIXTH IMAM, TO HIS STUDENT MU'AWIYA IBN WAHB

إِذَا تَابَ الْعَبْدُ تَوْبَةً نَصُوحاً أَحَبَّهُ اللهُ فَسَتَرَ عَلَيْهِ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالآخِرَةِ فَقُلْتُ وَكَيْفَ يَسْتُرُ عَلَيْهِ قَالَ يُنْسِي مَلَكَيْهِ مَا كَتَبَا عَلَيْهِ مِنَ الذُّنُوبِ وَيُوحِي إِلَى جَوَارِحِهِ اكْتُمِي عَلَيْهِ ذُنُوبَهُ وَيُوحِي إِلَى بِقَاعِ الأَرْضِ اكْتُمِي مَا كَانَ يَعْمَلُ عَلَيْكِ مِنَ الذُّنُوبِ فَيَلْقَى اللهَ حِينَ يَلْقَاهُ وَلَيْسَ شَيْءٌ يَشْهَدُ عَلَيْهِ بِشَيْءٍ مِنَ الذُّنُوبِ.

"When a servant turns back to God in sincere repentance, God loves him and covers him, in this world and the next." I asked, "How does He cover him?" He said, "He makes his two angels forget the sins they wrote against him. He tells his limbs, 'Keep his sins hidden.' He tells the places of the earth, 'Keep hidden the sins he did on you.' So when he meets God, nothing is left to testify against him."[15]

al-Kafi 2 · Belief & Disbelief · ch. 191 · no. 1 · **Reliable chain**

If God hides a repentant person's past even from their own hands and feet, that person has no reason to put it on display. Other reports, with weaker chains, praise the one who keeps a wrong covered over the one who broadcasts it.[16] Privacy, though, is not the same as silence. Confidential advice from a scholar, a counsellor or a trusted friend can be wise. And when a wrong has hurt someone, putting it right may mean admitting it to them.

What about intercession? Shia Muslims ask the Prophet and the Imams (a) to pray for them, at their shrines and in their own prayers. That is asking, not absolving. The Qur'an describes it: "If, when they had wronged themselves, they had come to you and asked God's forgiveness, and the Messenger had asked forgiveness for them, they would have found God ever-turning, merciful" (Qur'an 4:64).

The Messenger asks; God forgives. As another verse puts it, "Who forgives sins except God?" (Qur'an 3:135). Scholars give guidance and rulings, but they cannot forgive anyone anything. Du'a Kumayl says it in a single line: "I seek You as my intercessor with Yourself."[17]

◆

What does it take to come back?

A man once said *astaghfirullah* in front of Imam Ali (a). The Imam stopped him with an old Arabic cry of alarm: "May your mother lose you!" Then he asked, "Do you know what seeking forgiveness is?" It is a rank of the highest people, he said, and it stands on six things.[18]

The first is remorse for the past, and the second a resolve never to go back. The third is to give people back what is theirs, "so that you meet God clean, owing nothing." The fourth is to fulfil every duty you neglected. The fifth is to melt away with grief the flesh that grew from unlawful gain, until new flesh grows. The sixth is to make the body taste the pain of obedience, as you once made it taste the sweetness of sin. "Then," he said, "say *astaghfirullah*."

Remorse comes first, and it carries more weight than people think. Imam al-Baqir (a) put it bluntly: "By God, no one escapes a sin except one who admits it." And: "Remorse is enough as repentance."[19] His father, Imam Zayn al-Abidin (a), the fourth Imam (d. c. 713 CE), turned remorse into prayer. His prayers are gathered in *al-Sahifa al-Sajjadiyya*, named for his title al-Sajjad, "the one who prostrates."

FROM THE SUPPLICATION OF REPENTANCE
IMAM ZAYN AL-ABIDIN (A), THE FOURTH IMAM

أَللَّهُمَّ إِنْ يَكُنِ النَّدَمُ تَوْبَةً إِلَيْكَ فَأَنَا أَنْدَمُ النَّادِمِينَ، وَإِنْ يَكُنِ التَّرْكُ لِمَعْصِيَتِكَ إِنَابَةً فَأَنَا أَوَّلُ الْمُنِيبِينَ...

O God, if remorse is repentance to You, then I am the most remorseful of the remorseful. If giving up disobeying You is turning back to You, then I am the first of those who turn back...[20]

al-Sahifa al-Sajjadiyya · Supplication 31 · vv. 118–119 · **Compiled text, not graded here**

Notice how much of Imam Ali's list faces outward, toward other people. God can forgive what is owed to Him, but what is owed to people stays owed until it is paid back or they forgive it. Shia jurists draw the same line, as the steps below show. Repair should be thoughtful, though: an apology made mainly to ease your own guilt can hand a fresh burden to the person you hurt. The aim is to give them back what is theirs, not to make them comfort you.

IN PRACTICE

How to make tawba

1. **Stop.** Leave the wrong now, not after one last time.
2. **Feel it, without drowning.** Remorse is the heart of repentance. Despair is not humility.
3. **Turn to God in your own words.** No one else needs to hear. Many use Adam's prayer, "Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves" (Qur'an 7:23), and say *astaghfirullah*.
4. **Resolve, and make it easier.** Decide not to go back, then change what makes the wrong easy: a setting, a habit, an app, a friendship.
5. **Give back what you owe people.** Return what was taken. If you spoke badly of someone, ask God to forgive them whenever they come to mind. Where it will cause no further harm, the office of Ayatollah al-Sistani, a leading Shia jurist, says you should also ask them to forgive you, as an obligatory precaution.[21]
6. **Make up what you owe God.** Missed obligatory prayers must be made up, steadily and without neglect, and so must missed fasts (Chapter 28 gives the details).[22]
7. **Fill the space with good.** "Good deeds wipe away bad deeds" (Qur'an 11:114).

Details differ between scholars, so check the rulings of the scholar you follow (your *marja'*). If a habit has a grip on you, ask for help from a scholar, a counsellor or a doctor.

◆

What if I fall again?

Abu Basir, a close student of Imam al-Sadiq (a), once asked him about the Qur'an's call to "sincere repentance" (Qur'an 66:8). The Imam said it means turning from a sin and never going back to it. Abu Basir did the honest arithmetic: "And which of us has never gone back?" The Imam called him by his familiar name. "Abu Muhammad, God loves the servant who is tested and keeps turning back."[23]

Another student, Muhammad ibn Muslim, brought Imam al-Baqir (a) the same worry. What about someone who sins and repents, again and again? The Imam answered with a question: "Do you think a believer regrets his sin, asks forgiveness and repents, and God does not accept it?" Then he said, "Whenever the believer returns with repentance, God returns to him with forgiveness." He ended with a

warning for the listener, not the sinner: "Never make believers despair of God's mercy."[24]

He also described God's joy. God is gladder at a servant's repentance than a traveller who loses his camel and his food on a pitch-dark night, and then finds them.[25] The Imams were echoing the Qur'an: "God loves those who keep turning back" (Qur'an 2:222). The word is *tawwab*, the same word the Qur'an uses for God Himself, "the Ever-Turning" (Qur'an 2:37). When a person turns, God turns.

> *"God loves the servant who is tested and keeps turning back.*
>
> IMAM JA'FAR AL-SADIQ (A)

So Islam treats despair as a serious sin, not a passing mood. Imam al-Sadiq listed "despairing of God's relief" among the major sins. The phrase echoes Jacob (a), who after years of grief for his son Joseph (a) told his other sons, "Do not despair of God's relief" (Qur'an 12:87). The same list names despair's mirror image: "feeling safe from God's plan."[26]

One person says, "God will never forgive me." Another says, "God will forgive me whatever I do." The first sets a limit on God's mercy; the second forgets His justice. The verse that opens this chapter speaks to the first: "My servants who have gone too far against yourselves, do not despair of God's mercy. God forgives all sins" (Qur'an 39:53). Notice whom God calls "My servants": the very people who went too far.

A report preserved by the scholar al-Saduq (d. 991 CE) goes further. On the Day of Resurrection, Imam al-Sadiq said, God will spread out His mercy until even Iblis hopes for it.[27] It is an image, not a doctrine, but its point is plain: if the devil can hope, no human being needs to despair. Du'a Kumayl begins in the same place: "O God, I ask You by Your mercy, which embraces all things."[28]

The door stays open for a lifetime. A report preserved without its full chain has the Prophet (s), in his last sermon, shrink the deadline before his listeners' eyes. Whoever repents a year before death, God accepts it. Then: a year is long, so a month. A month is long, so a week. A week is long, so a day. A day is long, so an hour. An hour is long, and he pointed to his throat.[29] It is the same "here" that God promised Adam (a): the last breath.

A FAIR QUESTION

If the door is open until my last breath, why not enjoy myself now and repent at the end?

The Qur'an answers this directly: repentance cannot be scheduled. It is for those who do wrong in ignorance "and then repent soon after." It is not for those who keep doing wrong "until, when death comes to one of them, he says, 'Now I repent'" (Qur'an 4:17–18). Imam al-Baqir (a) drew the same line at the last breath: then "there is no repentance for the one who knew, but there is for the one who did not."[30] A plan to repent later is not repentance. It is a plan to keep sinning. Meanwhile the black spot spreads, and the person who meant to turn back may find they no longer want to. Feeling safe from God's plan is itself a major sin. And no deathbed prayer pays back what was taken from someone else. The open door is for people who stumble, not for people who schedule.

Adam asked for something to carry into the world, and he was given an open door. Imam Ali (a) said that God would not "open the door of repentance to a servant and then shut the door of forgiveness on him."[31] The chapters ahead turn to prayer, fasting, giving and pilgrimage. Each of them, in its own way, is a return. No one comes to them disqualified, and no one who turns back while there is breath finds the door locked. "Lord," said Adam, "that is enough for me."

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Islam teaches that no one inherits guilt: every child is born with the *fitra*, and no one carries another's burden.
2. Sin harms the sinner and others, never God, and repentance wipes the heart clean before the stain spreads.
3. Muslims confess to God directly. Intercession means asking God, and only God forgives.
4. Real repentance joins remorse and resolve to repair: giving people their rights and making up neglected duties.
5. Despair is a major sin. God loves the one who keeps turning back, and the door stays open until death.

NEXT TIME · GO FURTHER

Next time: *Why Muslims Pray.* If repentance is a door, the daily prayers are a way of walking back through it, again and again, from dawn to nightfall. Why would anyone need to return that often?

Go further:

Courses: Introduction to Islamic Ethics and God and His Attributes, Level 1 courses at Tasneem Institute (tasneeminstitute.org/courses/introduction-to-islamic-ethics; tasneeminstitute.org/courses/god-and-his-attributes)

Read: *al-Sahifa al-Sajjadiyya*, Supplication 31, "In mentioning and asking for repentance," the prayer of Imam Zayn al-Abidin (a) quoted in this chapter.

Watch: Invitation to Islam, Episode 5, "How Does Islam Explain Sin?" (11 min).

In the circle

LOOK BACK

1. Revelation began with one command: "Read." What did Chapter 25 say that command asks of us?
2. Chapter 21 called the earth "a trust, not a storehouse." What is the difference?
3. Part Two asked, "Is it good?" Which of its teachings would be hardest to live by, day to day?

TALK ABOUT IT

WARM-UP

1. Think of an apology you once received that felt real. What made it work? You needn't say what it was for.

UNDERSTAND

2. The Qur'an tells Adam's story without passing his guilt to his children (7:23; 6:164). How does that differ from original sin as the chapter describes it?
3. Imam Ali (a) said seeking forgiveness stands on six things (Nahj al-Balagha, Saying 417). Which of them involve other people, and why can't *astaghfirullah* alone cover those?

REFLECT

4. Imam al-Sadiq (a) said God loves "the servant who is tested and keeps turning back." Does that line comfort you, unsettle you, or both? Why?
5. The chapter calls guilt a pain signal from a living heart. When is guilt healthy, and when does it slide into the despair the Imams warned against?

APPLY

6. Is there something you could still put right with someone: a debt, a borrowed thing, an unkind word? Name one step for this week. You needn't share what it was.

GO DEEPER

7. Read Imam al-Baqir's conversation with Muhammad ibn Muslim about a believer who keeps falling (al-Kafi, vol. 2, Book of Belief and Disbelief, ch. 191, no. 6; reliable chain). Why does he end by warning the listener rather than the sinner?
8. Read Imam Zayn al-Abidin's prayer of repentance (al-Sahifa al-Sajjadiyya, Supplication 31; compiled text, not graded). Which line rings truest to you, and which would be hardest to say honestly?

CARRY IT HOME

Choose one way in this week:

☐ **Notice:** When guilt arrives this week, after a sharp word or a cut corner, pause before you push it away. Treat it as a signal, not a verdict. What is it pointing to?

☐ **Do:** Put one thing right, quietly. Return something borrowed, pay a small debt, or take back an unkind word. If you pray, add Adam's prayer (Qur'an 7:23) that night. If you don't, write down how putting it right felt.

☐ **Learn:** Read Imam Ali's six parts of seeking forgiveness (Nahj al-Balagha, Saying 417) in a translation. Which one would ask the most of you, and why?

Aim. Help the circle see that, in Islam, sin is serious but never final: no one inherits guilt, and no one is beyond return.

Protect this question. No. 4, on "the servant who is tested and keeps turning back." A guest, a new Muslim and a lifelong Muslim can each answer it honestly without confessing anything.

Answer notes.

- *Q2.* In the Qur'an both turn back, and God turns to Adam (2:37). "No one carries another's burden" (6:164), and every child is born with the *fitra*. Catholic teaching calls original sin an inherited state, not a personal fault (Catechism 404–405). Islam denies even the inherited state.
- *Q3.* Giving people back their rights, and making up neglected duties; the fifth, on unlawful gain, also touches others. God may forgive what is owed to Him. What is owed to people must be repaid, or forgiven by them.

Likely questions.

- *"If prophets don't sin, what did Adam do?"* See "Are we born guilty?" (Imam al-Rida; al-Tabataba'i's doctor).
- *"Can I sin now and repent later?"* See the "fair question" box.
- *"Do Shia Muslims confess to scholars, or ask the Imams for forgiveness?"* See "Who do you confess to?" (Qur'an 4:64 and 3:135).

Watch for. Read the care note aloud. Never ask anyone what they have done, and steer away from confessions in the room. Some people carry shame from religion taught through fear; let them hear that the door is open. If someone discloses harm to themselves or others, speak privately afterwards and follow the centre's safeguarding policy.

Bring. A recording of the opening lines of Du'a Kumayl, or printed copies of Supplication 31 of *al-Sahifa al-Sajjadiyya* for anyone who would like one.

MY THREAD · CHAPTER 26

What would I do differently tomorrow if I truly believed no door was closed to me?

MY QUESTION FOR THE BOX

27

Why Muslims Pray

A daily return to what matters most.

إِنَّنِيٓ أَنَا ٱللَّهُ لَآ إِلَٰهَ إِلَّآ أَنَا۠ فَٱعْبُدْنِى وَأَقِمِ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ لِذِكْرِىٓ ﴿١٤﴾

Truly, I am God; there is no god but Me. So worship Me, and keep up the prayer to remember Me.

QUR'AN 20:14 · SURAT TA HA

WATCH · EPISODE 07 · 12:58

youtu.be/VDRWI9B-wcw

In the video: the stillness of the house during the night prayer, when "not a creature was stirring" (6:09)

Reading time: about 15 minutes

A man is travelling through the desert at night with his family. Years ago he fled Egypt after a killing. He married in a far country and spent long seasons tending another man's flocks (Qur'an 28:15–29). Now he is on the road again. The night is cold, and he is no longer sure of the way.

Then, on the slope of a mountain, he sees a fire. "Wait here," he tells his family. "I can see a fire. Maybe I can bring you a burning branch to warm yourselves, or find someone there to guide us."

He goes toward the light. As he comes near, a voice calls to him from a tree on the side of the valley. "Moses! I am your Lord. Take off your sandals: you are in the sacred valley of Tuwa. I have chosen you, so listen to what is revealed." He is on holy ground, and the voice goes on: "Truly, I am God; there is no god but Me. So worship Me, and keep up the prayer to remember Me" (Qur'an 20:9–14; 27:7; 28:29–30).

Moses (a) will go on to face Pharaoh, cross the sea and receive the Torah. Yet before any law or miracle, God asks him for prayer, and gives the reason: *to remember Me*.

Muslims believe the same God still calls every human being, though not from a fire on a mountainside. Five times a day, all over the world, Muslims stop what they are doing. They wash, slip off their shoes and stand where Moses stood: before God, with empty hands. Why would God ask this of anyone, and so often? And what are Muslims actually doing when they pray?

THE BIG QUESTION

Why would anyone stop five times a day to pray, and what are Muslims doing when they do?

Have you ever wondered why a God who knows everything would want to hear the same words, day after day? How anyone fits five prayers around a job, a commute and small children? Or, if you have prayed since childhood, what each bow and each prostration actually means?

This chapter looks at why Muslims pray, what a prayer looks like from the first splash of water to the final greeting of peace, and how the conversation carries on between prayers.

WORDS TO KNOW

ṣalāh (صَلَاة) · *sa-LAAH* · the ritual prayer Muslims offer five times a day, with set words and movements.

wuḍūʾ (وُضُوء) · *wu-DOO* · the washing before prayer: face and arms are washed, then head and feet wiped.

Allāhu akbar (اَللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ) · *al-LAA-hu AK-bar* · "God is greater" than all else: the words that open the prayer and mark its movements.

rakʿa (رَكْعَة) · *RAK-ah* · one unit of prayer: standing, reciting, bowing and two prostrations.

khushūʿ (خُشُوع) · *khu-SHOO* (*kh* as in Scottish "loch") · humble, wholehearted presence before God in prayer.

turba (تُرْبَة) · *TUR-ba* · a small tablet of clean earth, often from Karbala, on which the forehead rests in prostration.

◆

Why would God ask for prayer?

The Qur'an gives a startling answer to why human beings exist: "I created jinn and humans only to worship Me" (Qur'an 51:56). The jinn are unseen beings (Chapter 10). To modern ears that can sound like vanity. Why would the Maker of galaxies want praise from creatures on one small planet?

The Qur'an turns the question around: "O people, it is you who need God, and God is the Self-Sufficient, the Praiseworthy" (Qur'an 35:15). Prayer adds nothing to God; it is for the one who prays. Chapter 2 described everything we have as "on loan": our health, our heartbeat, the people we love. Loans are easy to forget. We wake, reach for the phone, and the day carries us off as if it all belonged to us. Prayer is the moment the borrower remembers the Lender.

That is the force of God's words to Moses (a): keep up the prayer "to remember Me." Remembrance (*dhikr*) in the Qur'an is not recalling a fact for a quiz. It is coming back to something true that has slipped out of view. Imam Ali (a), the Prophet's cousin and the first Imam (d. 661 CE), called prayer "the offering of every God-fearing person." His word, *qurban*, comes from a root meaning "to draw near."[1]

Muslims pray with the whole body. Some say it looks made for this: a spine that bends, knees that fold, a forehead that can rest on the earth. Some postures resemble yoga stretches, and prayer calms many people, but Muslims do not pray to stretch. They pray because the body, too, has something to say to its Maker.

Nor is prayer new with Islam. Abraham (a) asks, "My Lord, make me one who keeps up the prayer, and my descendants too" (Qur'an 14:40). Jesus (a), speaking from the cradle, says God "has charged me with prayer and charity as long as I live" (Qur'an 19:31). Asked what brings a servant nearest to God, Imam Jaʿfar al-Sadiq (a), the sixth

Imam (d. 765 CE), put nothing above prayer except knowing God. Then he quoted those words of Jesus.[2]

In 661 CE (40 AH), struck down by an assassin, Imam Ali left a final will for his sons al-Hasan (a) and al-Husayn (a), the second and third Imams. He spoke of orphans, neighbours and the Qur'an. Then: "God, God, in prayer, for it is the pillar of your religion."[3] A report traced to the Prophet (s) makes it the first deed examined on the Day of Judgement. Pull out the pillar, and the tent falls.

He also passed on the Prophet's image for why prayer comes so often.

IMAM ALI (A), THE FIRST IMAM

وَإِنَّهَا لَتَحُتُّ الذُّنُوبَ حَتَّ الْوَرَقِ، وَتُطْلِقُهَا إِطْلاَقَ الرِّبَقِ، وَشَبَّهَا رَسُولُ اللَّهِ (صلى الله عليه وآله) بِالْحَمَّةِ تَكُونُ عَلَى بَابِ الرَّجُلِ، فَهُوَ يَغْتَسِلُ مِنْهَا فِي الْيَوْمِ وَاللَّيْلَةِ خَمْسَ مَرّات، فَمَا عَسَى أَنْ يَبْقَى عَلَيْهِ مِنَ الدَّرَنِ؟

Prayer strips sins away as leaves are stripped from a tree, and loosens their hold as a tether is untied. The Messenger of God (s) likened it to a hot spring at a man's door, where he bathes five times every day and night. What dirt could be left on him?[4]

Nahj al-Balagha · Sermon 199 · **Compiled text, not graded here**

Five baths may sound like a lot, until you count the dust a single day raises: a sharp word, an envious glance, a small lie.

A FAIR QUESTION

If God knows my heart, why does He want five set prayers a day?

God does not need the prayers; we do. Sincerity is the heart of the matter, and Islam welcomes prayer in your own words at any hour. But hearts forget. Without a rhythm, what is urgent crowds out what matters, and "I'll pray when I feel like it" slowly turns into "never." We call the people we love on ordinary days, not only in emergencies, and the calls keep love alive. A fixed form helps in the same way: a musician practises scales so that music can come. A discipline you choose stops distraction from making every other choice for you. The Qur'an admits it is not easy: "Seek help in patience and prayer, and it is hard, except for the humble" (Qur'an 2:45).

Five prayers, or three?

Ask what people know about Muslims, and many say, "They pray five times a day." Then they meet a Shia friend who seems to pray three times. Both are right. There are five prayers, and many Shia Muslims pray them in three sittings. The Qur'an sets out the times in one verse.

أَقِمِ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ لِدُلُوكِ ٱلشَّمْسِ إِلَىٰ غَسَقِ ٱلَّيْلِ وَقُرْءَانَ ٱلْفَجْرِ إِنَّ قُرْءَانَ ٱلْفَجْرِ كَانَ مَشْهُودًا ﴿٧٨﴾

Keep up the prayer from the sun's decline to the dark of night, and the recitation at dawn. The dawn recitation is witnessed.

QUR'AN 17:78 · SURAT AL-ISRA

NOTICE One verse holds the whole day: from the sun's turn past noon to the dark of night, and then dawn. Only the dawn recitation is singled out as "witnessed."

Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a), the fifth Imam (d. c. 733 CE), explained the verse to his student Zurara. Between the sun's decline, when it passes its highest point at noon, and the middle of the night, God set four prayers. The recitation at dawn is the fifth.[5]

So five prayers fall into three windows. Fajr comes in the grey light before sunrise, before the day makes any demands. Zuhr, after midday, is a pause for thanks in the middle of work, and for many the hardest to keep. 'Asr follows in the afternoon. Maghrib, just after sunset, is the hinge between day and night, and 'Isha, at nightfall, seals the day.

Why three sittings? Imam al-Sadiq (a) recalled that the Prophet (s) led the people in Zuhr and 'Asr together just after noon, and in Maghrib and 'Isha together before the twilight faded. He did it in congregation and "without any reason," with no illness or travel to excuse it, "only so that the time would be ample for his community."[6]

Ibn 'Abbas, the Prophet's cousin (d. c. 687 CE), reports the same in *Sahih Muslim*, one of the most respected Sunni collections. The Prophet joined the prayers in

Medina "without fear or travel," he says, wanting "none of his community to be put to hardship."[7]

Sunni schools generally keep the five apart, joining them only in special cases such as travel. Shia jurists, following the Imams, allow joining them on any day. Zuhr and ʿAsr share one span of time, from midday to sunset; Maghrib and ʿIsha share another, from just after sunset to midnight. Each pair is prayed in order, and each prayer stays its own act of worship.[8] Many still pray them apart, with the voluntary prayers the Imams taught in between.[9] Five prayers in three sittings, then: never three prayers.

When travelling, Zuhr, ʿAsr and ʿIsha, the four-unit (*rakʿa*) prayers, shrink to two units. Fajr and Maghrib never change: the sunset prayer keeps its three units.[10]

◆

What happens in a prayer?

Prayer begins with water. "When you rise for prayer," the Qur'an says, "wash your faces and your hands up to the elbows, and wipe your heads and your feet up to the ankles" (Qur'an 5:6). This washing is *wudu*.

Imam al-Baqir (a) once showed a student how the Prophet (s) did it. A palmful of water for the face, one for each forearm; then, with the moisture left on his hands, a wipe of the head and the feet. A palmful of oil can cover a whole body, he remarked, and water goes further.[11] Shia Muslims still make *wudu* this way; Sunni Muslims, reading the verse differently, wash their feet.

Then the worshipper faces the *qibla*: the direction of the Kaʿba, the ancient House of God in Mecca (Qur'an 2:144). The place can be a mosque, a living room or a quiet corner at work. Many slip off their shoes, remembering perhaps the command to Moses (a): "Take off your sandals" (Qur'an 20:12).

"Hammad," Imam al-Sadiq (a) once asked his student Hammad ibn ʿIsa, "can you pray well?" Hammad said he knew a whole book on prayer by heart. "Never mind that," said the Imam. "Stand and pray." He watched, then said, "You do not pray well. How shameful for one of you to reach sixty or seventy without once offering a prayer complete in all its limits." Humbled, Hammad asked to be taught.

The Imam stood upright facing the *qibla*, his arms hanging down, his hands resting on his thighs. With humility he said, "*Allahu akbar*": God is greater. He recited the Qur'an's opening chapter slowly, then bowed, his back so level that a drop of water would not have run off it.

He prostrated on eight points of his body, seven of them required: the forehead, palms, knees and big toes. These, he said, are what God means by "The places of pros-

tration belong to God, so call on no one alongside God" (Qur'an 72:18). After two units, the testimony of faith and the greeting of peace, he said, "Hammad, pray like this."[12]

Shia Muslims still pray with their arms at their sides. Imam al-Baqir told Zurara not to fidget in prayer, not to yawn or stretch, and not to fold his arms (*la tukaffir*).[13] Most Sunni Muslims fold their hands, following reports in their own collections. In a mosque you may see both in one row, shoulder to shoulder, saying the same words to the same God.

Why the earth?

The forehead goes down on bare earth or something that grows from it. Imam al-Sadiq's student Hisham ibn al-Hakam asked why. Prostration is allowed only on these, the Imam replied, except what is eaten or worn. "Prostration is humility before God, so it should not be on what is eaten or worn, because the people of this world are slaves of what they eat and wear." The earth itself is best, "because it is the fullest humility."[14] The highest part of a person comes down on the plainest thing in the world.

The Prophet (s) prayed on a small mat woven of palm leaves, a *khumra*. One of the Imams recalled his father laying such a mat on the carpet to prostrate on, or a few pebbles when there was no mat.[15] That is all a *turba* is: a small, portable piece of clean earth.

Many are made of clay from Karbala in Iraq, where the Prophet's grandson Imam Husayn (a) was killed in 680 CE (61 AH). For many Shia Muslims, that clay holds a quiet memory of his sacrifice. Ayatollah al-Sistani, a leading Shia jurist in Najaf, ranks Karbala earth first, then ordinary earth, stone and grass. But no *turba* is required: wood or leaves will do.[16] And no one prays *to* it. The places of prostration belong to God; the forehead rests *on* the earth so that the heart can bow to Him.

Imam Ali (a) explained what the two prostrations mean. The first means, "O God, from it, the earth, You created us." Rising from it means, "and from it You brought us out." The second means, "and to it You will return us," and rising again, "and from it You will bring us out once more."[17] He was echoing a verse.

مِنْهَا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ وَفِيهَا نُعِيدُكُمْ وَمِنْهَا نُخْرِجُكُمْ تَارَةً أُخْرَىٰ ﴿٥٥﴾

From it We created you, into it We will return you, and from it We will bring you out once more.

QUR'AN 20:55 · SURAT TA HA

NOTICE Three movements around one small pronoun, "it": from it, into it, from it again. The earth is cradle, grave and ground of resurrection; Imam Ali mapped the verse onto two prostrations and two risings.

IN PRACTICE

A first guide to the prayer

The five daily prayers. Fajr, at dawn before sunrise: two units. Zuhr, after midday: four. 'Asr, in the afternoon: four. Maghrib, just after sunset: three. 'Isha, at night: four. That is seventeen units a day.[18]

Wudu. Do it for God; no words are needed. Wash the face from the hairline to the chin, from top to bottom. Wash the right arm from the elbow to the fingertips, then the left. With the water left on your hand, wipe the front of the head. Then wipe the top of the right foot from the toes to the ankle, then the left.[19]

Unit by unit. Facing the *qibla*, raise your hands and say *Allahu akbar*. Recite al-Fatiha, the Qur'an's opening chapter, and in the first two units another short chapter. Bow and praise God, stand, then prostrate twice, sitting briefly between. After the second unit, and again in the last, sit for the testimony of faith (*tashahhud*). The greeting of peace (*salam*) ends the prayer.[20]

In a mosque. Shoes come off at the door. Visitors are usually welcome to sit at the back and watch; no one will expect you to join. A Shia mosque often keeps a basket of *turba*s near the entrance, and its call to prayer includes the line "Come to the best of deeds."[21] Afterwards, many count on their fingers or prayer beads the praises the Prophet (s) taught his daughter, Lady Fatima (a).[22]

If illness makes standing hard, pray sitting, or lying on your side, as Imam al-Baqir (a) taught from Qur'an 3:191.[23] New Muslims learn the Arabic words step by step, reciting what they can meanwhile.[24] Details differ between scholars, so learn from a teacher and check the rulings of the scholar you follow (your *marja'*).

PAUSE AND RECALL

In your own words: why does the forehead go down on earth rather than on cloth or food? And what, according to Imam Ali, do the two prostrations recall?

◆

What makes a prayer come alive?

Hammad knew the manual by heart and still did not pray well. The movements are the body of a prayer; its life lies somewhere else. The Qur'an praises believers "who are humble in their prayer" (Qur'an 23:2). That humble, wholehearted presence is *khushu'*, and Imam al-Baqir (a) described it to Zurara.

IMAM MUHAMMAD AL-BAQIR (A), THE FIFTH IMAM

إِذَا قُمْتَ فِي الصَّلاَةِ فَعَلَيْكَ بِالإِقْبَالِ عَلَى صَلاَتِكَ فَإِنَّمَا يُحْسَبُ لَكَ مِنْهَا مَا أَقْبَلْتَ عَلَيْهِ وَلاَ تَعْبَثْ فِيهَا بِيَدِكَ وَلاَ بِرَأْسِكَ وَلاَ بِلِحْيَتِكَ وَلاَ تُحَدِّثْ نَفْسَكَ

When you stand in prayer, turn wholly toward your prayer, for you are credited only with what you turned toward. Do not fidget in it with your hand, your head or your beard, and do not hold conversations with yourself.[25]

al-Kafi 3 · Book of Prayer · ch. 16 · no. 1 · **Reliable chain**

His father, Imam Zayn al-Abidin (a), the fourth Imam (d. c. 713 CE), was called al-Sajjad, "the one who prostrates." His son and grandson remembered him at prayer. He stood like the trunk of a tree: nothing on him moved except what the wind moved. His colour changed, and when he prostrated he did not lift his head until he was running with sweat.[26]

> *"You are credited only with what you turned toward.*
>
> IMAM MUHAMMAD AL-BAQIR (A)

Most of us are not there yet; even after years, minds drift to emails and shopping lists. Is a wandering prayer worthless? The Imam's words suggest a gentler answer: you receive what you turned toward, so turn a little more each time. It helps to pause

before beginning and to pray slowly. Imam al-Sadiq (a) advised praying "as one saying farewell," as if this prayer might be the last.[27] Attention grows like any skill: slowly, with practice and patience.

A prayer that comes alive does not stay on the prayer mat.

اتْلُ مَا أُوحِيَ إِلَيْكَ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَأَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ إِنَّ الصَّلَاةَ تَنْهَىٰ عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنكَرِ وَلَذِكْرُ اللَّهِ أَكْبَرُ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ مَا تَصْنَعُونَ

﴿٤٥﴾

Recite what has been revealed to you of the Book, and keep up the prayer. Prayer restrains from indecency and wrongdoing, and the remembrance of God is greater. God knows what you do.

QUR'AN 29:45 · SURAT AL-ʿANKABUT

NOTICE Prayer "restrains": a claim anyone can test in daily life. Then the verse calls the remembrance of God "greater" (*akbar*), the same word that opens every prayer.

If prayer restrains wrongdoing, people who pray should become easier to live with: more honest at work, gentler at home. The Qur'an is blunt about prayer that changes nothing: "Woe to those who pray, who are heedless of their prayer, who make a show, and who refuse small kindnesses" (Qur'an 107:4–7). Prayer also gathers people. "Bow with those who bow," the Qur'an says (Qur'an 2:43). In congregation the rich and the poor, the newcomer and the elder, stand in one line before God.

◆

Can the conversation go on all day?

Many Muslims treasure above all a prayer that no one requires: "Keep vigil for part of the night, as something extra for you" (Qur'an 17:79). Imam al-Sadiq (a) described the nights of the Prophet (s). A covered jug of water stood by his head, his toothstick under his bed. He would sleep, wake, sit up, turn his eyes to the sky and recite, "In the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alternation of night and day, are signs

for people of understanding" (Qur'an 3:190). Then he would wash and pray, sleep, and rise again, until dawn.[28]

Anyone raised on the old Christmas poem knows the hush of that hour, when "not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse."[29] The house is still, and one person stands in quiet conversation with God. "The believer's honour," said Imam al-Sadiq, "is his prayer at night."[30] Al-Sistani allows it any time after nightfall, though near dawn is best.[31] Two units prayed with care beat a grand plan that soon becomes a burden.

Ritual prayer has set words. *Du'a*, personal supplication, has your own, in any language and at any hour: "Your Lord says: Call on Me, and I will answer you" (Qur'an 40:60). It can be as natural as talking to someone you love: a word of thanks for the sun on your face. Some play recorded supplications on the morning drive instead of the news.

Among the best-loved collections is *al-Sahifa al-Sajjadiyya*, the prayers of Imam Zayn al-Abidin (a). One greets the morning: "This is a day newly begun, a new day, and it stands over us as a witness close at hand. If we do well, it will bid us farewell with praise; if we do ill, it will leave us with reproach."[32] Many also love fifteen "whispered prayers" attributed to him, which reached later compilers without a chain of narrators.[33]

Your own words can start with a list. Thank God for the air and the rain, for the farmers, drivers and shop workers who bring food to your table, for a spouse, a child, a parent. Then widen the circle to the hungry and to the orphan who feels alone: *Feed them, and help me to help them.* Learn the list by heart, and it goes everywhere with you.

At the end of the day

The day ends with an account. "He is not one of us," said Imam Musa al-Kazim (a), the seventh Imam (d. 799 CE), "who does not take account of himself every day. If he did good, he asks God for more; if he did wrong, he asks God's forgiveness and turns back to Him."[34] Imam Ali (a) put it in a trader's terms: "Whoever takes account of himself gains; whoever neglects himself loses."[35] And: "A person's breaths are his footsteps toward his end."[36] Every breath counts.

One report recommends *wudu* before bed: whoever sleeps that way spends the night as if in a mosque.[37] Some close the day by renewing their covenant with God, in words Imam Ali taught for morning and evening: "I am content with God as my Lord, with Islam as my religion, with Muhammad as my prophet, with the Qur'an as

my message, and with Ali as my Imam."[38] Many add the Kaʿba as their *qibla* and the Prophet's family as their guides. It is a way of falling asleep at home.

Moses (a) went toward a fire hoping for a burning branch and directions. He found far more. He was told to take off his sandals, learned who was speaking, and heard what to do first: pray, and remember. Muslims believe that call has never stopped. Five times a day it interrupts the work, the worry and the endless scroll, and invites a person back to the One who lent them everything. A forehead touches the earth it came from. For a moment, what matters most is the only thing in view.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Muslims pray to remember God, on whom everything depends; prayer adds nothing to God but changes the one who prays.
2. Five daily prayers fall in three Qur'anic windows; following the Prophet (s), Shia Muslims may pray them in three sittings.
3. In Shia practice, *wudu* wipes the head and feet, the arms rest at the sides, and the forehead touches earth.
4. A prayer's life is presence of heart: you are credited only with what you turned toward.
5. Prayer should show in conduct, and the conversation with God continues all day through *duʿa*, gratitude and a nightly account.

NEXT TIME · GO FURTHER

Next time: *The Month of Ramadan.* Prayer interrupts the day five times. Ramadan asks for a month of days without food or drink, dawn to sunset. Why would freedom begin with learning to say no?

Go further:

Courses: The Islamic Prayer and Introduction to Tajweed, Level 1 courses at Tasneem Institute (tasneeminstitute.org/courses/the-islamic-prayer; tasneeminstitute.org/courses/introduction-to-tajweed)
Read: "Living the faith," Tasneem's *Discovering Islam* introduction to Islamic practice (tasneeminstitute.org/blog/discovering-islam/islamic-practices). For a deeper dive, *al-Sahifa al-Sajjadiyya*, Supplication 6, "In the morning and evening."
Watch: Invitation to Islam, Episode 7, "Why Muslims Pray" (13 min).

In the circle

LOOK BACK

1. Chapter 26 said God loves the servant who "keeps turning back." What does turning back involve?
2. Chapter 21 said every creature "knows its prayer and its praise" (Qur'an 24:41). What follows for how we treat them?
3. Part Three asks what living this faith means. What did Chapter 2 mean by calling everything "on loan"?

TALK ABOUT IT

WARM-UP

1. What small daily ritual, such as a morning coffee, a walk or a call home, would make your day feel "off" if you skipped it? What does it do for you?

UNDERSTAND

2. How can Shia Muslims pray five prayers in three sittings? What did the Prophet's practice in Medina have to do with it?
3. According to Imam al-Sadiq's answer to Hisham, why does the forehead go down on earth rather than on food or cloth?

REFLECT

4. Hammad knew a whole book on prayer by heart, yet the Imam said he did not pray well. What is the difference between knowing how and doing it well?
5. If you pray, what most often pulls your attention away? If you don't, what would be hardest about stopping five times a day?

APPLY

6. Pick one moment this week to pause for two minutes, before a prayer or in plain stillness. When will it be, and what will you bring to mind?

GO DEEPER

7. Read Imam al-Sadiq's whole lesson to Hammad (al-Kafi, vol. 3, Book of Prayer, ch. 20, no. 8; reliable chain). What might a prayer "complete in all its limits" include besides the movements?
8. Read *al-Sahifa al-Sajjadiyya*, Supplication 6, "In the morning and evening" (compiled text, not graded here). What does Imam Zayn al-Abidin (a) ask of a new day, and of himself?

CARRY IT HOME

Choose one way in this week:

☐ **Notice:** Look up today's five prayer times for your town. At each one, notice where you are and what has your attention. If you pray, notice which prayer is hardest to reach.

☐ **Do:** If you pray, pray one prayer slowly, as Hammad was taught, letting a full breath pass between movements. If you don't, sit in silence for two minutes at sunset and name one thing you depend on but did not make.

☐ **Learn:** Learn the meaning of al-Fatiha, the opening chapter recited in every prayer, line by line. Or read Supplication 6 of *al-Sahifa al-Sajjadiyya*, "In the morning and evening," before bed.

Aim. Help the circle see prayer from the inside: why Muslims return to God five times a day, and what each movement means.

Protect this question. No. 4, on Hammad. Everyone has known a skill "by the book" before knowing it by heart, so guests, new Muslims and lifelong Muslims can all answer honestly.

Answer notes.

- *Q2.* The five prayers fall in three Qur'anic windows (17:78). In Medina the Prophet (ﷺ) joined Zuhr with ʿAsr and Maghrib with ʿIsha "so that the time would be ample for his community" (al-Kafi; also *Sahih Muslim*). Joining is valid; many still pray them apart. See "Five prayers, or three?"
- *Q3.* Prostration is humility before God, and "the people of this world are slaves of what they eat and wear," so the forehead rests on earth or what grows from it. Earth itself is best. A *turba* is portable earth, not an object of worship (72:18). See "Why the earth?"

Likely questions.

- *"Do I have to pray in Arabic?"* The set words are Arabic and are learned step by step; *duʿa* can be in any language. See the "In practice" box and the last section.
- *"What if my mind wanders?"* See "What makes a prayer come alive?"
- *"Can I watch a prayer?"* Usually yes. Arrange it with the imam or a host.

Watch for. Never ask who prays or how often. Some Muslims carry guilt about missed prayers; keep the tone of Chapter 26: the door stays open. If arms or *turba*s spark a Sunni–Shia debate, return to the picture of one row, and to Chapter 8.

Bring. A prayer mat and a *turba*, a printed timetable of this week's prayer times for your town and, if possible, a recording of the call to prayer.

MY THREAD · CHAPTER 27

When in my day do I come back to what matters most, and what would help me come back more often?

MY QUESTION FOR THE BOX

NOTES

28

The Month of Ramadan

The freedom of saying no.

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ كُتِبَ عَلَيۡكُمُ ٱلصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى ٱلَّذِينَ مِن قَبۡلِكُمۡ لَعَلَّكُمۡ تَتَّقُونَ ﴿١٨٣﴾

Believers, fasting has been laid down for you, as it was laid down for those before you, so that you may be mindful of God.

QUR'AN 2:183 · SURAT AL-BAQARA

WATCH · EPISODE 04 · 11:05

youtu.be/-etXoSFpIU0

In the video: the fast of the eyes, the ears and the tongue, "perhaps the hardest fast of all" (3:54)

Reading time: about 15 minutes

Ramadan is about to begin. The Prophet Muhammad (s) stands to address his companions, and he speaks of the coming month the way a host speaks of a banquet.

"People, the month of God has come to you, with blessing, mercy and forgiveness." In this month, he tells them, they are invited to be God's guests. Their breathing will count as praise of God, and their sleep as worship. He asks them to let their hunger and thirst remind them of the hunger and thirst of the Day of Resurrection. He asks them to give to their poor, to be tender with orphans, to guard their tongues and to lower their eyes.

Then his cousin Ali (a) rises with a question. "Messenger of God, what is the best deed in this month?"

The answer is not a prayer, or a gift, or even the fast itself. It is a refusal. "Abu al-Hasan," the Prophet says, calling Ali by his familiar name, "the best deed in this month is to keep away from what God has forbidden."

Then he weeps.

"Messenger of God, what makes you weep?"

"Ali, I weep for what will be done to you in this month." He describes it as if it were happening in front of him: Ali at prayer, and the most wretched of men rising up to strike him on the head, so that his beard is dyed with his blood.

Ali has one question. Not when, not who, not whether it can be stopped. "Messenger of God, will my faith be safe?"

"Your faith will be safe."[1]

A month that opens like a feast, and its best deed is a refusal. A man told of his own death, whose only fear is for his faith. What kind of freedom is that? And why would the best thing to do in the month of God be to say *no*?

THE BIG QUESTION

Why do Muslims go without food and water from dawn to sunset for a whole month, and what is it supposed to do to a person?

Have you ever wondered whether going hungry on purpose is anything more than a test of willpower? Whether a month of early breakfasts and late dinners

could change the other eleven? Or, if you have fasted since childhood, whether anyone ever told you what the hunger is for?

This chapter looks at what the fast asks of the whole person, why it can be called a kind of freedom, and why one of its nights is said to be better than a thousand months.

WORDS TO KNOW

ṣawm (صَوْم) · *SAWM* · fasting: going without food, drink and certain other things, from dawn to sunset, for God.

taqwā (تَقْوى) · *TAQ-waa* · God-consciousness: a guarding awareness of God that shapes what a person does (Qur'an 2:183).

suḥūr (سُحُور) · *su-HOOR* · the meal eaten before dawn on a fasting day.

iftār (إفْطار) · *if-TAAR* · the meal that breaks the fast at sunset, often begun with a date and water.

Laylat al-Qadr (لَيْلة القَدْر) · *LAY-lat al-QADR* · the Night of Decree, when the Qur'an was sent down and the coming year is measured out.

ʿĪd al-Fiṭr (عيد الفِطْر) · *EED al-FITR* · the festival of breaking the fast, on the first day after Ramadan.

◆

Why go hungry on purpose?

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, which follows the moon. A lunar year is about eleven days shorter than a solar one, so Ramadan drifts through the seasons, from short winter days to long summer ones. Even its name remembers the heat. The Shia commentator al-Tabrisi (d. 1154 CE) traced it to the sun's scorch on sand, and recorded another explanation too: the month burns away sins.[2]

Why fast at all? The key verse answers: "Believers, fasting has been laid down for you, as it was laid down for those before you, so that you may be mindful of God" (Qur'an 2:183). The Bible remembers Moses (a) forty days on the mountain without bread or water (Exodus 34:28), and Jesus (a) fasting forty days in the wilderness (Matthew 4:2). On the Day of Atonement, the Torah tells Jews to "afflict your souls" (Leviticus 16:29, KJV). The Qur'an tells of Mary (a) vowing a fast of silence (Qur'an 19:26).

What marks Islam's fast is its shape: a whole community, a whole month, first light to sunset. Muslims are about a quarter of humanity, close to two billion people.[3] They do not all make the pilgrimage together, or pray at the same moment. But in

Ramadan they fast together, as dawn and then sunset sweep west around the globe, city by city.

The verse names the goal: *taqwa*, God-consciousness, from a root meaning to guard oneself. Think of a careful driver, alert to the road without thinking about it. Fasting trains it in an unexpected way. By day, a fasting person refuses things that are good and lawful: food, water, intimacy with their own husband or wife. No one would see a sip of water in an empty kitchen. The fast holds only because the person holds it, for God.

Fasting has a special place in a saying the Prophet (s) reported from God: "Fasting is Mine, and I reward it."[4] Such a saying, which the Prophet attributes to God outside the Qur'an, is called a *hadith qudsi*. Imam Ali (a), the Prophet's cousin and the first Imam (d. 661 CE), named what the fast tests: God made it a duty "as a trial of people's sincerity."[5]

Suppose you can say no to a glass of water when you are thirsty and it is permitted. Then you are practising for harder refusals: the cutting remark, the second look, the thing that is not yours. The self that can refuse what is lawful learns to refuse what is not. That is the freedom in this chapter's title, and it is why, when Ali asked for the month's best deed, the Prophet named a refusal.

> *"The best deed in this month is to keep away from what God has forbidden.*
>
> THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD (S)

Imam Ali gave the idea another image: "Everything has its zakat, and the zakat of the body is fasting."[6] *Zakat* is the alms that cleanse wealth by giving part of it away (Chapter 29); fasting cleanses the body by giving up part of its comfort.

A FAIR QUESTION

Isn't a month of rules about eating and drinking the opposite of freedom?

Many people picture freedom as doing what you want, when you want. By that measure, a faith that tells you when to eat, drink and even touch your spouse looks like control. The Islamic answer is that freedom runs deeper: it is the power to choose. Someone who cannot turn down a craving is not free in front of it, as anyone who has fought a habit knows. Athletes accept hard limits so that their bodies will obey them. And the fast must itself be chosen: without the intention to fast for God, it does not count. It also has exits: no one has to fast if it would harm them. Imam Ali (a) urged his son al-Hasan (a) to hold himself above anything base, even if it would bring him what he craved, since nothing repays what a person sells of their own self. "Do not be the slave of another," he wrote, "when God has made you free."[7]

◆

What else is supposed to fast?

Anyone who has fasted knows the feeling a few days before the month: *Ramadan is coming*. Dread and joy pull against each other. How will I manage the long afternoons, the early alarms? Yet many describe a kind of divine arithmetic: the days they feared turn out manageable, then almost easy, even sweet. Hunger quiets the mind, too. A fasting person thinks about God, family and their own soul, and, admittedly, about what to eat at sunset.

But the stomach is only where the fast begins. Imam Jaʿfar al-Sadiq (a), the sixth Imam (d. 765 CE), taught his students that the whole person fasts.

IMAM JAʿFAR AL-SADIQ (A), THE SIXTH IMAM, TO HIS STUDENT MUHAMMAD IBN MUSLIM

إِذَا صُمْتَ فَلْيَصُمْ سَمْعُكَ وَبَصَرُكَ وَشَعْرُكَ وَجِلْدُكَ وَعَدَّدَ أَشْيَاءَ غَيْرَ هَذَا وَقَالَ لا يَكُونُ يَوْمُ صَوْمِكَ كَيَوْمِ فِطْرِكَ.

"When you fast, let your hearing fast, and your sight, your hair and your skin." He named other things as well, and said: "Do not let the day you fast be like the day you do not."[8]

al-Kafi 4 · Fasting · ch. 11 · no. 1 · **Reliable chain**

So the eyes fast from what they should not see; some people even avoid looking at billboards. The ears fast from gossip, even if that means leaving the room when talk turns to someone absent. The hands fast from what is forbidden, and the feet from the places that lead to it.

Imam Zayn al-Abidin (a), the fourth Imam (d. c. 713 CE), turned the list into a prayer for the start of the month. He asked God for help to fast "so that we do not lend our ears to idle talk, or rush our eyes toward distraction."[9]

The tongue may be the hardest fast of all. Imam al-Sadiq told how the Prophet (s) once heard a fasting woman insulting her servant girl. He called for food and told her, "Eat." "But I am fasting," she said. "How can you be fasting," he replied, "when you have insulted your servant? Fasting is not only from food and drink."[10]

Does a sharp word break the fast, then? Law and spirit answer differently, and both are true. In law, it does not. Ayatollah al-Sistani, a leading Shia authority in Najaf, lists eight things that break a fast, such as eating, drinking and sex. Gossip and insults are grave sins, but they are not on the list.[11] In spirit, though, they can empty the fast.

> **IMAM ALI (A), THE FIRST IMAM**
>
> كَمْ مِنْ صَائِمٍ لَيْسَ لَهُ مِنْ صِيَامِهِ إِلَّا (الْجُوعُ وَ)الظَّمَأُ، وَكَمْ مِنْ قَائِمٍ لَيْسَ لَهُ مِنْ قِيَامِهِ إِلَّا السَّهَرُ وَالْعَنَاءُ، حَبَّذَا نَوْمُ الْأَكْيَاسِ وَإِفْطَارُهُمْ.
>
> Many a person fasts and gets nothing from it but hunger and thirst. Many a person stands in prayer all night and gets nothing from it but sleeplessness and fatigue. How fine is the sleep of the wise, and their eating.[12]
>
> Nahj al-Balagha · Saying 145 · **Compiled text, not graded here**

The wise gain more from an ordinary night's sleep and meal than the careless gain from a day of hunger. What matters is not how much a person refuses, but what the refusing does to them. So the heart fasts too. Its fast is not a deprivation but a clearing out, leaving room only for love, mercy, the remembrance of God and the people who have less.

> **PAUSE AND RECALL**
>
> *In your own words, how can a fast be valid in law and still empty? What does Imam Ali's saying add?*

◆

Who is hungry tonight?

The fast of the heart turns the mind toward others, and the Prophet (s) built that turn into the month. His sermon welcoming Ramadan pairs hunger with giving: let your hunger remind you of the hunger of the Day of Resurrection, it says, and give to your poor.[13] Another report calls Ramadan "the month of sharing one another's burdens."[14]

Imam al-Sadiq (a) explained the logic to his student Hisham ibn al-Hakam. The rich never feel the touch of hunger, he said, because whatever they want, they can have. So God made fasting a duty to make rich and poor equal. He lets the rich taste hunger "so that they grow tender toward the weak, and have mercy on the hungry."[15] Whoever is never refused anything never learns what it is to go without.

Yet a fasting person's hunger ends at sunset. Ramadan hunger is a reminder of those for whom no meal is coming. The people of Gaza have known hunger that no one chose: in August 2025 the world's main famine-monitoring system detected famine there.[16] For them, and for all who go hungry without choosing it, the fast is a small, chosen echo, and a call to act.

Thirst carries memories too. For many Shia Muslims, a long afternoon's dry mouth recalls Karbala, in Iraq. There, in 680 CE (61 AH), the Prophet's grandson Imam Husayn (a), with his family and companions, was cut off from the Euphrates, its water in plain sight, before he was killed.[17] That was in Muharram, the first month, not Ramadan, but it gives thirst a face.

So feeding others becomes part of the fast. Whoever gives a fasting believer their *iftar*, the sunset meal, the Prophet (s) said, earns the reward of freeing a slave. When some said they could not afford it, he answered: "Shield yourselves from the Fire, even with half a date ... even with a drink of water." Another report adds "a little milk thinned with water."[18] No one is too poor to host.

Sunset in Ramadan has its own sound and smell. Families who rarely share a meal gather at one table, debating what to cook and whom to invite. Mosques spread long cloths on the floor and welcome anyone who walks in, whatever their faith. Many begin with a date and water, a custom traced to the Prophet (s). The fasting person, he said, has two joys: one at the breaking of the fast, and one on meeting their Lord.[19]

Is fasting meant to hurt?

None of this means the fast is meant to harm. The verse that names the month builds mercy into the command.

شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ ٱلَّذِىٓ أُنزِلَ فِيهِ ٱلْقُرْءَانُ هُدًى لِّلنَّاسِ وَبَيِّنَٰتٍ مِّنَ
ٱلْهُدَىٰ وَٱلْفُرْقَانِ فَمَن شَهِدَ مِنكُمُ ٱلشَّهْرَ فَلْيَصُمْهُ وَمَن كَانَ
مَرِيضًا أَوْ عَلَىٰ سَفَرٍ فَعِدَّةٌ مِّنْ أَيَّامٍ أُخَرَ يُرِيدُ ٱللَّهُ بِكُمُ ٱلْيُسْرَ وَلَا
يُرِيدُ بِكُمُ ٱلْعُسْرَ وَلِتُكْمِلُوا۟ ٱلْعِدَّةَ وَلِتُكَبِّرُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ عَلَىٰ مَا هَدَىٰكُمْ
وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿١٨٥﴾

The month of Ramadan is the month in which the Qur'an was sent down: guidance for people, with clear signs of guidance and of the criterion between right and wrong. Whoever of you is present for the month should fast it. Whoever is ill or travelling should fast the same number of other days. God wants ease for you; He does not want hardship for you. He wants you to complete the number and to proclaim God's greatness for guiding you, so that you may give thanks.

QUR'AN 2:185 · SURAT AL-BAQARA

NOTICE Command and exemption arrive in one breath, followed by the reason: "God wants ease for you." The verse ends not in exhaustion but in thanks.

The law has bent toward mercy before. At first, anyone who fell asleep after sunset could not eat or drink again until the next night. Khawwat ibn Jubayr, a companion of the Prophet (s) from Medina, was fasting while he dug the trench that defended the city. Home in the evening, he asked for food. "Don't fall asleep," his family said, "until it's ready." He leaned back, and fell asleep.

The next day, back in the trench, he kept fainting. When the Prophet (s) heard why, God revealed the words Muslims still follow: "Eat and drink until the white thread of dawn is distinct from the black thread" (Qur'an 2:187).[20] One exhausted man changed the law for everyone.

The same spirit runs through the rules today. Al-Sistani teaches that no one has to fast who is sure, or has reason to fear, that it will do them significant harm. If it could cost a life or a limb, fasting is forbidden.[21] Travellers make the days up later.

A woman near childbirth, or a nursing mother with little milk, may break a fast she cannot bear. "There is no blame on them," said Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a), the fifth Imam (d. c. 733 CE). Each gives the poor a measure of food a day, and fasts the days later.[22] The very old, and people with an illness that makes them very thirsty, give a daily measure of food instead and owe no make-up days. If they cannot, the Imam added, "nothing is due from them."[23]

Women do not fast during their period or the bleeding after childbirth, and make the days up later. The Prophet (s) taught this to his daughter Lady Fatima (a), who taught the believing women. Children often practise with shorter fasts; the duty begins at maturity.[24] Not fasting for a good reason is not second-class worship. It is obedience too.

IN PRACTICE

A day of fasting, step by step

1. **Intend it.** Decide to fast, for God. No words are needed, and you can make the intention any night, up to dawn.
2. **Eat before dawn.** *Suhur* ends at true dawn (*subh*), when "the white thread of dawn is distinct from the black" (Qur'an 2:187). Mosques publish timetables.
3. **Hold back until sunset.** Eating, drinking, sex and a few other acts break the fast.
4. **Forgot? Carry on.** Eating or drinking by genuine mistake does not break it.
5. **Break the fast at maghrib, the evening prayer time.** Al-Sistani rules, by precaution, that it begins once the redness in the eastern sky after sunset has passed overhead, so Shia timetables often show *iftar* a little later.
6. **Make up what you miss.** Make up days missed for a good reason before the next Ramadan if you can; delay without excuse adds a measure of food per day. Breaking a fast deliberately, without excuse, also brings an expiation (*kaffara*), such as feeding sixty poor people.
7. **Watch for the new moon.** The month begins and ends with a sighting, valid where horizons are shared, or after thirty days, so communities sometimes start or finish on different days.

Rulings differ between scholars, so check the rulings of the scholar you follow (your *marja'*). If you have a health condition, talk to your doctor before you fast.[25]

◆

What happens on the Night of Decree?

Ramadan is the month "in which the Qur'an was sent down" (Qur'an 2:185), and a short chapter names the night.

إِنَّآ أَنزَلْنَٰهُ فِى لَيْلَةِ ٱلْقَدْرِ ﴿١﴾ وَمَآ أَدْرَىٰكَ مَا لَيْلَةُ ٱلْقَدْرِ ﴿٢﴾
لَيْلَةُ ٱلْقَدْرِ خَيْرٌ مِّنْ أَلْفِ شَهْرٍ ﴿٣﴾ تَنَزَّلُ ٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ وَٱلرُّوحُ فِيهَا
بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهِم مِّن كُلِّ أَمْرٍ ﴿٤﴾ سَلَٰمٌ هِىَ حَتَّىٰ مَطْلَعِ ٱلْفَجْرِ
﴿٥﴾

We sent it down on the Night of Decree. And what will make you understand what the Night of Decree is? The Night of Decree is better than a thousand months. On it the angels and the Spirit come down, by their Lord's leave, with every matter. Peace it is, until the break of dawn.[26]

QUR'AN 97:1–5 · SURAT AL-QADR

NOTICE The verb for the angels' coming, *tanazzalu*, is in the present tense: they come down, not came down. The commentator al-Tabataba'i (d. 1981 CE) read this, with 44:4, as a sign that the night returns every year.

Qadr means measuring out: on this blessed night, another verse says, "every wise matter is made distinct" (Qur'an 44:4). On it, Imam al-Baqir (a) explained, the coming year is measured: "good and evil, obedience and disobedience, birth, death and provision."[27] Imam al-Sadiq (a) called it "the head of the year."[28] So many Muslims feel Ramadan as a new year, a time to settle accounts with God and begin again, though the calendar year starts in Muharram.

Which night is it? The Qur'an does not say. Sunni reports vary widely, the best known favouring the twenty-seventh; the Imams' reports agree that it is one of three nights.[29] "The measuring is on the night of the nineteenth," said Imam al-Sadiq, "the confirming on the twenty-first, and the sealing on the twenty-third."[30] Asked where to seek the night itself, he said, "Seek it on the twenty-first night or the twenty-third."[31] Al-Tabataba'i suggested it stays unnamed so that no one treats it lightly.[32]

The twenty-third has a story. 'Abd Allah ibn Unays, of the Juhayna tribe, kept camels and sheep far from Medina. He asked the Prophet (s) for one night to come in for the prayer. The Prophet whispered in his ear, and ever after, on the twenty-third

night, the man brought his flocks and family into town. It became known as "the night of al-Juhani."[33]

On these nights many Shia Muslims bathe, as the Imams advised, and keep vigil until dawn.[34] They read the Qur'an and long prayers such as *Du'a al-Jawshan al-Kabir*, which calls on God by a thousand names, and hold the Qur'an over their heads.[35] Above all, they confess the year's failures. Few people know what is best for them; at most they have an idea. So they ask God to make them what He wants them to be.

Doesn't all this measuring sound like fate? If the year is written that night, why stay awake asking? The Imams left the door open. Angels and scribes come down that night to write the year's events, one of them said, "but the matter stays with Him, held open; in it is His will. He brings forward what He wills and holds back what He wills; He erases and confirms" (compare Qur'an 13:39).[36]

Elsewhere Imam al-Sadiq taught, "Supplication turns back the decree, even when it has come down from heaven and been firmly confirmed."[37] He used the very word, *ibram*, that names the twenty-first night's confirming. On those nights, people pray for a rewritten destiny.

Shia teaching draws one more lesson. If the angels still come down every year "with every matter," someone on earth receives it. Reports from Imam al-Baqir, though their chain is weak, name that someone: each prophet and his successor in turn and, after the Prophet (s), the Imam of each age.[38] The world is never left without a guide.

These nights carry another memory. In 661 CE (40 AH), Imam Ali (a) was in Kufa, in Iraq. On the nineteenth night of Ramadan he stayed awake. Again and again, the scholar al-Mufid (d. 1022 CE) records, he went out to look at the sky, saying, "By God, I have not lied, and I have not been lied to. This is the night I was promised."

At dawn he went out for the prayer, and in the mosque he was struck on the head. As the blow fell, Shia sources remember, he said: "By the Lord of the Ka'ba, I have won."[39]

He lived two more days and left a will for his sons al-Hasan (a) and al-Husayn (a). "God, God, the orphans," it says: "do not let their mouths go hungry." About the man who struck him, the will limits retaliation to one blow for one blow, and forbids mutilation: "Do not kill anyone on my account but my killer. If I die of this blow, strike him one blow for his blow, and do not mutilate the man."[40]

He died on the night of the twenty-first.[41] So on these nights Shia mosques hold vigil and mourning together. They remember a fasting man struck down at prayer, who thought of orphans, limited retaliation to one blow for one blow, and forbade mutilation.

When the new moon appears, the month ends with *Eid al-Fitr*, the festival of breaking the fast; *Eid al-Adha*, the festival of sacrifice, belongs to the pilgrimage season (Chapter 30). Before the Eid prayer, each household gives *zakat al-fitra*, a measure of food for every member, so that the poor eat too (Chapter 29).[42]

And on Eid morning, fasting is forbidden.[43] The month that trained the believer to say no ends with a command to say yes: to eat, to celebrate, to visit. The no was never the goal. It clears the way for a freer yes: to God, without appetite tugging at the sleeve; to the hungry neighbour; to justice without revenge. Imam Ali was free in that way. Told of his own death, he asked one thing only, and a month of saying no is a month of learning to ask it: "Will my faith be safe?"

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. The Qur'an lays down fasting, as it did for those before, "so that you may be mindful of God."
2. Refusing what is lawful for a few hours trains a person to refuse what is wrong: that is its freedom.
3. The eyes, ears, tongue and hands fast too; without them, a fast may yield only hunger and thirst.
4. Fasting must not harm: the ill, travellers, the very old, and pregnant or nursing mothers have gentler rules.
5. Laylat al-Qadr, sought on the 19th, 21st and 23rd nights, renews the year, and prayer can change its decree.

NEXT TIME · GO FURTHER

Next time: *Secrets of Zakat.* Fasting is the zakat of the body. What does God ask of our wealth, and whose was it to begin with?

Go further:

Course: Fiqh Made Easy: Practical Principles, a Level 1 course at Tasneem Institute (tasneeminstitute.org/courses/fiqh-made-easy-practical-principles)

Read: "Living the faith," Tasneem's *Discovering Islam* introduction to Islamic practice (tasneeminstitute.org/blog/discovering-islam/islamic-practices). For a deeper dive, the Prophet's sermon welcoming Ramadan (al-Saduq, *'Uyun akhbar al-Rida*, vol. 1, ch. 28, no. 48), and *al-Sahifa al-Sajjadiyya*, Supplications 44 and 45, welcoming the month and bidding it farewell.

Watch: Invitation to Islam, Episode 4, "The Month of Ramadan" (11 min).

In the circle

LOOK BACK

1. Chapter 27 called prayer "a daily return to what matters most." What does it return a person to?
2. Chapter 24 named a "greater jihad." What is that struggle, and where is it fought?
3. Part Three asks what it would mean to live Islam. Which practice so far seems hardest to begin?

TALK ABOUT IT

WARM-UP

1. Have you ever given up something you enjoy for a while, such as coffee, sugar or your phone? What did you notice about yourself?

UNDERSTAND

2. Qur'an 2:183 says fasting is laid down "so that you may be mindful of God." How is going without food meant to build that awareness?
3. Why does the chapter say a sharp word does not break a fast in law, yet can empty it? Use Imam Ali's Saying 145.

REFLECT

4. The chapter claims that saying no can make a person freer. Where have you found that true, or not? You needn't share the details.
5. If you fast, when does it feel most like freedom, and when most like a burden? If you don't, which daily comfort would be hardest to give up?

APPLY

6. The Prophet (s) said even half a date or a drink of water counts. Whom could you feed, or sit beside at a meal, this week?

GO DEEPER

7. Read the Prophet's sermon welcoming Ramadan (*'Uyun akhbar al-Rida*, vol. 1, ch. 28, no. 48; reliable chain). Which instruction surprises you most, and why might the Prophet weep?
8. Read Imam Zayn al-Abidin's prayer for the coming of Ramadan (*al-Sahifa al-Sajjadiyya*, Supplication 44; compiled text, not graded here). Which "fast" of the limbs would be hardest for you?

CARRY IT HOME

Choose one way in this week:

☐ **Notice:** For one day, count the small yeses you give to impulses: the extra scroll, the snack, the sharp reply. Don't judge them. Just notice who is in charge.

☐ **Do:** Fast from one thing besides food for a week: complaining, gossip or a screen after dark. If you are fasting Ramadan, add it to your fast. If you aren't, try it anyway, and watch what changes.

☐ **Learn:** Read Sura 97, *al-Qadr*, slowly in a translation. Then read the prayer for the coming of Ramadan in *al-Sahifa al-Sajjadiyya* (Supplication 44). Which limb does your own fast need most?

Aim. Help the circle see fasting as a training in freedom and mercy, not a feat of endurance.

Protect this question. No. 4, on whether saying no can make a person freer. A guest, a new Muslim and a lifelong Muslim can each answer it from experience.

Answer notes.

- *Q2. Taqwa* is a guarding awareness of God. Refusing lawful food and drink, unseen, for God, trains it: the self that can refuse the lawful learns to refuse the unlawful.
- *Q3.* In al-Sistani's rulings, eight things break a fast; backbiting and insults are not among them, so the day stands. But Imam Ali (a) warns that such a fast may yield "nothing but hunger and thirst."

Likely questions.

- *"Isn't fasting without water dangerous?"* See "Is fasting meant to hurt?" and the In-practice box. Send health questions to a doctor, and legal ones to a scholar.
- *"Why do Shia Muslims break the fast later, or start Eid on a different day?"* See the In-practice box, steps 5 and 7.
- *"Why is there mourning in Ramadan?"* See the end of "What happens on the Night of Decree?"

Watch for. Never ask who is fasting, or why someone is not. Illness, pregnancy, periods, medication or a history of disordered eating are private matters. Speak of Gaza and Karbala with compassion, not politics. If the circle meets during Ramadan, end before sunset, or share the *iftar*.

Bring. Dates and water for everyone, fasting or not, and a printed Ramadan timetable from a local mosque.

MY THREAD · CHAPTER 28

What is one thing I could learn to say no to, so that I can say yes to something better?

MY QUESTION FOR THE BOX

29

Secrets of Zakat

The share of the poor was never yours to keep.

وَٱلَّذِينَ فِىٓ أَمْوَٰلِهِمْ حَقٌّ مَّعْلُومٌ ﴿٢٤﴾ لِّلسَّآئِلِ وَٱلْمَحْرُومِ ﴿٢٥﴾

And those in whose wealth there is a known right, for the one who asks and the one who is deprived.

QUR'AN 70:24–25 · SURAT AL-MA'ARIJ

WATCH · EPISODE 10 · 9:00

youtu.be/3lnm0m6ZNKo

In the video: why we can take "the deeds the dollars do," but never the dollars (6:09)

Reading time: about 20 minutes

The room is full. People have crowded in to put their questions to Imam Ali al-Rida (a), the Prophet's descendant and the eighth of the twelve Imams whom Shia Muslims follow (d. 818 CE, 203 AH): what is lawful, and what is not. He answers them.

Then a tall man comes in. He greets the Imam as "son of the Messenger of God" and says he loves him and his forefathers. He is a pilgrim from Khurasan, far to the east, on his way home from Mecca, and he has lost his money. He has not enough left to reach the next stopping place. "Help me get back to my town," he says, "and when I arrive I will give the same amount in charity on your behalf. I am not someone who should take charity."

"Sit down," says the Imam, "God have mercy on you." And he goes back to the questions.

The room empties, until only the pilgrim and three companions remain. The Imam asks their leave and steps into an inner room. After a while he comes back, pulls the door to, and reaches one hand out over the top of it.

"Where is the man from Khurasan?"

"Here I am."

"Take these two hundred gold dinars. Use them for the road and for your needs, and may they bring you blessing. Do not give them away in charity for me. Now go, so that I do not see you and you do not see me."

When the man has gone, the Imam comes out. Then one of the companions, Sulayman al-Ja'fari, asks him: "You were generous and kind to him. So why did you hide your face?"

"For fear of seeing in his face the humiliation of asking, because I had met his need."[1]

Most of us picture charity the other way round: the giver in the light, the receiver looking at the floor. The Imam reversed the picture. He hid, so that a stranger could keep his dignity, and he would not even let himself be repaid. What did he understand about money, and about the people who need it, that the rest of us so easily forget?

THE BIG QUESTION

Why does Islam make giving to the poor a duty, and not just a kindness?

Have you ever wondered whether a religion has any business telling people what to do with their money? Whether it matters how you give, as long as the money arrives? Or, if you grew up with Islam, what the difference really is between zakat, khums and the coins in the charity box?

This chapter looks at what zakat is, whom it is for, how it differs from other giving, and why the Qur'an calls the share of the poor a right.

WORDS TO KNOW

zakāt (زكاة) · *za-KAAT* · obligatory alms on certain kinds of wealth; the word means both "purity" and "growth."

ṣadaqa (صدقة) · *SA-da-qa* · charity, usually voluntary: a gift of any size, to anyone in need.

khums (خمس) · *KHUMS* · "a fifth": in Shia law, a fifth of a year's surplus income and of certain other gains.

niṣāb (نصاب) · *ni-SAAB* · the threshold an asset must reach before zakat falls due on it; below it, nothing is owed.

ḥaqq maʿlūm (حق معلوم) · *HAQQ ma-LOOM* · "a known right": the share in one's wealth owed to those in need (Qur'an 70:24).

marjaʿ (مرجع) · *MAR-jaʿ* · "reference": the senior jurist whose rulings a Shia Muslim follows.

◆

Why would giving make anyone pure?

Every loaf of bread begins with a seed that no baker made. A farmer plants it, but soil, rain and sun do the growing, and at harvest he carries home far more than he put into the ground. Muslims believe every wage works the same way. The hands that do the work, the eyes that read the figures, the mind that learned the trade: none of them were self-made. "To God belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth" (Qur'an 2:284). On this view, whatever we hold, we hold in trust.

None of this makes money suspect. Islam has no quarrel with earning, saving or enjoying good things. The danger lies in what wealth can do to a heart: the same bank balance can make one person arrogant and another grateful. So Islam builds a habit of letting go into ownership itself, an engine that keeps mercy moving. Its name is *zakat*, and the verse that commanded it uses both meanings of the word.

خُذْ مِنْ أَمْوَٰلِهِمْ صَدَقَةً تُطَهِّرُهُمْ وَتُزَكِّيهِم بِهَا وَصَلِّ عَلَيْهِمْ إِنَّ
صَلَوٰتَكَ سَكَنٌ لَّهُمْ وَٱللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿١٠٣﴾

Take alms from their wealth, to cleanse them and make them grow by it, and pray for them: your prayer brings them peace. God is all-hearing, all-knowing.

QUR'AN 9:103 · SURAT AL-TAWBA

NOTICE Both verbs point at the giver: the alms "cleanse" and "make grow." The second verb shares its root with *zakat*. And the one who collects is told to pray for the one who pays.

We might expect alms to cleanse the poor, as if need were a stain. The verse says the opposite: the alms cleanse those who pay them. What do they wash away? The grip of possession. Most of us know the small tightening in the chest when money we had other plans for leaves our hands. Paid year after year, zakat trains that grip to loosen. The Qur'an sets the bar higher still: "You will not attain true goodness until you give from what you love" (Qur'an 3:92).

And growth? The Qur'an pictures wealth spent in God's way as a single grain that sprouts seven ears, with a hundred grains in every ear (Qur'an 2:261). What is sown in other people's lives is not lost.

Zakat is one of the pillars of Islam, and the Qur'an rarely mentions it alone: in twenty-six verses it names prayer and zakat together.[2] Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (a), the sixth Imam (d. 765 CE), described the day the duty was announced. The verse of zakat came down in Ramadan, the month of fasting. The Prophet (s) sent his crier out among the people: "God has made zakat a duty for you, as He made prayer a duty."

The list was short: gold and silver; camels, cattle, sheep and goats; wheat, barley, dates and raisins. Everything else, the Imam said, was left free. A year later, when the fast was over, the crier went out again: "Muslims, pay the zakat on your wealth, and your prayers will be accepted."[3]

Imam Ali (a), the Prophet's cousin and the first Imam (d. 661 CE), explained why the two duties stand together, and how giving should feel.

IMAM ALI (A), THE FIRST IMAM

ثُمَّ إِنَّ الزَّكَاةَ جُعِلَتْ مَعَ الصَّلاَةِ قُرْبَاناً لِاَهْلِ الاْسْلاَمِ، فَمَنْ أَعْطَاهَا طَيِّبَ النَّفْسِ بِهَا، فَإِنَّهَا تُجْعَلُ لَهُ كَفَّارَةً، وَمِنَ النَّارِ حِجَازاً وَوِقَايَةً، فَلاَ يُتْبِعَنَّهَا أَحَدٌ نَفْسَهُ، وَلاَ يُكْثِرَنَّ عَلَيْهَا لَهَفَهُ، فَإِنَّ مَنْ أَعْطَاهَا غَيْرَ طَيِّبِ النَّفْسِ بِهَا، يَرْجُو بِهَا مَا هُوَ أَفْضَلُ مِنْهَا، فَهُوَ جَاهِلٌ بِالسُّنَّةِ، مَغْبُونُ الاْجْرِ، ضَالُّ الْعَمَلِ، طَوِيلُ النَّدَمِ.

Zakat has been set alongside prayer as an offering by which the people of Islam draw near to God. Whoever gives it with a willing heart, it becomes an atonement for him, and a barrier and a shield from the Fire. So let no one's heart trail after it, and let no one sigh over it. Whoever gives it grudgingly, while hoping it will win him something better, does not know the Prophet's way: he is cheated of his reward, his deed is lost, and his regret will be long.[4]

Nahj al-Balagha · Sermon 199 · **Compiled text, not graded here**

◆

Zakat, khums or charity: what is the difference?

Ask a mosque treasurer about giving, and you may hear four words in one breath. They are not four names for one thing, and paying one does not pay another.

- **Zakat** is a fixed share of certain kinds of wealth, due once they pass a threshold, the *nisab*. Ayatollah al-Sistani, a leading Shia jurist today, lists ten: the nine on the Prophet's list, plus business goods as a precaution. Crops pay a tenth, or a twentieth if watered by bucket or pump; gold and silver coins pay 2.5 percent.[5] Zakat goes to the eight groups of Qur'an 9:60.
- **Khums**, "the fifth," is paid by Shia Muslims on what is left of a year's income after living costs, and on a few other gains.[6]
- **Zakat al-fitra** is a small payment at the end of Ramadan, for yourself and your dependants: about three kilograms of a staple food per person, or its value.[7]
- **Sadaqa** is charity: voluntary, any amount, any time, for anyone in need. "Every kindness is charity," the Prophet (s) said, so a smile counts too.[8] But no smile settles what zakat or khums owes.

Khums rests on a verse revealed after the battle of Badr in 624 CE (2 AH). "Know that whatever you gain," it says, "a fifth of it belongs to God and the Messenger, to the near relatives, the orphans, the needy and the stranded traveller" (Qur'an 8:41). Sunni scholars have generally applied it to the spoils of war. The Imams read "whatever you gain" in its widest sense, which the Arabic allows: any gain, from trade, work or war.[9]

Asked about khums, Imam Musa al-Kazim (a), the seventh Imam (d. 799 CE), replied: "On everything people gain, little or much." His grandson Imam Muhammad al-Jawad (a), the ninth Imam (d. 835 CE), was asked by letter whether khums comes before living costs or after. He wrote back: "After the living costs."[10]

Khums is divided in two. Half goes to needy descendants of the Prophet (s), the *sayyids*, who may not receive zakat from others. The other half, "the share of the Imam," is held in trust while the twelfth Imam is hidden. Al-Sistani rules that it goes to a fully qualified jurist, or is spent on purposes he approves.[11]

A FAIR QUESTION

Isn't khums just a tax for the clergy?

"Why hand a fifth of my savings to a scholar's office? Isn't that just a religious tax?"

The Imams took that worry seriously, from the other side. Half of khums never goes to a scholar at all: it belongs to needy descendants of the Prophet (s). The Imam's half is not the jurist's to keep; he holds it in trust, for the purposes it serves. Imam Muhammad al-Jawad (a) once released the steward of his endowments in Qum, in Iran, from ten thousand the man had spent. When the steward had gone, the Imam said: "One of them pounces on the wealth that is the right of the family of Muhammad, their orphans, their needy, their poor and their stranded travellers, takes it, and then comes and says, 'Release me.' Did he think I would refuse? By God, God will question them about it on the Day of Resurrection, and closely."[12] Paying through a trusted, accountable channel, and keeping the receipt, honours that warning.

◆

A gift, or a right?

"Humankind was created restless," the Qur'an says, "fretful when hardship touches him, grudging when good fortune comes" (Qur'an 70:19–21). Then it names the

exceptions: "those who pray, who keep up their prayer constantly." And it adds the people of this chapter's key verse: "those in whose wealth there is a known right, for the one who asks and the one who is deprived" (Qur'an 70:22–25).

Look closely at three words. The first is *right*, *haqq*. A favour depends on the mood of the giver; a right belongs to the one who receives it. The Qur'an does not say that good people have kindness in their wealth. It says their wealth holds something that already belongs to someone else.

The second is *known*. Some early commentators took the known right to be zakat itself. Imam al-Sadiq (a) read it more widely: something beyond zakat that a person fixes for himself, "according to his capacity and the extent of his wealth," and pays regularly.[13] The great Shia commentator al-'Allama al-Tabataba'i (d. 1981 CE) noticed that the verse itself points the same way. Zakat has eight kinds of recipient, while this verse names only two.

The third is the pair it is owed to. Shia commentators old and new describe the *deprived* as a poor person who holds back out of self-respect and never asks.[14] The pilgrim from Khurasan was an asker, and asking cost him. Imam al-Rida (a) made sure it cost him nothing more.

And the grudging person of verse 21? The Qur'an's word, *manu'*, means "one who withholds." The Imams reached for the same root when they explained why anyone goes hungry. God placed enough for the poor in the wealth of the rich, Imam al-Sadiq taught; "they are failed only by the withholding of those who withhold from them."[15] Someone once asked him why zakat was set at twenty-five in every thousand.

IMAM JA'FAR AL-SADIQ (A), AS REPORTED BY IMAM ALI AL-RIDA (A)

قِيلَ لأَبِي عَبْدِ اللهِ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلام) لأَيِّ شَيْءٍ جَعَلَ اللهُ الزَّكَاةَ خَمْسَةً وَعِشْرِينَ فِي كُلِّ أَلْفٍ وَلَمْ يَجْعَلْهَا ثَلاثِينَ فَقَالَ إِنَّ اللهَ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ جَعَلَهَا خَمْسَةً وَعِشْرِينَ أَخْرَجَ مِنْ أَمْوَالِ الأَغْنِيَاءِ بِقَدْرِ مَا يَكْتَفِي بِهِ الْفُقَرَاءُ وَلَوْ أَخْرَجَ النَّاسُ زَكَاةَ أَمْوَالِهِمْ مَا احْتَاجَ أَحَدٌ.

Someone asked Abu 'Abd Allah [al-Sadiq]: "Why did God set zakat at twenty-five in every thousand, and not thirty?" He said: "God, Mighty and Majestic, made it twenty-five because He set aside from the wealth of the rich exactly what the poor need to have enough. If people paid the zakat on their wealth, no one would be in need."[16]

al-Kafi 3 · Zakat · ch. 3 · no. 1 · **Reliable chain**

No one asks to be born into poverty. So why does it exist? The Imams' answer blames neither God nor the poor, but what people do with what they are given. That is a claim about societies, not a verdict on any one family: illness, war and disaster strike the generous and the careless alike. Yet where a community holds back what it owes, the Prophet (s) warned, the earth itself holds back: "When zakat is withheld, the earth withholds its blessings."[17]

> *"If people paid the zakat on their wealth, no one would be in need.*
>
> IMAM JA'FAR AL-SADIQ (A)

God does not force anyone to pay; people are as free to refuse as they are to skip a prayer. But freedom does not make either one optional. The Qur'an warns that whatever the grasping withhold "will be fastened around their necks on the Day of Resurrection" (Qur'an 3:180). Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a), the fifth Imam (d. c. 733 CE), explained that this means zakat withheld.[18]

Zakat, then, is the floor, not the ceiling. Above it, Imam al-Sadiq taught, God placed other rights in wealth: the known right, the ties of kinship, and the small kindnesses the Qur'an calls *al-ma'un* (Qur'an 107:7). *Al-ma'un*, he said, is "the loan one lends, the household thing one lends out, and the good turn one does."[19]

PAUSE AND RECALL

In your own words: what does it mean to call the share of the poor a "right" (Qur'an 70:24)? And how is zakat different from khums?

Who has a share, and how should it reach them?

The Qur'an names the people zakat is for in a single verse.

إِنَّمَا ٱلصَّدَقَٰتُ لِلْفُقَرَآءِ وَٱلْمَسَٰكِينِ وَٱلْعَٰمِلِينَ عَلَيْهَا وَٱلْمُؤَلَّفَةِ قُلُوبُهُمْ وَفِى ٱلرِّقَابِ وَٱلْغَٰرِمِينَ وَفِى سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ وَٱبْنِ ٱلسَّبِيلِ فَرِيضَةً مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ وَٱللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿٦٠﴾

The alms are only for the poor and the needy, for those who work to collect them, and for those whose hearts are to be won over; and in freeing slaves and debtors, in the way of God, and in helping the stranded traveller. It is an obligation from God, and God is all-knowing, all-wise.[20]

QUR'AN 9:60 · SURAT AL-TAWBA

NOTICE Listen for the small words. The first four groups come with "for," the last four with "in." One explanation: the first four receive alms as their own, while for the rest money is spent on their cause.

The *poor*, in al-Sistani's rulings, are those who cannot cover a year's expenses for themselves and their families; the *needy* are worse off still. For them zakat can mean rent paid, food on the table and a coat for winter.

Some zakat pays those who collect and distribute it. Some may go to "those whose hearts are to be won over," who can include non-Muslims. Some buys people out of slavery (Chapter 23 tells that story), and some clears the debts of those who cannot pay. "The way of God" lets zakat build for a whole community: al-Sistani's examples include mosques, religious schools, clean streets and roads.[21]

And the stranded traveller, the *ibn al-sabil* or "child of the road," may receive zakat even if wealthy at home. The trip must not be for a sinful purpose, and there must be

no other way home.[22] The pilgrim from Khurasan, comfortable at home and penniless on the road, is exactly that person.

What about orphans and widows? The Qur'an speaks often of orphans: the verse of khums names them (Qur'an 8:41), as do verses on charity (Qur'an 2:177, 2:215). In zakat, a poor orphan or widow receives a share as one of "the poor." The Qur'an saves sharp words for those who forget them: "Have you seen the one who denies the Judgement? That is the one who shoves the orphan away, and does not urge the feeding of the needy" (Qur'an 107:1–3).

How a gift is given matters as much as what is given. Poverty can strip a person of dignity; zakat, an economics of dignity, is meant to give it back. "A kind word and forgiveness are better than charity followed by hurt," the Qur'an says, and it tells believers not to cancel out their charity "by reminders and hurt" (Qur'an 2:263–264). Al-Sistani adds a gentle rule: if a poor person would be ashamed to take zakat, it is better to give it without saying what it is.[23]

Voluntary charity is best given in secret (Qur'an 2:271), though Imam al-Sadiq (a) explained that obligatory zakat is paid openly.[24] The verse after the command of zakat adds a striking detail: it is God Himself who "takes the alms" (Qur'an 9:104). It is reported that Imam al-Baqir (a) would place a gift in the asker's hand, then take it back, kiss it, smell it and return it.[25]

IN PRACTICE

Paying zakat and khums today

These steps follow Ayatollah al-Sistani's *Islamic Laws*. Scholars differ on details, so check the rulings of the scholar you follow (your *marja'*).

1. **Check whether zakat applies.** Many salaried people own none of the ten: paper money and bank balances are not on the list. Gold and silver count only as coins in use as money; for gold, from about 69 grams, owned for eleven months.[26]
2. **Fix your khums date.** Your khums year begins when you start earning; a solar year is fine.
3. **On that date, count what is left:** unspent income, and provisions bought but not used. What you spent on yourself and your family, including pilgrimage, is not counted. A wife's *mahr* (marriage gift) and an ordinary inheritance are exempt. One fifth of the rest is khums.[27]
4. **Pay through trusted hands.** Half is for needy *sayyids*; the Imam's half goes to your *marja'* or his authorised agent, usually through his office. Ask for a receipt.
5. **Give zakat with care.** In al-Sistani's rulings, the person receiving it must be a Twelver Shia, and it may not cover the upkeep of people you already must support.[28]
6. **Before the Eid prayer, give *zakat al-fitra*.** If at sunset on the eve of Eid you are a sane adult and not poor, give about three kilograms of a staple food, or its value, for yourself and for each of your dependants. If you do not attend the Eid prayer, you may give it until midday.[29]
7. **Then go beyond the floor.** Voluntary *sadaqa* has no fixed amount or recipient.

◆

What do open hands look like?

Prayer turns a person toward God; giving turns them toward people. One verse joins the two in a single moment.

إِنَّمَا وَلِيُّكُمُ ٱللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُۥ وَٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ ٱلَّذِينَ يُقِيمُونَ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ ٱلزَّكَوٰةَ وَهُمْ رَٰكِعُونَ ﴿٥٥﴾

Your guardian is only God, His Messenger, and those who believe: who keep up the prayer and give zakat while they are bowing.

QUR'AN 5:55 · SURAT AL-MA'IDA

NOTICE "Only" (*innama*) narrows the list to three. The third is described not by a name but by a scene: believers who give zakat "while they are bowing."

The word *wali* can mean a friend and ally, or a guardian with authority. Shia Muslims, following the Imams, read it in the second sense, and read "those who believe" as Imam Ali (a) and the Imams after him. Imam al-Baqir (a) taught that God "commanded His Messenger with the guardianship of Ali" and sent down this very verse, which he linked with the Prophet's proclamation at Ghadir Khumm (Chapter 8).[30]

The reading was disputed even then. Abu Masruq, a companion of Imam al-Sadiq (a), told him what happened when they cited this verse in debate. People replied that it "was revealed about the believers": believers in general, not one man.[31]

In the story behind the Shia reading, a beggar comes into the Prophet's mosque, and Ali, bowing in prayer, hands him the ring from his finger. The Prophet (s) asks the man who gave it, and how. "That man there, who is praying," he says. "He was bowing." The Prophet cries, "God is greatest," and the mosque cries it with him.

Honesty matters here. No version of this story in al-Kafi, the great hadith collection, has a strong chain, and the scholar al-Saduq (d. 991 CE) records it through weak narrators. Early Sunni commentators knew it too: al-Tabari (d. 923 CE) records it from two authorities, though he reads *wali* as "helper."[32] The doctrine rests on the Imams' graded teaching; the story is old, widespread and, in these versions, weak. Its point here is simpler: even in the middle of prayer, Ali's hand was open.

The Imams after him kept their hands open, usually in the dark. Hisham ibn Salim, a student of Imam al-Sadiq, remembered how the Imam spent his nights. Once darkness had fallen and part of the night had passed, he would lift a sack of bread, meat and coins onto his shoulder. Then he carried it to the needy of Medina. He

shared it out, and they never knew who he was. Only when he died, and the visits stopped, did they understand.[33]

A less firmly attested report tells the same of his grandfather, Imam Zayn al-Abidin (a), the fourth Imam (d. c. 713 CE). He went from door to door on dark nights, covering his face as he handed over food and coins. When his body was washed for burial, his back bore marks like the calluses on a camel's knees.[34]

Does giving leave the giver poorer? The sources promise the opposite. "Charity pays off debt and leaves blessing in its place," Imam al-Sadiq said.[35] Imam Ali told his followers: "Tend your faith with charity, fortify your wealth with zakat, and push back the waves of trouble with supplication." Charity, he said, is "an effective remedy."[36] Is that a selfish bargain? The Qur'an makes the heart decisive: charity given to be seen is like soil on a rock, washed bare by one downpour (Qur'an 2:264). Hoping for blessing is no sin. But no one can out-give God.

Nor does goodness shrink as it is shared. In one report, Imam al-Sadiq says that if a kindness passed through eighty hands, all eighty would be rewarded, and the first giver would lose nothing.[37] Picture a fund to feed the hungry: the donor, the volunteer who packs the boxes, the driver who delivers them. The reward is not divided between them; it is multiplied.

Death does not end it either. Six things follow a believer after death, the Imam said, among them "a tree he plants, a well he digs, and a charity he sets flowing."[38] Many people who lose a parent quietly ask God to give the reward of their good deeds to the one they miss, wanting nothing for themselves. Reports from the Imams say that such gifts reach the dead, and that the reward "is written for the one who does it and for the dead."[39]

Picture the hands in this chapter: one reaching over a closed door, one held out in the middle of a bow, one steadying a sack on a dark street. None of them was parting with something it owned. Each was handing on what had never been its owner's to keep. One day each of us will leave this world with empty hands. The money will stay behind. What goes with us, the Imams taught, is what the money did: not the dollars, but the deeds the dollars do.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. *Zakat* means both purification and growth: giving loosens wealth's grip on the giver and blesses what is given.
2. The Qur'an calls the share of those in need a "right" in wealth, not a favour from the wealthy.
3. Zakat, khums, *zakat al-fitra* and voluntary *sadaqa* are different duties with different rules; check your *marjaʿ*.
4. Zakat goes to the eight groups of Qur'an 9:60, and must be given without reminders, hurt or humiliation.
5. Ali's open hand in prayer and the Imams' gifts by night teach that our deeds, not dollars, go with us.

NEXT TIME · GO FURTHER

Next time: *The Hajj.* Once in a lifetime, if they are able, Muslims travel to Mecca, lay aside every sign of rank and wealth, and circle one House with people from every nation. What happens to a person there, and what do they carry home?

Go further:

Course: Fiqh Made Easy: Practical Principles, a Level 1 course at Tasneem Institute (tasneeminstitute.org/courses/fiqh-made-easy-practical-principles)

Read: *al-Kafi*, vol. 4, the Book of Zakat, chapter 4, "Giving charity by night," and chapter 19, the story of Imam al-Rida and the pilgrim from Khurasan.

Watch: Invitation to Islam, Episode 10, "Secrets of Zakat" (9 min).

In the circle

LOOK BACK

1. Chapter 28 called fasting "the freedom of saying no." What does a fast train us to say no to?
2. Chapter 26 said repentance includes repaying what we owe people. Why isn't asking God enough?
3. Part Three asks, "What would it mean to live it?" Which practice so far would change your week most?

TALK ABOUT IT

WARM-UP

1. Think of a time someone helped you without making you feel small. What did they do, and how did it feel? You needn't say who it was.

UNDERSTAND

2. Qur'an 9:103 says the alms "cleanse" and "make grow." According to the chapter, who is cleansed, and of what?
3. In your own words, what is the difference between zakat, khums and *sadaqa*?

REFLECT

4. Imam al-Rida (a) hid his face as he gave. When can giving in public do good, and when can it hurt the one who receives?
5. The Qur'an calls the share of the poor a "right" (70:24), not a favour. Does that word change how you think about giving, or about receiving? Why?

APPLY

6. If you already give regularly, what could make your giving kinder to the one who receives it? If you don't, what small "known right" could you set yourself this month?

GO DEEPER

7. Read Imam al-Sadiq's answer on why zakat is "twenty-five in every thousand" (al-Kafi, vol. 3, Book of Zakat, ch. 3, no. 1; reliable chain). What does it assume about why poverty exists? Do you find it convincing?
8. Read Imam Ali (a) on zakat and prayer (Nahj al-Balagha, Sermon 199; compiled text, not graded). Why might he warn against a heart that "trails after" its gift?

CARRY IT HOME

Choose one way in this week:

☐ **Notice:** Each evening, name one thing you have that you did not make yourself: a skill, a meal, a chance someone gave you. On the last day, ask whose share might be folded into it.

☐ **Do:** Set yourself a "known right" (Qur'an 70:24): a small, fixed amount, given regularly and quietly. Give it so that the person who receives it never has to thank you.

☐ **Learn:** Look up your *marja'*'s rulings on zakat and khums, or ask a local scholar to show you how a khums year is worked out. Then note, privately, when your own khums date would fall.

Aim. Help the circle see zakat as giving back a share that already belongs to others, in a way that protects their dignity.

Protect this question. No. 4, on Imam al-Rida's hidden face. Givers and receivers can both answer it without saying anything about their own money.

Answer notes.

- *Q2.* The giver is cleansed: of greed and of the grip of possession. "Make grow" points to the giver and to the wealth (9:103 and 2:261; Imam Ali, Sermon 199).
- *Q3.* Zakat: a fixed share of ten kinds of wealth above a threshold, for the eight groups of 9:60. Khums: a fifth of what is left of a year's income, split between needy *sayyids* and the Imam's share (8:41; al-Sistani, Rulings 1769 and 1851). *Sadaqa*: voluntary, open to all. *Zakat al-fitra*: at the end of Ramadan.

Likely questions.

- *"Do I owe zakat on my savings?"* In al-Sistani's rulings, savings in paper money owe no zakat, but income still unspent on the khums date owes khums. See the "In practice" box.
- *"Why does khums go to a marjaʿ?"* See the "fair question" box.
- *"Can my zakat go to a food bank, or to a non-Muslim neighbour?"* See "Who has a share…?" Zakat has conditions; *sadaqa* can go to anyone. Refer the details to the *marjaʿ*'s office.

Watch for. Money is private and can be painful. Never ask about anyone's income, debts or giving. Someone in the room may receive help: speak of the poor as neighbours, never as "them." Keep the circle from turning into a fatwa clinic. When *sayyids* come up, don't make anyone's family line a topic.

Bring. A handful of grain to pass around while someone reads Qur'an 2:261 aloud.

MY THREAD · CHAPTER 29

What do I hold that was never mine to keep, and whom is it for?

MY QUESTION FOR THE BOX

NOTES

30

The Hajj

One centre for everyone, and then the long road home.

وَأَذِّن فِى ٱلنَّاسِ بِٱلْحَجِّ يَأْتُوكَ رِجَالًا وَعَلَىٰ كُلِّ ضَامِرٍ يَأْتِينَ مِن كُلِّ فَجٍّ عَمِيقٍ ﴿٢٧﴾

Announce the pilgrimage to humankind. They will come to you on foot and riding every lean camel, from every far mountain road.

QUR'AN 22:27 · SURAT AL-HAJJ

WATCH · EPISODE 25 · 11:57

youtu.be/fZGRD8xLjXU

In the video: a night at Muzdalifa, with the earth for a bed and the sky for a roof (8:29)

Reading time: about 20 minutes

For ten years in Medina, the Prophet Muhammad (s) had not made the pilgrimage to Mecca. Then a verse came down, repeating the call once given to Abraham (a): "Announce the pilgrimage to humankind. They will come to you on foot and riding every lean camel, from every far mountain road" (Qur'an 22:27). The Prophet ordered callers to cry it at the tops of their voices: the Messenger of God is making the pilgrimage this year. People gathered from the town, from the villages around it and from the desert tribes. They came to watch him, and to do what he did.

Early on the ninth day of the month of pilgrimage, in 632 CE (10 AH), he sets out with the pilgrims. Quraysh, Mecca's ruling tribe, are used to keeping their own station at Muzdalifa, nearer the city, and barring other people from pressing on from it. They hope he will stop with them. Instead his tent moves on past them, toward the wide plain of ʿArafat, where everyone else will stand.

After noon he preaches and leads the prayer. Then he goes to the place of standing, and the crowd surges after him. Everyone wants to stand beside his camel, close to its hooves. He moves the camel aside, and they move with it.

"People," he calls out, "the place of my camel's hooves is not the place of standing. All of this is." And with his hand he points across the whole plain. The crowd spreads out over it.[1]

On that plain, every patch of ground served for the standing, not only the patch beside the Prophet. Fourteen centuries later, the crowds are larger. In 2026 more than 1.7 million people made this pilgrimage, the Hajj, and nine in ten of them came from outside Saudi Arabia.[2] Why would God ask every believer who can manage it to come to this one valley, once in a lifetime? And what are they meant to carry home?

THE BIG QUESTION

Why would God ask people to travel, once in their lives, to a stone house in a desert valley?

Have you ever wondered why a faith that says God is everywhere asks for a pilgrimage to one place? Whether the money would do more good in the hands of the poor? Or, if you have watched the white-clad crowds circling the Kaʿba on a screen, what each step of the pilgrimage actually means?

> This chapter walks through the Hajj rite by rite, from the first cry of "Here I am" to the long road home.

WORDS TO KNOW

ḥajj (حَجّ) · *HAJJ* · literally "setting out for" a place; the pilgrimage to Mecca, owed once in a lifetime by all who are able.

iḥrām (إِحْرام) · *ih-RAAM* · the consecrated state a pilgrim enters with intention and the talbiya; men wear two plain cloths.

talbiya (تَلْبِيَة) · *TAL-bee-ya* · the pilgrim's cry, *labbayka llāhumma labbayk*: "Here I am, O God, here I am."

ṭawāf (طَواف) · *ta-WAAF* · circling the Kaʿba seven times, keeping it on one's left.

saʿy (سَعْي) · *SA-ee* · "striving": walking seven times between the hills of Ṣafā and Marwa, in Hagar's footsteps.

wuqūf (وُقوف) · *woo-KOOF* · "standing": being present on the plain of ʿArafāt from noon to sunset on the ninth day.

◆

Why would God invite everyone to one valley?

The answer begins long before the Prophet (s), with a family. Abraham (a) brought his wife Hagar and their baby son, Ishmael (a), to a dry valley in Arabia. Imam Jaʿfar al-Sadiq (a), the sixth Imam (d. 765 CE), described what was there: thorn trees, and a low mound of red earth where God's House would stand. As Abraham turned to leave, Hagar called after him, "Abraham, to whom are you leaving us?" He answered, "To the Lord of this House."[3] The Qur'an keeps his prayer:

رَّبَّنَآ إِنِّيٓ أَسۡكَنتُ مِن ذُرِّيَّتِي بِوَادٍ غَيۡرِ ذِي زَرۡعٍ عِندَ بَيۡتِكَ
ٱلۡمُحَرَّمِ رَبَّنَا لِيُقِيمُواْ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ فَٱجۡعَلۡ أَفۡـِٔدَةٗ مِّنَ ٱلنَّاسِ تَهۡوِيٓ
إِلَيۡهِمۡ وَٱرۡزُقۡهُم مِّنَ ٱلثَّمَرَٰتِ لَعَلَّهُمۡ يَشۡكُرُونَ ﴿٣٧﴾

Our Lord, I have settled some of my children in a valley without crops, by Your Sacred House, so that, our Lord, they may keep up the prayer. So make people's hearts long for them, and provide them with fruits, so that they may give thanks.

QUR'AN 14:37 · SURAT IBRAHIM

NOTICE Look at the order. Abraham names the purpose first: the prayer. Then he asks for people's hearts. Only then does he ask for fruit.

Chapter 7 told how the spring of Zamzam burst out at the thirsty child's feet.[4] Later, father and son raised the House together, praying, "Our Lord, ... show us our rites" (Qur'an 2:127–128).

The Hajj is a family story that strangers are invited to join, and the invitation has conditions. "Pilgrimage to the House is a duty people owe to God," the Qur'an says, "for whoever can find a way to it" (Qur'an 3:97). Ayatollah al-Sistani, a leading Shia authority, spells out what "can" means: money for the trip, health, a safe road and time, support for dependants, and a livelihood to return to. Whoever has all this must go once in a lifetime, and whoever keeps putting it off must still go, even when it is hard. Going again is recommended.[5] Imam Ali (a), the Prophet's cousin and the first Imam (d. 661 CE), called the Hajj "the jihad [striving] of every weak person."[6]

A fair question hangs over the rite. If God is everywhere, why walk around a stone building? Isn't that idol worship? The first command given at the site answers the second: "Associate nothing with Me" (Qur'an 22:26). Muslims pray toward the Ka'ba, the cube-shaped House in Mecca, never to it. Imam Ali answered the first. God tested humanity, he said, "with stones that neither harm nor benefit, neither see nor hear," set in "the most rugged, stony place on earth." Had He placed His House among gardens and rivers, "the reward would have shrunk with the lightness of the test."[7] The point is not the stone but the obedience.[8]

Would the money do more good given to the poor? The Hajj is due only from people whose dependants are provided for, and the rites themselves feed the hungry: "eat from them, and feed the destitute poor" (Qur'an 22:28). In al-Sistani's rulings, a third of each sacrifice must go, as a precaution, to the needy.[9]

IN PRACTICE

The rites in order

Pilgrims from far away make *Hajj al-tamattu'*: a shorter pilgrimage, the *'umra*, then the Hajj (Qur'an 2:196). In al-Sistani's rulings the order is:[10]

The 'umra, on arrival

1. **Ihram** at a *miqat*, a boundary station outside Mecca.
2. **Tawaf**: seven circuits of the Ka'ba, and its prayer.
3. **Sa'y**: seven passes between Safa and Marwa.
4. **Trimming** a little hair, which ends ihram until the Hajj.

The Hajj, 8th–12th of Dhu al-Hijja

5. **Ihram again**, in Mecca.
6. **'Arafat**, from noon to sunset on the 9th.
7. **Muzdalifa**, for part of the night, and from dawn to sunrise.
8. **Mina, on the 10th (Eid)**: stoning the pillar of al-'Aqaba, the sacrifice, then shaving or trimming the hair (women only trim).
9. **Mecca**: tawaf and its prayer, sa'y, then *tawaf al-nisa'* and its prayer. This last circuit, required of women and men alike, makes spouses lawful to each other again.
10. **Mina** for the nights of the 11th and 12th, stoning all three pillars each day.

Medina is cherished, but it is not a rite of the Hajj. Details differ between scholars, so check the rulings of the scholar you follow (your *marja'*), and travel with a qualified guide.

◆

What does a pilgrim leave behind?

Pilgrims enter *ihram*, a consecrated state, at a *miqat*, a boundary station outside Mecca. When the Prophet (s) reached the *miqat* on the road from Medina, he told the people to wash and strip down to a waist-cloth and a shoulder-cloth.[11] Men still wear just two plain cloths, usually white. Women wear their ordinary modest clothes, with their faces uncovered.[12]

Then comes the *talbiya*, the cry that completes ihram: "Here I am, O God, here I am. Here I am, You have no partner, here I am. All praise and blessing are Yours, and the kingdom. You have no partner." The Prophet repeated it whenever he met a rider, climbed a hill or went down into a valley.[13] It is the reply of someone who has heard their name called.

Picture what the two cloths do. A king and a street-sweeper stand side by side, and no one can tell which is which. On that pilgrimage the Prophet said it outright, in a sermon preserved in Shia and Sunni books: "People, your Lord is one and your father is one. You all belong to Adam, and Adam is from dust. ... No Arab has merit over a non-Arab except by mindfulness of God."[14] The Qur'an says God made people "nations and tribes so that you may come to know one another" (Qur'an 49:13). On his Hajj in April 1964, the African American Muslim leader Malcolm X (1925–1965) found pilgrims of "all colors, from blue-eyed blonds to black-skinned Africans" sharing the same rites as equals. He came home as el-Hajj Malik el-Shabazz.[15]

Ihram also asks for restraint.

ٱلْحَجُّ أَشْهُرٌ مَّعْلُومَٰتٌ ۚ فَمَن فَرَضَ فِيهِنَّ ٱلْحَجَّ فَلَا رَفَثَ وَلَا
فُسُوقَ وَلَا جِدَالَ فِى ٱلْحَجِّ ۗ وَمَا تَفْعَلُوا۟ مِنْ خَيْرٍ يَعْلَمْهُ ٱللَّهُ ۗ
وَتَزَوَّدُوا۟ فَإِنَّ خَيْرَ ٱلزَّادِ ٱلتَّقْوَىٰ ۚ وَٱتَّقُونِ يَٰٓأُو۟لِى ٱلْأَلْبَٰبِ ﴿١٩٧﴾

The Hajj is in the well-known months. Whoever takes on the Hajj in them: no sexual intimacy, no wrongdoing and no quarrelling during the Hajj. Whatever good you do, God knows it. Take provisions, and the best provision is mindfulness of God. So be mindful of Me, people of insight.

QUR'AN 2:197 · SURAT AL-BAQARA

NOTICE The verse turns from what to leave behind to what to pack: provisions for the road, and the one provision that matters most.

Al-Sistani lists twenty-five things a pilgrim in ihram must avoid, among them hunting, perfume, admiring oneself in a mirror, lying, abuse, boasting and quarrelling. A pilgrim may not kill even the lice on their own body, and it is better, as a precaution,

to spare harmless mosquitoes too. In the Haram, the sanctuary around Mecca, no one may uproot the grass or cut down the trees.[16] For a few days, everything around the pilgrim is safe from them. The Qur'an calls such reverence honouring "the sacred symbols of God," and says it springs "from the mindfulness of hearts" (Qur'an 22:32).

◆

Why circle, and why run?

In Mecca the pilgrim begins the *tawaf*, circling the Kaʿba seven times. Each round starts and ends at the Black Stone, set in one corner, and the Kaʿba stays on the pilgrim's left. The circle must also take in a low, curved wall beside the House, the Hijr of Ishmael.[17] Asked whether the Hijr is part of the House, Imam al-Sadiq (a) said, "No, not even a nail-clipping of it. But Ishmael buried his mother in it, and he did not want her grave to be walked on, so he walled it in."[18] Every tawaf passes around the grave of Hagar.

Imam Ali (a) saw something larger in the circling crowds.

> **IMAM ALI (A), THE FIRST IMAM**
>
> وَفَرَضَ عَلَيْكُمْ حَجَّ بَيْتِهِ الحَرَامِ، الَّذِي جَعَلَهُ قِبْلَةً لِلاَنَامِ، يَرِدُونَهُ وُرُودَ الاَنْعَامِ، وَيأْلَهُونَ إِلَيْهِ وُلُوهَ الحَمَامِ. جَعَلَهُ سُبْحَانَهُ عَلاَمَةً لِتَوَاضُعِهِمْ لِعَظَمَتِهِ، وَإِذْعَانِهِمْ لِعِزَّتِهِ، وَاخْتَارَ مِنْ خَلْقِهِ سُمَّاعاً أَجَابُوا إِلَيْهِ دَعْوَتَهُ، وَصَدَّقُوا كَلِمَتَهُ، وَوَقَفُوا مَوَاقِفَ أَنْبِيَائِهِ، وَتَشَبَّهُوا بِمَلاَئِكَتِهِ المُطِيفِينَ بِعَرْشِهِ
>
> He has made it your duty to go on pilgrimage to His Sacred House, which He made the direction of prayer for all people. They come down to it as herds come down to water, and flock to it with the longing of doves. He made it a sign of their humility before His greatness and their surrender to His might. From His creation He chose listeners who answered His call and believed His word. They stood where His prophets stood, and made themselves like His angels who circle His Throne.[19]
>
> Nahj al-Balagha · Sermon 1 · **Compiled text, not graded here**

So the pilgrim joins a circle that runs through the whole of creation. The crowd may be vast, yet a pilgrim can feel that God is listening to no one else.

The words recommended at the Black Stone reach back to Chapter 1 and the covenant with Adam's children: "Am I not your Lord?" (Qur'an 7:172). Imam al-Sadiq taught that "when God took the covenants of His servants, He commanded the Stone, and it swallowed them." So pilgrims say there: "My trust I have delivered and my covenant I have kept, so that you may bear witness that I came."[20] The circle is a return to the beginning: a promise made before birth, renewed on foot.

After his seven rounds, the Prophet (s) prayed behind the Station of Abraham, the stone where Abraham (a) stood. Then he drank from Zamzam and said: "O God, I ask You for knowledge that benefits, provision that is ample, and healing from every illness and ailment."[21] Then he walked seven times between Safa and Marwa, which the Qur'an calls "among the sacred symbols of God" (Qur'an 2:158).[22]

This is the *sa'y*, the "striving," and it retraces Hagar. She had heard Abraham entrust her to God. Yet she did not sit and wait. She climbed one hill and called out, crossed to the other and called again, seven times. "God made that a rite," said Imam al-Sadiq. When the angel Gabriel came, she told him Abraham's words. "Then he has entrusted you," said Gabriel, "to One who is enough."[23] Trust in God, *tawakkul*, is not standing still. It is doing all you can, while knowing the outcome is not yours.

Her search ended in a spring that turned an empty valley into a stop for caravans. So a pilgrim between the two hills may ask: What is my Zamzam? What spring of purpose has God placed in me? God is not an aimless Creator. He gave every person gifts, and the Hajj can set that spring flowing again.

> **PAUSE AND RECALL**
>
> *Why does the tawaf begin at the Black Stone? And what does Hagar's run between Safa and Marwa say about trusting God?*

◆

What happens on the plain of 'Arafat?

The rites so far make up the 'umra. The Hajj proper begins on the eighth of Dhu al-Hijja, the month of pilgrimage, with ihram again in Mecca. On the ninth, from noon until sunset, pilgrims must be present on the plain of 'Arafat, about twelve miles from the city.[24] Being there, with intention, is the rite. People pray, read, weep and wait for the sun to go down.

> *The place of my camel's hooves is not the place of standing. All of this is.*
>
> THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD (S), AT ʿARAFAT

Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a), the fifth Imam (d. c. 733 CE), and his son al-Sadiq (a) told how the plain got its name. Gabriel brought Abraham (a) there and said: "This is ʿArafat. Come to know your rites here, and confess your sin."[25] Both verbs share the name's root: *ʿarafa*, to know, and *iʿtarafa*, to confess. The day is for coming to know God, and for owning up to yourself.

To a man from Medina, the Prophet (s) promised: "The day of ʿArafa is a day on which God takes pride in [the pilgrims] before the angels. If you came on that day with sins as many as the grains of sand in the dunes of ʿAlij, the drops of rain and the days of the world, they would be cut away from you that day."[26]

The promise has a condition, and a warning. Imam al-Sadiq quoted his father: whoever sets out for the House "free of arrogance" comes back from his sins "as on the day his mother bore him." The worst arrogance, the Prophet had said, is "to look down on people and to scorn the truth."[27] The warning runs the other way. Asked who carries the heaviest burden of sin, Imam al-Sadiq described someone who goes through all the rites "and then tells himself, or suspects, that God has not forgiven him."[28] Pride can empty a Hajj. So can despair.

Shia Muslims remember one ʿArafa above all. Two men of the tribe of Asad described Imam Husayn (a), the Prophet's grandson and the third Imam (d. 680 CE), coming out of his tent that afternoon "humble and lowly." Facing the House, he raised his hands "like a poor man asking for food." Those around him stopped praying for themselves, said *amin* to his prayers and wept with him until sunset. Among his words: "O You whom I thanked so little, yet You did not deprive me." The earliest books to record this scene date from the thirteenth century and give no chain, and the great hadith scholar al-Majlisi (d. 1699 CE) doubted the prayer's famous final section.[29]

A STORY FROM THE SOURCES

The man who prayed only for others

Ibrahim ibn Hashim, father of the Qur'an commentator Ali ibn Ibrahim al-Qummi, once watched ʿAbd Allah ibn Jundab on the plain of ʿArafat. He had never seen anyone stand so well. Ibn Jundab kept his hands stretched toward the sky, and his tears ran down his cheeks to the ground.

When the crowds moved off, Ibrahim told him so.

"By God," said Ibn Jundab, "I prayed only for my brothers." Imam Musa al-Kazim (a), the seventh Imam (d. 799 CE), had taught him why. Whoever prays for a brother in his absence hears a call from the Throne: "And for you, a hundred thousand times as much."

"I did not want to give up a hundred thousand times over, guaranteed, for one prayer for myself that might not be answered."[30]

After sunset the pilgrims press on to Muzdalifa and spend the night in the open: the earth for a bed and the sky for a roof. There they gather the small pebbles they will need at Mina, a valley about three miles from Mecca, as Imam al-Sadiq advised. Women, children, the elderly, the sick and those caring for them may move on before dawn; everyone else stays until sunrise.[31]

◆

What does Mina ask, and what comes home?

On the tenth, the day of Eid al-Adha, the festival of the sacrifice, pilgrims throw seven pebbles at a stone pillar in Mina. Imam Musa al-Kazim (a) was asked why. "Because Iblis [Satan], the accursed, used to show himself to Abraham at the place of the pillars," he said, "and Abraham stoned him. So it became the practice."[32]

The Qur'an tells the story behind it sparingly. When the boy was old enough to work alongside him, Abraham (a) said, "My son, I see in a dream that I am sacrificing you. So consider: what do you think?" He answered, "Father, do as you are commanded. God willing, you will find me patient" (Qur'an 37:102). The word for "work alongside" is *saʿy*, the very name of Hagar's run. "When they had both surrendered" (Qur'an 37:103) uses the verb behind the word *islam*, in a form meaning both of them together. And God "ransomed him with a great sacrifice" (Qur'an 37:107).

The report that named ʿArafat adds two moments. The boy asked, "Father, cover my face and tie me tight." Abraham answered, "My son, binding as well as slaughter?

By God, I will not do both to you today." Then Satan came as an old man, with a clever argument: "You are a leader whom people follow. If you sacrifice your son, people will sacrifice their children." Abraham refused to say another word to him.[33] Temptation rarely looks ugly. It often sounds wise, even kind, and every pebble repeats Abraham's refusal to argue with it.

Who was the son? The Qur'an does not name him, and it announces Isaac's birth only after this story (Qur'an 37:112). Imam Ali al-Rida (a), the eighth Imam (d. 818 CE), named Ishmael (a): every animal sacrificed at Mina, he said, is a ransom for Ishmael. Most Muslim scholars agree. Genesis names Isaac, and so did some early reports.[34] The lesson of surrender is the same.

لَن يَنَالَ ٱللَّهَ لُحُومُهَا وَلَا دِمَآؤُهَا وَلَٰكِن يَنَالُهُ ٱلتَّقْوَىٰ مِنكُمْ
كَذَٰلِكَ سَخَّرَهَا لَكُمْ لِتُكَبِّرُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ عَلَىٰ مَا هَدَىٰكُمْ ۗ وَبَشِّرِ ٱلْمُحْسِنِينَ

﴿٣٧﴾

Neither their flesh nor their blood reaches God. What reaches Him is your mindfulness of Him. So He has made them of service to you, that you may proclaim God's greatness for guiding you. Give good news to those who do good.

QUR'AN 22:37 · SURAT AL-HAJJ

NOTICE One verb carries the verse: "reaches." It comes twice, once for what does not reach God and once for what does.

At the Prophet's sacrifice, a piece of meat was taken from each camel and cooked in one pot. He and Ali (a), whom he had called "my partner in my offering," ate from it, and the rest was given away.[35]

The long road home

Then the hardest part: leaving. Imam al-Sadiq (a) taught pilgrims to circle the House one last time, press close to it and pray.

FROM THE FAREWELL TO THE HOUSE

IMAM JA'FAR AL-SADIQ (A), THE SIXTH IMAM

فَإِنْ كُنْتَ قَدْ غَفَرْتَ لِي ذُنُوبِي فَازْدَدْ عَنِّي رِضًا وَقَرِّبْنِي إِلَيْكَ زُلْفَى وَلَا تُبَاعِدْنِي وَإِنْ كُنْتَ لَمْ تَغْفِرْ لِي فَمِنَ الآنَ فَاغْفِرْ لِي قَبْلَ أَنْ تَنْأَى عَنْ بَيْتِكَ دَارِي فَهَذَا أَوَانُ انْصِرَافِي إِنْ كُنْتَ أَذِنْتَ لِي غَيْرَ رَاغِبٍ عَنْكَ وَلَا عَنْ بَيْتِكَ وَلَا مُسْتَبْدِلٍ بِكَ وَلَا بِهِ

If You have forgiven my sins, then be more pleased with me still, bring me near to You, and do not send me far away. And if You have not forgiven me, then forgive me now, before my home grows far from Your House. This is the hour of my leaving, if You have given me leave: not turning away from You or from Your House, and not taking anything in exchange for You or for it.[36]

al-Kafi 4 · Hajj · ch. 203 · no. 1 · **Reliable chain**

Then pilgrims drink from Zamzam and walk out, saying: "Returning, repenting, worshipping, praising our Lord, longing for our Lord, returning to God, if God wills." When the Imam himself left, he fell into prostration at the door of the mosque for a long time, then rose and went out.[37]

The Prophet's own road home from his pilgrimage passed a pool called Khumm. There, Shia and Sunni reports agree, he took Ali by the hand and said, "Whoever I am master of, Ali is his master." Chapter 8 tells that story.[38] For Shia Muslims it belongs to the meaning of the Hajj. Imam al-Baqir (a) put it plainly: "People were commanded only to come to these stones and circle them, and then to come to us, tell us of their loyalty and offer us their support." Other reports call meeting the Imam part of the Hajj's completion.[39] The circle around the House is meant to open onto the guides God gave.

Many pilgrims travel on to Medina to greet the Prophet (s) at his grave. It is not a rite of the Hajj, but the Imams encouraged it. Asked what awaits someone who sets out to visit the Prophet, Imam Muhammad al-Jawad (a), the ninth Imam (d. 835 CE), answered in one word: "Paradise." The Prophet called the ground between his house and his pulpit "a garden of the gardens of Paradise." Is it a garden even now, a student asked Imam al-Sadiq. "Yes. If the veil were lifted, you would see it." And for those who cannot make the trip: "Send me your greeting," the Prophet said, in a report without a verified chain, "for it reaches me."[40]

The last word belongs to Imam Ali. Dying of a sword-blow, he left his sons a will: "God, God, your Lord's House: do not leave it empty as long as you live."[41] Pilgrims keep it full by going back; everyone else, by turning toward it to pray, five times a day.

The cloths are folded away and the crowds scatter. What happens on the Hajj does not stay in Mecca. The test of a pilgrim is not the afternoon at ʿArafat but the morning after the return: a queue, a kitchen table, a hard conversation at work. Every circle has one centre, and every pilgrim must in the end go home, carrying the words they said as they left: returning, repenting, praising, returning to God.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. The Hajj is owed to God once in a lifetime by every Muslim who can safely make the trip.
2. Its rites retrace a family's trust: Abraham's surrender, Hagar's search for water and Ishmael's readiness.
3. Ihram strips away rank, so that pilgrims of every nation stand equal around one centre.
4. ʿArafa promises forgiveness to the humble, and warns against both arrogance and despair.
5. For Shia Muslims, the Hajj leads on to the Prophet's family, and it should end in a changed life.

NEXT · GO FURTHER

Next: *Homecoming.* Turn the page to find your next steps, a letter to write to the person who began this book, and the completion page. On your first *My thread* page you wrote why you came. What would you tell that person now?

Go further:

Course: Fiqh Made Easy: Practical Principles, a Level 1 course at Tasneem Institute (tasneeminstitute.org/courses/fiqh-made-easy-practical-principles)

Read: Imam Ali on the Kaʿba, *Nahj al-Balagha*, Sermon 192; then the farewell to the House, *al-Kafi*, vol. 4, Book of Hajj, ch. 203, no. 1 (reliable chain).

Watch: Invitation to Islam, Episode 25, "The Hajj" (12 min).

In the circle

LOOK BACK

1. Chapter 29 said the share of the poor was never yours to keep. Why not?
2. Chapter 26 promised "no closed door." Until when, according to the Imams, does the door of repentance stay open?
3. Part Three asks, "What would it mean to live it?" Which practice has surprised you most so far?

TALK ABOUT IT

WARM-UP

1. Think of a time you came home changed: from a trip, a move or a long illness. What looked different when you walked back in?

UNDERSTAND

2. Imam Ali (a) says God set His House among bare rocks, not gardens and rivers (Nahj al-Balagha, Sermon 192). What reason does he give?
3. Hagar had heard Abraham (a) entrust her to God, yet she ran seven times between Safa and Marwa. What does the chapter draw from that?

REFLECT

4. At ʿArafat the Prophet (s) said the whole plain, not just the ground by his camel, was the place of standing. Where do people still jostle for the "best spot"?
5. Ibn Jundab spent ʿArafa praying only for others. If you had one afternoon to pray for, or wish good to, other people, who would come first? You needn't share names.

APPLY

6. "Do not leave it empty as long as you live," Imam Ali said of the House. What will you keep from going empty: a habit, a friendship, a question?

GO DEEPER

7. Read the farewell to the House taught by Imam al-Sadiq (a) (al-Kafi, vol. 4, Book of Hajj, ch. 203, no. 1; reliable chain). Why ask forgiveness "before my home grows far from Your House"?

CARRY IT HOME

Choose one way in this week:

☐ **Notice:** For one day, notice what sits at the centre of your attention: what you reach for first in the morning, and what you keep circling back to. Is it what you would choose?

☐ **Do:** Keep one "ihram hour" each day: no complaining, no quarrelling, no unkind word (Qur'an 2:197). If you pray, spend part of it praying for someone else, as Ibn Jundab did. If you don't, do one quiet kindness for someone who will never know.

☐ **Learn:** Trace the rites on a map of Mecca, Mina, Muzdalifa and ʿArafat, using "The rites in order." Then read Imam Ali on the Kaʿba in Nahj al-Balagha, Sermon 192.

Aim. Help the circle see the Hajj as a family story everyone is invited into, and close the book as a beginning rather than an ending.

Protect this question. No. 6, on what you will keep from going empty. Everyone can answer it, whatever they believe, and it turns the last session toward the future.

Answer notes.

- *Q2.* So that the test would be real: stones that "neither harm nor benefit," in the harshest valley. Among gardens, the reward "would have shrunk." Obedience is the point (22:26).
- *Q3.* Trust is not passivity. Hagar knew she was in God's care and still ran, and God made her effort a rite.

Likely questions.

- *"Isn't circling the Kaʿba idol worship?"* See the first section (22:26; Sermon 192).
- *"Was it Ishmael or Isaac?"* See the Mina section. Don't let it become a contest.
- *"How would I go?"* Point to "The rites in order," a qualified group and the person's *marjaʿ*.

Watch for. Some people cannot afford the Hajj or are too unwell to go. Never suggest that their faith is lacking: Imam Ali called it "the jihad of every weak person." Don't ask who has been. Some guests may find the sacrifice hard to hear about; let them say so.

Milestone: Homecoming. This session closes the book. If you can, run it long, about 105 minutes, with a shared meal, and invite families. Read the circle agreements once more. Sign each other's completion pages. Anyone who wishes reads a line from *My thread*. Set out a "where next" table with courses, books and local classes, and invite someone to host the next circle. In a Ramadan circle, this is the Eid gathering.

Bring. Dates and water (Zamzam, if anyone has some), pens for the completion pages, and a map of the Hajj sites.

MY THREAD · CHAPTER 30

Before you write your letter, reread your first My thread page. What would you most want the person who wrote it to know?

MY QUESTION FOR THE BOX

◆

Homecoming

When the pilgrims have finished the Hajj, they go home. They return to the same streets and the same work, and yet something has changed. They have stood where Abraham stood and walked where Hagar ran, and they carry that home with them.

You have come to the end of a journey of your own: thirty conversations about God, meaning and how to live. Wherever you stand now, we hope you leave with clearer questions, some truer answers, and friends you did not have when you began.

Read your thread

Turn back to the first *My thread* page, where you wrote why you came, your biggest question, and what you hoped would change. Read it slowly. Then read the lines you wrote at the end of each chapter. What has moved? What has stayed the same? On the next page, write a short letter to the person who opened this book on the first day.

Your next step

Every reader finishes in a different place. Choose the step that fits you.

- **Keep exploring.** Rewatch the episodes that raised the most questions for you, and follow the *Go further* suggestions. Take your questions to a scholar: Tasneem Institute offers private one-to-one consultations online.
- **Take a step in practice.** Visit a mosque or Islamic centre for a prayer, an iftār or a lecture. You do not have to be Muslim to be welcome.
- **Go deeper.** Begin Tasneem Institute's learning path. Level 1, *Foundations of Faith*, starts with *God and His Attributes*.

If you are ready

Some readers reach the end of this book and find that they believe. If that is you, there is no examination to pass and no ceremony to arrange. A person becomes Muslim by bearing witness, sincerely, to two truths:

أَشْهَدُ أَنْ لَا إِلٰهَ إِلَّا ٱللّٰهُ، وَأَشْهَدُ أَنَّ مُحَمَّدًا رَسُولُ ٱللّٰهِ

Ashhadu an la ilaha illa Allah, wa ashhadu anna Muhammadan rasul Allah.

I bear witness that there is no god but God, and I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of God.

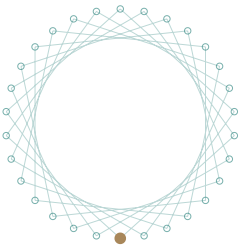
These two testimonies are the doorway into Islam. Shia Muslims understand the Prophet's family, beginning with Imam Ali (a), as the guides God appointed to carry his message faithfully, and many add a line to their testimony to say so.

You can say these words alone, between you and God. But faith is lived among people, and you deserve to be welcomed. Speak to the imam of a local centre, or to the person who led your circle. They will help you take the next steps: learning to pray, finding a community and friends for the road. Go gently. The Qur'an came to its first believers over twenty-three years, a little at a time (Qur'an 17:106), and faith can grow in you the same way.

And if you are not ready, or not sure, that is all right too. "There is no compulsion in religion" (Qur'an 2:256). The door stays open, and there is still a place for you in the circle.

Lead the next circle

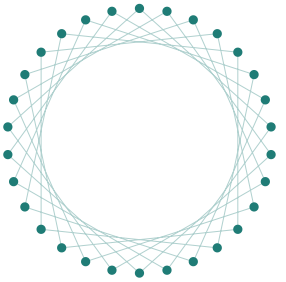
Every circle begins with one person who decides to invite others. You now know how this book works, and somewhere in your life there may be someone waiting for an invitation. The *Circle toolkit* at the back of the book has everything you need to begin.



Every circle starts with one person.

A letter to the person who began

Write to the person you were when you opened this book. What would you tell them? What are you still asking?



The circle is complete

This page records that

_____

completed the thirty conversations of Invitation to Islam

with the circle at

_____

on

_____

_____ _____

HOST FACILITATOR

Every circle starts with one person.

◆

Where to go next

With Tasneem Institute

- **Start here.** *New to Islam* brings together short introductions, a free study guide and the next steps for newcomers: tasneeminstitute.org/new-to-islam
- **Learning paths.** Three levels of courses taught by scholars. Level 1, *Foundations of Faith*, begins with *God and His Attributes*: tasneeminstitute.org/learning-paths
- **Talk to a scholar.** Private one-to-one consultations, online: tasneeminstitute.org/consultations
- **Watch.** The *Invitation to Islam* series, lecture series and documentaries: youtube.com/@tasneeminstitute

Read the sources

- **The Qur'an.** Choose a translation that sets the Arabic beside the English, such as *The Qur'an: With a Phrase-by-Phrase English Translation* by 'Ali Quli Qara'i.
- ***Nahj al-Balagha.*** The sermons, letters and sayings of Imam Ali (a). An English translation can be read free at thaqalayn.net.
- ***al-Sahifa al-Sajjadiyya.*** The supplications of Imam Zayn al-Abidin (a), translated by William C. Chittick as *The Psalms of Islam*.
- ***al-Kafi.*** The greatest Shia collection of hadith. Its first volume opens with the Book of Intellect and Ignorance and the Book of the Virtue of Knowledge. It can be read free at thaqalayn.net.

Read further

- *Shi'ite Islam*, by 'Allama Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i: a classic introduction to Shia belief, history and spirituality by one of its greatest twentieth-century scholars.
- *Discovering Islam*: nine short introductions on Tasneem's website, adapted from the writing of Sayyid Moustafa al-Qazwini (tasneeminstitute.org/new-to-islam).
- *The Adornment of the Righteous*, by Shaykh Azhar Nasser (tasneeminstitute.org/read).
- For practical rulings, *Islamic Laws*, the English edition of the rulings of Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Ali al-Sistani (sistani.org).

For new Muslims

Find a local mosque or Islamic centre and introduce yourself to the imam. Most communities are glad to pair new Muslims with a mentor, and many run classes on the prayer. If you embraced Islam through this circle, stay in touch with the people who walked with you. Faith grows best among friends.

◆

Circle toolkit

Everything you need to start a circle at your mosque, centre, campus or kitchen table. The pages marked "photocopy" may be copied freely for your own circle.

Start a circle

Who you need

- **A host**, who finds the room, brings the tea and welcomes people at the door.
- **A facilitator**, who leads the conversation (see "Leading a circle" at the front of the book). One person can do both.
- **Four to twelve people.** Fewer than four and the talk runs dry; more than twelve and quiet voices disappear. If more people come, start a second circle.

Where and when

- A side room at a mosque or centre, a campus prayer room, a library meeting room, or a living room.
- The same day and time each week. Consistency builds the circle.
- Brothers', sisters' or mixed circles, as your community prefers. Circles can also meet online.

What to bring

- A copy of this book for each person, or at least the chapter.
- A screen for the episode, or ask everyone to watch at home.
- Name tags, pens, question slips and a box.
- Tea, water, dates or something sweet.

Your first month

1. Agree on a format with your imam or centre (see "Four ways to run a circle").
2. Hold a taster session (below).
3. Announce the circle (see the invitation texts).
4. Read the circle agreements together at the first session.

A taster session: "Session 0"

Sixty minutes, for anyone curious. Welcome everyone with tea (10 minutes). Watch the first episode together (15). Ask three questions: *What did you notice? What surprised you? What question would you bring to a circle like this?* (25). Explain how the circle works and pass round the sign-up sheet (10).

Three reading paths

Not ready for thirty chapters? Each path keeps the book's order.

- **Taster (six sessions):** 1, 2, 4, 11, 15, 27.
- **First steps, for new Muslims (eight sessions):** 1, 3, 4, 8, 9, 18, 26, 27.
- **Hard questions (eight sessions):** 2, 5, 11, 15, 17, 22, 23, 24.

First time in a mosque?

You are welcome. A few things will help you feel at home.

- **Shoes come off** at the entrance to the prayer hall. There is usually a rack.
- **Dress modestly:** arms and legs covered. Women are usually asked to cover their hair in the prayer hall, and centres often keep scarves for guests.
- **During the prayer,** sit quietly at the back or the side and watch. No one expects a guest to pray.
- **Men and women** often pray in separate areas, side by side or one behind the other.
- **Ask anything.** People will be glad you came.

Invitation texts

Copy, adapt and share. (Photocopy)

An announcement to read aloud

> *"This [day], we are starting a study circle called Invitation to Islam. Each week we watch a short video, read a chapter together and talk honestly about the big questions: God, purpose, suffering, and how to live. Everyone is welcome, Muslim or not. Bring your questions, and bring a friend."*

A message for WhatsApp or text

> *Salam! We're starting a study circle, Invitation to Islam: thirty conversations on God, meaning and how to live. One short video, one chapter, honest conversation and tea. [Day], [time], at [place]. Everyone welcome. Bring your questions! Reply to save a seat.*

A STUDY CIRCLE

Invitation to Islam

Thirty conversations on God, meaning and how to live

Bring your questions.

WHEN

WHERE

CONTACT

Everyone welcome. Tea provided.

PHOTOCOPY

Sign-up sheet

First names are enough. Contact details are optional, and only with permission. Never ask anyone's religion.

FIRST NAME	PHONE OR EMAIL (OPTIONAL)	MAY WE CONTACT YOU ABOUT THE CIRCLE?

PHOTOCOPY

Attendance

Tick a box for each session attended. Never ask anyone's religion.

SESSIONS 1–15

FIRST NAME	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15

SESSIONS 16–30

FIRST NAME	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30

PHOTOCOPY

Questions for a scholar

Questions from the box that the circle could not answer. Take them to a scholar, and bring the answers back.

DATE	THE QUESTION	ANSWERED?	ASKED OF

PHOTOCOPY

Who to call

Fill this in before the first session, and keep it with you. When a question needs a scholar, or a person needs more care than a circle can give, you will know where to turn.

	Name	Phone or email
Imam or scholar		
A second scholar		
Counselling service		
Local support services		
Safeguarding lead at the centre		
Centre office		

Glossary

The words to know from every chapter, with a guide to pronunciation. Capitals mark the stressed syllable.

A

ʿadl عَدْل *ADL* justice; God's justice, which wrongs no one. For Shia Muslims, one of the five roots of faith. Ch. 11, 20

ʿafw عفو *AFF-w* pardon: letting go of a right you could have claimed, such as a debt or a penalty. Ch. 15

Ahl al-Bayt أهل البيت *AHL al-BAYT* "the people of the house," the Prophet's family, whom Shia Muslims follow as guides. Ch. 1

ahl al-kitāb أهل الكِتاب *AHL al-ki-TAAB* "People of the Book": communities given earlier scripture, chiefly Jews and Christians. Ch. 7, 16

Allāhu akbar اَللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ *al-LAA-hu AK-bar* "God is greater" than all else: the words that open the prayer and mark its movements. Ch. 27

amān أمان *a-MAAN* a pledge of safety given to an enemy, binding on the whole army. Ch. 24

amāna أمانة *a-MAA-na* a trust held on someone else's behalf and answered for later; parents hold their children as one. Ch. 18, 21

ʿaql عقل *AQL* reason, the intellect, which Shia teaching calls God's "inner proof." Ch. 3, 5, 9

ʿĀshūrāʾ عَاشُورَاء *aa-shoo-RAA* the tenth day of Muharram, when Imam Husayn was killed at Karbala in 680 CE. Ch. 11

astaghfiru-llāh أَسْتَغْفِرُ اللهَ *as-TAGH-fi-rul-LAAH* "I ask God's forgiveness," a phrase many Muslims say every day. Ch. 26

āya, pl. āyāt آية / آيات *AA-ya, aa-YAAT* a sign: a verse of the Qur'an, or anything in nature that points to God. Ch. 5, 6

B

balāʾ بَلاء *ba-LAA* trial; the hardship, or the blessing, through which a person is tested. Ch. 11

barzakh بَرْزَخ *BAR-zakh* "barrier": the life between death and the Day of Resurrection (Qur'an 23:100). Ch. 12

bayḍat al-Islām بيضة الإسلام *BAY-dat al-is-LAAM* literally "the egg of Islam": the community's very survival, which may always be defended. Ch. 24

bi-idhn Allāh بِإِذْنِ الله *bi-IDH-nil-LAAH* "by God's permission"; the Qur'an's phrase for the source of every prophet's signs. Ch. 6

birr بِرّ *BIRR* devoted kindness; the word used for a child's goodness to parents, and in 60:8. Ch. 16

birr al-wālidayn بر الوالدين *BIRR al-waa-li-DAYN* generous, devoted kindness to one's parents, in their lifetime and after their death. Ch. 18

D

darajāt درجات *da-ra-JAAT* ranks or levels; paradise has many, reached through faith, good deeds and a life lived with the Qur'an. Ch. 14

dhanb ذَنْب *THANB (th as in "this")* a sin; a wrong that leaves behind it. Its plural, *dhunūb*, appears in Qur'an 39:53. Ch. 26

dhimma ذمّة *DHIM-ma* a covenant of protection between a Muslim state and a community of another faith. Ch. 16

F

fakk raqaba فكّ رقبة *FAKK RA-qa-ba* "untying a neck": the Qur'an's image for freeing a person from bondage (90:13). Ch. 23

fasād فساد *fa-SAAD* corruption or ruin: anything that spoils the good order of life (30:41). Ch. 21

fiṭra فطرة *FIT-ra* the inborn human nature that recognises its Creator. Ch. 1, 2, 26

fiṭrī فِطريّ *FIT-ree* in Shia law, an apostate who was born to at least one Muslim parent. Ch. 22

G

al-ghayb الغيب *al-GHAYB* the unseen: whatever lies beyond our senses, known fully only to God. Ch. 10

ghusl al-mayyit غُسْل المَيِّت *GHUSL al-MAY-yit* the washing of the dead: three gentle washes before the shroud. Ch. 12

H

ḥadd, pl. ḥudūd حَدّ / حُدود *HADD, hu-DOOD* a fixed penalty of Islamic law, for a lawful judge to apply. Ch. 22

ḥajj حَجّ *HAJJ* literally "setting out for" a place; the pilgrimage to Mecca, owed once in a lifetime by all who are able. Ch. 30

ḥanīf حنيف *ha-NEEF* one who turns from every false god to the one God; the Qur'an's word for Abraham. Ch. 7

ḥaqq al-nās حَقّ النّاس *HAQQ an-NAAS* "the rights of people": what we owe others, which must be repaired, not just regretted. Ch. 13

ḥaqq maʿlūm حق معلوم *HAQQ ma-LOOM* "a known right": the share in one's wealth owed to those in need (Qur'an 70:24). Ch. 29

ḥawza حَوْزَة *HAW-za* a Shia seminary for training scholars, such as those of Najaf and Qum. Ch. 25

ḥikma حِكْمَة *HIK-ma* wisdom: knowledge put to right use. Ch. 25

ḥujja حجة *HUJ-ja* "proof": a guide through whom God's guidance reaches people, so that no one is left without it. Ch. 3, 5

I

Iblīs شيطان / إبليس *ib-LEES, shay-TAAN* Iblis is the jinn who refused to bow to Adam; a *shayṭān* is any devil or tempter. Ch. 10

ʿĪd al-Fiṭr عِيد الفِطْر *EED al-FITR* the festival of breaking the fast, on the first day after Ramadan. Ch. 28

iftār إفْطار *if-TAAR* the meal that breaks the fast at sunset, often begun with a date and water. Ch. 28

iḥrām إحْرام *ih-RAAM* the consecrated state a pilgrim enters with intention and the talbiya; men wear two plain cloths. Ch. 30

iḥtikār احتكار *ih-ti-KAAR* hoarding staple food to push its price up; forbidden in Islamic law. Ch. 19

iʿjāz إعجاز *ij-AAZ* inimitability: the quality of the Qur'an that defeats every attempt to produce its like. Ch. 4

iʿjāz ʿilmī إعجاز علمي *ij-AAZ ILM-ee* "scientific miracle": the modern claim that verses foretold scientific discoveries. Ch. 5

ikrāh إكراه *ik-RAAH* compulsion. "There is no *ikrāh* in religion" (2:256): faith cannot be forced. Ch. 16

ʿilm علم *ILM* knowledge; in the hadith chiefly knowledge of faith, and by extension all true knowledge. Ch. 5, 25

imām إمام *ee-MAAM* a leader whom people follow; in the Qur'an, a rank God gave Abraham after his trials. Ch. 7, 8

īmān إيمان *ee-MAAN* faith: knowing what is true and embracing it in heart, word and deed. Ch. 2

ʿimāra عمارة *ʿi-MAA-ra* making land flourish by farming, planting and building; the task God gives people in 11:61. Ch. 21

Injīl إنجيل *in-JEEL* the Gospel: the scripture that God gave to Jesus, according to the Qur'an. Ch. 15

innā lillāhi wa innā ilayhi rājiʿūn إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ *IN-naa lil-LAA-hi wa IN-naa i-LAY-hi raa-ji-OON* "We belong to God, and to Him we are returning": said at news of a loss (Qur'an 2:156). Ch. 11

inṣāf إنصاف *in-SAAF* fairness that begins with yourself: giving others their due from your own side. Ch. 20

irtidād اِرتِداد *ir-ti-DAAD* apostasy: turning away from Islam after having been a Muslim. Such a person is a *murtadd*. Ch. 22

islām إسلام *is-LAAM* surrender to God. It comes from the root *s-l-m*, which it shares with *salām*, "peace." Ch. 1, 7

ʿiṣma عصمة *ISS-ma* God-given protection from sin, and from error in conveying His message. Ch. 3, 4, 8, 26

isrāf إسراف *is-RAAF* waste: using more than is needed, or throwing away what still has a use. Ch. 21

istighfār اِسْتِغْفار *is-tigh-FAAR* asking God's forgiveness; literally, asking Him to cover a wrong, as a helmet covers the head. Ch. 26

istikhlāf استخلاف *is-tikh-LAAF* stewardship: holding wealth as God's trustee rather than its absolute owner (Qur'an 57:7). Ch. 19

ʿitq عتق *ITQ* setting an enslaved person free. Done for God's sake, it counted as worship. Ch. 23

J

janna جنة *JAN-na* garden; the Qur'an's usual word for paradise, a place of rivers, fruit and shade. Ch. 14

jihād جهاد *ji-HAAD* striving in God's way, from a root meaning "effort"; in law, also armed struggle under strict conditions. Ch. 24

jihād al-nafs جهاد النفس *ji-HAAD an-NAFS* the struggle with one's own self, which a well-known report calls "the greater struggle." Ch. 9, 24

jinn جنّ *JINN* beings created from smokeless fire who, like humans, can believe or disbelieve, and will be judged. Ch. 10

juḥūd جُحود *ju-HOOD* knowing denial: rejecting what one has recognised as true. Doubt is not *juḥūd*. Ch. 22

K

kafan كَفَن *KA-fan* the shroud: three plain pieces of cloth, the same for rich and poor. Ch. 12

kaffāra كفّارة *kaf-FAA-ra* an expiation: a penalty that makes amends for a broken oath, a broken fast or another wrong. Ch. 23

karāma كرامة *ka-RAA-ma* the dignity God has given every human being (Qur'an 17:70). Ch. 20

khalīfa خليفة *kha-LEE-fa* a deputy who acts in another's name; the Qur'an's word for humanity's role on earth (2:30). Ch. 21

khāriq lil-ʿāda خارِق لِلعادة *KHAA-riq lil-AA-da* "breaking the habitual course": going beyond what usually happens, not against what reason allows. Ch. 6

khulʿ خلع *KHUL'* a divorce a wife asks for, returning her marriage gift or other property. Ch. 17

khums خمس *KHUMS* "the fifth": in Shia law, a fifth of what remains of a year's income after living costs. Ch. 19, 29

khushūʿ خُشوع *khu-SHOO (kh as in Scottish "loch")* humble, wholehearted presence before God in prayer. Ch. 27

kuttāb كُتّاب *kut-TAAB* an elementary school where children learned to read and write, starting with the Qur'an. Ch. 25

L

Laylat al-Qadr لَيْلَة القَدْر *LAY-lat al-QADR* the Night of Decree, when the Qur'an was sent down and the coming year is measured out. Ch. 28

luṭf لطف *LUTF* grace: God's help that draws people toward good without forcing them. Ch. 3

M

maʿād مَعاد *ma-AAD* "the Return": resurrection and judgement, one of the five foundations of Shia belief. Ch. 13

mahr مهر *MAHR* the marriage gift a husband owes his wife. It belongs to her alone, to keep or to give. Ch. 17

malak, pl. malāʾika ملك / ملائكة *MA-lak, ma-LAA-ʾi-ka* an angel: an honoured servant and messenger of God who never disobeys Him. Ch. 10

mā malakat aymānukum ما ملكت أيمانكم *maa MA-la-kat ay-MAA-nu-kum* "what your right hands possess": the Qur'an's phrase for enslaved people. Ch. 23

marjaʿ مرجع *MAR-jaʿ* "reference": the senior jurist whose rulings a Shia Muslim follows. Ch. 29

al-Masīḥ المسيح *al-ma-SEEH* the Messiah, the Qur'an's title for Jesus son of Mary (*Īsā ibn Maryam*). Ch. 15

mawadda wa raḥma مودة ورحمة *ma-WAD-da wa RAH-ma* love and mercy: the bond God places between spouses, love that acts and mercy that meets need (Qur'an 30:21). Ch. 18

mawlā مولى *MAW-laa* master, guardian or close friend; the key word of the Prophet's words at Ghadir Khumm. Ch. 8

millī مِلّي *MIL-lee* in Shia law, an apostate who had first converted to Islam from another faith. Ch. 22

mīthāq ميثاق *mee-THAAQ* a binding covenant. The Qur'an calls marriage "a solid pledge" (4:21), words it also uses for God's covenants. Ch. 18

mīzān مِيزان *mee-ZAAN* the scale: God's exact justice in weighing every deed, however small. Ch. 13, 21

mubāhala مباهلة *mu-BAA-ha-la* a solemn mutual prayer calling down God's curse on whoever is lying (3:61). Ch. 16

muʿjiza مُعْجِزة *MU-ji-za* a miracle: an act beyond nature's ordinary course, brought to prove a mission from God, which no one can match. Ch. 6

mujtahida مجتهدة *muj-TA-hi-da* a woman qualified to derive Islamic law herself, directly from its sources. Ch. 17

mukātaba مكاتبة *mu-KAA-ta-ba* a written contract by which enslaved people buy their own freedom in instalments. Ch. 23

mumkin al-wujūd ممكن الوجود *MUM-kin al-wu-JOOD* a contingent being: one that may exist or not, and so receives its existence from another. Ch. 2

muṣḥaf مصحف *MUS-haf* a written copy of the whole Qur'an, bound between two covers. Ch. 4

muslim مسلم *MUS-lim* a person who surrenders to God. Ch. 1

mustaḍʿaf مستضعَف *mus-TAD-af* "one made weak": someone the truth never truly reached, whose case rests with God. Ch. 16

N

nabī, rasūl نبي / رسول *NA-bee, ra-SOOL* prophet, messenger. Every messenger is a prophet; a messenger is also sent to a people with a mission. Ch. 3

nafs نفس *NAFS* the self: the living, wanting, choosing "I"; often just "a person." Ch. 9

nafs wāḥida نفس واحدة *NAFS WAA-hi-da* "a single soul": the Qur'an's phrase for the one shared origin of women and men (4:1). Ch. 17

niṣāb نصاب *ni-SAAB* the threshold an asset must reach before zakat falls due on it; below it, nothing is owed. Ch. 29

nushūz نشوز *nu-SHOOZ* serious defiance of the marriage bond, by a wife or by a husband (4:34; 4:128). Ch. 17

Q

qalb قلب *QALB* the heart: not the organ, but the inner centre where understanding and faith live. Ch. 9

qiṣāṣ قصاص *qi-SAAS* fair retaliation for an injury: a right that the victim may choose to waive. Ch. 15

qisṭ قسط *QIST* equity: the fair share and the honest measure, applied to everyone alike, friend or stranger. Ch. 20

qitāl قتال *qi-TAAL* fighting, combat: the Qur'an's plain word for armed battle. Ch. 24

qiwāma قوامة *qi-WAA-ma* a husband's responsibility to provide for and take charge of his household (4:34). Ch. 17

R

raḥma رحمة *RAH-ma* mercy: compassion that acts. The Qur'an gives this word to both Jesus and Muhammad. Ch. 15

rakʿa رَكْعَة *RAK-ah* one unit of prayer: standing, reciting, bowing and two prostrations. Ch. 27

ribā ربا *RI-baa* an increase fixed in advance on a loan; Islamic law forbids taking or paying it. Ch. 19

riḍwān رضوان *rid-WAAN* God's good pleasure, which the Qur'an calls greater than all the gardens (9:72). Ch. 14

rizq رزق *RIZQ* provision: all that God gives to sustain a life, which people still seek through honest effort. Ch. 19

rūḥ روح *ROOH* the spirit God breathes into each human being: created, and "from the command of my Lord." Ch. 9

ruʾya رؤية *ROO-ya* "seeing" God; Shia teaching holds that no eye will ever see Him, though hearts perceive Him. Ch. 14

S

sabab, pl. asbāb سبب / أسباب *SA-bab, as-BAAB* a cause: the means through which God works in the world. Ch. 5

ṣabr صَبْر *SABR* patience: steady endurance in doing right. Not passivity, and not pretending not to hurt. Ch. 11

ṣabr jamīl صَبْر جَمِيل *SABR ja-MEEL* "beautiful patience": grief taken to God rather than complained of to people (Qur'an 12:18). Ch. 11

ṣadaqa صدقة *SA-da-qa* charity, usually voluntary: a gift of any size, to anyone in need. Ch. 29

ṣadaqa jāriya صَدَقَة جَارِيَة *SA-da-qa JAA-ri-ya* "flowing charity": a good work whose reward keeps reaching a person after death. Ch. 12

ṣalāh صَلاة *sa-LAAH* the ritual prayer Muslims offer five times a day, with set words and movements. Ch. 27

salām سلام *sa-LAAM* peace; the greeting of paradise, and the air its people breathe. Ch. 14

ṣawm صَوْم *SAWM* fasting: going without food, drink and certain other things, from dawn to sunset, for God. Ch. 28

saʿy سَعْي *SA-ee* "striving": walking seven times between the hills of Ṣafā and Marwa, in Hagar's footsteps. Ch. 30

shafāʿa شَفاعة *sha-FAA-ʿa* intercession: a plea to God for someone else, made only by His permission. Ch. 13

sharīʿa شريعة *sha-REE-ah* a revealed law; the Qur'an says each community was given its own. Ch. 7

shīʿa شيعة *SHEE-ah* "followers" or "partisans"; short for *shīʿat ʿAlī*, the followers of Ali. Ch. 8

siḥr سِحْر *SIHR* sorcery or illusion, resting on skills that others can learn. Ch. 6, 10

ṣilat al-raḥim صلة الرحم *SI-lat ar-RA-him* keeping the ties of kinship with the wider family; literally, "joining the womb." Ch. 18

ṣirāṭ صِراط *si-RAAT* "the path"; in the hereafter, the bridge over the Fire that every soul must cross. Ch. 13

suḥūr سُحُور *su-HOOR* the meal eaten before dawn on a fasting day. Ch. 28

sunna سنّة *SOON-na* the Prophet's example: what he said, did and approved. Sunnis are *ahl al-sunna*, "people of the Prophet's way." Ch. 8

sūra سورة *SOO-ra* one of the Qur'an's 114 chapters; the shortest has three verses, the longest 286. Ch. 4

T

taḥrīf تحريف *tah-REEF* distortion of a scripture, whether of its words or of its meaning. Ch. 4

takfīr تكفير *tak-FEER* declaring a Muslim to be an unbeliever; al-Sistani condemns its use to justify violence. Ch. 22, 24

talbiya تَلْبِيَة *TAL-bee-ya* the pilgrim's cry, *labbayka llāhumma labbayk*: "Here I am, O God, here I am." Ch. 30

taqwā تَقْوى *TAQ-waa* God-consciousness: a guarding awareness of God that shapes what a person does (Qur'an 2:183). Ch. 28

tasalsul تسلسل *ta-SAL-sul* an endless chain of causes, each depending on the one before it. Ch. 2

Tasnīm تسنيم *tas-NEEM* a spring of paradise; those brought nearest to God drink from it (83:27–28). Ch. 14

ṭawāf طَواف *ta-WAAF* circling the Kaʿba seven times, keeping it on one's left. Ch. 30

tawātur تَواتُر *ta-WAA-tur* mass transmission: a report carried by so many independent witnesses that collusion is not credible. Ch. 6

tawba تَوْبَة *TAW-ba* repentance; literally "turning back." When God "turns" (*tāba*), He turns to us in mercy. Ch. 26

tawḥīd توحيد *taw-HEED* the oneness of God, the foundation of every Islamic belief. Ch. 1

tazkiya تزكية *taz-KEE-ya* purifying the self so that it grows; its root means both "to be pure" and "to thrive." Ch. 9

thaqalayn الثقلين *tha-qa-LAYN* "the two weighty things": the Qur'an and the Prophet's household. Ch. 8

ṭulaqāʾ طلقاء *tu-la-QAA* "the freed ones": the people of Mecca, whom the Prophet set free in 630 CE. Ch. 15

turba تُرْبَة *TUR-ba* a small tablet of clean earth, often from Karbala, on which the forehead rests in prostration. Ch. 27

U

ulū al-ʿazm أولو العزم *OO-loo al-AZM* "the resolute": Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad, who each brought a new law. Ch. 7

umm walad أمّ ولد *UMM WA-lad* "mother of a child": an enslaved woman who bore her master's child, and could go free through that child. Ch. 23

ʿuqūq عقوق *ʿu-QOOQ* wounding, neglecting or disowning one's parents, counted among the major sins. Ch. 18

W

waḥy وحي *WAH-yee* revelation: God's communication to a prophet. The Qur'an uses the same word for His guidance of the bee. Ch. 3, 4

wājib al-wujūd واجب الوجود *WAA-jib al-wu-JOOD* the Necessary Being: the One who exists by Himself and gives existence to everything else. Ch. 2

wājib kifāʾī وَاجِب كِفَائِي *WAA-jib ki-FAA-ee* a collective duty: once some people fulfil it, everyone else is released. Ch. 12, 25

walāya وَلَايَة *wa-LAA-ya* loving loyalty to the Prophet's family, the Ahl al-Bayt, as God's chosen guides. Ch. 12

waqf وَقْف *WAKF* an endowment: property given for good causes for ever, such as a school, a library or a hospital. Ch. 25

waswasa وسوسة *WAS-wa-sa* whispering: the suggestions a tempter slips into the heart. Ch. 10

wuḍū’ وُضوء *wu-DOO* the washing before prayer: face and arms are washed, then head and feet wiped. Ch. 27

wuqūf وُقوف *woo-KOOF* “standing”: being present on the plain of ʿArafāt from noon to sunset on the ninth day. Ch. 30

Y

yawm al-qiyāma يَوم القِيامة *YOWM al-qi-YAA-ma* the Day of Rising, when all people are raised, gathered and judged. Ch. 13

Z

zakāt زكاة *za-KAAT* obligatory alms due on specified kinds of wealth, such as crops, livestock, gold and silver. Ch. 19, 29

zindīq زنديق *zin-DEEQ* in the Imams’ time, a freethinker or dualist who denied God or revelation. Ch. 2

ziyāra زيارة *zi-YAA-ra* a visit to the grave of a prophet or Imam, and the greeting recited there. Ch. 20

ẓulm ظلم *ZULM* wrongdoing; literally, putting something where it does not belong. The opposite of *ʿadl*. Ch. 20

People in this book

The prophets, companions and scholars who appear most often in these pages. The prophets are given with their Arabic names. Dates are CE. The Prophet's family and the Twelve Imams are listed at the front of the book.

PROPHETS AND THE RIGHTEOUS

Adam · *Adam* · The first human being, whom God taught "the names" (2:31).

Noah · *Nuh* · He called his people for nine hundred and fifty years before the flood (29:14).

Abraham · *Ibrahim* · God's "friend" (4:125), father of Ishmael and Isaac. With Ishmael he raised the Ka'ba (2:127).

Ishmael · *Isma'il* · Abraham's son through Hagar. The Prophet Muhammad (s) is his descendant.

Isaac · *Ishaq* · Abraham's son through Sarah, and the father of Jacob.

Jacob · *Ya'qub* · Also called Israel. The twelve tribes descend from him.

Joseph · *Yusuf* · Jacob's son, sold by his brothers and later trusted with Egypt's stores (Sura 12).

Job · *Ayyub* · The prophet of patience in suffering (21:83–84).

Moses · *Musa* · God spoke to him (4:164). He received the Torah and led the Israelites out of Egypt.

Aaron · *Harun* · Moses' brother and helper (20:29–32).

David · *Dawud* · Prophet and king, given the Psalms (*Zabur*) (4:163).

Solomon · *Sulayman* · David's son, prophet and king.

Elisha · *al-Yasa'* · A prophet of Israel named in the Qur'an (6:86).

Ezekiel · *Hizqil* · A prophet of Israel, cited by Imam al-Rida (a) in debate (Chapter 6).

Jonah · *Yunus* · He called to God from the darkness and was saved (21:87–88).

Zechariah · *Zakariyya* · The guardian of Mary in the sanctuary (3:37).

Jesus · *'Isa* · Born of Mary without a father; God's messenger and His word (4:171). Muslims believe he will return.

Mary · *Maryam* · The mother of Jesus. She is the only woman the Qur'an names, and Sura 19 bears her name.

FAMILY AND COMPANIONS

Lady Khadija (d. 619) · The Prophet's first wife and the first to believe in him.

Abu Talib (d. 619) · The Prophet's uncle and protector, and the father of Imam Ali (a).

Lady Zaynab (d. 682) · Daughter of Imam Ali (a) and Lady Fatima (a). She survived Karbala and spoke for it.

Salman al-Farisi (d. c. 656) · A Persian seeker who became one of the Prophet's closest companions (Chapter 1).

Abu Dharr al-Ghifari (d. 652) · An early companion, remembered for speaking out against hoarded wealth.

ʿAmmar ibn Yasir (d. 657) · An early believer whose parents were among the first martyrs. He fell at Siffin, fighting beside Imam Ali (a).

Bilal ibn Rabah (d. c. 640) · An Abyssinian, once enslaved, who became the Prophet's caller to prayer.

Malik al-Ashtar (d. 658) · Imam Ali's commander, to whom he wrote his famous letter on government (*Nahj al-Balagha*, Letter 53).

Kumayl ibn Ziyad (d. c. 702) · A companion of Imam Ali (a), who taught him the supplication that bears his name.

Zurara ibn Aʿyan (d. 767) · One of the leading students of Imam al-Baqir (a) and Imam al-Sadiq (a).

Hisham ibn al-Hakam · A theologian among the students of Imam al-Sadiq (a) and Imam al-Kazim (a).

SCHOLARS WHOSE WORKS ARE QUOTED

al-Kulayni (d. 941) · Compiler of *al-Kafi*, the most important Shia collection of hadith.

al-Saduq, Ibn Babawayh (d. 991) · Compiler of *Man la yahduruhu al-faqih* and many other collections.

al-Sharif al-Radi (d. 1015) · Compiler of *Nahj al-Balagha*, the sermons, letters and sayings of Imam Ali (a).

al-Mufid (d. 1022) · Theologian and jurist of Baghdad, author of *al-Irshad*.

al-Tusi (d. 1067) · Jurist and Qur'an commentator, compiler of *Tahdhib al-ahkam*.

al-Tabrisi (d. 1154) · Author of the Qur'an commentary *Majmaʿ al-bayan*.

al-Muhaqqiq al-Hilli (d. 1277) · Author of *Sharaʾiʿ al-Islam*, the standard classical manual of Shia law.

al-ʿAllama al-Hilli (d. 1325) · Theologian and jurist whose short creed is still taught.

al-Majlisi (d. 1699) · Compiler of *Bihar al-anwar*, and author of *Mirʾat al-ʿuqul*, which grades the reports of *al-Kafi*.

al-Tabataba'i (d. 1981) · Philosopher and author of the Qur'an commentary *al-Mizan*.

al-Khu'i (d. 1992) · Jurist of Najaf, author of *al-Bayan*, an introduction to the Qur'an.

al-Sistani (b. 1930) · A leading Shia jurist (*marjaʿ*), based in Najaf.

Timeline

From the Prophet's birth to the age of the great scholars. Dates are CE, with AH (years after the Hijra) where the sources give them.

- **c. 570** · The Prophet Muhammad (s) is born in Mecca, in the Year of the Elephant.
- **c. 600** · Ali ibn Abi Talib (a) is born in Mecca, thirty years after the Year of the Elephant.
- **610** · The first revelation comes to the Prophet (s) on Mount Hira. His mission begins.
- **c. 615** · Lady Fatima (a), the Prophet's daughter, is born in Mecca.
- **c. 619** · The "Year of Sorrow": Lady Khadija (a), the Prophet's wife and first believer, and Abu Talib, his uncle and protector, both die.
- **622** · The Hijra: the Prophet (s) and his followers emigrate to Medina. The Islamic calendar counts its years from here.
- **624 (2 AH)** · The Battle of Badr.
- **630 (8 AH)** · The Prophet (s) returns to Mecca and pardons its people.
- **632 (10 AH)** · The Farewell Pilgrimage. On the way home, at Ghadir Khumm, the Prophet (s) declares, "Whoever's master I am, Ali is his master."
- **632 (11 AH)** · The Prophet (s) dies in Medina. Lady Fatima (a) dies seventy-five days later.
- **656** · Imam Ali (a) becomes caliph.
- **661 (40 AH)** · Imam Ali (a) is struck down while praying in the mosque of Kufa and dies in Ramadan. He is buried in Najaf.
- **669/670 (49/50 AH)** · Imam al-Hasan (a) dies in Medina.
- **680 (61 AH)** · Karbala: on the tenth of Muharram ('Ashura), Imam al-Husayn (a), his family and companions are killed.
- **713 (95 AH)** · Imam Zayn al-Abidin (a), whose prayers fill al-Sahifa al-Sajjadiyya, dies in Medina.
- **733 (114 AH)** · Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a) dies in Medina.
- **765 (148 AH)** · Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (a), teacher of a great generation of scholars, dies in Medina.
- **799 (183 AH)** · Imam Musa al-Kazim (a) dies in prison in Baghdad.
- **818 (203 AH)** · Imam Ali al-Rida (a) dies in Tus, today's Mashhad.
- **835 (220 AH)** · Imam Muhammad al-Jawad (a) dies in Baghdad.

868 (254 AH) · Imam Ali al-Hadi (a) dies in Samarra.

869 (255 AH) · Imam Muhammad al-Mahdi (a) is born.

874 (260 AH) · Imam al-Hasan al-ʿAskari (a) dies in Samarra. The Minor Occultation begins: the Twelfth Imam guides his followers through four deputies.

941 (329 AH) · The Major Occultation begins. In the same year al-Kulayni, compiler of *al-Kafi*, dies.

991 (381 AH) · Al-Shaykh al-Saduq, compiler of *Man la yahduruhu al-faqih*, dies.

1015 (406 AH) · Al-Sharif al-Radi, compiler of *Nahj al-Balagha*, dies.

1022 (413 AH) · Al-Shaykh al-Mufid, theologian and teacher of a generation, dies in Baghdad.

1067 (460 AH) · Al-Shaykh al-Tusi, compiler of *Tahdhib al-ahkam* and *al-Istibsar*, dies in Najaf, where he had gathered the students who began its seminary.

1699 (1110 AH) · ʿAllama Muhammad Baqir al-Majlisi, compiler of *Bihar al-anwar* and commentator on *al-Kafi*, dies in Isfahan.

Notes

CHAPTER 1 · WHY ISLAM?

1. The fullest Shia account of Salman's conversion is narrated from Imam Musa al-Kazim (a): Ibn Bābawayh al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn wa tamām al-niʿma*, bāb 9 ("The report of Salmān al-Fārisī"), ḥadīth 1. thaqalayn.net/hadith/39/2/9/1. Its chain includes an unnamed narrator (unverified chain). The broad outline appears in many early histories, Shia and Sunni, which differ in their details. The opener also draws on Ibn Isḥāq's account, which al-Rāwandī's *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* transmits through al-Ṣadūq (al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* 22:362–66). The saying "Salmān is one of us, the people of the house" is in al-Ṣadūq, *ʿUyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, vol. 2, in the collected reports transmitted through Imam al-Riḍā (a), ḥadīth 283 in the Thaqalayn numbering. thaqalayn.net/hadith/12/1/1/283. Not graded.
2. al-ʿAllāma al-Ḥillī (d. 726/1325), *al-Bāb al-ḥādī ʿashar*, opening section ("The necessity of knowing the principles of religion"). Knowing God, His attributes, prophecy, the Imamate and the Return is obligatory and, in al-Ḥillī's own words, must come "by proof (*dalīl*), not by imitation (*taqlīd*)" (*bi-l-dalīl lā bi-l-taqlīd*). English: W. M. Miller (trans.), *Al-Bābu ʾl-Ḥādī ʿAshar*, with the commentary of al-Miqdād al-Suyūrī (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1928).
3. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 60 ("Love and aversion for the sake of God"), ḥadīth 5, narrated by Fuḍayl ibn Yasār from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 8:259). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/60/5. Translation: this companion.
4. al-Sayyid ʿAlī al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws*, Chapter One, "Following a Jurist (Taqlīd)," Ruling 1. sistani.org/english/book/48/2117/.
5. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Saying 125 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/3/125/151. Parallel versions appear in al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 22, ḥadīth 1, and in al-Ṣadūq, *Maʿānī al-akhbār*. Translation: this companion.
6. John 14:16, 15:26 and 16:7 speak of the coming of the "Comforter" (KJV; Greek *paraklētos*); Christians identify him with the Holy Spirit (John 14:26). In a debate before al-Maʾmūn, Imam ʿAlī al-Riḍā (a) cited this Gospel promise of the *Bāraqlīṭā* to the Catholicos as a prophecy of Muḥammad (s): al-Ṣadūq, *ʿUyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, vol. 1, bāb 12, ḥadīth 1; thaqalayn.net/hadith/11/2/12/1 (unverified chain; its isnād includes an unnamed narrator). On Qurʾān 61:6 in Shia exegesis, see al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, commentary on 61:6.
7. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb 64 (on God's and the Messenger's explicit designation of the Imams), ḥadīth 4, from Imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir (a): "Each obligation was revealed after another, and the guardianship (*wilāya*) was the last of the obligations. Then God revealed: *Today I have completed your religion for you…*" Al-Majlisī: ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 3:250). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/4/64/4. Translation: this companion.
8. Some commentators read Qurʾān 7:172 as an event before our lives on earth, as Imam al-Bāqir (a) explains it; others read it as a picture of what every person witnesses in this life: their need for a Lord. Al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī sets out the objections raised against the first reading in *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān* 8:311–12.
9. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 6 ("God created people with knowledge of His oneness in their nature"), ḥadīth 4, narrated by Zurāra from Imam al-Bāqir (a). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 7:57); al-Bihbūdī includes it in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* (1:65–66). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/6/4. The Imams teach that God is never seen with the eyes. "Showed them Himself" here means that He made Himself known to them (see Chapter 2). Translation: this companion.
10. The five foundations (*uṣūl al-dīn*) as usually taught in the Shia tradition are the oneness of God (*tawḥīd*), divine justice (*ʿadl*), prophethood (*nubuwwa*), the Imamate (*imāma*) and the Return

(*maʿād*). In this book see Chapter 2 (God), Chapter 11 (justice and suffering), Chapters 3–4 (prophethood and revelation), Chapter 8 (the Imamate) and Chapters 12–14 (the Return).

11. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 190 ("Intending a good or a bad deed"), ḥadīth 4, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), quoting the Prophet (s). The angel's words cite Qurʾān 11:114, "Good deeds remove bad deeds." Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ. thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/190/4. Abridged; translation: this companion.
12. On Bilāl ibn Rabāḥ as the Prophet's muezzin, who refused to give the call to prayer for anyone after the Prophet's death, see al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, vol. 1, bāb 45 ("The call to prayer…"), ḥadīth 9. thaqalayn.net/hadith/34/1/45/9. On Salmān, see note 1.
13. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 18 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/18/4. Translation: this companion.
14. al-Ṣadūq, *ʿUyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, vol. 2, ḥadīth 32 of the second section (Thaqalayn numbering), transmitted by Imam al-Riḍā (a) from his father, Imam Mūsā al-Kāẓim (a): a man put the question to Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). thaqalayn.net/hadith/12/1/2/32. Ungraded in the data; its chain runs through literary narrators. Translation: this companion.
15. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-ʿishra, bāb 26 ("Good companionship and the rights of a fellow traveller"), ḥadīth 5, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), from his forefathers. Al-Majlisī gives no grading (unverified chain). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/4/26/5. Retold, not translated word for word.
16. For the Shia reports, see al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn wa tamām al-niʿma*, bāb 24 ("The Prophet's designation of the Qāʾim"), e.g. ḥadīth 1–3. thaqalayn.net/hadith/39/2/24/1. The same promise appears in Sunni collections, e.g. Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, Kitāb al-Mahdī, no. 4282, from ʿAbd Allāh ibn Masʿūd (Sunni source; graded ḥasan ṣaḥīḥ by al-Albānī).
17. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 13 ("The pillars of Islam"), ḥadīth 5, narrated by Zurāra from Imam al-Bāqir (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 7:102). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/13/5. Translation: this companion.
18. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 37 ("Scrupulous restraint"), ḥadīth 14, narrated by Ibn Abī Yaʿfūr from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 8:65); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ. thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/37/14. Translation: this companion.

CHAPTER 2 · PROVING GOD'S EXISTENCE

1. The Qurʾān calls the scene Abraham's argument with his people (6:83). Al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, commentary on 6:74–83, weighs two readings of "This is my Lord": a supposition put to the test, or, the reading he finds better supported by 19:43–47, Abraham conceding his people's premise for the sake of argument in order to expose it, a method that wins a fairer hearing. Either way it is not a belief held. He takes the star to be Venus, and treats "I do not love things that set" as a real argument: worship rests on love, and the heart cannot rest its love on what fades. A report preserved by al-Ṣadūq from Imam al-Riḍā (a) agrees: Abraham spoke "by way of disavowal and inquiry" (*ʿalā al-inkār wa-l-istikhbār*), "because setting is a mark of what is originated, not of what is eternal." Al-Ṣadūq, *ʿUyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, vol. 1, bāb 15, ḥadīth 1. thaqalayn.net/hadith/11/2/15/1. Ungraded in the data; al-Ṣadūq himself notes that its narrator, ʿAlī b. Muḥammad b. al-Jahm, was hostile to the Prophet's family (unverified chain). Translation: this companion.
2. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Saying 227 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/3/227/275. Translation: this companion.
3. al-Sayyid ʿAlī al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws*, Chapter One, "Following a Jurist (Taqlīd)," Ruling 1. sistani.org/english/book/48/2117/. See also Chapter 1 of this book.
4. ʿAllāma Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī (d. 1402/1981), *Uṣūl-i falsafa wa rawish-i riʾālism* ("The Principles of Philosophy and the Method of Realism"), with the commentary of Murtaḍā Muṭahharī. Its starting point is the reality of the world, which even the sceptic relies on in doubting it. Described, not quoted.

5. The maxim *fāqid al-shayʾ lā yuʿṭīhi*, "what lacks a thing cannot give it," is a commonplace of Islamic philosophy and theology. Here it applies to existence: what does not have existence cannot give it.
6. al-Ṣadūq, *al-Tawḥīd*, bāb 42 ("The Assertion of the Emergence of the Universe"), ḥadīth 3. thaqalayn.net/hadith/14/2/42/3. Ungraded in the data (unverified chain). The corpus reads «مثلم»; read «مثلك», "like you." Translation: this companion.
7. Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037), *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, namaṭ 4, on the existent that is necessary in itself and the existent that is possible (contingent) in itself. Described, not quoted.
8. Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274), *Tajrīd al-iʿtiqād*, with the commentary of al-ʿAllāma al-Ḥillī (d. 726/1325), *Kashf al-murād*, in the part on proving the Maker. Their argument runs: whatever exists is either necessary in itself or rests, in the end, on what is necessary, since circular causation (*dawr*) and an endless chain (*tasalsul*) are both impossible. Described, not quoted.
9. Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, namaṭ 4, with al-Ṭūsī's commentary (Qum, 1996), vol. 3, pp. 66–67, where he calls his proof that of "the truthful" (*al-ṣiddīqīn*) and links it to the end of Qurʾān 41:53. Mullā Ṣadrā's version (his "method of the truthful"): *al-Asfār al-arbaʿa*, Journey III, vol. 6, pp. 17–18 (2001–5 ed.). Both as cited in S. Rizvi, "Mulla Sadra," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (plato.stanford.edu/entries/mulla-sadra). Ṣadrā's death is traditionally dated 1050/1640–41; his grandson gives 1045/1635–36.
10. Planck Collaboration, "Planck 2018 results. VI. Cosmological parameters," *Astronomy & Astrophysics* 641 (2020), A6: an age of 13.787 ± 0.020 billion years. The "singularity" of the classical models lies beyond the range where general relativity is known to hold, and what came "before" remains an open question.
11. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-tawḥīd, bāb 1 ("The origination of the world and the proof of its Originator"), ḥadīth 3, narrated by Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Khurāsānī, a servant of Imam al-Riḍā (a). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/3/1/3. No grading by al-Majlisī in the data. The parallel in al-Ṣadūq, *al-Tawḥīd*, bāb 36, ḥadīth 3 (thaqalayn.net/hadith/14/2/36/3), shows that the chain runs through Abū Samīna Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Ṣayrafī, whom the biographers judged weak (weak chain). Translation: this companion.
12. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-tawḥīd, bāb 2 ("Can God be called a thing?"), ḥadīth 4, narrated by Zurāra b. Aʿyan from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 1:284); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 1:13). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/3/2/4. The last line quotes Qurʾān 42:11. Translation: this companion.
13. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 1 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/1/3. Translation: this companion.
14. The two errors are named in a report from Imam Abū Jaʿfar (a): asked whether God may be called "a thing," he said yes, in a sense that "takes Him out of the two limits: the limit of emptying (*taʿṭīl*) and the limit of likening (*tashbīh*)." al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-tawḥīd, bāb 2, ḥadīth 7. Al-Majlisī: mursal (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 1:294) (unverified chain). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/3/2/7. Ḥadīth 2 of the same bāb gives the same words from "Abū Jaʿfar al-Thānī," Imam Muḥammad al-Jawād (a), the ninth Imam (al-Majlisī: ḍaʿīf, *Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 1:282; thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/3/2/2). Translation: this companion.
15. al-Ṣadūq, *al-Tawḥīd*, bāb 9 ("Omnipotence"), ḥadīth 9, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), from Imam ʿAlī (a). thaqalayn.net/hadith/14/2/9/9. Ungraded in the data (unverified chain). In the same bāb, ḥadīth 11 (graded *muʿtabar al-isnād* by Hādī al-Najafī, *Mawsūʿat aḥādīth Ahl al-Bayt* 9:89; thaqalayn.net/hadith/14/2/9/11), Imam al-Riḍā (a) answers a looser form of the riddle with an image: God has already placed the heavens and the earth inside something smaller than an egg, the human eye. Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) gives the same image answer to al-Dayṣānī in al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-tawḥīd, bāb 1, ḥadīth 4 (al-Majlisī: *majhūl*; thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/3/1/4): an answer suited to the questioner, beside Imam ʿAlī's logical one. Translation: this companion.
16. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 185 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/185/7. Translation: this companion.

17. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-tawḥīd, bāb 1, ḥadīth 4. Al-Majlisī: majhūl (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 1:256) (unverified chain). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/3/1/4. The Dayṣāniyya, named after Bardaiṣān of Edessa, taught a dualism of light and darkness. Retold; the Imam's words translated by this companion.
18. al-Ṣadūq, *al-Tawḥīd*, bāb 36 ("The Refutation of the Dualists and the Atheists"), ḥadīth 2, narrated by Hishām b. al-Ḥakam. thaqalayn.net/hadith/14/2/36/2. Ungraded in the data; its narrators (Ibn al-Walīd, al-Ṣaffār, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. ʿĪsā, Ibn Abī ʿUmayr and Hishām) are all well regarded in the Shia biographical works. Translation: this companion.
19. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Letter 31, to his son al-Ḥasan (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/2/31/151. Abridged; translation: this companion.
20. The Smith–Van Dyck Arabic Bible (1865), Genesis 1:1: «فِي ٱلْبَدْءِ خَلَقَ ٱللهُ ٱلسَّمَاوَاتِ وَٱلْأَرْضَ».
21. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 179 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ), Imam ʿAlī's (a) answer to Dhiʿlib al-Yamānī. thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/179/1 and /2. Parallels: al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-tawḥīd, bāb 9 ("The invalidity of the belief that God can be seen"), ḥadīth 6 (al-Majlisī: majhūl, *Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 1:337; thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/3/9/6), and bāb 22, ḥadīth 4 (al-Majlisī: marfūʿ; thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/3/22/4). Translation: this companion.
22. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-tawḥīd, bāb 1, ḥadīth 2. Al-Majlisī: ḍaʿīf (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 1:244) (weak chain). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/3/1/2. The report continues, through a link al-Kulaynī marks as *marfūʿ*, with a second and third day of questions and a meeting at the next year's pilgrimage. Abridged; translation: this companion.
23. The purse: the same report as note 22 (weak chain); paraphrased, except for the Imam's closing words. The Egyptian: al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-tawḥīd, bāb 1, ḥadīth 1, narrated by Hishām b. al-Ḥakam. Al-Majlisī: majhūl (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 1:235) (unverified chain). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/3/1/1. Translations: this companion.
24. Imam al-Ṣādiq's (a) words: note 22. Imam al-Riḍā's (a): note 11 (weak chain). Blaise Pascal's wager is in his *Pensées*, published after his death, in 1670.
25. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Saying 250 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/3/250/301. Many printed editions add a third phrase, «وَنَقْضِ الْهِمَمِ» ("and the collapse of aspirations"); the Thaqalayn text does not. Translation: this companion.
26. The same report as note 11 (weak chain). Paraphrased, except for the closing words; translation: this companion.
27. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-tawḥīd, bāb 4 ("The least degree of knowing God"), ḥadīth 3, narrated by Ibrāhīm b. ʿUmar from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 1:302). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/3/4/3. Translation: this companion.

CHAPTER 3 · DOES HUMANITY NEED PROPHETS?

1. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb 1 ("The necessity of the presence of Divine Authority among the people"), ḥadīth 3, narrated by Yūnus ibn Yaʿqūb. Al-Majlisī: majhūl (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 2:265) (unverified chain), so it is told here as a treasured narrative, not as proof. thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/4/1/3. ʿAmr ibn ʿUbayd was a famous early Muʿtazilī theologian of Basra. Retold, with some exchanges shortened; quoted lines translated by this companion.
2. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ʿaql wa-l-jahl, ḥadīth 35, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), narrated by al-Ḥasan ibn ʿAmmār. No grading by al-Majlisī is recorded in the Thaqalayn data, and its narrators are little known (unverified chain); the same point rests on the reliable report in note 3. Chapter 5 quotes the report and its key clause, «فَلَمْ يَجِدْ عَقْلُهُ يَدُلُّهُ عَلَى ذَلِكَ»: reason does not show the particulars of what God loves and forbids. thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/1/0/35.
3. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb 1, ḥadīth 2, narrated by Manṣūr ibn Ḥāzim. Al-Majlisī: majhūl ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ, "one narrator unidentified, but as good as ṣaḥīḥ" (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 2:262). The Imam's blessing comes at the end of Manṣūr's whole argument, which continues as told in "Does guidance end with the last prophet?" thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/4/1/2. Translation: this companion.
4. al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī (d. 1402/1981), *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, vol. 2, p. 131 (commentary on Qurʾān 2:213; page as in the 20-volume edition digitised by OpenITI). He calls this the general proof of

prophethood: human beings are by nature inclined to make use of others (*mustakhdim bi-l-ṭabʿ*), which produces both society and conflict; nature cannot cure what nature causes, so the cure must come through revelation. Summarised, not quoted.

5. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ʿaql wa-l-jahl, ḥadīth 12, Imam Mūsā al-Kāẓim's (a) long teaching to Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam. Al-Majlisī: mursal, its chain incomplete (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 1:38) (unverified chain). A similar saying, "God's proof over His servants is the Prophet, and the proof between His servants and God is the intellect," is in the same book, ḥadīth 22 (al-Majlisī: ḍaʿīf, *Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 1:80; thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/1/0/22). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/1/0/12. Translation: this companion.
6. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb 1, ḥadīth 1, Imam al-Ṣādiq's (a) reply to a *zindīq*, a sceptic who denied revelation. The word for the envoys is *sufarāʾ*, "ambassadors." Al-Majlisī: majhūl (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 2:256) (unverified chain); the argument stands on its own reasoning. thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/4/1/1. Summarised; translation: this companion.
7. al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, *al-Nukat al-iʿtiqādiyya*, defining *luṭf* as «ما يقرّب المكلَّف معه من الطاعة، ويبعده عن المعصية، ولا حظ له في التمكين، ولم يبلغ الإلجاء»: "what brings the responsible person closer to obedience and further from disobedience, plays no part in giving him the ability to act, and stops short of compulsion." Cited from p. 35 as quoted on areq.net ("Burhān al-luṭf"), which does not name the edition. Translation: this companion.
8. Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274), *Tajrīd al-iʿtiqād*, with al-ʿAllāma al-Ḥillī's (d. 726/1325) commentary *Kashf al-murād*: «الإمام لطف، فيجب نصبه على الله تحصيلاً للغرض», "the Imam is a grace, so appointing him is incumbent on God, to achieve His purpose" (*Kashf al-murād*, p. 182, as quoted on areq.net; edition not named). Al-Ḥillī gives the short form of the argument in *al-Bāb al-ḥādī ʿashar*. Translation: this companion.
9. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 1 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ), the passage on the choosing of the prophets. thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/1/10. The verb rendered "unearth," *yuthīrū*, is the one the Qurʾān uses for tilling the earth (30:9). Translation: this companion.
10. The figure comes from a report of Abū Dharr's questions to the Prophet (s): al-Ṣadūq, *al-Khiṣāl*, Part 20, bāb 9 ("What Abū Dharr asked the Prophet"), ḥadīth 1. thaqalayn.net/hadith/10/21/9/1. It is not graded in the data, and its chain runs through non-Shia narrators. The same number appears in other ungraded reports (e.g. al-Ṣadūq, *al-Amālī*, majlis 41, ḥadīth 10; thaqalayn.net/hadith/29/1/41/10), while a weak report in *al-Kāfī* gives 120,000 (vol. 1, Kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb 33, ḥadīth 2; al-Majlisī: ḍaʿīf, *Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 3:17; thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/4/33/2). The Qurʾān names some messengers and says others were not named (4:164; 40:78).
11. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 1 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/1/11. Translation: this companion.
12. al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq (d. 381/991), *al-Iʿtiqādāt*, chapter on infallibility (*ʿiṣma*); English: A. A. A. Fyzee (trans.), *A Shiite Creed*, "Concerning Infallibility" (text on al-islam.org). On everyday lapses there was a classical discussion. Al-Ṣadūq included and accepted reports that God once let the Prophet (s) sleep through the dawn prayer and forget during a prayer "as a mercy for this community," so that no believer would be shamed for such a slip: *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, vol. 1, bāb 50, ḥadīth 48 (not graded by al-Majlisī in the data; not included by al-Bihbūdī in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*). thaqalayn.net/hadith/34/1/50/48. Most later Twelver theologians denied that any such lapse can happen to a prophet. All agree that no prophet sins, and none errs in receiving or conveying revelation. Translation: this companion.
13. al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, vol. 11, pp. 162–163 (in his discussion of Joseph, Qurʾān 12:24; 20-volume edition digitised by OpenITI). He calls *ʿiṣma* a kind of knowledge that never fails. It does not take away choice: someone certain that a drink is a deadly poison "will certainly refrain from drinking it, by his own choice." His reading of 12:24, that Joseph would have inclined to her had he not seen his Lord's proof, and so did not incline, is at vol. 11, p. 128. Imam al-Riḍā (a) reads the verse another way: she resolved on the sin, and Joseph resolved to kill her if she forced him, so God turned both the killing and the indecency away from him (al-Ṣadūq, *ʿUyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, vol. 1, bāb 14, ḥadīth 1; thaqalayn.net/hadith/11/2/14/1; not graded in the data). Both readings keep Joseph free of sin. Translation: this companion.

14. 2 Samuel 11:2–27 and 12:1–13.

15. al-Ṣadūq, *ʿUyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, vol. 1, bāb 14, ḥadīth 1, Imam al-Riḍā's (a) answers to ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Jahm on the sinlessness of the prophets. Not graded in the data. thaqalayn.net/hadith/11/2/14/1. In the same answer the Imam explains the Qurʾān's own account of David (38:21–26) as a ruling given before both parties had been heard, not a sin of the kind the tale alleged. Translation: this companion.

16. al-Ṣadūq, *ʿUyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, vol. 1: bāb 14, ḥadīth 1 (the rule of reading, and Adam; thaqalayn.net/hadith/11/2/14/1) and bāb 15, ḥadīth 1 (Moses, and 48:2; thaqalayn.net/hadith/11/2/15/1). Neither is graded in the data, and al-Ṣadūq himself remarks that the bāb 15 report is unusual, since its narrator, Ibn al-Jahm, was hostile to the Prophet's family. They are given here as the Imam's teaching on how to read the verses, not as proof-texts. In the bāb 15 version the Imam calls Adam's lapse a forgiven minor fault from before his prophethood. Later Shia theology, notably al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā's *Tanzīh al-anbiyāʾ*, reads such verses through *tark al-awlā*. Translation: this companion.

17. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb 1, ḥadīth 2 (reliable chain; see note 3). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/4/1/2. Manṣūr's conclusion: «فَأَشْهَدُ أَنَّ عَلِيّاً (عَلَيْه السَّلام) كَانَ قَيِّمَ الْقُرْآنِ وَكَانَتْ طَاعَتُهُ مُفْتَرَضَةً وَكَانَ الْحُجَّةَ عَلَى النَّاسِ بَعْدَ رَسُولِ اللهِ (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِه) وَأَنَّ مَا قَالَ فِي الْقُرْآنِ فَهُوَ حَقٌّ»; the Imam's reply: «رَحِمَكَ اللهُ». The people first named other Companions, but agreed that none of them knew all of the Qurʾān. Summarised; the quoted words translated by this companion.

18. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb 4, ḥadīth 4, narrated by Abān ibn Taghlib from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 2:294). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/4/4/4. Translation: this companion.

CHAPTER 4 · WHY THE QUR'AN IS THE WORD OF GOD

1. The scene is Qurʾān 74:11–25, which the classical commentators connect with al-Walīd b. al-Mughīra. The details are from al-Ṭabrisī, *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on 74:11–25 (vol. 10, pp. 178–179 in the edition of 1415/1995, as digitised by OpenITI), where the account is introduced without a chain ("it is narrated"): an occasion-of-revelation report (unverified chain). Al-Ṭabrisī also gives a shorter version from Mujāhid; parallels in al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* 9:167 and 17:212. The reports differ over which verses al-Walīd heard. The nickname *rayḥānat Quraysh*, "the sweet basil of Quraysh," is in the same account. Retold; al-Walīd's words translated by this companion.

2. al-Ṭabrisī, *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, introduction, fifth part (vol. 1, p. 42 in the OpenITI text), surveys the views and refers readers to al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā's *al-Mūḍiḥ ʿan wajh iʿjāz al-Qurʾān*. Besides eloquence, arrangement and style, the views he lists include *ṣarfa*: that God turned the Arabs away from meeting the challenge.

3. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-ḥajj, bāb 9 (on the rebuilding of the Kaʿba), ḥadīth 4, "through various chains" that al-Kulaynī does not give in full. Al-Majlisī: marfūʿ (unverified chain). thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/3/9/4. The report names the four men who lifted the cloak, one of them from al-Walīd's clan, Banū Makhzūm. Retold.

4. The Qurʾān calls Muḥammad (s) *al-nabī al-ummī* (7:157), usually rendered "the unlettered prophet." The word's meaning is debated: one report, from Imam Muḥammad al-Jawād (a), the ninth Imam, explains it as "from Mecca, the Mother of Towns" and says the Prophet read and wrote many languages (al-Ṣadūq, *Maʿānī al-akhbār*, bāb 27, ḥadīth 6; thaqalayn.net/hadith/28/1/27/6; ungraded, with an unidentified narrator: unverified chain). The argument here rests on 29:48 and 10:16, which concern his life *before* the revelation and on which all agree.

5. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 192 (*al-Qāṣiʿa*) (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/192/39. The same passage says that he grew up in the Prophet's care, and that in those days Islam was found in no house but that of the Prophet and Khadīja, "and I was the third." Translation: this companion.

6. al-Ṣadūq, *ʿUyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, vol. 1, bāb 12 (al-Riḍā's debate with the leaders of the religions at al-Maʾmūn's court), ḥadīth 1. The Exilarch (*raʾs al-jālūt*) was the recognised head of the Jewish community. thaqalayn.net/hadith/11/2/12/1. Ungraded; the chain includes an unnamed narrator

("one who heard al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad al-Nawfalī"): unverified chain. Told here as illustration, not proof. Translation: this companion.

7. On the absence of a written Arabic Bible before Islam, and the oral circulation of biblical stories among Arabic speakers, see Sidney H. Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic: The Scriptures of the "People of the Book" in the Language of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), especially ch. 2, "The Bible in the Arabic Qurʾān." The earliest written translations are dated after the rise of Islam; the dating of the very first is still debated. The charge that old tales were "dictated to him morning and evening" is also recorded in Qurʾān 25:5.
8. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "Pharaoh": the Egyptian *per ʿaa* ("great house") first denoted the royal palace and came to be used for the king himself under the New Kingdom (from the 18th dynasty, c. 1539 BCE). Bible references follow the standard chapter and verse numbering; the word "Pharaoh" is quoted from the KJV. In the Qurʾān, *firʿawn* ("Pharaoh") occurs 74 times, always for the ruler of Moses' day; in Sūrat Yūsuf, Joseph's ruler is *al-malik* ("the king": 12:43, 50, 54, 72, 76).
9. Halim Sayoud (Department of Electronics and Informatics, USTHB, Algiers), "Author discrimination between the Holy Quran and Prophet's statements," *Literary and Linguistic Computing* 27, no. 4 (2012): 427–444, doi:10.1093/llc/fqs014. Sixteen experiments in three series (global, segmental and automatic attribution), using the whole Qurʾān and a sample from *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*; the abstract concludes that "the two books should have two different authors." Sixteen experiments within one study, by one researcher.
10. Behnam Sadeghi, "The Chronology of the Qurʾān: A Stylometric Research Program," *Arabica* 58, no. 3–4 (2011): 210–299, doi:10.1163/157005810X529692. Using average verse length and the frequencies of common morphemes, he finds that these markers vary smoothly across his proposed sequence of the suras, which he takes as support for its chronology and for a single author.
11. al-Ṭabrisī, *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on Sūrat al-Ḍuḥā (vol. 10, p. 381 in the OpenITI text), from Ibn ʿAbbās: revelation was held back for fifteen days, and the polytheists said, "Muḥammad's Lord has said goodbye to him and turned against him (*waddaʿahu rabbuhu wa-qalāh*); if his affair were from God, it would keep coming." Other reports give twelve or forty days. An occasion-of-revelation report (unverified chain). Translation: this companion.
12. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb faḍl al-Qurʾān, bāb 14 (*al-nawādir*), ḥadīth 14, from ʿAbd Allāh b. Bukayr. Al-Majlisī: majhūl (unverified chain). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/3/14/14. A second report in the same entry explains that whatever God says in reproach to His Prophet, such as 17:74, "refers to someone else." Translation: this companion.
13. al-Ṣadūq, *ʿUyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, vol. 1, bāb 15, ḥadīth 1. thaqalayn.net/hadith/11/2/15/1. Ungraded; al-Ṣadūq himself calls the report unusual because its narrator, ʿAlī b. Muḥammad b. al-Jahm, was hostile to the Prophet's family (unverified chain). The Imam cites 39:65 and 17:74 as further examples. Neither chain is reliable; the principle they state is the standard Shia reading of these verses.
14. al-Ṭabrisī, *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on 80:1–10 (vol. 10, pp. 265–267 in the OpenITI text). He records the common account that the verses reproach the Prophet, then quotes al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā: nothing in the verse shows that it addresses the Prophet, frowning was not among his traits even with his enemies, and 68:4 praises his character. He then cites the report from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) that it "was revealed about a man of Banū Umayya" (unverified chain). He also gives the other view: if the common account is sound, frowning at a blind man, who could not see it, was no sin, and the verses taught the finest manners. He cites a second report from al-Ṣādiq in which the Prophet greets Ibn Umm Maktūm with "No, by God, God will never reproach me over you," and his verse-by-verse comment takes the Prophet as the one addressed. Al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, on 80:1–10 (vol. 20, pp. 203–204 in the OpenITI text), argues against the common account at length and rejects the second report on the same grounds. The first report does not name the man. Translation: this companion.

15. al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, *al-Amālī*, majlis 29, ḥadīth 2 ("How Sūrat al-Kāfirūn was revealed"). thaqalayn.net/hadith/13/29/2/1. The four were ʿUtba b. Rabīʿa, Umayya b. Khalaf, al-Walīd b. al-Mughīra and al-ʿĀṣ b. Saʿīd. The chain runs through the early biographer Ibn Isḥāq to "more than one" companion of Saʿīd b. Mīnāʾ (unverified chain). Translation: this companion.

16. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 160 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/160/14 and /15. Translation: this companion.

17. al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* 19:25, citing Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāwandī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*: Abū Ṭālib died at the end of the tenth year of the mission, Khadīja three days later, and the Prophet called that year "the Year of Sorrow" (*ʿām al-ḥuzn*). Other reports differ over the order and the interval.

18. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 18 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/18/2 and /3. The omitted words quote Qurʾān 6:38, "We have left nothing out of the Book." Translation: this companion.

19. al-Ṭabrisī, *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on 30:1–5 (vol. 8, pp. 42–44 in the OpenITI text). He notes that the sura is Meccan, gives the grammarian al-Zajjāj's definition of *biḍʿ* ("between three and ten"), reports from al-Zuhrī how the Meccan polytheists used Persia's victory to taunt the Muslims, and counts the passage among the verses showing that the Qurʾān is from God. *Adnā al-arḍ*, "the nearest land," is the land nearest the Arabs, around Syria; al-Ṭabrisī's authorities all read *adnā* here as "nearest," and none as "the lowest point on earth."

20. For these dates, see Walter E. Kaegi, *Heraclius, Emperor of Byzantium* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). Damascus fell to Persia in 613 CE and Jerusalem in 614; Heraclius set out on his counter-offensive in April 622; the battle near Nineveh was fought on 12 December 627; and in 628 Khosrow II was overthrown and his successor sought peace.

21. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 8 (*al-Rawḍa*), ḥadīth 397, narrated by Abū ʿUbayda from Imam al-Bāqir (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (reliable chain). thaqalayn.net/hadith/8/1/397/1. The Imam calls this a *taʾwīl* known to "those firmly rooted in knowledge" from the Prophet's family. Asked why the victory over Persia came so long after "a few years," he points to the words that follow, "The matter belongs to God, before and after." The report sets the letters to the two kings, and the revelation of the passage, after the Hijra; the letters are usually dated after the truce of Ḥudaybiya (628), and al-Ṭabrisī counts the sura as Meccan (note 19).

22. al-Sayyid Abū al-Qāsim al-Khūʾī, *al-Bayān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, chapter on the protection of the Qurʾān from alteration (*ṣiyānat al-Qurʾān min al-taḥrīf*), where he argues from the Imams' instruction to recite a complete sura after al-Fātiḥa in the first two units of the obligatory prayers. English translation: *The Prolegomena to the Qurʾān*, trans. Abdulaziz Sachedina, al-islam.org/al-bayan-fi-tafsir-al-quran-prolegomena-quran-sayyid-abu-al-qasim-al-khoei/7-protection-quran. The chapter's English phrases from al-Khūʾī ("the accepted view among Muslims," at note 25; "a faction," in note 26) follow that translation.

23. al-Ṣadūq, *al-Iʿtiqādāt*, chapter on the extent of the Qurʾān; English in A. A. A. Fyzee (trans.), *A Shiʿite Creed* (al-islam.org/shiite-creed-shaykh-saduq/concerning-extent-quran). The first sentence is translated by this companion; "is a liar" follows Fyzee. In the same chapter he quotes Imam ʿAlī (a) saying of the copy he had compiled, "not a single word has been added to it or omitted from it" (Fyzee's translation).

24. Reported by al-Ṭabrisī, *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, introduction, fifth part (vol. 1, p. 43 in the OpenITI text), from al-Murtaḍā's *Jawāb al-masāʾil al-Ṭarābulusiyyāt*. Al-Murtaḍā compares knowledge of the Qurʾān's transmission to knowledge of "great cities, great events and famous books," uses the example of the grammar of Sībawayh, and adds that companions such as ʿAbd Allāh b. Masʿūd and Ubayy b. Kaʿb recited the whole Qurʾān to the Prophet more than once. Paraphrased.

25. Al-Ṭabrisī: *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, introduction (vol. 1, pp. 42–43 in the OpenITI text): addition is agreed to be false, and "the correct position of our school" rejects omission. Al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī: *al-Mīzān*, on 15:9 (vol. 12, pp. 101–108 in the OpenITI text), where the verse is said to guard the Qurʾān against *taḥrīf* "in all its kinds." Al-Khūʾī: as in note 22; his list of scholars holding this view includes al-Ṣadūq, al-Ṭūsī, al-Ṭabrisī and al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī.

26. The report: al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb faḍl al-Qurʾān, bāb 14, ḥadīth 28, from Hishām b. Sālim. Al-Majlisī: muwaththaq (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 12:525). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/3/14/28. Al-Ṣadūq's explanation: *al-Iʿtiqādāt*, as in note 23. On the minority view, see al-Khūʾī (note 22), who notes that "a faction" of Shia traditionists and a group of Sunni scholars held that alterations occurred, and al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān* 12:108, who reads many "thus it was revealed" reports as revealed explanation (*tanzīl* in the sense of *tafsīr*). Al-Murtaḍā, as reported by al-Ṭabrisī (note 24), says the dissent came from traditionists who relied on weak reports they took to be sound.

27. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 8 (*al-Rawḍa*), ḥadīth 16, Imam al-Bāqir's (a) letter to Saʿd al-Khayr. Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ ʿalā al-ẓāhir (reliable chain). thaqalayn.net/hadith/8/1/16/1. Translation: this companion.

28. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb faḍl al-Qurʾān, bāb 14, ḥadīth 23, narrated by Sālim b. Salama. Al-Majlisī: ḍaʿīf (weak chain). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/3/14/23. The report goes on: when the Qāʾim rises, he will recite the Book of God "according to its proper form" and bring out the muṣḥaf that Imam ʿAlī (a) wrote. Al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī cites the Imams' instruction "read as the people read" as one of the proofs of the Qurʾān's integrity, and holds that if the muṣḥaf ʿAlī compiled differed from the common one at all, it differed only in the order of suras or verses (*al-Mīzān* 12:108). Similar instructions, "read as you were taught," are reported from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) and from Abū al-Ḥasan (a) in the same book (bāb 14, ḥadīth 15, and bāb 12, ḥadīth 2; al-Majlisī: ḍaʿīf for both). Translation: this companion.

29. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb faḍl al-ʿilm, bāb 22 ("Following the Sunna and the evidence of the Book"), ḥadīth 3, narrated by Ayyūb b. al-Ḥurr from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 1:229); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 1:11). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/2/22/3. *Zukhruf*, "gilding," is something made to glitter. Translation: this companion.

30. Same bāb, ḥadīth 5, narrated by Hishām b. al-Ḥakam and others from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: majhūl ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 1:229) (reliable chain). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/2/22/5. Translation: this companion.

31. al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān*, on 15:9 (vol. 12, pp. 107–108 in the OpenITI text), arguing from the reports that command testing reports against the Book and from the ḥadīth of the two weighty things: there is no sense in commanding people to hold fast to a distorted Book.

32. For example al-Ṣadūq, *ʿUyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, vol. 2, ḥadīth 259 in the Thaqalayn numbering: "I am leaving among you the two weighty things, the Book of God and my family, and they will not separate until they come to me at the Pool." thaqalayn.net/hadith/12/1/1/259. Ungraded in the data. Al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī calls the ḥadīth *mutawātir* (mass-transmitted) through both Sunni and Shia channels (*al-Mīzān* 12:107). Chapter 8 gives its Sunni sources. Translation: this companion.

33. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb faḍl al-Qurʾān, bāb 5 ("Reciting the Qurʾān"), ḥadīth 1, narrated by Ḥarīz from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan; al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 1:155) (reliable chain). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/3/5/1. Translation: this companion.

34. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 176 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/176/5. In the same passage the Qurʾān is "the adviser who never deceives, the guide who never misleads, and the speaker who never lies." Compiled text, not graded here. Translation: this companion.

35. al-Ṭabrisī, *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on 8:63 (vol. 4, p. 489 in the OpenITI text): the verse means the Anṣār, the Aws and the Khazraj, "according to Abū Jaʿfar [al-Bāqir] (a), al-Suddī and most commentators"; "no two Arab clans had such enmity between them," and God united their hearts "through the blessing of our Prophet." Translation: this companion.

36. al-Ṣadūq, *ʿUyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, vol. 2, ḥadīth 32 of the second section (Thaqalayn numbering), through Imam al-Riḍā (a) from Imam al-Kāẓim (a). thaqalayn.net/hadith/12/1/2/32. Ungraded in the data (unverified chain). Also quoted in Chapter 1. Translation: this companion.

37. *Al-Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya*, Supplication 42 ("On completing a reading of the Qurʾān"), ¶1 and ¶8. Arabic checked at al-islam.org/sahifa-al-kamilah-al-sajjadiyya-imam-ali-zayn-al-abidin/42-his-supplication-upon-completing-reading. The phrase "a guardian over every book" echoes Qurʾān 5:48. Compiled text, not graded here. Translation: this companion.

1. *al-Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya*, Supplication 36 ("His supplication when he looked at clouds and lightning and heard the sound of thunder"), ¶1. Arabic checked against al-islam.org (al-islam.org/sahifa-al-kamilah-al-sajjadiyya-imam-ali-zayn-al-abidin/36-his-supplication-upon-hearing-thunder): «اللَّهُمَّ إِنَّ هَذَيْنِ آيَتَانِ مِنْ آيَاتِكَ ، وَ هَذَيْنِ عَوْنَانِ مِنْ أَعْوَانِكَ ، يَبْتَدِرَانِ طَاعَتَكَ بِرَحْمَةٍ نَافِعَةٍ أَوْ نَقِمَةٍ ضَارَّةٍ». Compiled text, not graded here. Translation: this companion.
2. The standard account, summarised in "Lightning," *Wikipedia* (checked 28 October 2026): rising ice crystals collide with graupel (soft hail) and the two take opposite charges; the near-instant heating of the air by the lightning stroke makes it expand explosively, producing the shock wave heard as thunder.
3. al-Kulaynī (d. 329/941), *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ʿaql wa-l-jahl, ḥadīth 1, narrated by Muḥammad ibn Muslim from Imam al-Bāqir (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 1:25); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 1:1). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/1/0/1. Abridged; translation: this companion.
4. Imam al-Riḍā (a) explained the same words, "in fear and in hope," in Qurʾān 13:12: "fear for the traveller, and hope for the one at home." al-Ṣadūq, *Maʿānī al-akhbār*, bāb 424, ḥadīth 1 (thaqalayn.net/hadith/28/1/424/1); also in his *al-Amālī*, majlis 17, ḥadīth 7 (thaqalayn.net/hadith/29/1/17/7), and *ʿUyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, vol. 1, bāb 28, ḥadīth 47 (thaqalayn.net/hadith/11/2/28/47). Ungraded in the data (unverified chain). Translation: this companion.
5. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ʿaql wa-l-jahl, ḥadīth 12, Imam Mūsā al-Kāẓim's (a) long counsel to Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam. The nature verses come near its opening: Qurʾān 2:163–164, 16:12, 40:67, 45:5, 57:17, 13:4 and 30:24. Al-Majlisī: mursal, its chain incomplete (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 1:38) (unverified chain). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/1/0/12. A shorter saying of Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) makes the same point: "God's proof over His servants is the Prophet, and the proof between His servants and God is reason" (same book, ḥadīth 22; al-Majlisī: ḍaʿīf, *Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 1:80; thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/1/0/22). Translations: this companion.
6. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 185 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). The ant's grain-carrying and summer stores are in thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/185/6; the passage in the panel is thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/185/7. Translation: this companion.
7. "God refuses to make things happen except through causes": al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb 7 (on knowing the Imam), ḥadīth 7, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), narrated by Ribʿī ibn ʿAbd Allāh through an unnamed link. Al-Majlisī: majhūl (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 2:312) (unverified chain). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/4/7/7. The report goes on: God "gave everything a cause, every cause an explanation, every explanation a body of knowledge, and every body of knowledge a speaking door," whom it names as the Prophet (s) and the Imams. Its main concern is the guides to knowledge; this chapter uses only its opening principle, which the Qurʾān's own language of means supports (e.g. 7:57; 30:24). Translation: this companion.
8. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Letter 31, to his son al-Ḥasan (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/2/31/166. Translation: this companion.
9. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Saying 86 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/3/86/104. Al-Raḍī records a variant reading, *mashhad* for *jalad*. Translation: this companion.
10. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ʿaql wa-l-jahl, ḥadīth 18, narrated by Abū Hāshim al-Jaʿfarī, who was present. Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 1:77). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/1/0/18. *Adab*, here "cultivation," is the learning and discipline a person acquires. Translation: this companion.
11. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ʿaql wa-l-jahl, ḥadīth 35, narrated by al-Ḥasan ibn ʿAmmār from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), "in a long report." No grading by al-Majlisī is recorded in the Thaqalayn data, al-Bihbūdī did not include it, and its narrators are little known (unverified chain). Its teaching also rests on reliable reports: reason as the faculty God addresses (note 3), and Manṣūr ibn Ḥāzim's argument, approved by Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), that God's pleasure and anger "can be known only through revelation or a messenger" (*al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb 1, ḥadīth 2; al-Majlisī: majhūl ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ, *Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 2:262; thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/4/1/2). The key clause, «فَلَمْ يَجِدْ عَقْلُهُ يَدُلُّهُ عَلَى

ذَلِكَ», says that reason does *not* show the details of what God loves and forbids; the Thaqalayn English reverses it ("nothing but intelligence shows him all these facts"). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/1/0/35. Abridged; translation: this companion.

12. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Saying 80 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/3/80/97. Translation: this companion.

13. On the Qurʾān and the early Islamic sciences, the translation of Greek, Persian and Indian learning into Arabic, and Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (1201–1274), his creed *Tajrīd al-iʿtiqād* and the Marāgha observatory (begun 1259), see Chapter 25 and its notes.

14. On the modern "scientific miracle" (*iʿjāz ʿilmī*) literature, popularised from the 1970s and 1980s by writers such as Maurice Bucaille and by ʿAbd al-Majīd al-Zindānī's Commission on Scientific Signs in the Qurʾān and Sunna, see "Quran and science," *Wikipedia* (checked 28 October 2026), and the works it cites.

15. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb 15, ḥadīth 1, from Imam al-Riḍā (a) at Marw, narrated by ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ibn Muslim. Al-Majlisī: marfūʿ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 2:376) (unverified chain). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/4/15/1. A parallel in al-Ṣadūq, *Maʿānī al-akhbār*, bāb 35, ḥadīth 3, reads "the detailing of everything" (thaqalayn.net/hadith/28/1/35/3). In context the Imam is arguing that the religion was completed, including its guidance on leadership after the Prophet (s). Translation: this companion.

16. On Galen's four stages, Aristotle's view that the embryo's parts form in sequence, and the eighteenth-century dominance of "preformation" until Caspar Friedrich Wolff's *Theoria generationis* (1759), see "Embryology," *Wikipedia* (checked 28 October 2026).

17. al-Ṭabrisī, *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, vol. 7, p. 128 (on Qurʾān 22:5): *ʿalaqa* is "a piece of congealed blood" (*al-qiṭʿa min al-dam al-jāmid*); likewise al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān*, vol. 14, p. 344 (on 22:5). Al-Ṭabrisī adds that it is so called because it clings while moist (*Majmaʿ al-bayān*, vol. 10, p. 396, on 96:2). Volume and page as given in the OpenITI digital texts. The embryologist Keith L. Moore's 1983 "special edition" of his textbook, often cited as independent confirmation, was produced together with al-Zindānī, and in 2002 Moore said it had been "ten or eleven years" since he was involved with the subject ("Quran and science," *Wikipedia*, checked 28 October 2026).

18. *Mūsiʿūn* (Qurʾān 51:47) is rendered "expanders" or "steadily expanding" by some modern translators (Qarāʾī, Asad, Saheeh International) and "make the vast extent," "extend it wide" or "made them vast" by others (Pickthall, Arberry, Abdel Haleem). The same participle in 2:236, *al-mūsiʿ*, means "the well-off." On *bi-aydin*, "with might," see note 26.

19. Georges Lemaître (1927, in the *Annales de la Société Scientifique de Bruxelles*) and Edwin Hubble (1929, in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*); see "Hubble's law," *Wikipedia* (checked 28 October 2026). Age of the universe: Planck Collaboration, "Planck 2018 results. VI. Cosmological parameters," *Astronomy & Astrophysics* 641 (2020), A6: 13.787 ± 0.020 billion years.

20. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 1 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/1/2. Translation: this companion.

21. On George Airy's 1855 hypothesis (proposed alongside John Pratt's rival model), under which mountain roots reach about five times deeper than the mountains are high, see "Isostasy," *Wikipedia* (checked 28 October 2026). Mountains rise where the earth's plates collide and buckle ("Mountain formation," *Wikipedia*), and the crust's slow isostatic adjustment can itself cause earthquakes ("Isostasy").

22. "Water cycle," *Wikipedia* (checked 28 October 2026), on Aristotle's account of the sun drawing water up as vapour, the long-held view that rivers were fed from below by the sea (still held by Athanasius Kircher in 1644), Bernard Palissy (1580) and Pierre Perrault (1674), and the general acceptance of rain-fed rivers only in the early nineteenth century. Ecclesiastes 1:7 is quoted from the King James Version (1769 text); see also Ecclesiastes 11:3 and Job 36:27–28.

23. On estuaries, where fresh water spreads over denser seawater and mixes with it at the boundary, see "Estuary," *Wikipedia* (checked 28 October 2026). On Jacques Cousteau (d. 1997), whose

funeral Mass was celebrated at Notre-Dame by Archbishop Jean-Marie Lustiger, see "Jacques Cousteau," *Wikipedia* (checked 28 October 2026).

24. Zafar Ishaq Ansari (1932–2016), "Scientific Exegesis of the Qurʾān," *Journal of Qurʾānic Studies* 3, no. 1 (2001), as quoted in "Quran and science," *Wikipedia* (checked 28 October 2026). Only the words in quotation marks are Ansari's; the rest of the sentence follows the article's summary of his view. The article also cites the critiques of Muzaffar Iqbal and Nidhal Guessoum.
25. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb faḍl al-ʿilm, bāb 11 ("Forbidding speech without knowledge"), ḥadīth 8, narrated by Isḥāq ibn ʿAbd Allāh from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). The two verses are Qurʾān 7:169 and 10:39. Al-Majlisī: ḥasan ʿalā al-ẓāhir (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 1:139); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 1:6). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/2/11/8. Translation: this companion.
26. al-Ṣadūq, *al-Tawḥīd*, bāb 13 (on Qurʾān 38:75, "what I created with My two hands"), ḥadīth 1, narrated by Muḥammad ibn Muslim from Imam al-Bāqir (a); parallel in al-Ṣadūq, *Maʿānī al-akhbār*, bāb 13, ḥadīth 8. thaqalayn.net/hadith/14/2/13/1; thaqalayn.net/hadith/28/1/13/8. Ungraded in the data (unverified chain). The Imam cites 38:17, 51:47 and 58:22. Translation: this companion.
27. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ʿaql wa-l-jahl, ḥadīth 32, narrated by al-Ḥasan ibn al-Jahm from Imam al-Riḍā (a). Al-Majlisī: muwaththaq (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 1:93). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/1/0/32. The Imam goes on to recall the creation of reason, ending: "Through you I take, and through you I give." Compare the weaker report from Imam al-Bāqir (a) that God will examine people closely at the reckoning "in proportion to the reason He gave them in this world" (same book, ḥadīth 7; al-Majlisī: ḍaʿīf, *Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 1:34; thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/1/0/7). Translations: this companion.
28. *al-Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya*, Supplication 36, ¶2, checked as in note 1. Translation: this companion.

CHAPTER 6 · ISLAM, MIRACLES & SCIENCE

1. The contest is told three times in the Qurʾān: 7:103–126, 20:56–76 and 26:10–51. This retelling draws on all three: the festival day and the mid-morning gathering (20:59), the summons to the cities (26:36–37), the promised reward (7:113–114), Moses and Aaron facing the magicians ("these two", 20:63), the spell on the people's eyes (7:116), Moses' fear (20:67), the staff (7:117; 20:69), the prostration (7:120–122), the magicians as "the first of the believers" (26:51), Pharaoh's threat (20:71) and the magicians' reply (20:72). Translations: this companion.
2. al-Ṣadūq, *al-Tawḥīd*, bāb 9 ("Omnipotence"), ḥadīth 9, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), from Imam ʿAlī (a). thaqalayn.net/hadith/14/2/9/9. Ungraded in the data; the chain passes through the little-known Abū Ayyūb al-Madanī (unverified chain). In the same bāb, ḥadīth 11, Imam al-Riḍā (a) answers the same riddle with an image: God has already placed the heavens and the earth in something smaller than an egg, the human eye. Hādī al-Najafī grades that report *muʿtabar al-isnād* (*Mawsūʿat aḥādīth Ahl al-Bayt* 9:89); thaqalayn.net/hadith/14/2/9/11. See also Chapter 2. Translation: this companion.
3. Abū al-Qāsim al-Khūʾī, *al-Bayān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, the chapter on the inimitability of the Qurʾān (*iʿjāz al-Qurʾān*): the definition of the miracle, the condition that the claim be possibly true, and the exclusion of magic, trickery and techniques resting on known natural causes. An English translation, *The Prolegomena to the Qurʾān*, trans. Abdulaziz Sachedina, is at al-islam.org/al-bayan-fi-tafsir-al-quran-prolegomena-quran-sayyid-abu-al-qasim-al-khoei/1-inimitability-quran. Summarised, not quoted.
4. Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, vol. 1, commentary on 2:23–24, the discussion headed "The meaning of the miraculous sign in the Qurʾān": the miracle is *al-amr al-khāriq lil-ʿāda*, showing "an action of what lies beyond nature in the world of nature," *lā bi-maʿnā al-amr al-mubṭil li-ḍarūrat al-ʿaql*. Vol. 1, p. 73, in the pagination of the OpenITI digital text (editions differ). Translation: this companion.
5. Compare Qurʾān 5:110, where God says "by My permission" four times in recalling the same signs, and 13:38: "No messenger could bring a sign except by God's permission."
6. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb 7 ("Knowing the Imam"), ḥadīth 7, narrated by Ribʿī ibn ʿAbd Allāh from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). The saying continues: "so He gave everything a cause," and it ends by naming the Prophet (s) and the Imams as the "speaking door" to the knowledge of

causes. Al-Majlisī: *majhūl* (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 2:312) (unverified chain). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/4/7/7. Translation: this companion.

7. al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, vol. 1, commentary on 2:23–24, section 2 ("The Qurʾān affirms what breaks the habitual course"), pp. 74–77 (OpenITI digital text). He reads Qurʾān 65:3, "God has set a measure for everything," to mean that God reaches what He wills through real connections between things, "a natural cause hidden from our knowledge." He also stresses that such events are not impossible in themselves, as contradictions are (p. 75). Translation: this companion.
8. al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, vol. 1, commentary on 2:23–24, section 7 ("The Qurʾān counts the miracle a proof of the truth of the mission"), pp. 83–84 (OpenITI digital text). The prophets argued for God's oneness and for the resurrection by reasoning (he cites 14:10 and 38:27–28); miracles were asked of them, and given, to establish their claim to receive revelation. Summarised.
9. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ʿaql wa-l-jahl, ḥadīth 20, narrated by Abū Yaʿqūb al-Baghdādī. Al-Majlisī: *ḍaʿīf* (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 1:78) (weak chain). The chain passes through Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Sayyārī, whom Ibn al-Ghaḍāʾirī calls weak (*Kitāb al-ḍuʿafāʾ*, no. 11; thaqalayn.net/hadith/17/2/11/1). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/1/0/20. *Al-Kāfī* names the Imam only as Abū al-Ḥasan. Al-Ṣadūq's parallel names him Abū al-Ḥasan al-Riḍā and says the Prophet brought "from the Book of God, its admonitions and its rulings": *ʿUyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, vol. 2, chapter on al-Riḍā's sayings about the reasons for things, ḥadīth 12; thaqalayn.net/hadith/12/1/2/12. Al-Khūʾī cites the report as al-Riḍā's (*al-Bayān*, chapter on the inimitability of the Qurʾān). Other evidence points to the tenth Imam, ʿAlī al-Hādī (a). Ibn al-Sikkīt (186–244/802–858) was about sixteen when al-Riḍā died in 203/818; al-Najāshī counts him among the close companions of Imams al-Jawād and al-Hādī; and Ibn Shahrāshūb's *Manāqib*, quoted in al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* 50:164–165, sets the same exchange at the court of the caliph al-Mutawakkil, with the answer dictated by "ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad", al-Hādī. That version also ends with "What is the proof now?" "Reason." In al-Kāfī the narrator hedges on poetry: "and I think he said poetry." The principle is echoed in the Prophet's saying, "We prophets have been commanded to speak to people according to the measure of their understanding" (al-Kāfī, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ʿaql wa-l-jahl, ḥadīth 15; al-Majlisī: *mursal*; thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/1/0/15). Summarised; translation: this companion.
10. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 192 (*al-Qāṣiʿa*; numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ), Thaqalayn segments 41–45. thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/192/41. Compiled text, not graded here. Abridged; translation: this companion.
11. al-Ṣadūq, *ʿUyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, vol. 1, bāb 12 (al-Riḍā's debate with the leaders of other religions), ḥadīth 1. thaqalayn.net/hadith/11/2/12/1. A parallel is in al-Ṣadūq, *al-Tawḥīd*, bāb 65; thaqalayn.net/hadith/14/2/65/1. Ungraded in the data; the chain includes an unnamed narrator (unverified chain). In the Hebrew Bible, Elisha restores a dead child to life (2 Kings 4:32–37), a dead man revives on touching his bones (2 Kings 13:21), and Naaman is cleansed of leprosy at his word (2 Kings 5:14). Ezekiel's valley of dry bones is presented there as a vision (Ezekiel 37:1–14). A report in *al-Kāfī* links Ezekiel with Qurʾān 2:243 (vol. 8, ḥadīth 237; al-Majlisī: *ḍaʿīf*; thaqalayn.net/hadith/8/1/237/1). Translation: this companion.
12. al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn wa tamām al-niʿma*, bāb 43 (the signed letters of the Qāʾim), ḥadīth 38 in the Thaqalayn numbering, narrated by Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Isḥāq al-Ṭālaqānī. thaqalayn.net/hadith/39/2/43/38. Parallel: al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*; thaqalayn.net/hadith/27/1/37/30. Ungraded in the data (unverified chain). Ibn Rawḥ ends with Qurʾān 8:42, "so that whoever perished might perish by a clear proof, and whoever lived might live by a clear proof," and says the next day that his answer was "heard from the Proof (*al-ḥujja*)." Abridged; translation: this companion.
13. al-Ṣadūq, *ʿUyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, vol. 1, bāb 12 (al-Riḍā's debate with the leaders of other religions), ḥadīth 1. thaqalayn.net/hadith/11/2/12/1. The Imam's word for the reports about Jesus, and about Zoroaster, is *mutawātira*, "widely transmitted." Ungraded in the data; the chain includes an unnamed narrator (unverified chain). Abridged; translation: this companion.

14. al-Khūʾī, *al-Bayān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, the chapter on the inimitability of the Qurʾān: miracles that last a moment cannot be verified by people far away, so a final prophecy requires a lasting miracle. Summarised.
15. David Hume, *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* (1748), §10, "Of Miracles," Part 1. Richard Price, *Four Dissertations*, 4th ed. (London: T. Cadell, 1777), p. 402. Both as quoted in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, s.v. "Miracles."
16. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ʿaql wa-l-jahl, ḥadīth 20, Ibn al-Sikkīt's exchange with Abū al-Ḥasan (a). Al-Majlisī: *ḍaʿīf* (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 1:78) (weak chain). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/1/0/20. Parallel, naming Imam al-Riḍā (a): *ʿUyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, vol. 2, chapter on al-Riḍā's sayings about the reasons for things, ḥadīth 12; thaqalayn.net/hadith/12/1/2/12. Translation: this companion.
17. *Karāmāt* (sing. *karāma*): wonders granted to God's friends without any claim to prophecy. Al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī names the *karāmāt al-awliyāʾ* among events that break the habitual course, and gives an answered prayer as an example (*al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, vol. 1, commentary on 2:23–24, pp. 80 and 83, OpenITI digital text).
18. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb faḍl al-ʿilm, bāb 22 ("Following the Sunna and the evidence of the Book"), ḥadīth 3, narrated by Ayyūb ibn al-Ḥurr from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: *ṣaḥīḥ* (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 1:229); al-Bihbūdī: *ṣaḥīḥ*. thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/2/22/3. Translation: this companion.
19. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb faḍl al-ʿilm, bāb 11 ("The prohibition of speaking without knowledge"), ḥadīth 6, narrated by Muḥammad ibn Muslim from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: *ṣaḥīḥ* (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 1:138). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/2/11/6. Translation: this companion.
20. *Tawḥīd al-Mufaḍḍal*, a dictation attributed to Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), narrated by al-Mufaḍḍal ibn ʿUmar, is preserved in al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 3, bāb 4 ("The report known as the Tawḥīd of al-Mufaḍḍal"), from p. 57: the voice (p. 71), the eyelid (p. 73), the bird (p. 103) and the leaf (p. 131). Pp. 67–68 describe the liver turning food into blood and sending yellow bile to the gall bladder and black bile to the spleen, the humoral medicine of the age. Pages as in the 110-volume edition (2nd ed., 1983) behind the OpenITI digital text. Shia scholars disagree about al-Mufaḍḍal. Ibn al-Ghaḍāʾirī calls him weak (*Kitāb al-ḍuʿafāʾ*; thaqalayn.net/hadith/17/20/2/1), while al-Shaykh al-Mufīd counts him among Imam al-Ṣādiq's trusted inner circle (*al-Irshād*).
21. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Saying 8 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/3/8/9. Compiled text, not graded here. Translation: this companion.

CHAPTER 7 · HOW ISLAM EMBODIES THE ABRAHAMIC FAITHS

1. Ibn Bābawayh al-Ṣadūq, *ʿUyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, vol. 1, bāb 15 (al-Riḍā's session with al-Maʾmūn on the infallibility of the prophets), ḥadīth 1. The Imam says Abraham spoke "by way of denial and inquiry (*ʿalā al-inkār wa-l-istikhbār*), not by way of statement and affirmation," before three groups who worshipped Venus (*al-zuhra*), the moon and the sun. thaqalayn.net/hadith/11/2/15/1. Ungraded in the data (unverified chain). Translation: this companion.
2. For Christians: Romans 4:11, "that he might be the father of all them that believe" (King James Version, as for every Bible quotation in this chapter). For Muslims: Qurʾān 4:125, "God took Abraham as a close friend (*khalīl*)." In Jewish teaching Abraham is *Avraham avinu*, "Abraham our father" (e.g. Mishnah, Avot 5:3).
3. The Qurʾān calls Āzar Abraham's *ab*, "father" (6:74). Many Shia scholars hold that Āzar was not his father by birth but an elder who raised him, since Arabic also uses *ab* for a grandfather, an uncle or a guardian. In Qurʾān 2:133, for example, Jacob's sons count Ishmael, Jacob's uncle, among his "fathers." See al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, commentary on 6:74–79; and al-Ṭabrisī, *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on 6:74, who gives the Imāmī view that Āzar was Abraham's maternal grandfather or his uncle.
4. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-ḥajj, bāb 7 ("The pilgrimage of Abraham and Ishmael, and their building of the House"), ḥadīth 2, narrated by Muʿāwiya ibn ʿAmmār from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 17:33). thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/3/7/2. That Abraham brought them there at God's command is in ḥadīth 1 of the same chapter (al-Majlisī: ḥasan ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ, *Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 17:32; al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ). thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/3/7/1. Retold, abridged and slightly

reordered: in the report, "God made that a rite" (*sunna*) comes straight after the seven runs. Hagar's call is literally "Is there any companion in the valleys?"

5. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 12 ("al-Sharāʾiʿ," the revealed laws), ḥadīth 2, narrated by Samāʿa ibn Mihrān from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), answering a question on Qurʾān 46:35. Al-Majlisī: muwaththaq (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 7:98); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 1:67). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/12/2. Abridged; translation: this companion. The Imam names the same five as "the masters of the prophets and messengers" in al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb 2, ḥadīth 3 (al-Majlisī: muwaththaq, *Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 2:286). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/4/2/3.
6. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 1 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ), the passage on the choosing of the prophets. thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/1/10. Translation: this companion.
7. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 160 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). The portraits of Moses, David and Jesus are at thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/160/11, /12 and /13. Abridged; translation: this companion.
8. al-Ṣadūq, *ʿUyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, vol. 1, bāb 12 (al-Riḍā's debate with the leaders of other religions), ḥadīth 1. thaqalayn.net/hadith/11/2/12/1. A parallel is in al-Ṣadūq, *al-Tawḥīd*, bāb 65. thaqalayn.net/hadith/14/2/65/1. Ungraded in the data; the chain includes an unnamed narrator (unverified chain). Retold. In the same debate the Imam points out that Elisha and Ezekiel also raised the dead, yet no one worshipped them.
9. Genesis 1:1 in the Arabic translation of Eli Smith and Cornelius Van Dyck (1865): *fī al-badʾ khalaqa Allāhu al-samāwāti wa-l-arḍ*.
10. al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, commentary on 2:124. He argues that Abraham could ask about his descendants only after he had been promised children in old age (15:53–55), and that the trials included the command to sacrifice his son, which the Qurʾān calls "the clear trial" (37:106).
11. al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, commentary on 2:124. He concludes that an Imam must be appointed by God and protected by Him from wrongdoing (*maʿṣūm*).
12. The teaching appears in reports such as al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb 33, ḥadīth 2, from Imam al-Bāqir (a), quoting the Prophet (s): "No prophet passed away without having a trustee (*waṣī*)." Al-Majlisī: ḍaʿīf (weak chain). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/4/33/2. Translation: this companion. See also al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn wa tamām al-niʿma*, bāb 22 ("The continuity of the trusteeship since Adam"), thaqalayn.net/chapter/39/2/22.
13. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 8 (*al-Rawḍa*), ḥadīth 80, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: muwaththaq (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 15:257); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 3:385). thaqalayn.net/hadith/8/1/80/1. The saying is also in the main Sunni collections, e.g. al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, no. 3706, and Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, no. 2404. Translation: this companion.
14. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb 33 ("The Imams inherited the knowledge of the Prophet and of all the prophets and trustees before them"), ḥadīth 4, narrated by Ḍurays al-Kunāsī from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ ʿalā al-ẓāhir, "apparently sound" (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 3:20). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/4/33/4. Translation: this companion.
15. al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn wa tamām al-niʿma*, bāb 31, ḥadīth 16, from Imam al-Bāqir (a): "…and the Spirit of God, Jesus son of Mary, will descend and pray behind him." thaqalayn.net/hadith/39/2/31/16 (two reports share this address; the first is meant). Ungraded in the data. Translation: this companion. For the Sunni tradition of Jesus' return, in which he declines to lead the prayer, see Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-īmān, no. 156.
16. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 8 (*al-Rawḍa*), ḥadīth 203, from Imam al-Bāqir (a). Al-Majlisī: majhūl (unverified chain; *Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 16:71); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 3:391). thaqalayn.net/hadith/8/1/203/1. The Prophet (s) then told them, "A man's nobility is his faith, his honour is his character, and his root is his intellect," and recited Qurʾān 49:13. Translation: this companion.
17. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-tawḥīd, bāb 32 ("Explanation, instruction and the binding force of proof"), ḥadīth 1, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 1:20); no grading by

al-Majlisī is recorded in the data. thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/3/32/1. Translation: this companion. On those "who can find no means and are not guided to a way," see also Qurʾān 4:98–99.

18. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 69 ("Kindness to parents"), ḥadīth 11, narrated by Zakariyyā ibn Ibrāhīm. Al-Majlisī: majhūl (unverified chain; *Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 8:423). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/69/11. Retold and abridged, not translated word for word. In the report she first insists that the Imam must be a prophet, and her son replies that there is no prophet after Muhammad (s), only his descendant.
19. al-Sayyid ʿAlī al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws*, "8. Disbeliever (kāfir)," Ruling 103: "As for the People of the Book (ahl al-kitāb) (i.e. Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians), they are ruled to be pure." sistani.org/english/book/48/2134/. Some earlier jurists took a stricter, precautionary view, which is one reason to check your own marjaʿ.

CHAPTER 8 · THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SUNNI AND SHIA

1. The Farewell Pilgrimage was the only pilgrimage the Prophet made after his emigration to Medina: al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-Maghāzī, no. 4404 (in-book 64:426), from Zayd ibn Arqam. sunnah.com/bukhari:4404. On the crowds who came to Medina to make it with him: Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-Ḥajj, no. 1218a (in-book 15:159), from Jābir ibn ʿAbd Allāh. sunnah.com/muslim:1218a. Sunni sources (ṣaḥīḥ).
2. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb Faḍāʾil al-Ṣaḥāba, bāb min faḍāʾil ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, no. 2408a (in-book 44:55), narrated by Zayd ibn Arqam. sunnah.com/muslim:2408a. Sunni source: *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* is one of the two collections Sunni scholars hold most authoritative. Muslim's report places the sermon "at a water called Khumm, between Mecca and Medina." Sunni and Shia scholars place the gathering at Khumm on the Prophet's return from the Farewell Pilgrimage; al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī calls this point agreed (*al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, commentary on 5:3). Translation: this companion.
3. Ibn Mājah, *Sunan*, al-Muqaddima ("The Book of the Sunnah" on sunnah.com), no. 116, narrated by al-Barāʾ ibn ʿĀzib: on the way back from his pilgrimage the Prophet halted, called the people to congregational prayer and took ʿAlī's hand. sunnah.com/ibnmajah:116. Sunni source: graded ṣaḥīḥ by al-Albānī and ṣaḥīḥ li-ghayrihi (authentic through corroboration) by Shuʿayb al-Arnaʾūṭ; Zubayr ʿAlī Zaʾī judged its chain weak. For the Shia report see note 20. A fuller Shia parallel sets the call to prayer, the Prophet's words "I am closer to the believers than they are to themselves," the raised hand and the two weighty things in one sermon, at al-Juḥfa: al-Ṣadūq, *al-Khiṣāl*, part 2, ch. 81, ḥadīth 1, from Ḥudhayfa ibn Asīd al-Ghifārī. thaqalayn.net/hadith/10/3/81/1. Muḥsinī grades it reliable (*muʿtabar*) in *Muʿjam al-aḥādīth al-muʿtabara*, ch. 48, no. 2 (thaqalayn.net/hadith/9/3/48/2). Translation: this companion.
4. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb 111 ("The birth of the Prophet and his death"), al-Kulaynī's opening note: after ten years in Medina the Prophet died on 12 Rabīʿ al-awwal, aged sixty-three. thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/4/111/0. The pilgrimage had ended in Dhū al-Ḥijja 10 AH.
5. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-ḥajj, bāb 225 ("The mosque of Ghadīr Khumm"), ḥadīth 2, narrated by Ḥassān al-Jammāl, who was carrying the Imam from Medina to Mecca. Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ ʿalā al-ẓāhir, "apparently sound" (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 18:283). thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/3/225/2. Only the Imam's first sentence is translated here. Translation: this companion.
6. Ibn Bābawayh al-Ṣadūq (d. 381/991), *al-Iʿtiqādāt*, chapter on the extent of the Qurʾān; trans. A. A. A. Fyzee, *A Shiʿite Creed* (Tehran: WOFIS, 1982), al-islam.org/shiite-creed-shaykh-saduq/concerning-extent-quran. The quoted words are Fyzee's.
7. al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb Aḥādīth al-anbiyāʾ, no. 3370 (in-book 60:44), narrated by ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Laylā from Kaʿb ibn ʿUjra. sunnah.com/bukhari:3370. Sunni source (ṣaḥīḥ). The Companions' question was literally, "How should we bless you, the People of the House?" Sunni Muslims recite this blessing in the final sitting of the prayer. Translation: this companion.
8. al-Sayyid ʿAlī al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws*, Ruling 1086 (the wording of the *tashahhud*). sistani.org/english/book/48/2239/.
9. Pew Research Center, *Mapping the Global Muslim Population* (7 October 2009): "10-13% are Shia Muslims and 87-90% are Sunni Muslims."

10. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 197 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ): "I undertook his washing, and the angels were my helpers." thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/197/3. Translation: this companion.

11. ʿUmar's own account of the meeting at the Saqīfa of Banū Sāʿida is in al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-Ḥudūd, no. 6830 (in-book 86:56): "'Alī and al-Zubayr and those with them held back from us." sunnah.com/bukhari:6830. On the council of six named by ʿUmar ('Alī, ʿUthmān, al-Zubayr, Ṭalḥa, Saʿd and ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn ʿAwf): al-Bukhārī, Kitāb Faḍāʾil al-Ṣaḥāba, no. 3700. ʿAlī gave his pledge to Abū Bakr after the death of Fāṭima, who outlived the Prophet by six months; he told Abū Bakr, "We held that our kinship with the Messenger of God gave us a share in this matter": al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Maghāzī, nos. 4240–4241 (in-book 64:278). sunnah.com/bukhari:4240. Sunni sources (ṣaḥīḥ). On the pledge the people gave ʿAlī after ʿUthmān's death, in ʿAlī's own words ("I did not seek the people until they sought me"): *Nahj al-balāgha*, Letter 54. thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/2/54/350.

12. al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-Adhān, no. 678 (in-book 10:72): "Tell Abū Bakr to lead the people in prayer." sunnah.com/bukhari:678. Sunni source (ṣaḥīḥ).

13. al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-Aḥkām, no. 7218 (in-book 93:78); also Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-Imāra, no. 1823a. sunnah.com/bukhari:7218. Sunni sources (ṣaḥīḥ). In Muslim no. 1823b, ʿUmar's son ʿAbd Allāh had urged him to name someone: a shepherd who left his flock untended would be thought negligent, and caring for people matters more. Translation: this companion.

14. Ilyas Patel, "What Is the Basis for the Superiority of Abu Bakr over Ali?", SeekersGuidance, 24 October 2022, citing the creed of al-Ṭaḥāwī and the consensus of Sunni scholars.

15. al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-Jihād, no. 3053 (in-book 56:259: Ibn ʿAbbās's tears and the Prophet's request) and Kitāb al-ʿIlm, no. 114 (in-book 3:56: ʿUmar's words and Ibn ʿAbbās's lament); Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-Waṣiyya, nos. 1637a–c. sunnah.com/bukhari:3053; sunnah.com/bukhari:114. Sunni sources (ṣaḥīḥ). In no. 3053 the Prophet then gave three spoken instructions, the third of which the narrator forgot. The Shia scholar al-Mufīd records the same scene in his *al-Amālī*, assembly 5, report 3. thaqalayn.net/hadith/13/5/3/1. Translation: this companion.

16. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 74 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ), spoken when the council chose ʿUthmān. thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/74/2. Translation: this companion.

17. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Letter 62 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ), to the people of Egypt, sent with Mālik al-Ashtar. thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/2/62/378. Translation: this companion.

18. Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, Musnad ʿAlī, no. 950 in sunnah.com's numbering (in-book 5:377, grouped there with nos. 951–952, parallel reports through ʿAmr Dhū Murr and Zayd ibn Arqam), narrated by Saʿīd ibn Wahb and Zayd ibn Yuthayʿ. sunnah.com/ahmad:950. Sunni source, graded "ṣaḥīḥ because of corroborating evidence" by the Darussalam editors. Other versions in the *Musnad* give different numbers of witnesses. Translation: this companion.

19. The five foundations (*uṣūl al-dīn*) as usually taught in the Shia tradition are the oneness of God (*tawḥīd*), divine justice (*ʿadl*), prophethood (*nubuwwa*), the Imamate (*imāma*) and the Return (*maʿād*), following the structure of al-ʿAllāma al-Ḥillī (d. 726/1325), *al-Bāb al-ḥādī ʿashar*, trans. W. M. Miller (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1928).

20. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb 64 ("God's and His Messenger's explicit designation of the Imams, one by one"), ḥadīth 1, narrated by Abū Baṣīr from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ by both its chains (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 3:213); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 1:33–35). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/4/64/1. Abridged: the omitted lines give the parallel examples of alms and pilgrimage. The report goes on to describe the Prophet gathering ʿAlī, Fāṭima, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn under a cloak in the house of Umm Salama, and the passing of the Imamate from ʿAlī to al-Ḥasan, al-Ḥusayn and their successors. Translation: this companion.

21. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb 5 ("The earth is never without a proof"), ḥadīth 2, narrated by Isḥāq ibn ʿAmmār from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan muwaththaq (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 2:295); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 1:25). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/4/5/2. Translation: this companion.

22. Besides 4:59, 33:33 and 2:124, these include 5:55 (see Chapter 29), 5:67 and 42:23. On 5:67 ("O Messenger, convey what has been sent down to you from your Lord…"), al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī notes more than fifteen reports, transmitted by Sunni and Shia narrators, that link it with Ghadīr Khumm (*al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, commentary on 5:3). On 2:124 and the Imam's protection from wrongdoing, see his commentary on that verse and Chapter 7.

23. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb 53 ("The Imams resemble those who came before, and it is disliked to call them prophets"), ḥadīth 3, narrated by Ayyūb ibn al-Ḥurr from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 3:157); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 1:31). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/4/53/3. Translation: this companion.

24. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ḥujja, bābs 113 and 115–125, al-Kulaynī's notes on the birth and death of each Imam (e.g. thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/4/113/0). Dates converted to CE. Al-Kulaynī dates al-Ḥasan's death to the end of Ṣafar 49 AH (669 CE); other reports differ by a year.

25. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb 126 ("The Twelve Imams"), ḥadīth 15, narrated by Abū Baṣīr from Imam al-Bāqir (a). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 6:231). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/4/126/15. Translation: this companion.

26. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb 80 ("The occultation"), ḥadīth 19, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: muwaththaq (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 4:52); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 1:40). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/4/80/19. The shorter occultation ended with the death of the fourth deputy, ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad al-Samarrī, in 329 AH (941 CE), after a final letter announcing that "the complete occultation" had begun: al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, nos. 365 and 367 (thaqalayn.net/hadith/27/1/46/6 and thaqalayn.net/hadith/27/1/46/8). Al-Ṭūsī devotes a chapter to the four deputies (thaqalayn.net/hadith/27/1/43/1). Translation: this companion.

27. Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, Kitāb al-Mahdī, no. 4284 (in-book 38:6), narrated by Umm Salama. sunnah.com/abudawud:4284. Sunni source: graded ṣaḥīḥ by al-Albānī. Translation: this companion.

28. al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn wa-tamām al-niʿma*, the chapter on the Imam's signed letters (Thaqalayn ch. 43), ḥadīth 4. thaqalayn.net/hadith/39/2/43/4. Also al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, no. 247. thaqalayn.net/hadith/27/1/37/3. The letter answered questions sent by Isḥāq ibn Yaʿqūb through the deputy Muḥammad ibn ʿUthmān al-ʿAmrī. Muḥsinī grades al-Ṭūsī's chain reliable (*muʿtabar*) in *Muʿjam al-aḥādīth al-muʿtabara* (thaqalayn.net/hadith/9/3/98/1). Translation: this companion.

29. al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws*, Chapter One, "Following a Jurist (Taqlīd)," Rulings 1–2. sistani.org/english/book/48/2117/. Ruling 2 sets out the qualifications of the jurist one follows and adds that, where jurists differ, one follows the most learned (*aʿlam*). An older root is Imam al-Ṣādiq's instruction to look to "one of you who narrates our ḥadīth, examines what we permit and forbid, and knows our rulings": al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb faḍl al-ʿilm, bāb 21, ḥadīth 10. Al-Majlisī: muwaththaq, accepted by the scholars (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 1:221). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/2/21/10.

30. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-ṣalāt, bāb 20, ḥadīth 8: Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) shows his student Ḥammād ibn ʿĪsā how to pray, standing with both hands resting on his thighs. Al-Majlisī: ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 15:101). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/4/20/8.

31. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb Ṣalāt al-musāfirīn, no. 705a (in-book 6:59), narrated by Ibn ʿAbbās. sunnah.com/muslim:705a. Sunni source (ṣaḥīḥ). In Shia law the noon and afternoon prayers share one span of time, from midday until sunset (al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws*, Ruling 717; sistani.org/english/book/48/2209/).

32. al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws*, Ruling 722: one who doubts that the sun has set must not say the sunset prayer until the redness in the eastern sky has passed overhead, and even without doubt one waits for it as an obligatory precaution. sistani.org/english/book/48/2212/. On the fast: in his chapter on the time for breaking the fast, al-Kulaynī gives Imam al-Bāqir's (a) words, "When the redness has gone from this side," meaning the east, "the sun has set in the east of the earth and in its west": *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-ṣiyām, bāb 20, ḥadīth 2, narrated by Burayd ibn Muʿāwiya. Al-Majlisī: majhūl (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 16:270); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 2:72). thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/2/20/2. Translation: this companion.

33. al-Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-ṣalāt, bāb 11, ḥadīth 133, Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) answering Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam. Al-Ghaffārī: ṣaḥīḥ. thaqalayn.net/hadith/42/1/11/133. The reason is given in a fuller version: al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, vol. 1, bāb 42, ḥadīth 1 (ungraded). thaqalayn.net/hadith/34/1/42/1. The Prophet's words: al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-Tayammum, no. 335 (in-book 7:2). sunnah.com/bukhari:335. Sunni source (ṣaḥīḥ).

34. al-Sīstānī, Questions and Answers, "Adhan and Iqamah": the testimony to ʿAlī's *wilāya* "is not a part of Adhan and Iqamah but it is good to say it after reciting Ash hadu anna Muhammadan Rasulul lah with the intention (Niyyat) of Qurbat." sistani.org/english/qa/01131/.

35. al-Tirmidhī, *Jāmiʿ*, Kitāb al-Manāqib, no. 3788 (in-book 49:187), from Zayd ibn Arqam and Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī. sunnah.com/tirmidhi:3788. Sunni source: al-Tirmidhī calls it ḥasan gharīb; al-Albānī grades it ṣaḥīḥ. A shorter version, spoken at ʿArafa, reaches al-Tirmidhī through Imam Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq and his father, Imam al-Bāqir (no. 3786). Mālik's *Muwaṭṭaʾ* has a report without a chain of narrators, "the Book of God and the Sunna of His Prophet" (Kitāb al-Qadar, in-book 46:3; sunnah.com/malik/46/3; graded ṣaḥīḥ li-ghayrihi, authentic through corroboration, by Salīm al-Hilālī); the two wordings need not exclude each other. Translation: this companion.

36. al-Tirmidhī, *Jāmiʿ*, Kitāb al-Manāqib, no. 3713 (in-book 49:109), graded ṣaḥīḥ by al-Albānī. sunnah.com/tirmidhi:3713. The same wording is in Ibn Mājah, *Sunan*, al-Muqaddima, no. 121 (graded ṣaḥīḥ by al-Albānī and al-Arnaʾūṭ; sunnah.com/ibnmajah:121); compare Ibn Mājah no. 116 (note 3) and Aḥmad, *al-Musnad*, no. 950 (note 18). Sunni sources. Al-Bukhārī does not record the Khumm sermon; Muslim gives it only in the wording of the two weighty things (note 2).

37. al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-Maghāzī, no. 4416 (in-book 64:438), on the Tabūk campaign; also Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb Faḍāʾil al-Ṣaḥāba, nos. 2404a–b. sunnah.com/bukhari:4416. Sunni sources (ṣaḥīḥ). Translation: this companion.

38. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-Imāra, no. 1821f (in-book 33:10); compare no. 1821a and al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Aḥkām, nos. 7222–7223 ("There will be twelve leaders"). sunnah.com/muslim:1821f. Sunni sources (ṣaḥīḥ). The narrator, Jābir ibn Samura, could not hear the last words over the crowd and asked his father what had been said. Translation: this companion.

39. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb Faḍāʾil al-Ṣaḥāba, no. 2424 (in-book 44:91), narrated by ʿĀʾisha. sunnah.com/muslim:2424. Sunni source (ṣaḥīḥ). The Shia parallel, set in the house of Umm Salama, is in al-Kāfī, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb 64, ḥadīth 1 (note 20). Translation: this companion.

40. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb Faḍāʾil al-Ṣaḥāba, no. 2404d (in-book 44:50). sunnah.com/muslim:2404d. Sunni source (ṣaḥīḥ). Translation: this companion.

41. On one soldier's complaint against ʿAlī after the mission to Yemen, see al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-Maghāzī, no. 4350 (in-book 64:377), where the Prophet asks Burayda, "Do you hate ʿAlī? Do not hate him." Al-Bukhārī's chapter heading places the mission before the Farewell Pilgrimage. sunnah.com/bukhari:4350. Sunni source (ṣaḥīḥ). Sunni translators render *mawlā* as "friend": sunnah.com's English for Ibn Mājah 121 reads, "If I am a person's close friend, Ali is also his close friend."

42. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, no. 2408a (note 2). Asked there whether the Prophet's wives are not of his household, Zayd answers, "His wives are of his household, but his household are those barred from charity after him." In no. 2408d (in-book 44:58), asked "His wives?", he answers, "No, by God": a wife may be divorced and return to her father and her people, while his household are his own kin, barred from charity after him. sunnah.com/muslim:2408d. Sunni source (ṣaḥīḥ). Translation: this companion.

43. Al-Bukhārī's version of the saying speaks of "twelve leaders" (*amīr*): Kitāb al-Aḥkām, nos. 7222–7223 (note 38). Sunni source (ṣaḥīḥ).

44. Mālik ibn Anas, *al-Muwaṭṭaʾ*, Kitāb al-Janāʾiz, in-book 16:1 ("Mālik, from Jaʿfar ibn Muḥammad, from his father…"). sunnah.com/malik/16/1. Sunni source. The *Muwaṭṭaʾ* cites Imam al-Ṣādiq in this way more than ten times.

45. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 206 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ), spoken at Ṣiffīn (37/657). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/206/2. Translation: this companion.

46. *al-Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya*, Supplication 4 (“Blessing upon the attesters to the messengers”), §§3 and 7. Arabic and English at al-islam.org/node/18823. Compiled text, not graded here. Translation: this companion.
47. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-ʿishra, bāb 1 (“The duty of good social relations”), ḥadīth 5, narrated by Zayd al-Shaḥḥām from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 12:528); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 1:160). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/4/1/5. Abridged; translation: this companion.
48. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 91 (“Making peace between people”), ḥadīth 2, narrated by Hishām ibn Sālim from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 9:145). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/91/2. Translation: this companion.

CHAPTER 9 · WHAT IS THE SOUL?

1. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Letter 45, to ʿUthmān ibn Ḥunayf al-Anṣārī, Imam ʿAlī’s governor of Basra (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). The banquet: thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/2/45/226. The two garments and two loaves: thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/2/45/227. “It is only my own self…” and the honey, wheat and silk: thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/2/45/229. Abridged; translation: this companion.
2. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-tawḥīd, bāb 21 (“al-Rūḥ”), ḥadīth 1, narrated by al-Aḥwal from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), who was asked about Qurʾān 15:29. Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 2:82). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/3/21/1. The explanation of “My spirit” is ḥadīth 3 of the same chapter, narrated by Muḥammad ibn Muslim: God “attributed it to Himself because He chose it above all other spirits, just as He said of one house among the houses ‘My House’… and all of that is created.” Al-Majlisī: majhūl (unverified chain; *Mirʾāt* 2:83). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/3/21/3. Al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī likewise calls the possessive in “My spirit” one “of honour and ennoblement” (*al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, vol. 12, p. 155, on 15:29). Translation: this companion.
3. al-Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī (d. 1402/1981), *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, commentary on 17:85, vol. 13, pp. 195–97. The spirit is “of the kind of the command” (*min sinkh al-amr*), and the command is defined by Qurʾān 36:82. Page numbers follow the OpenITI digital text, whose printed edition is not stated.
4. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb 56 (“The spirit by which God keeps the Imams on the right course”), ḥadīth 3, narrated by Abū Baṣīr from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt* 3:171). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/4/56/3. The report adds that this Spirit “is from the unseen realm (*al-malakūt*).” Ḥadīth 4 of the same chapter (al-Majlisī: ḥasan, *Mirʾāt* 3:172; thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/4/56/4) says it keeps the Imams on the right course. Compare Qurʾān 97:4, where “the angels and the Spirit” descend on the Night of Power. Translation: this companion.
5. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb 55 (“The spirits in the Imams”), ḥadīth 1, narrated by Jābir al-Juʿfī from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt* 3:165). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/4/55/1. The Imam is explaining Qurʾān 56:7–11. *Rūḥ al-madraj*, “the spirit of going about,” is rendered here as the spirit of movement. Abridged; translation: this companion.
6. Ibn Bābawayh al-Ṣadūq, *al-Amālī*, majlis 29, ḥadīth 15, narrated by Muḥammad ibn al-Qāsim al-Nawfalī from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Not graded in the data (unverified chain). thaqalayn.net/hadith/29/1/29/15. Translation: this companion.
7. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb 126 (on the texts designating the twelve Imams), ḥadīth 1, narrated by Abū Hāshim al-Jaʿfarī from Imam Muḥammad al-Jawād (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt* 6:203). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/4/126/1. Al-Ḥasan’s answers are preserved in Ibn Abī Zaynab al-Nuʿmānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, bāb 4, ḥadīth 2 (not graded in the data). thaqalayn.net/hadith/22/2/4/2. Retold, not translated word for word. On al-Khiḍr and Moses, compare the reports in which “al-Khiḍr said to Moses…”, e.g. *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 203, ḥadīth 22 (al-Majlisī: mursal). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/203/22.
8. al-Ṭabrisī, *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on Qurʾān 12:53 (vol. 5, p. 414 in the OpenITI digital text): “This is from Joseph’s words, according to most commentators”; some give it to the wife of the ʿAzīz. Al-

Ṭabāṭabāʾī also holds that Joseph is speaking, crediting his innocence to his Lord's mercy (*al-Mīzān*, vol. 11, pp. 197–200).

9. Ibn Bābawayh al-Ṣadūq, *Thawāb al-aʿmāl wa-ʿiqāb al-aʿmāl*, bāb 244 ("The reward for reciting Sūrat al-Fajr"), ḥadīth 1, narrated by Dāwūd ibn Farqad from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a): "Recite Sūrat al-Fajr in your obligatory and voluntary prayers, for it is the sūra of al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī." Not graded in the data (unverified chain); quoted here as devotional tradition. thaqalayn.net/hadith/23/2/244/1. Translation: this companion.
10. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Saying 449 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/3/449/569. Translation: this companion.
11. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 109 ("The heart has two ears"), ḥadīth 1, narrated by Ḥammād from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt* 9:377); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 1:104). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/109/1. The Imam ends by reciting Qurʾān 50:17–18, on the two recorders seated "on the right and on the left." Translation: this companion.
12. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 109, ḥadīth 3, narrated by Abān ibn Taghlib from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt* 9:390). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/109/3.
13. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 6 ("God created people with knowledge of His oneness in their nature"), ḥadīth 3, narrated by Zurāra from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt* 7:57); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 1:65). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/6/3. Translation: this companion.
14. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ʿaql wa-l-jahl, ḥadīth 1, narrated by Muḥammad ibn Muslim from Imam al-Bāqir (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt* 1:25); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ. thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/1/0/1. One line quoted; translation: this companion.
15. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ʿaql wa-l-jahl, ḥadīth 12, Imam Mūsā al-Kāẓim's long counsel to Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam. Al-Majlisī: mursal (unverified chain; *Mirʾāt* 1:38). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/1/0/12. Translation: this companion.
16. Mullā Ṣadrā (Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, d. 1050/1640) summed up his view in the phrase *jismāniyyat al-ḥudūth, rūḥāniyyat al-baqāʾ*, "bodily in its origin, spiritual in its survival": the soul grows, through its own development, from a bodily beginning into a spiritual being. See Sajjad H. Rizvi, "Mulla Sadra," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, §4.2 ("The Soul-Body relationship"), plato.stanford.edu/entries/mulla-sadra/.
17. Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037), *al-Shifāʾ*, Book of the Soul (*al-Nafs*): the thought experiment usually called the "floating man."
18. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ʿaql wa-l-jahl, ḥadīth 10, narrated by ʿAbd Allāh ibn Sinān from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt* 1:36); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ. thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/1/0/10. The omitted words are the narrator's question, "And how does he obey Satan?" Translation: this companion.
19. al-Sayyid ʿAlī al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws*, Rulings 1170–1171, on the excessive doubter (*kathīr al-shakk*). sistani.org/english/book/48/2255/. Ruling 1170 adds that one who is only "developing a habit of doubting" already counts.
20. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, Kitāb al-jihād, bāb 3 ("The kinds of struggle"), ḥadīth 3, narrated by al-Sakūnī from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ḍaʿīf ʿalā al-mashhūr (weak chain; *Mirʾāt* 18:336). thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/1/3/3. Also in al-Ṣadūq, *Maʿānī al-akhbār*, bāb 117, ḥadīth 1 (thaqalayn.net/hadith/28/1/117/1), and *al-Amālī*, majlis 71, ḥadīth 9 (thaqalayn.net/hadith/29/1/71/9), both ungraded, which add: "The best struggle is that of one who struggles against the self between his two sides." Translation: this companion.
21. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 203 ("Taking account of one's deeds"), ḥadīth 2, narrated by Ibrāhīm ibn ʿUmar al-Yamānī from "Abū al-Ḥasan al-Māḍī," that is, Imam Mūsā al-Kāẓim (a). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan (*Mirʾāt* 11:358). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/203/2. Translation: this companion.

22. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 112 (“The major sins”), ḥadīth 12, narrated by al-Fuḍayl from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), on the adulterer: the spirit of faith “is stripped from him” during the act, and when he leaves off, “faith returns.” Al-Majlisī: ḥasan ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ. thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/112/12. Imam al-Bāqir’s identification of this spirit with Qurʾān 58:22 is ḥadīth 11 of the same chapter, narrated by Ibn Bukayr. Al-Majlisī: muwaththaq ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt* 10:26). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/112/11.

CHAPTER 10 · ANGELS, JINN & THE UNSEEN

1. The account of Ṭāʾif and the night at Nakhla, from al-Zuhrī, Saʿīd ibn Jubayr and others, is given by al-Faḍl ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabrisī (d. 548/1154), *Majmaʿ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, on Qurʾān 46:29–31, vol. 9, p. 154; a report from Ibn ʿAbbās and Saʿīd ibn Jubayr on the previous page places the listening at Baṭn Nakhla, as the Prophet prayed the dawn prayer on his way to the market of ʿUkāẓ. al-Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, vol. 18, pp. 219–20, quotes a third version from the *Tafsīr* of al-Qummī and comments that the reports about these jinn “are many and differ greatly, and there is no way to verify their texts by the Book or by reliable indications.” Page numbers follow the OpenITI digital texts. Translation: this companion.
2. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb 45 (a short chapter on the unseen), ḥadīth 3, narrated by Sudayr. Al-Majlisī: majhūl (unverified chain; *Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 3:112). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/4/45/3. In the same report the Imam cites Qurʾān 27:40 and 13:43 on “knowledge of the Book.” Translation: this companion.
3. *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Kitāb al-zuhd wa-l-raqāʾiq, no. 2996 (ʿAbd al-Bāqī numbering), from ʿĀʾisha, quoting the Prophet (s): “The angels were created from light, the jinn from a smokeless flame of fire, and Adam from what has been described to you.” Sunni source. A similar report attributed to Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) is in *al-Ikhtiṣāṣ* (attributed to al-Shaykh al-Mufīd), as cited by al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 11, p. 102, no. 8; its chain is marfūʿ (unverified). Translation: this companion.
4. Ibn Bābawayh al-Ṣadūq (d. 381/991), *ʿIlal al-sharāʾiʿ*, as cited in al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, *Wasāʾil al-Shīʿa* (Āl al-Bayt ed.), vol. 15, p. 209, no. 20298 (in the chapter “The obligation that intellect prevail over desire”), and al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 57, p. 299, no. 5. ʿAbd Allāh ibn Sinān asked Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) whether the angels or the children of Adam are better, and the Imam answered by quoting Imam ʿAlī (a). No grading found (unverified chain); the passage was not checked in a printed edition of *ʿIlal*. Translation: this companion.
5. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 109 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/109/5. Translation: this companion.
6. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 8 (*al-Rawḍa*), ḥadīth 402, narrated by Dāwūd al-Raqqī from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan ʿalā al-ẓāhir (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 16:277). thaqalayn.net/hadith/8/1/402/1. Translation: this companion.
7. *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 1 (the same number in every edition). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/1/6. Abridged; translation: this companion.
8. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-duʿāʾ, bāb 60 (short supplications for the needs of this world and the next), ḥadīth 23, narrated by Muḥammad ibn Muslim. Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 12:460). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/2/60/23. Imam al-Sajjād (a) also names “Isrāfīl, the one with the Trumpet” in *al-Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya*, Supplication 3. Translation: this companion.
9. The name ʿIzrāʾīl does not occur in the Qurʾān, in *al-Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya*, Supplication 3 (which says “the angel of death and his helpers”), or in any of the thirty-nine hadith books searched for this companion. It appears in later works, for example al-Ṭabrisī, *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, reporting an opinion on Qurʾān 27:87 (vol. 7, p. 409 in the OpenITI digital text). It also appears in some reports gathered by al-Majlisī, for example one attributed to Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), with an abbreviated chain, from the *Tafsīr* of Furāt al-Kūfī (*Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 6, p. 162, no. 31, OpenITI digital text). Translation: this companion.
10. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb 56 (“The spirit by which God keeps the Imams on the right course”), ḥadīth 3, narrated by Abū Baṣīr from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), on Qurʾān 17:85. Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 3:171). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/4/56/3. Imam al-Sajjād (a) likewise blesses “the

Spirit who is of Your command" in *al-Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya*, Supplication 3. Translation: this companion.

11. *Nahj al-balāgha*, Saying 201 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/3/201/249. Translation: this companion.
12. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 190 ("Intending a good or a bad deed"), ḥadīth 4, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), quoting the Prophet (s). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ. thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/190/4. The same seven hours' respite appears in bāb 192 ("Seeking forgiveness"), ḥadīth 2 and 5, both ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 11:307, 309). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/192/2. Abridged; translation: this companion.
13. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 109 ("The heart has two ears"), ḥadīth 1. Al-Majlisī: ḥasan ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 9:377). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/109/1.
14. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-janāʾiz, bāb 88 ("Questioning in the grave: who is questioned and who is not"), ḥadīth 4, narrated by Muḥammad ibn Muslim from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ. thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/3/88/4. Ḥadīth 1 of the same chapter (ḥasan; *Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 14:206) adds that the rest "are left alone." The names Munkar and Nakīr appear in *al-Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya*, Supplication 3, and in weaker reports of the same chapter, e.g. ḥadīth 7 (majhūl). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/3/88/7. Translation: this companion.
15. *al-Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya*, Supplication 3 ("In blessing the bearers of the Throne and every angel brought near"), paragraphs 1, 6, 18 and 25 in the numbering of al-islam.org, where the Arabic was checked on 28 October 2026: al-islam.org/sahifa-al-kamilah-al-sajjadiyya-imam-ali-zayn-al-abidin/3-blessing-upon-bearers-throne. The prayer weaves in Qurʾān 21:19–20, 66:6 and 82:11. Abridged; translation: this companion.
16. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb 98 ("The jinn come to the Imams…"), ḥadīth 1, narrated by Saʿd al-Iskāf. Al-Majlisī: majhūl (unverified chain; *Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 4:291). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/4/98/1. A second version, ḥadīth 3, is mursal (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 4:293). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/4/98/3. Retold, not translated word for word.
17. *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 192, *al-Qāṣiʿa* (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/192/4 and thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/192/6. Translation: this companion.
18. *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 192: God would not admit a human being to Paradise "for a deed for which He expelled an angel from it." thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/192/6. Al-Ṣadūq explains that one who is not an angel may be counted among them, citing Qurʾān 18:50 (*al-Khiṣāl*, Part 4, "The four prophets who were kings," author's comment). thaqalayn.net/hadith/10/5/88/1. Translation: this companion.
19. al-Ṭabrisī, *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on Qurʾān 114:4, vol. 10, p. 497 (OpenITI digital text), citing a report (*athar*). Translation: this companion.
20. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb faḍl al-ʿilm, bāb 11 ("Forbidding speech without knowledge"), ḥadīth 4, narrated by Ziyād ibn Abī Rajāʾ from Imam al-Bāqir (a). Al-Majlisī: muwaththaq (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 1:137); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 1:5). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/2/11/4. Translation: this companion.
21. al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, on Qurʾān 2:275, vol. 2, pp. 412–13 (OpenITI digital text; printed edition not stated). He reports and rejects the view that the verse only borrows a popular belief, and concludes that the jinn have "some role in some of those afflicted, if not all." Natural causes "such as disorder of the nerves and injury to the brain are near causes, behind which stands Satan": causes one behind another, not side by side. Translation: this companion.
22. *Nahj al-balāgha*, Saying 400 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/3/400/498. Quoted in part; translation: this companion.
23. The same verse names two angels in Babylon, Hārūt and Mārūt, who warned everyone they taught, "We are only a trial, so do not disbelieve." A popular tale made them fallen angels seduced by a woman who became the planet Venus. Imam ʿAlī al-Riḍā (a), the eighth Imam (d. 203/818), is reported to have called the star story a lie, and to have explained that the two angels taught people about magic so that they could protect themselves from sorcerers: al-Ṣadūq, *ʿUyūn akhbār al-*

Riḍā, vol. 1, bāb 27 (on Hārūt and Mārūt), ḥadīth 2, answering a question from the caliph al-Maʾmūn. Not graded in the data (unverified chain). thaqalayn.net/hadith/11/2/27/2. Translation: this companion.

24. *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 79 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ), with al-Raḍī's heading: spoken "when he resolved to march against the Kharijites." thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/79/1; thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/79/2; thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/79/3. Abridged; translation: this companion.
25. al-Sayyid ʿAlī al-Sīstānī, official English question-and-answer pages: "Black Magic," sistani.org/english/qa/01138/; "Invocation of Jinn," sistani.org/english/qa/01224/; "Palmistry," sistani.org/english/qa/01285/. All checked on 28 October 2026. The site's list of the four *Qul* chapters names one of them twice by mistake; it evidently means Sūras 109, 112, 113 and 114.
26. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-duʿāʾ, bāb 49 ("Supplication before sleep and on waking"), ḥadīth 4, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: majhūl; al-Bihbūdī includes it in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* (1:146). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/2/49/4. Translation: this companion.
27. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-ḥajj, bāb 45 ("Prayers on leaving home, and the excellence of charity"), ḥadīth 3, narrated by Ḥammād ibn ʿUthmān (al-Majlisī: ḥasan, *Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 17:175; al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ), and ḥadīth 4, narrated by ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Ḥajjāj (al-Majlisī and al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ). thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/3/45/3; thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/3/45/4. Translation: this companion.
28. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb faḍl al-ʿilm, bāb 4 ("The reward of the scholar and the student"), ḥadīth 1, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), quoting the Prophet (s). Al-Majlisī: one chain majhūl, the other "ḥasan or muwaththaq, not falling short of ṣaḥīḥ" (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 1:113). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/2/4/1. Translation: this companion.

CHAPTER 11 · WHY IS THERE SUFFERING?

1. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 47 ("al-Ṣabr", Patience), ḥadīth 6, narrated by Abū Baṣīr from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 8:129); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 1:78). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/47/6. Translation: this companion.
2. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Saying 470 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). Asked about *tawḥīd* and *ʿadl*, Imam ʿAlī (a) said: "*Tawḥīd* is that you do not imagine Him; justice is that you do not accuse Him." thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/3/470/597. Translation: this companion.
3. Ibn Bābawayh al-Ṣadūq, *al-Tawḥīd*, bāb 61 ("Children and God's justice concerning them"), the author's own discussion after ḥadīth 12. This is al-Ṣadūq's reasoning, not a hadith. thaqalayn.net/hadith/14/2/61/12. Paraphrased and abridged by this companion.
4. al-Ṣadūq, *al-Tawḥīd*, bāb 59 ("The negation of compulsion and delegation"), ḥadīth 7, narrated by Sulaymān b. Jaʿfar al-Jaʿfarī from Imam al-Riḍā (a). Graded *ṣaḥīḥ al-isnād* by Hādī al-Najafī (*Mawsūʿat aḥādīth Ahl al-Bayt* 2:347). thaqalayn.net/hadith/14/2/59/7. Parallel: al-Ṣadūq, *ʿUyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, vol. 1, bāb 11, ḥadīth 48 (thaqalayn.net/hadith/11/2/11/48). Translation: this companion.
5. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-tawḥīd, bāb 30 ("Predestination, fate and the middle road in between," in Thaqalayn's English), ḥadīth 13, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a): *lā jabra wa-lā tafwīḍa wa-lākin amrun bayna amrayn*. Al-Majlisī: mursal (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 2:195). It is cited here as the tradition's formula; the report from Imam al-Riḍā (a) in note 4 is its support. thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/3/30/13. Translation: this companion.
6. The dictation known as *Tawḥīd al-Mufaḍḍal*, which Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) is reported to have given his student al-Mufaḍḍal b. ʿUmar, reproduced in al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* (printed ed. 1403/1983), vol. 3, pp. 138–140, on hardships and calamities. Some scholars doubted al-Mufaḍḍal and Muḥammad b. Sinān, who transmits from him, so the text is cited as attributed. English: *The Tradition of Mufaḍḍal*, "The Natural Disasters" and "Trouble Free Life," al-islam.org/tradition-mufaddal/fourth-session-natural-disasters. Translation here: this companion.

7. *Nahj al-balāgha*, Saying 241 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/3/241/292. Translation: this companion.
8. On pains (*ālām*) and compensation (*aʿwāḍ*) in classical Imāmī theology, see Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, *Tajrīd al-iʿtiqād*, with al-ʿAllāma al-Ḥillī's commentary *Kashf al-murād*, in the discussion of divine justice. On children, see al-Ṣadūq, *al-Tawḥīd*, bāb 61 (note 3). One report there, ungraded, offers a tender consolation: the young children of believers who die are cared for by a relative who died before them, or by Lady Fāṭima (a), until their parents arrive (bāb 61, ḥadīth 8; thaqalayn.net/hadith/14/2/61/8).
9. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 31 ("al-Riḍā bi-l-qaḍāʾ", Contentment with God's decree), ḥadīth 8, narrated by Ibn Abī Yaʿfūr from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 7:8). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/31/8. Translation: this companion.
10. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 106 ("Shiddat ibtilāʾ al-muʾmin", The severity of the believer's trial), ḥadīth 29, narrated by Samāʿa from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan aw muwaththaq (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 9:352). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/106/29. The shorter version in ḥadīth 1 of the same chapter is graded ḥasan ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt* 9:321; thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/106/1). The Imams described the "Book of ʿAlī" as a scroll dictated by the Prophet (s) and written in Imam ʿAlī's own hand (*al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb 40, ḥadīth 6; unverified chain). The report goes on to say that trial comes to the God-fearing believer "faster than rain runs down to the low ground." Translation: this companion.
11. al-Ṣadūq, *al-Khiṣāl*, the chapter of sevens, "Job suffered for seven years without having committed any sins," ḥadīth 2 (Thaqalayn numbering 7/55/2), from Imam al-Bāqir (a) through Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Not graded in the data (unverified chain), so it is offered as a report, not a proof. It also rejects the popular picture of Job's body rotting, which the Qur'an never mentions. thaqalayn.net/hadith/10/8/55/2. Translation: this companion.
12. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 106, ḥadīth 20, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: marfūʿ, a broken chain (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 9:337). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/106/20. The sound report is ḥadīth 21 of the same chapter, from the Prophet (s) through Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: muwaththaq ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt* 9:338). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/106/21. The Arabic *mā lillāh fīhi min ḥāja* says that God "has no need of" such a person; it does not say that God has abandoned him. Translations: this companion.
13. *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 192 (*al-Qāṣiʿa*; numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/192/24. Translation: this companion.
14. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-janāʾiz, bāb 95 ("Rare reports"), ḥadīth 45, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ḍaʿīf ʿalā al-mashhūr (its chain includes Sahl b. Ziyād). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/3/95/45. A parallel without a chain: al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, vol. 1, bāb 27, ḥadīth 25 (thaqalayn.net/hadith/34/1/27/25). Because the Shia chains are weak, note that the scene is also reported in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Kitāb al-janāʾiz, no. 1303 (Sunni source, graded authentic in its tradition), where the Prophet (s) calls his tears "mercy." Translation: this companion.
15. *Nahj al-balāgha*, Saying 291 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/3/291/355. The saying continues: "If you are patient, the decree runs its course and you are rewarded; if you rage against it, the decree runs its course and you carry the burden" (thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/3/291/356). Translation: this companion.
16. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 106, ḥadīth 30, narrated by Yūnus b. ʿAmmār. Al-Majlisī: majhūl (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 9:353); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 1:103–104). Before teaching the prayer, the Imam reminded him that the believer from Pharaoh's people, whom the Qur'an praises (40:28), had crippled fingers. thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/106/30. Retold, not translated word for word.
17. al-Faḍl b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabrisī, *Majmaʿ al-bayān* (1st ed. 1415/1995), vol. 10, p. 390, on Qur'an 94:5–6. He cites the grammarians al-Farrāʾ and al-Zajjāj, and the reading that "hardship stands between two eases: relief in this world, or the reward of the next." The saying "one hardship will not overcome two eases" is reported on the same page from Ibn ʿAbbās and, through al-Ḥasan al-

Baṣrī, from the Prophet (s); see also al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān* 20:318. Neither report has a verified chain here. Translation: this companion.

18. Ibn Shuʿba al-Ḥarrānī, *Tuḥaf al-ʿuqūl*, ed. ʿA. A. al-Ghaffārī (2nd ed., 1404 AH), p. 245, among the sayings of Imam al-Ḥusayn (a); it gives no chain. The first two quoted sentences also appear in Ibn Ṭāwūs, *al-Luhūf* (reproduced in al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* 44:381), and, from Abū Nuʿaym's *Ḥilyat al-awliyā'* (Sunni source, not graded), in *Biḥār al-anwār* 44:192. Abridged; translation: this companion.

19. The early layer: Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil al-Ṭālibiyyīn*, citing Abū Mikhnaf and an eyewitness, as quoted in al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* 45:47; there the child is ʿAbd Allāh, and Husayn throws the blood toward the sky with a short prayer of his own. Al-Mufīd also names him ʿAbd Allāh (cited in *Biḥār al-anwār* 45:46). The words quoted here are from Ibn Ṭāwūs (d. 664/1266), *al-Luhūf*, as reproduced in *Biḥār al-anwār* 45:46; English in *Lohoof (Sighs of Sorrow)*, "The Battle and Its Related Events," al-islam.org/lohoof-sighs-sorrow-sayyid-ibn-tawus/battle-and-its-related-events. Translation: this companion.

20. al-Ṣadūq, *al-Amālī*, majlis 31, ḥadīth 3, narrated through Abū Nuʿaym from a doorkeeper (*ḥājib*) of ʿUbayd Allāh b. Ziyād. Not graded (unverified chain). thaqalayn.net/hadith/29/1/31/3. Also in al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* 45:154. Translation: this companion.

21. Ibn Ṭāwūs, *al-Luhūf*, as reproduced in al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* 45:115–116 («مَا رَأَيْتُ إِلَّا جَمِيلاً»); English in *Lohoof (Sighs of Sorrow)*, "After the Martyrdom of Husayn," al-islam.org/lohoof-sighs-sorrow-sayyid-ibn-tawus/after-martyrdom-husayn, where it is rendered "Nothing but good!" Historians note that the phrase is first securely attested in *al-Luhūf*, nearly six centuries after the event; the one earlier witness, Ibn Aʿtham's *al-Futūḥ* (4th/10th century), has «جميلا» only in a disputed reading, which one edition prints as «حملا» (see the Arabic WikiShia article «ما رأيت إلا جميلا», summarising the historian Muḥammad Hādī al-Yūsufī al-Gharawī). The tenth-century report in note 20 gives the rest of her reply without it. Translation: this companion.

22. al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn wa tamām al-niʿma*, bāb 43 (on the signed letters issued by the Qā'im), ḥadīth 38 in the Thaqalayn numbering (37 in the printed Arabic), narrated by Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Isḥāq al-Ṭālaqānī, who was present when the question about al-Ḥusayn (a) was put to Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥusayn b. Rawḥ. The next day, Ibn Rawḥ told him that he had not spoken from his own opinion but from what he had heard from the Imam. Not graded in the data (unverified chain). thaqalayn.net/hadith/39/2/43/38. Abridged; translation: this companion.

23. al-Ṣadūq, *al-Khiṣāl*, the chapter of fives, "The five who wept," ḥadīth 1 (Thaqalayn numbering 5/13/1), from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Its chain is incomplete (*marfūʿ*), and it is not graded. thaqalayn.net/hadith/10/6/13/1. Translation: this companion.

24. *al-Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya*, Supplication 15 ("His supplication when he was ill"), paragraphs 2–4. Arabic checked against al-islam.org/sahifa-al-kamilah-al-sajjadiyya-imam-ali-zayn-al-abidin/15-his-supplication-when-sick. In paragraph 5 the Imam adds that even during his illness the two recording angels wrote for him pure deeds "that no heart had thought of, no tongue had spoken and no limb had done," as a gift. Translation: this companion.

25. For the layers described here: Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī and al-Mufīd as cited in al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* 45:46–47 (note 19); al-Ṣadūq, *al-Amālī*, majlis 31, ḥadīth 3 (note 20); Ibn Ṭāwūs, *al-Luhūf*, as reproduced in *Biḥār al-anwār* 45:46 and 45:115–116 (notes 19 and 21). A *maqtal* ("the killing," as in the title *Maqtal al-Ḥusayn*) is the traditional name for such an account. The genre itself is early: al-Majlisī lists "the Book of the *Maqtal* by al-Shaykh Abū Mikhnaf" among his sources (*Biḥār al-anwār* 1:25, OpenITI digital text); the texts written to be recited at mourning gatherings are later.

26. *Nahj al-balāgha*, Letter 47 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ), Imam ʿAlī's (a) will to al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn (a) after Ibn Muljam struck him. thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/2/47/243. Translation: this companion.

27. The verse speaks of change "within themselves." Its parallel, Qur'an 8:53, applies the same rule to God's blessings. Reading it as a call to act against injustice is a fair application of the principle, not its only meaning.

28. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 85 (“Relieving the believer’s distress”), ḥadīth 5, narrated by Dharīḥ al-Muḥāribī from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 9:121). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/85/5. Translation: this companion.

CHAPTER 12 · WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE DIE?

1. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-janāʾiz, bāb 13 (“What believers and unbelievers see at death”), ḥadīth 3, narrated by Saʿīd b. Yasār. Al-Majlisī: muwaththaq (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 13:289). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/3/13/3. Saʿīd says he thinks the dying man was Zakariyyā b. Sābūr. Translation: this companion.
2. To *tawaffā* a thing is “to take it whole and complete, as one receives what one is owed, or a debt from a debtor”: al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī (d. 1402/1981), *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, vol. 16, p. 251 (on 32:11); see also vol. 3, p. 206. *Wafāt*, “death,” comes from the same root, *w-f-y*. Page references to *al-Mīzān* follow the printed edition behind the OpenITI digital text. Translation: this companion.
3. al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, vol. 2, p. 113; similarly vol. 1, p. 351. Answering the objection that bodies dissolve and are lost in the earth, the verse says that the angel of death takes people in full, “so they are other than their bodies. Their bodies are lost in the earth, but they, that is, their selves, are not lost.” Translation: this companion.
4. Ibn Bābawayh al-Ṣadūq, *Maʿānī al-akhbār*, bāb 321 (“The meaning of death”), ḥadīth 3, narrated from Imam ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn (a), who says that the faces of most of those with his father changed colour as the danger grew, while his own shone. thaqalayn.net/hadith/28/1/321/3. Not graded. The chapter’s reports come through Muḥammad b. al-Qāsim al-Astarābādī (al-Jurjānī), the transmitter of the *Tafsīr* attributed to Imam al-ʿAskarī, a chain that rijāl critics regard as weak. Abridged; translation: this companion.
5. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-janāʾiz, bāb 95 (“Rare reports”), ḥadīth 36, narrated by Hishām b. Sālim from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 14:263). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/3/95/36. Retold, not translated word for word.
6. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 203 (“Evaluating one’s deeds”), ḥadīth 20, narrated by ʿAbd Allāh b. Sinān from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), who relates the exchange. Not graded in the data; the chain has an unnamed link (“from some of his companions”), so it is unverified. thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/203/20. Abridged; translation: this companion.
7. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 5 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). He spoke after the Prophet’s death, when al-ʿAbbās and Abū Sufyān offered him their allegiance and he knew that his silence would be called fear of death. thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/5/3. Translation: this companion.
8. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-janāʾiz, bāb 13, ḥadīth 15, narrated by Abū Baṣīr, who asked Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) about Qurʾān 56:83–87. Al-Majlisī: muwaththaq (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl*). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/3/13/15. Translation: this companion.
9. “His eye is delighted”: al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-janāʾiz, bāb 13, ḥadīth 14, narrated by Jārūd b. al-Mundhir. Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 13:296). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/3/13/14. The tear: same bāb, ḥadīth 6, narrated by Yaḥyā b. Sābūr. Al-Majlisī: ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 13:293); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 1:229). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/3/13/6. Translations: this companion.
10. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-janāʾiz, bāb 13, ḥadīth 8, narrated by ʿUqba from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), who links it to Qurʾān 10:64 (“for them is good news in the life of this world and in the hereafter”). Al-Majlisī: mursal ka-l-ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 13:294); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 1:230). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/3/13/8. See also ḥadīth 5, where Imam al-Bāqir (a) confirms Imam ʿAlī’s words, “No servant who loves me and dies loving me will fail to see me at his death where he would love to,” and adds, “and the Messenger of God on the right” (al-Majlisī: majhūl; al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ; thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/3/13/5). These reports describe a hope for the believer, not a promise about what any particular dying person will see.
11. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-janāʾiz, bāb 14 (“How the souls of believers and unbelievers are taken”), ḥadīth 1, narrated by Idrīs al-Qummī from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a): God commands the angel of death to hold back the believer’s soul so as to make it easy for him, and to draw it out in the

gentlest way. Al-Majlisī: ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 13:298). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/3/14/1. Translation: this companion.

12. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 109 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/109/8. Translation: this companion.
13. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-janāʾiz, bāb 2 ("The reward of illness"), ḥadīth 1, narrated by ʿAbd Allāh b. Sinān from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). God's words continue: "for as long as he is held in My ropes." Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 13:262). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/3/2/1. Abridged; translation: this companion. On illness lightening the sins a person carries, see *al-Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya*, Supplication 15, quoted in Chapter 11.
14. al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws* (English ed.), Rulings 530 (the guardian's duty, and the collective obligation if there is no guardian or he refuses) and 534 (who the guardian is). sistani.org/english/book/48/2185/.
15. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-janāʾiz, bāb 33 ("The reward for washing a believer"), ḥadīth 3, narrated by Ibrāhīm b. ʿUmar. Al-Majlisī: ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 13:346); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 1:236). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/3/33/3. Translation: this companion.
16. al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws* (English ed.), Rulings 547–549 (who may wash whom) and 558–568 (the shroud; none of these rulings sets a colour). sistani.org/english/book/48/2186/ and sistani.org/english/book/48/2187/. White is recommended on the strength of al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 6, Kitāb al-ziyy wa-l-tajammul wa-l-murūʾa, bāb 4 (on white cotton clothing), ḥadīth 1, narrated by Ibn al-Qaddāḥ from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), quoting the Prophet (s): "Wear white, for it is the finest and the purest, and shroud your dead in it." Al-Majlisī: muwaththaq (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 22:322). thaqalayn.net/hadith/6/7/4/1. Translation: this companion.
17. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-janāʾiz, bāb 87 ("The dying person sees his wealth, his children and his deeds"), ḥadīth 1, narrated by Suwayd b. Ghafala from Imam ʿAlī (a). Not graded in the data (unverified chain). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/3/87/1. Abridged; translation: this companion. Chapter 13 tells a similar teaching of the Prophet (s) to Qays b. ʿĀṣim.
18. al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws* (English ed.), checked on sistani.org on 28 October 2026. At the bedside: Rulings 521–528, including 524 on prompting the dying with the testimonies and "the avowal of the Most Noble Prophet and the Infallible Imams" (sistani.org/english/book/48/2183/). Who acts: 530–534 (.../2185/). Washing: 538, 544, 547–549 (.../2186/). Shroud: 558–568 (.../2187/). Camphor: 573 (.../2188/). Funeral prayer: 597 (.../2190/). Burial: 602–604 (.../2192/). Food for three days: 621 (.../2193/). The prayer of loneliness, two rakʿas, with Āyat al-Kursī after al-Ḥamd in the first and Sūrat al-Qadr ten times after al-Ḥamd in the second: 627–629 (.../8296/). Coffins: Questions and Answers, sistani.org/english/qa/01205/.
19. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-janāʾiz, bāb 89 ("What the grave says every day"), ḥadīth 3, narrated by ʿAmr b. Yazīd. Al-Majlisī: majhūl (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl*), so the chain is unverified. thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/3/89/3. Translation: this companion.
20. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-janāʾiz, bāb 88, ḥadīth 16; the questioner does not name the Imam. Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 14:214). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/3/88/16. A parallel without a chain adds: "The Lord of the earth is the Lord of the air" (ḥadīth 17). Translation: this companion.
21. al-Ṭabrisī, *Majmaʿ al-bayān* (1st ed. 1415/1995), vol. 8, p. 269, on 36:26, citing Ibn Masʿūd (his people trampled him to death) and Qatāda (they stoned him). Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and Mujāhid held instead that God raised him up alive.
22. "In bodies like their bodies": al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-janāʾiz, bāb 91 (on the souls of believers), ḥadīth 1, narrated by Abū Wallād al-Ḥannāṭ. Al-Majlisī: ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 14:221). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/3/91/1. "In chambers in the Garden": same bāb, ḥadīth 4, narrated by Abū Baṣīr; they also eat of its food and drink of its drink. Al-Majlisī: ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl*). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/3/91/4. See also ḥadīth 7 (muwaththaq). Their prayer for the Hour to come shows that they are still in the barzakh. Translations: this companion.
23. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-janāʾiz, bāb 89, ḥadīth 2, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ḍaʿīf ʿalā al-mashhūr (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl*). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/3/89/2. Also Ibn Bābawayh al-Ṣadūq, *al-Khiṣāl*, Part 3, ch. 84 ("The three hardest hours for the son of Adam"), ḥadīth 1, from Imam ʿAlī b.

al-Ḥusayn (a), who says it after reciting 23:100. Not graded; its chain runs through ʿAbd al-Razzāq, Maʿmar and al-Zuhrī. thaqalayn.net/hadith/10/4/84/1. Translation: this companion.

24. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-janāʾiz, bāb 88 ("Questioning in the grave: who is questioned and who is not"), ḥadīth 4, narrated by Muḥammad b. Muslim from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl*). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/3/88/4. Translation: this companion.

25. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-janāʾiz, bāb 88, ḥadīth 3, from Imam al-Bāqir (a). Al-Majlisī: muwaththaq (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl*). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/3/88/3. Also ḥadīth 1, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a): "and the others are left alone." Al-Majlisī: ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 14:206). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/3/88/1. Translations: this companion.

26. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-janāʾiz, bāb 87, ḥadīth 3, narrated by Jābir from Imam al-Bāqir (a), who gives "the like of" the previous report and adds the words quoted. Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 14:205). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/3/87/3. The previous report (ḥadīth 2; al-Majlisī: ḍaʿīf; thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/3/87/2) is the Prophet's (s), relayed by Imam al-Bāqir (a) from Jābir b. ʿAbd Allāh: "God's enemy" (*ʿaduww Allāh*), carried to his grave, cries out to his bearers about the world, the friends, the children and the wealth that failed him. Translation: this companion.

27. The names and the four questions: al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-janāʾiz, bāb 88, ḥadīth 12. Al-Majlisī: ḍaʿīf (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 14:212). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/3/88/12. That report and ḥadīth 10 (ḍaʿīf ʿalā al-mashhūr) apply Qurʾān 14:27 to this moment. Imam ʿAlī Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn (a) names "Munkar and Nakīr, and Rūmān, the tester in the graves" in *al-Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya*, Supplication 3 ("In blessing the bearers of the Throne"), paragraph 18 in the al-islam.org numbering. Chapter 10 discusses the angels. Translations: this companion.

28. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-janāʾiz, bāb 88, ḥadīth 15, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/3/88/15. Unverified chain: it is *marfūʿ* ("raised"), running through Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Khurāsānī from his father with the links to the Imam left out, and al-Majlisī quotes it that way (*Biḥār al-anwār* 6:265–266, no. 111). The Thaqalayn data prints al-Majlisī's grading as ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 14:214), the same grade and page it gives the next report (ḥadīth 16); a raised chain cannot be ṣaḥīḥ, so this appears to be an error in the data. Translation: this companion.

29. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-janāʾiz, bāb 88, ḥadīth 5, narrated by Abū Baṣīr. Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl*). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/3/88/5. Translation: this companion.

30. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-janāʾiz, bāb 89, ḥadīth 3, narrated by ʿAmr b. Yazīd: Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) tells him that on the Day of Resurrection his followers will enter Paradise through the intercession of the Prophet (s) or his successor, "but by God, I fear for you in the barzakh." Al-Majlisī: majhūl (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl*), so the chain is unverified. thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/3/89/3. Translation: this companion.

31. al-Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ṭahāra, bāb 13 (on instructing the dying, their washing and their shrouding), ḥadīth 9, narrated by Zurāra. Al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Tahdhīb*, p. 111); al-Ghaffārī: muwaththaq ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ (his edition of the *Tahdhīb*, 1:305). thaqalayn.net/hadith/41/1/13/9. The report calls the boy "a son of Jaʿfar"; this was most likely Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), which would make the boy Imam al-Bāqir's grandson, but the report does not say so. Before leading the prayer the Imam put on a fine robe, cloak and turban. Retold; the quoted words are translated by this companion.

32. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-janāʾiz, bāb 79 ("The neighbours' duties to the bereaved, and mourning gatherings"), ḥadīth 1, narrated by Ḥafṣ b. al-Bakhtarī and Hishām b. Sālim from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Fāṭima (a) was to go to Asmāʾ with her women. Al-Majlisī: ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl*); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 1:247). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/3/79/1. Imam al-Bāqir (a) adds that a mourning gathering is held for the family "for three days from the day he died" (ḥadīth 2; al-Majlisī: ḥasan; thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/3/79/2). Translations: this companion.

33. al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws* (English ed.), Ruling 621, which also discourages eating in the bereaved family's house during those days. sistani.org/english/book/48/2193/.

34. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-janāʾiz, bāb 85 ("Visiting graves"), ḥadīth 3, narrated by Hishām b. Sālim from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 14:193); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ*

al-Kāfī 1:249). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/3/85/3. The visits were on Mondays and Thursdays, and her words suggest the martyrs of Uḥud. Reports differ on how long Lady Fāṭima (a) lived after the Prophet (s); this one says seventy-five days. Translation: this companion.

35. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-janāʾiz, bāb 82 (on patience, anguish and saying "We belong to God"), ḥadīth 6, narrated by Dāwūd b. Razīn. Al-Majlisī: ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 14:184). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/3/82/6. The full words are: "We belong to God, and to Him we are returning; praise be to God, Lord of the worlds. O God, reward me for my loss, and give me better in its place." Translation: this companion.
36. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-janāʾiz, bāb 85, ḥadīth 1, narrated by Ḥafṣ b. al-Bakhtarī and Jamīl b. Darrāj from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), speaking of visits to graves. Al-Majlisī: ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl*); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 1:249). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/3/85/1. Translation: this companion.
37. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-janāʾiz, bāb 85, ḥadīth 5, narrated by ʿAbd Allāh b. Sinān from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl*); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 1:249). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/3/85/5. A similar greeting with a ṣaḥīḥ chain, in which the Imam is not named, is ḥadīth 7 (thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/3/85/7). Translation: this companion.
38. al-Sīstānī, Questions and Answers on burial, question 8: "There is no objection." sistani.org/english/qa/01205/.
39. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-janāʾiz, bāb 86 ("The dead visit their families"), ḥadīth 1, narrated by Ḥafṣ b. al-Bakhtarī from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 14:195); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 1:250). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/3/86/1. Translation: this companion.
40. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 7, Kitāb al-waṣāyā, bāb 36 ("What reaches the dead after death"), ḥadīth 4, narrated by Muʿāwiya b. ʿAmmār. Al-Majlisī: ḥasan aw muwaththaq (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 23:92); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 3:256–257). thaqalayn.net/hadith/7/1/36/4. Shorter versions in the same bāb (ḥadīths 1–3) name the same three things. Translation: this companion.
41. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 7, Kitāb al-waṣāyā, bāb 36, ḥadīth 5, narrated by Abū Kahmas from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a): "a child who asks forgiveness for him, a copy of the Qurʾān he leaves behind, a tree he plants, a well he digs, a charity he sets flowing, and a good practice that is followed after him." Al-Majlisī: majhūl ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl*). thaqalayn.net/hadith/7/1/36/5. Translation: this companion.
42. *al-Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya*, Supplication 40 ("When death was mentioned"), paragraph 3. Arabic checked against al-islam.org/sahifa-al-kamilah-al-sajjadiyya-imam-ali-zayn-al-abidin/40-his-supplication-when-death-was-mentioned. Its *maʾnasanā alladhī naʾnasu bihi* shares the root *ʾ-n-s* with Imam ʿAlī's *ānasu*, "more at ease," in Sermon 5. Translation: this companion.

CHAPTER 13 · UNDERSTANDING THE AFTERLIFE

1. al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, *al-Amālī*, majlis 29, ḥadīth 2: Ubayy ibn Khalaf "walked up to him with a decayed bone, crumbled it with his hand, then blew it," asked his question, and God revealed 36:78–79. thaqalayn.net/hadith/13/29/2/1. Its chain runs through the biographer Ibn Isḥāq, not an Imam, and is not graded. The same name is narrated from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) in *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī* (he "took a decayed bone from a wall, crumbled it"), as quoted by al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, vol. 17, p. 118. Al-Ṭabrisī, *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, vol. 8, p. 291, gives it from al-Ṣādiq (a) and from the early exegetes Qatāda and Mujāhid, and records other views (al-ʿĀṣ ibn Wāʾil; Umayya ibn Khalaf). The setting in Mecca follows from the sura, which al-Ṭabrisī calls Meccan by consensus (*Majmaʿ al-bayān*, vol. 8, p. 254). Page references for both commentaries follow the printed editions behind the OpenITI digital texts. Translation: this companion.
2. The pair "God and the Last Day" occurs in twenty-four verses, e.g. Qurʾān 2:62, 2:177, 4:59, 9:18, 33:21 and 65:2. On the five foundations of faith (*uṣūl al-dīn*), namely *tawḥīd*, *ʿadl*, *nubuwwa*, *imāma* and *maʿād*, see Chapter 1.
3. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Saying 93 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ): God tests people "though He knows them better than they know themselves, so that the deeds by which

reward and punishment are deserved may become manifest." thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/3/93/112. Translation: this companion.

4. al-Ṭabrisī (d. 548/1154), *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, vol. 8, p. 291 (on 36:77–80): the verse "establishes the proof against the polytheists by comparing the second creation with the first, and binds whoever accepts the first to accept the second." He names the *markh* and *ʿafār* trees, from which Arabs cut their fire-sticks; so too al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān*, vol. 17, p. 112. Translation: this companion.
5. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-janāʾiz, bāb 95 ("Rare reports"), ḥadīth 7, narrated by ʿAmmār ibn Mūsā al-Sābāṭī from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: muwaththaq (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 14:239). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/3/95/7. The omitted words say that the clay "remains in the grave, rounded." Translation: this companion.
6. Ibn Bābawayh al-Ṣadūq, *al-Amālī*, majlis 1, ḥadīth 4, narrated by Qays ibn ʿĀṣim. thaqalayn.net/hadith/29/1/1/4. Also al-Ṣadūq, *al-Khiṣāl*, Part 3, "There are three friends for a Muslim," thaqalayn.net/hadith/10/4/75/2. The chain runs through non-Imāmī transmitters and is not graded; al-Ṣadūq gives it as moral exhortation. Abridged; translation: this companion.
7. al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī (d. 1402/1981), *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, vol. 3, p. 156 (on 3:30). Because the verse says *muḥḍar*, "brought present," rather than "present," he reads it to mean that deeds "exist, preserved from perishing," and counts it among the verses that point to the embodiment of deeds (*tajassum al-aʿmāl*). On 99:6–8 he gives two readings: that people are shown the reward of their deeds, or that they see the deeds themselves, on the embodiment view (vol. 20, p. 343). Translation: this companion.
8. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb 9 ("The Imams are God's witnesses over His creation"), ḥadīth 4, narrated by Burayd al-ʿIjlī from Imam al-Bāqir (a). Al-Majlisī: disputed, and *ḥasan* in his own view (*mukhtalaf fīh wa ḥasan ʿindī*, *Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 2:343). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/4/9/4. Translation: this companion.
9. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-duʿāʾ, bāb 20 ("Blessings on Muḥammad and his family"), ḥadīth 15, narrated by Muḥammad ibn Muslim from "one of the two" Imams, al-Bāqir or al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: *ḥasan ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ*. thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/2/20/15. Translation: this companion.
10. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 49 ("Good character"), ḥadīth 2, from Imam ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn (a), quoting the Prophet (s): "Nothing placed in a person's scale on the Day of Resurrection is better than good character." Al-Majlisī: *ḍaʿīf ʿalā al-mashhūr* (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 8:167). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/49/2. Translation: this companion.
11. Ibn Bābawayh al-Ṣadūq, *al-Amālī*, majlis 33, ḥadīth 5: "People pass over the path in ranks. The path is finer than a hair and sharper than a sword's edge. Some pass like lightning, some like a galloping horse, some crawling, some walking, and some hanging on, the Fire taking something of them and leaving something." thaqalayn.net/hadith/29/1/33/5. An almost identical text is in al-Ahwāzī, *Kitāb al-zuhd*, ch. 17, ḥadīth 7, thaqalayn.net/hadith/31/2/17/7. Not graded; both chains pass through ʿAlī ibn Abī Ḥamza al-Baṭāʾinī, whom many critics weaken. Translation: this companion.
12. Ibn Bābawayh al-Ṣadūq, *Maʿānī al-akhbār*, bāb 22 ("The meaning of the path"), ḥadīth 1, narrated by al-Mufaḍḍal ibn ʿUmar from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a): "The path in this world is the Imam whose obedience [God] has made obligatory. Whoever knows him in this world and follows his guidance will pass over the path that is the bridge over hell in the hereafter." thaqalayn.net/hadith/28/1/22/1. Not graded; its chain includes obscure narrators. Translation: this companion.
13. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 176 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). The other two kinds are the injustice that is not forgiven, *shirk* (Qurʾān 4:48), and the injustice that is forgiven, a person's small lapses against himself. thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/176/15. Translation: this companion.
14. Imam al-Bāqir (a): al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 136 ("Injustice"), ḥadīth 12, narrated by Zurāra: "No one commits a wrong [against another] without God making him answer for it, in his own person and wealth. As for the wrong between a person and God, when he repents, God forgives him." Al-Majlisī: *ḥasan* (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 10:301). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/136/12. The watch-post: the same bāb, ḥadīth 2, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a).

Al-Majlisī: *mursal* (a link in the chain is unnamed). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/136/2. Also al-Ṣadūq, *Thawāb al-aʿmāl*, "The punishment of injustice," ḥadīth 2, thaqalayn.net/hadith/23/3/118/2. Translation: this companion.

15. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 8 (*al-Rawḍa*), ḥadīth 79 ("The conditions of the Day of Judgement"), narrated by Thuwayr ibn Abī Fākhita, who heard Imam ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn (a) relate it in the Prophet's mosque from his father, from Imam ʿAlī (a). Al-Majlisī: *ḍaʿīf*. thaqalayn.net/hadith/8/1/79/1. Abridged and retold; the quoted phrases are translated from the Arabic. The question about the settling comes from "a man of Quraysh" in the same sitting; the wrongdoer's good deeds pass to the wronged "in proportion to the wronged man's right" (*bi-qadr ḥaqq al-maẓlūm*). The same report names the Imams among the witnesses on that Day.

16. Ibn Bābawayh al-Ṣadūq, *al-Tawḥīd*, bāb 63 ("Command and prohibition, promise and threat"), ḥadīth 6, from Imam Mūsā al-Kāẓim (a). Graded *ṣaḥīḥ al-isnād* by Hādī al-Najafī, *Mawsūʿat aḥādīth Ahl al-Bayt* 2:279. thaqalayn.net/hadith/14/2/63/6. Translation: this companion.

17. Ibn Bābawayh al-Ṣadūq, *al-Tawḥīd*, bāb 56 ("Capability"), ḥadīth 24: "Nine things are lifted from my community: error, forgetfulness, what they are forced into, what they cannot bear, what they do not know…" Graded *ṣaḥīḥ al-isnād* by Hādī al-Najafī, *Mawsūʿat aḥādīth Ahl al-Bayt* 2:198. thaqalayn.net/hadith/14/2/56/24. Also *al-Khiṣāl*, Part 9, ch. 7, ḥadīth 1, thaqalayn.net/hadith/10/10/7/1. On those who could not reach the truth, see Qurʾān 4:98–99. Translation: this companion.

18. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 45 ("Moderation in worship"), ḥadīth 3, narrated by Ḥanān ibn Sadīr. Al-Majlisī: muwaththaq (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 8:110); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ. thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/45/3. Translation: this companion.

19. Ibn Bābawayh al-Ṣadūq, *al-Tawḥīd*, bāb 63, ḥadīth 6, the conversation between Imam Mūsā al-Kāẓim (a) and Muḥammad ibn Abī ʿUmayr. The Imam quotes the Prophet's words on intercession through his forefathers from Imam ʿAlī (a). Reliable chain (see note 20). thaqalayn.net/hadith/14/2/63/6. Translation: this companion.

20. Ibn Bābawayh al-Ṣadūq, *al-Tawḥīd*, bāb 63 ("Command and prohibition, promise and threat"), ḥadīth 6, narrated by Ibn Abī ʿUmayr (whose *kunya* was Abū Aḥmad) from Imam Mūsā al-Kāẓim (a). Graded *ṣaḥīḥ al-isnād* by Hādī al-Najafī, *Mawsūʿat aḥādīth Ahl al-Bayt* 2:279. The chain runs al-Ṣadūq ← Aḥmad ibn Ziyād al-Hamadānī ← ʿAlī ibn Ibrāhīm ← his father ← Ibn Abī ʿUmayr. thaqalayn.net/hadith/14/2/63/6. In the digital text the Imam's earlier answer reads *yartak*, a slip for *yartakib* ("commits"), as al-Majlisī quotes it in *Biḥār al-anwār* 8:351; the panel quotes the later answer, which has no such slip. Translation: this companion.

21. *al-Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya*, Supplication 31 ("In mentioning and asking for repentance"), v. 118, verse numbering of thaqalayn.net/duas/sahifa-sajjadiya-in-mentioning-and-asking-for-repentance. Translation: this companion.

22. The scene: Ibn Bābawayh al-Ṣadūq, *al-Amālī*, majlis 73, ḥadīth 10, thaqalayn.net/hadith/29/1/73/10, and *Thawāb al-aʿmāl*, "The punishment of one who takes prayer lightly," ḥadīth 1, thaqalayn.net/hadith/23/3/29/1; not graded. The saying itself, from Imam al-Kāẓim (a) recalling his father's deathbed: al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-ṣalāt, bāb 2, ḥadīth 15 (al-Majlisī: *ṣaḥīḥ ʿalā al-ẓāhir*, *Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 15:18), thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/4/2/15; and vol. 6, Kitāb al-ashriba, bāb 16, ḥadīth 7 (al-Majlisī: *ṣaḥīḥ*), thaqalayn.net/hadith/6/6/16/7. Retold, with the quoted words translated from the Arabic.

23. Ibn Bābawayh al-Ṣadūq, *al-Khiṣāl*, Part 4, ch. 101 ("Four things one is asked about on the Day of Resurrection"), ḥadīth 1, thaqalayn.net/hadith/10/5/101/1; also *al-Amālī*, majlis 10, ḥadīth 10, thaqalayn.net/hadith/29/1/10/10. Narrated through the line of the Imams by Ruqayya bint Isḥāq; not graded. Translation: this companion.

24. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 8 (*al-Rawḍa*), ḥadīth 29, narrated by Saʿīd ibn al-Musayyab, who says the sermon was "memorised and written down." thaqalayn.net/hadith/8/1/29/1. Also al-Ṣadūq, *al-Amālī*, majlis 76, ḥadīth 1, thaqalayn.net/hadith/29/1/76/1. No grading in the data. Translation: this companion.

25. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Saying 130 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ), echoing Qurʾān 2:197. thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/3/130/157 and thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/3/130/158. Translation: this companion.
26. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 42 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/42/2. Earlier versions are in al-Mufīd, *al-Amālī*. Translation: this companion.
27. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 42 ("Worship"), ḥadīth 5. Al-Majlisī: *ḥasan ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ* (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 8:86). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/42/5. Translation: this companion.
28. *Duʿāʾ Kumayl*, taught by Imam ʿAlī (a) to his companion Kumayl ibn Ziyād. ʿAbbās al-Qummī, *Mafātīḥ al-jinān*, gives its text from al-Ṭūsī's *Miṣbāḥ al-mutahajjid* and notes that Ibn Ṭāwūs also transmitted it; the lines are quoted by al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* 67:196. Arabic as in the *Mafātīḥ*. Translation: this companion.

CHAPTER 14 · WHAT IS HEAVEN?

1. Ibn Bābawayh al-Ṣadūq, *al-Amālī*, majlis 44, ḥadīth 13, told through two chains: from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) from his father, and from Ibn ʿAbbās. Not graded. thaqalayn.net/hadith/29/1/44/13. The report includes lines of verse attributed to ʿAlī and Fāṭima, probably later additions, which are left out here. That Qurʾān 76:5–22 was revealed about this household is reported, al-Ṭabrisī writes, "by both Shia and Sunni" (*al-khāṣṣ wa-l-ʿāmm*), from Ibn ʿAbbās, Mujāhid and Abū Ṣāliḥ: al-Ṭabrisī (d. 1154 CE), *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on 76:5–22, section on the occasion of revelation (*al-nuzūl*). Al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, on Sūrat al-Insān, gives the same story from the Sunni commentator al-Zamakhsharī (*al-Kashshāf*), with early reports that the sura was revealed in Medina. Retold, not translated word for word.
2. al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *al-Iʿtiqādāt*, chapter on belief concerning paradise and hell, quoted in al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 8, bāb 23 ("Paradise and its bliss"), no. 204. "Lasting disability" renders *zamāna*. English translation of the whole creed: Asaf A. A. Fyzee, *A Shiite Creed* (1942). Translation: this companion.
3. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 165 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ), closing section on the description of paradise. thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/165/14. Translation: this companion.
4. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ʿaql wa-l-jahl, ḥadīth 1, narrated by Muḥammad b. Muslim from Imam al-Bāqir (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 1:25); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ. thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/1/0/1. Only the report's closing words are quoted here. Translation: this companion.
5. On the night prayer: ʿAlī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī, *Tafsīr*, on 32:16–17, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), quoted with its chain in al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, *Wasāʾil al-Shīʿa*, bāb "Karāhat tark ṣalāt al-layl," ḥadīth 13; also al-Ṭabrisī, *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on 32:17. Not graded here. Imam al-Bāqir (a) recited 32:16 when he named the night prayer among "the gates of good": al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 13, ḥadīth 15. Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 7:119). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/13/15.
6. al-Ḥusayn b. Saʿīd al-Ahwāzī, *Kitāb al-zuhd*, ch. 19, ḥadīth 11, narrated by Abū Baṣīr from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Not graded. thaqalayn.net/hadith/31/2/19/11. The report adds that God made this garden "with His hand"; Imam ʿAlī teaches that God "makes without limbs" (*Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 179), so the phrase marks special care. Christian readers may recall 1 Corinthians 2:9 (King James Version): "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." Translation of the report: this companion.
7. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 165 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ), closing section on the description of paradise. thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/165/13 and thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/165/14. Translation: this companion.
8. al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, on 76:21–22. He also quotes the Sunni commentator al-Ālūsī (*Rūḥ al-maʿānī*), who explained the silence as respect for Fāṭima (a). The Qurʾān names the *ḥūr* in a handful of verses (e.g. 44:54; 56:22) and gives no number. The figure seventy-two comes from a report about martyrs in some Sunni collections (e.g. al-Tirmidhī, *Jāmiʿ*, no. 1663). The Shia

collections searched for this book do not have it, though one unverified report gives every believer seventy (al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 8, ḥadīth 69; al-Majlisī: *majhūl*; thaqalayn.net/hadith/8/1/69/1).

9. al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, on 9:72. He reads the indefinite *riḍwānun* either as a pleasure beyond human measure or as "any pleasure from Him, even a little," which is "greater than all of that." He adds that the servanthood the Qurʾān calls for is worship "out of love for Him, not out of greed for paradise or fear of the Fire." Translation: this companion.
10. For the Christian hope, see 1 Corinthians 13:12 (King James Version): "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face." Sunni source: al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, no. 554, from the Companion Jarīr b. ʿAbd Allāh: "You will see your Lord as you see this moon." Sunni scholars grade the report sound.
11. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 179 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ), Imam ʿAlī's reply to Dhiʿlib al-Yamānī. thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/179/1 and thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/179/2. The scene in the mosque of Kufa, with Dhiʿlib described as eloquent and brave-hearted, comes from fuller versions: al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-tawḥīd, bāb 22, ḥadīth 4 (al-Majlisī: marfūʿ, *Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 2:94), thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/3/22/4; and al-Ṣadūq, *al-Tawḥīd*, bāb 43, ḥadīth 2, thaqalayn.net/hadith/14/2/43/2. Those versions read "hearts have seen Him." Translation: this companion.
12. al-Ṣadūq, *al-Amālī*, majlis 70, ḥadīth 7, thaqalayn.net/hadith/29/1/70/7; and *ʿUyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, vol. 1, bāb 11, ḥadīth 3, thaqalayn.net/hadith/11/2/11/3; narrated by Abū al-Ṣalt al-Harawī. The version in al-Ṣadūq's *al-Tawḥīd* is rated reliable (*muʿtabar*) by al-Muḥsinī, *Muʿjam al-aḥādīth al-muʿtabara*, Kitāb al-tawḥīd, ch. 3, ḥadīth 7, thaqalayn.net/hadith/9/4/3/7. Al-Ṣadūq's creed also affirms that paradise and the Fire already exist and that the Prophet entered paradise on his Ascension (*al-Iʿtiqādāt*, quoted in *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 8, bāb 23, no. 204). Paraphrased and abridged; translation of the quoted line: this companion.
13. al-Ṣadūq, *al-Tawḥīd*, bāb 8, ḥadīth 19, thaqalayn.net/hadith/14/2/8/19; also *ʿUyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, vol. 1, bāb 11, ḥadīth 2, thaqalayn.net/hadith/11/2/11/2. Not graded. The Imam explains *nāẓira* ("looking") as "awaiting."
14. al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, on 76:21: here God "dropped all intermediaries" and ascribed the giving of drink to Himself; this is "the finest" of the blessings named, and perhaps part of the "more" of Qurʾān 50:35.
15. al-Ṣadūq, *al-Tawḥīd*, bāb 61 ("Children and God's justice concerning them"), ḥadīth 6, narrated by al-Ḥalabī from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Not graded in our data; its narrators (Saʿd b. ʿAbd Allāh, al-Haytham b. Abī Masrūq, al-Ḥasan b. Maḥbūb, ʿAlī b. Riʾāb, al-Ḥalabī) are well known. thaqalayn.net/hadith/14/2/61/6.
16. al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-nikāḥ, bāb 51 ("The state of believers' children who die"), ḥadīth 1, narrated by Abū Baṣīr from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Unverified chain. thaqalayn.net/hadith/36/3/51/1.
17. al-Ṣadūq, *al-Tawḥīd*, bāb 61, ḥadīth 10, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), quoting the Prophet (s). Not graded. thaqalayn.net/hadith/14/2/61/10. The same words appear in al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, Kitāb al-nikāḥ, bāb 15, ḥadīth 1, where al-Majlisī grades the chain ḥasan but this part mursal (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 20:25), thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/3/15/1. Translation: this companion.
18. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 6, ḥadīth 4, from Imam al-Bāqir (a), quoting the Prophet (s): "Every child is born upon the *fiṭra*." Al-Majlisī: ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 7:57). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/6/4.
19. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 42 ("Worship"), ḥadīth 5, narrated by Hārūn b. Khārija from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 8:86). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/42/5. Translation: this companion.
20. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Saying 237 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ): worship out of desire is "the worship of traders," out of fear "the worship of slaves," and out of gratitude "the worship of the free." thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/3/237/287. On the lover and the beloved: al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, on 9:72 (see note 9).

21. al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *al-Iʿtiqādāt*, chapter on belief concerning paradise and hell, quoted in al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 8, bāb 23, no. 204. He describes the people of paradise in ranks: some delight in praising God among His angels, others in its food, couches and companions, each according to what he longed for. Translation: this companion.
22. al-Ṣadūq, *al-Amālī*, majlis 44, ḥadīth 13, in the chain from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) from his father: "By God, they did not say this to them. They kept it hidden within themselves, and God told of what they had hidden." Not graded. thaqalayn.net/hadith/29/1/44/13.
23. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb faḍl al-Qurʾān, bāb 2 ("The excellence of those who carry the Qurʾān"), ḥadīth 3, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), quoting the Prophet (s). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ. thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/3/2/3. Abridged; translation: this companion.
24. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Saying 456 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/3/456/578. Translation: this companion.
25. Ibn ʿAbbās's answer is reported by Maymūn b. Mihrān in al-Ṭabrisī, *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on 83:27; al-Ṭabrisī also cites the early commentator Masrūq: those brought near drink Tasnīm pure, while it is mixed into the cups of "the people of the right." Al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, on 83:27–28, draws the same conclusion from the wording: Tasnīm is finer than the sealed drink it sweetens, and those brought near rank above the righteous described in the passage.

CHAPTER 15 · WAS JESUS MORE MERCIFUL THAN MUHAMMAD?

1. al-Faḍl b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabrisī (d. 548/1154), *Majmaʿ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, commentary on Sūrat al-Naṣr (Q 110), account of the conquest of Mecca, vol. 10, pp. 468–470 (10-vol. ed., 1415/1995). Quraysh armed their allies, Banū Bakr, against Khuzāʿa, who were allied with the Prophet under the truce of al-Ḥudaybiyya. The Prophet set out on 10 Ramaḍān 8 AH "with ten thousand Muslims." Ten thousand is the traditional figure of the early biographies. In this chapter, volume and page numbers for *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, *al-Mīzān* and *Biḥār al-anwār* follow the printed editions marked in the OpenITI digital texts. Translations from these works, here and in later notes, are this companion's.
2. al-Ṭabrisī, *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on Q 110, vol. 10, pp. 471–472: "Whoever shuts his door and holds back his hand is safe"; "He ordered them all to hold back their hands and to fight only those who fought them."
3. al-Ṭabrisī, *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on Q 110, vol. 10, p. 472: the chiefs of Quraysh "entered the Kaʿba, thinking that the sword would not be lifted from them."
4. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-ḥajj, bāb 12 ("God made Mecca sacred when He created the heavens and the earth"), ḥadīth 3, narrated by Ḥarīz from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan; al-Bihbūdī includes it in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* (2:106). thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/3/12/3. The full exchange is in the panel later in this chapter. Translation: this companion.
5. Counted in the Tanzil text of the Qurʾān: ʿĪsā, 25 times; Muḥammad, 4 times (3:144; 33:40; 47:2; 48:29). He is also called Aḥmad once (61:6).
6. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-ṣalāt, bāb 1 ("The excellence of prayer"), ḥadīth 1, narrated by Muʿāwiya b. Wahb from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), quoting Q 19:31. Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ; al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 1:255). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/4/1/1. Translation: this companion.
7. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb faḍl al-ʿilm, bāb 5 ("The qualities of the scholars"), ḥadīth 6. The chain is *marfūʿ* (links are missing). Al-Majlisī: ḍaʿīf ʿalā al-mashhūr (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 1:120). Weak chain: told here as a story, not as proof. thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/2/5/6. Compare John 13:14–15 (King James Version): "If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you." Translation: this companion.
8. al-Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī (d. 1981), *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, on Q 3:55, vol. 3, p. 218. He cites a report in the commentary of ʿAlī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī, traced to Imam al-Bāqir (a), in which a young disciple volunteers to have Jesus' likeness cast on him. He notes other views

and remarks that "the Qurʾān is silent about that." This companion found no explanation of 4:157 from the Imams with a reliable chain.

9. Bible quotations in this chapter are from the King James Version (standard text of 1769), the public-domain translation available for this edition. Modern translations word some verses differently.

10. al-Ṭabrisī, *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on Q 22:39, vol. 7, p. 156: Muslims beaten and wounded in Mecca came to the Prophet, "and he would say to them, 'Be patient, for I have not been commanded to fight,' until he emigrated, and God revealed this verse to him in Medina. It is the first verse revealed about fighting." The boycott of his clan and the deaths of Khadīja and Abū Ṭālib are recorded in all the early biographies.

11. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 136 ("Injustice"), ḥadīth 10, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), quoting the Prophet (s). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 10:300). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/136/10. The Arabic plays on *ẓulm* (injustice) and *ẓulumāt* (darknesses). Translation: this companion.

12. al-Ṭabrisī, *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on Q 16:126, vol. 6, p. 211, reporting from al-Shaʿbī, Qatāda and ʿAṭāʾ b. Yasār that the verse came down after the Muslims saw Ḥamza and the dead of Uḥud mutilated and swore to mutilate the enemy in return. He also records the view that the verse applies to every wrong.

13. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, Kitāb al-jihād, bāb 8 ("The Prophet's instructions to small expeditions"), ḥadīth 9, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 18:356); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 2:283). thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/1/8/9.

14. al-Ṭabrisī, *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, account of Uḥud under Q 3:121, vol. 2, pp. 377–378 (the archers leave their post), and on Q 3:128, vol. 2, p. 385 (his tooth broken and his face wounded "until the blood ran down his face"); on Ḥamza, on Q 16:126, vol. 6, p. 211.

15. On the setting: al-Ṭabrisī, *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on Q 3:159, vol. 2, p. 428, gives as one meaning of "pardon them": "pardon them their flight at Uḥud, and ask forgiveness for them for that sin."

16. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 53 ("Forgiveness"), ḥadīth 9, narrated by Zurāra from Imam al-Bāqir (a). Al-Majlisī: muwaththaq ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 8:196); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 1:81). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/53/9. The report calls her *al-yahūdiyya*, "the Jewish woman." Translation: this companion.

17. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, Kitāb al-jihād, bāb 8, ḥadīth 9, narrated by Muḥammad b. Ḥumrān and Jamīl b. Darrāj from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 18:356); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 2:283). thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/1/8/9. A parallel report is ḥadīth 1 of the same chapter. Summarised, not quoted; the same briefing also forbids treachery and theft from the spoils, and grants safe conduct to any enemy fighter who asks to hear the word of God (compare Q 9:6).

18. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Letter 14 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ), to his army before the encounter at Ṣiffīn. thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/2/14/51 and thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/2/14/52. Summarised, not quoted.

19. al-Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022), *Kitāb al-irshād*, trans. I. K. A. Howard, section on the carrying of the standard at the conquest of Mecca: the Prophet tells ʿAlī to take the standard from Saʿd and enter the city with it. al-Ṭabrisī, *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on Q 110, vol. 10, p. 472, adds: "carry it in gently" (*adkhilhā idkhālan rafīqan*). The same words are in al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* 21:130. Saʿd's full cry continues, "today the sacred will be violated."

20. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-ḥajj, bāb 12, ḥadīth 3, narrated by Ḥarīz from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan; al-Bihbūdī includes it in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* (2:106). thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/3/12/3. The Prophet quotes Joseph's words in Q 12:92. Translation: this companion.

21. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-zakāt, bāb 7 ("The minimum for zakat on crops"), ḥadīth 2, narrated by Ṣafwān b. Yaḥyā and Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Abī Naṣr from an Imam not named in this transmission. Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ ʿalā al-ẓāhir (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 16:26). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/5/7/2. Translation: this companion.

22. al-Ṭabrisī, *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on Q 110, vol. 10, p. 472: "What bad neighbours you were to the Prophet! You called me a liar, drove me away, expelled me and harmed me, and then, not content, you came to fight me in my own land. Go, you are the freed ones." Translation: this companion.

23. The exceptions: al-Ṭabrisī, *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on Q 110, vol. 10, p. 472, names four men and two singing women, gives the order to kill them "even if you find them clinging to the curtains of the Kaʿba" (*wa-in wajadtumūhum mutaʿalliqīna bi-astār al-Kaʿba*), and records that al-Ḥuwayrith b. Nufayl, Miqyas b. Ṣubāba, Ibn Khaṭal and one of the singing women were killed; the other woman escaped. Al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* 21:131, gives the same order and the same deaths, and describes those named as people "who used to harm the Prophet." The early biographies give longer lists, which differ in detail. ʿIkrima is one of four men named in a second report that al-Ṭabrisī quotes on Q 31:32, vol. 8, p. 95, which also tells of his vow (quoted in *Biḥār al-anwār* 22:49). Another on both lists, ʿAbd Allāh b. Saʿd b. Abī Sarḥ, was given protection when his foster-brother ʿUthmān asked for it (Sunni reports, from al-Ḥākim's *al-Mustadrak* and others, quoted from *al-Durr al-manthūr* by al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān*, on Q 6:93, vol. 7, p. 305).

24. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 53 ("Forgiveness"), ḥadīth 8, narrated by Ibn Faḍḍāl from Abū al-Ḥasan (a), probably Imam al-Riḍā, the eighth Imam (d. 818), whose companion he was. Al-Majlisī: muwaththaq ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 8:195). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/53/8. Translation: this companion.

25. Luke 9:51–56. Some of the earliest manuscripts lack the words "even as Elias did" (9:54). Many manuscripts, and many modern translations, also lack the rest of verse 55 and the first half of verse 56 as the King James Version has them ("Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them").

26. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* 3231 (Kitāb badʾ al-khalq), narrated by ʿĀʾisha. Sunni source, sound by Sunni standards; cited because the Shia parallel (note 27) has no chain and does not set the episode after Ṭāʾif. The chief who rejected him is named as Ibn ʿAbd Yālīl b. ʿAbd Kulāl, of Thaqīf, the tribe of Ṭāʾif. sunnah.com/bukhari:3231. Translation: this companion.

27. "O God, guide my people": al-Ṭabrisī, *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on Q 3:128, vol. 2, pp. 385–386, introduced with "it is narrated." "I was sent only as a mercy": Aḥmad b. ʿAlī al-Ṭabrisī (a different author, 6th/12th century), *al-Iḥtijāj*, quoted in al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* 10:30, from a dialogue between Imam ʿAlī (a) and a Jewish scholar from Syria, narrated through Imam Mūsā al-Kāẓim (a). No chain is given (unverified chain).

28. Luke 23:34 (King James Version). Some early manuscripts lack these words, while others include them; the standard critical edition of the Greek New Testament (Nestle–Aland, 28th edition) prints them in square brackets.

29. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 53 ("Forgiveness"), ḥadīth 1, narrated by ʿAbd Allāh b. Sinān from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), quoting the Prophet (s) "in his sermon." Al-Majlisī: ḥasan ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 8:192). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/53/1. Translation: this companion.

30. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* 3443 (Kitāb aḥādīth al-anbiyāʾ), narrated by Abū Hurayra. Sunni source, sound by Sunni standards; cited because the Shia collections attest the Prophet's calling Jesus "my brother" only in a report with an unverified chain (al-Ṣadūq, *al-Khiṣāl*, thaqalayn.net/hadith/10/23/16/1, ungraded). The omitted words call the prophets *ikhwa li-ʿallāt*, "sons of one father by different mothers." sunnah.com/bukhari:3443. Translation: this companion.

31. Aḥmad b. ʿAlī al-Ṭabrisī, *al-Iḥtijāj*, quoted in al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* 10:28, at the start of the same dialogue as note 27. Unverified chain. Translation: this companion.

CHAPTER 16 · PLURALISM IN ISLAM

1. The scene draws on three classical Shia accounts, which differ in small details. (1) ʿAlī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī, *Tafsīr*, on Qurʾān 3:61, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a): the Christians strike the *nāqūs* and pray in the Prophet's mosque ("Leave them"), the dispute about Jesus, "You have been fair" (*anṣafta*), the leaders' reasoning about whom he would bring, the four who came out, and the peace; quoted in al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* 21:340–41. Not graded here. (2) al-Faḍl b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabrisī (d. 1154),

Majmaʿ al-bayān, on 3:1–4 and 3:59–61 (10-vol. ed., 1995, vol. 2, pp. 234 and 309–10), drawing on early historians: the leaders and the bishop Abū Ḥāritha b. ʿAlqama, honoured by the Byzantine emperors (*mulūk al-Rūm*), the fine robes, the prayer "facing east", the bishop's retreat, because "I fear that he is truthful" (*akhāfu an yakūna ṣādiqan*), and his words to the Prophet ("We will not hold the contest with you; we will make peace with you"), the written terms (*wa-kataba lahum bi-dhālika kitāban*), and the return soon afterwards of two of the leaders, al-Sayyid and al-ʿĀqib, who "became Muslim" (*wa-aslamā*). (3) al-Ṭabrisī, *Iʿlām al-warā*, quoted in *Biḥār* 21:336–38, for the exchange about Jesus. Al-Mufīd's *al-Irshād* (trans. I. K. A. Howard) tells the same story, ending in a document of protection. Translations: this companion.

2. Ibn Bābawayh al-Ṣadūq, *al-Khiṣāl*, Part 20, ch. 9 ("What Abū Dharr asked the Messenger of God"), ḥadīth 1. thaqalayn.net/hadith/10/21/9/1. Also in his *Maʿānī al-akhbār*, thaqalayn.net/hadith/28/1/374/1. Not graded (unverified chain). The Qurʾān itself gives no number (40:78).
3. al-ʿAllāma Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, commentary on 2:256. Compulsion "works only on bodily actions, not on the beliefs of the heart", and "it is impossible for ignorance to produce knowledge"; the verse is "one of the verses showing that Islam was not built on the sword and blood". It is not abrogated by the verses on fighting, because a ruling lasts as long as its cause, and the cause the verse gives ("right guidance stands clear of error") cannot be removed. Translation: this companion.
4. Murtaḍā Muṭahharī, *Islam and Religious Pluralism* (English translation of part of his *ʿAdl-e Ilāhī*, "Divine Justice"), chapter "Good Deeds of Non-Muslims". al-islam.org/islam-and-religious-pluralism-murtadha-mutahhari.
5. The strong sense is associated with the philosopher John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion* (1989). "Pluralism" is also used loosely for the plain fact of a religiously mixed society, which Muslims have lived in since Medina.
6. al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān*, on 2:62 (section of traditions), citing al-Suyūṭī's *al-Durr al-manthūr* (Sunni source) and noting that the report comes "by several other routes". A report, not graded here. The Sabians (*al-ṣābiʾūn*) were a religious community of the ancient Near East whose identity is debated.
7. al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān*, on 2:62: names "such as believers, Jews, Christians and Sabians" bring "no reward with God and no safety from punishment"; "the basis of the matter… is the reality of faith in God and the Last Day, and good deeds", and in this "the prophets and those below them are equal". He does not read the verse as making all religions equal. Translation: this companion.
8. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-tawḥīd, bāb 32 ("al-Bayān wa-l-taʿrīf wa luzūm al-ḥujja"), ḥadīth 1, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), with a second chain noted by al-Kulaynī. Al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 1:20); no grading by al-Majlisī in our data. thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/3/32/1. Translation: this companion.
9. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-tawḥīd, bāb 32, ḥadīth 3, narrated by Ḥamza b. Muḥammad al-Ṭayyār from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan muwaththaq (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 2:224). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/3/32/3. The omitted middle reads 91:8 and 76:3 the same way: God makes good and evil known, and each person then takes or leaves. Translation: this companion.
10. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 172 ("al-Mustaḍʿaf"), ḥadīth 2, narrated by Zurāra from Imam al-Bāqir (a), who gives as examples "children, and men and women whose understanding is like that of children". Al-Majlisī: ḥasan ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 11:209); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 1:122). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/172/2. Qurʾān 4:97–99 first concerned believers in Mecca who failed to emigrate; the Imams draw a general category from its exception. Most reports in this chapter of al-Kāfī concern Muslims of the Imams' own day who did not know the claims of the Prophet's family; Shia scholars apply the principle more widely. Translation: this companion.
11. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 172, ḥadīth 7, narrated by Abū Baṣīr from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 11:212). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/172/7. A written

reply of Imam al-Kāẓim (a) in the same chapter (ḥadīth 11, weak chain) adds that the *mustaḍʿaf* is one "to whom no proof has been brought". Translation: this companion.

12. Muṭahharī, *Islam and Religious Pluralism*, chapter "Below the Zero Point", section "The Incapable and the Powerless" (al-islam.org). *Qāṣir* and *muqaṣṣir* are the jurists' terms for one who falls short through no fault of their own and one who falls short through neglect.

13. Muṭahharī, *Islam and Religious Pluralism*, chapter "Good Deeds of Non-Muslims", section 1, "The General Aspect of the Discussion" (al-islam.org).

14. Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawiyya* (his recension of Ibn Isḥāq), section "His document between the Emigrants and the Helpers, and the truce with the Jews". A Sunni historical source, cited because no Shia work preserves the full text. The fuller clause reads "sincere counsel and advice, and goodness, not wrongdoing"; disputes are referred "to God, Mighty and Majestic, and to Muḥammad, the Messenger of God". Clause numbers differ between editions. Translation: this companion.

15. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, Kitāb al-jihād, bāb 9 ("Granting protection"), ḥadīth 5, from Imam al-Ṣādiq, from his father Imam al-Bāqir (a). Al-Majlisī: ḍaʿīf ka-l-muwaththaq (weak chain; *Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 18:358), as it runs through Ṭalḥa b. Zayd, a non-Imāmī whose book was used. thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/1/9/5. A shorter version: *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-ʿishra, bāb 24, ḥadīth 2 (weak chain), thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/4/24/2. Here *jār* means a person granted protection, not only the family next door. Translation: this companion.

16. Ibn Bābawayh al-Ṣadūq, *ʿUyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, vol. 1, bāb 23, ḥadīth 1, narrated by al-Rayyān b. al-Ṣalt from Imam al-Riḍā's discussion with the caliph al-Maʾmūn and the scholars at Marw. Not graded. thaqalayn.net/hadith/11/2/23/1. Parallel: al-Ṣadūq, *al-Amālī*, majlis 79, ḥadīth 1, thaqalayn.net/hadith/29/1/79/1. Translation: this companion.

17. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Letter 19 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ), to one of his governors. thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/2/19/73. The *dihqāns* were the landowning gentry of Iraq and Persia. Ali goes on to tell the governor to wear for them "a cloak of gentleness, edged with a little firmness". Translation: this companion.

18. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Letter 53. Al-Raḍī's heading says ʿAlī wrote it for al-Ashtar al-Nakhaʿī on appointing him over Egypt, "the longest covenant he wrote" (thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/2/53/278). The letter lists among the classes of society "the payers of *jizya* and *kharāj* from the people of the *dhimma* and the Muslims" (thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/2/53/295).

19. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Letter 53 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/2/53/284. *Naẓīr* is a counterpart or peer, one of the same kind; "faith" renders *dīn*, religion. The bracketed word in the Arabic is a variant reading. Translation: this companion.

20. *Nahj al-balāgha*, Letter 53. thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/2/53/337. Translation: this companion.

21. Imam ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn (a), *Risālat al-ḥuqūq*, "the right of the people under protection" (*ḥaqq ahl al-dhimma*). thaqalayn.net/hadith/33/1/7/26; the full list of rights is at thaqalayn.net/hadith/33/1/1/1. Not graded here. Translation: this companion.

22. al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān*, on 5:51: the *wilāya* forbidden here is "the *wilāya* of love, union and affection, not the *wilāya* of alliance (*ḥilf*)", an affection that draws souls together until it leads to moral influence and turns a community from its religious way of life. Discussing 3:28 in the same passage, he notes that the Prophet (s) then had treaties and truces with the Jews. On 60:8 he explains that the warning of 60:1 does not forbid doing good (*birr*, which he glosses as *iḥsān*) to, or dealing justly with, those who have not fought the believers over religion; the verse covers people under covenant, not those at war, so 9:5 does not cancel it. Translation: this companion.

23. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb 106 (the Imams' manner in food and clothing), ḥadīth 4, narrated by Ḥammād b. ʿUthmān, who was present. Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 4:368); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ. thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/4/106/4. The Imam adds that when the Qāʾim of the Prophet's family rises, he will dress and live as ʿAlī did. Translation: this companion.

24. al-Sayyid ʿAlī al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws* (English ed.), Ruling 103: "the People of the Book (ahl al-kitāb) (i.e. Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians)… are ruled to be pure." Ruling 104 rules otherwise, as an obligatory precaution, for other non-Muslims. sistani.org/english/book/48/2134/.
25. al-Sīstānī, Q&A 14922: "it is permissible to eat their foods even if we know that they have touched the food with wet hands", but meat "should be ritually slaughtered", sistani.org/english/qa/01275/; Q&A 26252: "There is no harm in greeting them on their occasions", sistani.org/english/qa/02801/. Older Shia jurists held the People of the Book ritually impure, and some still advise caution.
26. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 27 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). Al-Raḍī's heading: delivered "to rouse the people when news came of the raid on al-Anbār by Muʿāwiya's army". thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/27/1 and thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/27/4. *Al-muʿāhada*, "the woman under covenant", is a non-Muslim living under the Muslims' protection. Translation: this companion.

CHAPTER 17 · WOMEN IN ISLAM

1. al-Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-ṣalāt, bāb 20 ("The prayer of tasbīḥ and other prayers"), ḥadīth 1, narrated by Bisṭām from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a): on the day Khaybar was conquered, news reached the Prophet (s) that Jaʿfar had arrived, and he said, "By God, I do not know which of the two makes me happier: Jaʿfar's arrival or the conquest of Khaybar." Al-Ghaffārī: ṣaḥīḥ. thaqalayn.net/hadith/43/1/20/1. For Asmāʾ's return with Jaʿfar, see note 2. Translation: this companion.
2. al-Faḍl b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabrisī (d. 548/1154), *Majmaʿ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, on Q 33:35, vol. 8, p. 158 (10-vol. ed., 1415/1995; page numbers as marked in the OpenITI digital text), citing the early commentator Muqātil b. Ḥayyān, with no chain back to the event (unverified chain). Sunni collections link the verse to other women's words: Umm ʿUmāra al-Anṣāriyya (al-Tirmidhī, no. 3211) and, through Mujāhid, Umm Salama (al-Tirmidhī, no. 3022, which al-Tirmidhī calls mursal and which ties her words first to Q 4:32). Sunni sources: al-Albānī grades both chains ṣaḥīḥ. Translation: this companion.
3. Umm Salama and Q 3:195: al-Ṭabrisī, *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on Q 3:195, vol. 2, p. 477 ("It is narrated that Umm Salama said…"). The women's delegate (*wāfidat al-nisāʾ*) and Q 4:32: *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on Q 4:32, vol. 3, p. 73. Both are reported without chains. On 3:195 al-Ṭabrisī comments that "you are of one another" means "My ruling for all of you is one ruling," because men and women share the quality of faith. Translation: this companion.
4. al-Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, on Q 4:1, vol. 4, p. 136: the verse explains that the mate is "of its own kind"; the idea that she was made from a part of him, "in agreement with some reports that God created Adam's wife from one of his ribs," has "no evidence for it in the verse." The rib is in Genesis 2:21–22. Shia reports differ: in one, Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) rejects the rib story (al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-nikāḥ, bāb 1, ḥadīth 1, *mursal*; thaqalayn.net/hadith/36/3/1/1), though the same report says God placed the newly created Eve in the hollow between Adam's hips "so that the woman would be a follower (*taba*ʿ) of the man"; another assumes it (vol. 4, bāb 165, on the inheritance of the hermaphrodite, ḥadīth 2; thaqalayn.net/hadith/37/1/165/2). In this book, volume and page numbers for *al-Mīzān* follow the printed edition marked in the OpenITI digital text. Translation: this companion.
5. Counted in the Tanzil text of the Qurʾān: the name Maryam occurs 34 times, in 31 verses. Sūra 19 is *Maryam*. No other woman is named in the Qurʾān.
6. al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān*, on Q 3:36, vol. 3, p. 172. He argues that "the male is not like the female" are God's words, not the mother's: had she said them, she would have said "the female is not like the male." Most commentators, he notes, took them as the mother's words.
7. On the double call: al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān*, on Q 3:42–43, vol. 3, p. 189. He also takes 3:42 as evidence that Mary was *muḥaddatha*, one to whom angels spoke and who heard them (p. 188). Translation of the verses: this companion.
8. al-Ṣadūq, *al-Khiṣāl*, the section on fours, bāb 14 ("The four best women of paradise"), ḥadīth 1, from Ibn ʿAbbās. thaqalayn.net/hadith/10/5/14/1. Not graded; the chain runs through ʿIkrima

(unverified chain). The same four names appear in Sunni collections, e.g. al-Tirmidhī, no. 3878 (Sunni source: graded ṣaḥīḥ by al-Albānī). Translation: this companion.

9. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, Kitāb al-nikāḥ, bāb 44 ("The marriage sermon"), ḥadīth 9, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ḍaʿīf (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 20:98). Weak chain: told here as a story. thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/3/44/9. In the same report a man of Quraysh scoffs, "A dowry paid by women to men!", and Abū Ṭālib answers that for men like his nephew the highest price is paid. Translation: this companion.
10. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 192 (*al-Qāṣiʿa*; numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/192/39. Compiled text, not graded here. Translation: this companion.
11. al-Mufīd, *al-Amālī*, majlis 31, ḥadīth 2, from Saʿd b. Abī Waqqāṣ. thaqalayn.net/hadith/13/31/2/1. Not graded. The report continues: "Fāṭima is the dearest of all creation to me." Sunni collections carry similar words, e.g. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 3714 (Sunni source): "Fāṭima is a part of me; whoever angers her angers me." Shia tradition also calls her "the mistress of the women of all the worlds": al-Ṣadūq, *Maʿānī al-akhbār*, bāb 40, ḥadīth 1, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a): "That was Mary: she was mistress of the women of her own world. Fāṭima is mistress of the women of all the worlds, from the first to the last." thaqalayn.net/hadith/28/1/40/1. Not graded; the chain includes Muḥammad b. Sinān, whom many critics weaken (unverified chain). Al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī reads Mary's being chosen "above the women of the worlds" (3:42) without limit of time, as concerning the wonder of Jesus' birth (*al-Mīzān* 3:189). Translations: this companion.
12. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb 40 (on the *Jafr*, the *Jāmiʿa* and the *Muṣḥaf* of Fāṭima), ḥadīth 5, narrated by Abū ʿUbayda from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 3:59). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/4/40/5. What ʿAlī wrote down became known as the *Muṣḥaf*, the Book, of Fāṭima. It is not a Qurʾān: in ḥadīth 1 of the same chapter (al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ) the Imam says, "By God, there is not a single letter of your Qurʾān in it." thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/4/40/1. Translation: this companion.
13. al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-ṭalāq, bāb 26 (on the major sins), ḥadīth 10: "Zaynab daughter of ʿAlī said: Fāṭima said in her address concerning Fadak..." thaqalayn.net/hadith/36/4/26/10. Al-Ṣadūq gives his full chain in the closing *Mashyakha*: "...from ʿAbbād al-ʿĀmirī, from Zaynab, daughter of the Commander of the Faithful, from Fāṭima" (vol. 5; thaqalayn.net/hadith/38/1/369/371). Al-Muḥsinī grades this chain *majhūl*, and al-Bihbūdī does not include the report in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Faqīh*. Longer versions of the address, in al-Ṭabrisī's *al-Iḥtijāj* and Ibn Ṭayfūr's *Balāghāt al-nisāʾ*, were not checked for this edition, so only al-Ṣadūq's passage is quoted. Excerpt; translation: this companion.
14. al-Ṣadūq, *al-Amālī*, majlis 31, ḥadīth 3, narrated by the doorkeeper (*ḥājib*) of ʿUbayd Allāh b. Ziyād. thaqalayn.net/hadith/29/1/31/3. Not graded; a historical chain (unverified chain). Zaynab's words echo Q 3:154. The often-quoted line "I saw nothing but beauty" comes from a later work, Ibn Ṭāwūs's *al-Luhūf*, not checked for this edition. Translation: this companion.
15. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 6, Kitāb al-ʿaqīqa, bāb 3 ("The merit of daughters"): ḥadīth 2, "The Messenger of God was a father of daughters" (al-Majlisī: ḥasan; al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 3:86; thaqalayn.net/hadith/6/1/3/2); ḥadīth 9, the "fragrant flower," said to al-Jārūd b. al-Mundhir (al-Majlisī: majhūl; thaqalayn.net/hadith/6/1/3/9); ḥadīth 10, three daughters or sisters, then two, then one (al-Majlisī: ḥasan; thaqalayn.net/hadith/6/1/3/10). Translation: this companion.
16. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 69 ("Kindness to parents"), ḥadīth 20, narrated by Jābir. Al-Majlisī: ḍaʿīf (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 8:429). Weak chain: told as a story. thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/69/20. A reliable report in the same chapter has the Prophet answer "your mother" three times before "your father" (ḥadīth 9; al-Majlisī: ḥasan ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ, *Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 8:419; thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/69/9); see Chapter 18. Translation: this companion.
17. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb faḍl al-ʿilm, bāb 1, ḥadīth 1, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), quoting the Prophet (s). Al-Majlisī: majhūl (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 1:98); al-Muḥsinī counts the saying reliable (*muʿtabar*) in *Muʿjam al-aḥādīth al-muʿtabara* (thaqalayn.net/hadith/9/1/3/7). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/2/1/1. The popular addition "and every Muslim woman" is not in al-Kāfī's text; the word "Muslim" already includes women. Translation: this companion.

18. Nuṣrat Amīn (1886–1983), known as Bānū Amīn, of Iṣfahān. Her Qurʾān commentary is *Makhzan al-ʿirfān* (15 vols). Her standing as a *mujtahida* was recognised in licences (*ijāzas*) from senior scholars of her day, and in 1965 she founded the Maktab-e Fāṭima in Iṣfahān. Details as summarised in the English Wikipedia article "Nosrat Amin" (checked 28 October 2026). Her dates and her standing as a *mujtahida* are confirmed by Mirjam Künkler and Roja Fazaeli, "The Life of Two Mujtahidahs: Female Religious Authority in 20th Century Iran," in *Women, Leadership and Mosques* (Leiden: Brill, 2012) (abstract checked); the commentary and the school rest on Wikipedia alone.

19. al-Sīstānī, Question & Answer, "Maintenance": "It is not necessary for the woman who is working to give her wages to her husband… The husband does not have the right to make her do so," and a wife who helps her husband "from her own desire" has "performed a praiseworthy action." sistani.org/english/qa/01273/. Housework: *Islamic Laws*, Ruling 2432 ("A man has no right to compel his wife to do housework"), sistani.org/english/book/48/2369/.

20. al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws*, Ruling 2389, condition 5 ("the man and the woman must consent to the marriage"); Ruling 2395 (an adult virgin needs the consent of her father or paternal grandfather); Ruling 2396 (this lapses if she is not a virgin, or if he totally prevents her from marrying a suitable match, is absent for a long time while she has a great need to marry, or is unable to give consent). sistani.org/english/book/48/2366/.

21. al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws*, Ruling 2 ("Only a mujtahid who is male… can be followed"), sistani.org/english/book/48/2117/; Ruling 1433 ("if the follower is a man, the imam must also be a man") and Ruling 1438 ("a woman who is not a mustaḥāḍah is permitted to follow a woman who is a mustaḥāḍah"), sistani.org/english/book/48/2269/.

22. On the closing names: al-Ṭabrisī, *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on Q 4:34, vol. 3, p. 80 (they show "His taking their side, and His power to take their side if they are too weak to"); al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān*, vol. 4, p. 345 (a warning that the strength husbands find in themselves must not deceive them into wronging their wives by lording it over them). On the occasion of the verse, al-Ṭabrisī (vol. 3, p. 79) records from Muqātil, with no chain, that Saʿd b. al-Rabīʿ slapped his wife Ḥabība; the Prophet granted her retaliation, then withdrew it when the verse came, saying, "We wanted one thing, and God wanted another, and what God wanted is better." Other early commentators give other names. Translations: this companion.

23. al-Ṭabrisī, *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on Q 4:34, vol. 3, p. 79: men are given charge "because of the greater merit they have over women in knowledge, reason, sound judgement and resolve, and because of what they spend on them of dowry and maintenance." al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān*, vol. 4, pp. 343–344: the "advantage" is men's greater strength in reasoning, with the endurance that follows from it; he extends the principle beyond marriage to government, judging and war. Yet within marriage, he writes, the husband's charge does not mean that "her will and her disposal of what she owns have no force," nor that she may not guard and defend "her individual and social rights." What it does mean is that she must comply with him in intimacy and keep faith with him in his absence. Translation: this companion.

24. al-Ṭabrisī, *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on Q 4:34, vol. 3, p. 80: "It is narrated from Abū Jaʿfar [al-Bāqir] that it is striking with the *siwāk*," and that leaving them in bed means "he turns his back to her." Al-Ṭabrisī also records the view that the blow must not "cut flesh or break bone." These reports are given without chains. al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān*, vol. 4, p. 345, explains the three steps as graded, from milder to sterner; the order, he notes, comes from the context, not from the conjunction "and." Translation: this companion.

25. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, Kitāb al-nikāḥ, bāb 151 ("Honouring the wife"), ḥadīth 1, narrated by Abū Maryam from Imam al-Bāqir (a). Al-Majlisī: ka-l-muwaththaq (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 20:322); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 3:72). thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/3/151/1. Translation: this companion.

26. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, Kitāb al-nikāḥ, bāb 152 ("The wife's right over her husband"), ḥadīth 1, narrated by Isḥāq b. ʿAmmār from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: muwaththaq (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 20:323); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 3:72). thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/3/152/1. Compare al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, vol. 3, bāb 32, ḥadīth 4 (thaqalayn.net/hadith/36/3/32/4). Translation: this companion.

27. Imam ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn (a), *Risālat al-ḥuqūq*, the right of the wife. thaqalayn.net/hadith/33/1/5/3. The same text is in al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-ḥajj, bāb 165 ("The rights"), ḥadīth 1 (thaqalayn.net/hadith/35/3/165/1); al-Bihbūdī does not include it among sound reports (unverified chain). The word rendered "captive" is *asīr*. The English in the Thaqalayn data reads "her right toward you is more incumbent," which reverses the Arabic *ḥaqquka ʿalayhā awjab*, "your right over her is weightier." The longer recension in Ibn Shuʿba al-Ḥarrānī's *Tuḥaf al-ʿuqūl* (p. 262, OpenITI page numbering) adds the wife's obedience: "even if your right over her is weightier, and obedience to you more binding on her in what you like and dislike, as long as it is not a sin, she has the right of mercy and companionship." Abridged; translation: this companion.

28. al-Ṭabrisī, *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on Q 2:228, vol. 2, pp. 100–101: the first half is "one of the wondrous phrases that gather many benefits," covering good companionship, avoiding harm, and fairness in time, maintenance and clothing. On the "degree" he records several readings: obedience, the power to divorce, and the larger inheritance with the duty of fighting (Mujāhid, Qatāda); the husband's maintenance and charge (al-Zajjāj); and, from Ibn ʿAbbās, a rank won by generosity, when a husband chooses not to claim all that is due to him. He also cites ʿAlī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī's commentary: "the right of men over women is greater than the right of women over men"; and a report from al-Ṣadūq's *al-Faqīh* (vol. 3, bāb 31, ḥadīth 1; thaqalayn.net/hadith/36/3/31/1) in which the Prophet sets out a husband's rights, among them that she not leave home without his permission, and tells a woman that her right over her husband is not like his, "not even one in a hundred." The same report is in *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, Kitāb al-nikāḥ, bāb 148, ḥadīth 1, from Imam al-Bāqir (a), with a chain al-Majlisī grades ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 20:318; thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/3/148/1); al-Bihbūdī includes it in neither selection. The verse sits among rules on divorce, where a husband may take his wife back during her waiting period. Translation: this companion.

29. al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws*, Ruling 2430: "It is obligatory for a husband to provide his wife with food, clothing, housing, and other things she needs"; if he does not, "he will be indebted to her"; and "one of the rights of a wife is that her husband must not subject her to harassment or abuse." The same ruling sets out the wife's duties, including that she not leave the home without his permission, except where necessity, hardship or an unsuitable home allows it. Ruling 2431 adds that a wife who does not fulfil her marital duties "has no right over him for food, clothing, and housing," though her dowry is still owed. sistani.org/english/book/48/2369/.

30. *Khulʿ*: al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws*, Ruling 2546, sistani.org/english/book/48/8213/. A husband who will neither pay maintenance nor divorce: Question & Answer, "Divorce," no. 15452: the wife "should seek redress with the Marji' or his deputy," who, if he chooses neither and maintenance cannot be paid, "should carry out the divorce." sistani.org/english/qa/01166/. A civil divorce alone may not end a marriage in religious law; check with your *marjaʿ*.

31. al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-nikāḥ, bāb 32 ("The wife's rights over her husband"), ḥadīth 5, narrated by Abū Baṣīr from Imam al-Bāqir (a): a man who does not give his wife "clothing to cover her and food to keep her upright." Al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Faqīh*, p. 282). thaqalayn.net/hadith/36/3/32/5. "The Imam" here means the legitimate authority. Translation: this companion.

32. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 7, Kitāb al-mawārīth, bāb 10 ("Why a male's share is twice a female's"), ḥadīth 3; the questioner was the sceptic Ibn Abī al-ʿAwjāʾ. Al-Majlisī: ḥasan. thaqalayn.net/hadith/7/2/10/3. In ḥadīth 2 of the same chapter Imam al-ʿAskarī (a) gives the same answer generations later, adding, "our answer is one" (al-Majlisī: ḍaʿīf; thaqalayn.net/hadith/7/2/10/2). Translation: this companion.

33. al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws*, Ruling 2745 (heirs fall into three groups; "As long as there is even one person from this group, those in the second group do not inherit"), sistani.org/english/book/48/8236/; Ruling 2748 ("the son receives twice the share of the daughter") and Ruling 2754 (with one parent and one daughter, the parent takes a quarter and "the rest is inherited by his daughter"), sistani.org/english/book/48/8237/; Ruling 2782 ("A wife does not inherit anything from the land…"; "She does, however, inherit from their value"), sistani.org/english/book/48/8240/.

34. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 7, Kitāb al-shahādāt, bāb 13, ḥadīth 8, narrated by ʿAbd Allāh b. Sinān from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ. thaqalayn.net/hadith/7/5/13/8. The same report excludes women's testimony in some matters, such as sighting the new moon. In ḥadīth 1 (al-Majlisī: ḥasan) the Imam accepts women's testimony in cases of killing, citing Imam ʿAlī: "the blood of a Muslim must not go for nothing." thaqalayn.net/hadith/7/5/13/1. Translation: this companion.

35. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 80 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ), introduced by al-Raḍī as spoken after the war of the Camel. thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/80/2. On the army at the Camel, compare Sermon 13, to the people of Basra: "You were the army of the woman." thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/13/2. Compiled texts, not graded here. On menstruation: al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-ḥayḍ, bāb 15, ḥadīth 4, narrated by Zurāra from Imam al-Bāqir (a). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 13:244); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ. thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/2/15/4. Translations: this companion.

36. *Nahj al-balāgha*, Letter 31, to his son al-Ḥasan (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/2/31/173. The earlier version: al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, Kitāb al-nikāḥ, bāb 151, ḥadīth 3, through three chains, two of which al-Majlisī judges weak; one names the recipient as ʿAlī's son Muḥammad. thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/3/151/3. Its reason in full: "that is more comfortable for her condition, more restful for her mind, and more lasting for her beauty." Translations: this companion.

37. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb faḍl al-ʿilm, bāb 22 ("Following the Sunna and the witness of the Book"), ḥadīth 1, from the Prophet (s); al-Majlisī: ḍaʿīf ʿalā al-mashhūr. thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/2/22/1. Al-Muḥsinī includes a version from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), through Jamīl b. Darrāj, in his collection of reliable reports, *Muʿjam al-aḥādīth al-muʿtabara*, in the chapter "The necessity of comparing ḥadīth with the Qurʾān." thaqalayn.net/hadith/9/2/9/4. Translation: this companion.

38. al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws*, Ruling 2451 ("It is unlawful for a man to look at the body or hair of non-maḥram [Muslim] women, be it with lust or without lust"; the rulings after it treat other cases) and Ruling 2453 ("A woman must cover her hair and body, apart from her face and hands, from a non-maḥram man"). sistani.org/english/book/48/2371/.

CHAPTER 18 · THE FAMILY UNIT IN ISLAM

1. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 68 ("Ṣilat al-raḥim"), ḥadīth 23, narrated by Ṣafwān al-Jammāl. Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 8:381); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 1:87). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/68/23. ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Ḥasan, called by his kunya Abū Muḥammad in the report, was the son of al-Ḥasan ibn al-Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī. Retold; the dialogue is translated by this companion.

2. al-Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī (d. 1402/1981), *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, vol. 16, p. 166 (commentary on Qurʾān 30:21; page as in the 20-volume edition digitised by OpenITI). *Mawadda* is "love whose effect appears in action"; *raḥma* is an inner response to seeing another's lack and need, which moves one to relieve it. "Among the most important places of *mawadda* and *raḥma* is the household," and their counterpart is seen in the wider society, where people are drawn to one another and show mercy to the poor, the helpless and the weak. Summarised; phrases translated by this companion.

3. al-Sayyid ʿAlī al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws* (English ed.), Ruling 2430: "It is obligatory for a husband to provide his wife with food, clothing, housing, and other things she needs"; if he does not, "he will be indebted to her"; and "her husband must not subject her to harassment or abuse." sistani.org/english/book/48/2369/. On the wife's rights and on *qiwāma* (Qurʾān 4:34), see Chapter 17.

4. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, Kitāb al-maʿīsha, bāb 11 ("'Amal al-rajul fī baytih," "A man's work in his house"), ḥadīth 1, narrated by Hishām ibn Sālim from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 19:35); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 2:296). thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/2/11/1. The same text is in al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-maʿīsha, bāb 1, ḥadīth 75; al-

Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Faqīh*, p. 212). thaqalayn.net/hadith/36/2/1/75. Translation: this companion.

5. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, Kitāb al-maʿīsha, bāb 11, ḥadīth 2, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a): "The Messenger of God used to milk his family's goat." Al-Majlisī: majhūl (unverified chain). thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/2/11/2. Translation: this companion.
6. al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, vol. 1, bāb 46 ("The description of the prayer from beginning to end"), ḥadīth 33, in which Imam ʿAlī (a) tells the story to a man of the Banū Saʿd. thaqalayn.net/hadith/34/1/46/33. Al-Ṣadūq gives it without a chain ("it is narrated"; unverified chain), and al-Bihbūdī does not include it in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Faqīh*. Retold and abridged. On reciting the glorification after the obligatory prayers, see al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-ṣalāt, bāb 32, ḥadīth 6, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a): God forgives whoever recites it "before moving his legs from an obligatory prayer." Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 15:173); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ. thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/4/32/6. Translation: this companion.
7. Kahlil Gibran, *The Prophet* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1923), "On Children." Quoted as literature, not as a source of Islamic teaching. Text checked against the Project Gutenberg edition (eBook no. 58585).
8. Imam ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn (a), *Risālat al-ḥuqūq*, "The right of your child" (*ḥaqq waladik*). thaqalayn.net/hadith/33/1/6/3. Al-Ṣadūq transmits the same wording, with small variants, through Abū Ḥamza al-Thumālī in *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, vol. 2, bāb 165 ("al-Ḥuqūq"), ḥadīth 1 (thaqalayn.net/hadith/35/3/165/1); al-Bihbūdī does not include it in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Faqīh*. The Arabic *walad* means a child of either sex. Translation: this companion.
9. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 6, Kitāb al-ʿaqīqa, bāb 35 ("Birr al-awlād," kindness to children), ḥadīth 8, narrated by Kulayb al-Ṣaydāwī from "Abū al-Ḥasan" (a). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 21:87; the data reads "1/87"); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 3:94). thaqalayn.net/hadith/6/1/35/8. Ibn Fahd al-Ḥillī's *ʿUddat al-dāʿī* gives the saying from "Abū al-Ḥasan Mūsā," that is, Imam al-Kāẓim (a), as cited in al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 101, p. 73 (OpenITI digital text). Translation: this companion.
10. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 6, Kitāb al-ʿaqīqa, bāb 35, ḥadīth 6, narrated by Yūnus ibn Ribāṭ from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), quoting the Prophet (s). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 21:87). thaqalayn.net/hadith/6/1/35/6. Abridged; translation: this companion.
11. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 6, Kitāb al-ʿaqīqa, bāb 34 (on the rights of children), ḥadīth 4, narrated by ʿAbd Allāh ibn Sinān from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 21:84); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 3:94). thaqalayn.net/hadith/6/1/34/4. Translation: this companion.
12. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Saying 399 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/3/399/497. Compiled text, not graded here. *Al-wālid* is literally "the father"; the Qurʾān gives the mother an even greater claim (31:14). Translation: this companion.
13. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 69 ("al-Birr bi-l-wālidayn"), ḥadīth 1, narrated by Abū Wallād al-Ḥannāṭ from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 8:388); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 1:88). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/69/1. Abridged. The full answer also asks a child to meet even a parent's blows with the words "May God forgive you both." It asks for restraint in the moment; it does not excuse violence, which the Imams condemn (see note 9). Translation: this companion.
14. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 143 ("al-ʿUqūq"), ḥadīth 9, narrated by Ḥadīd ibn Ḥakīm from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: majhūl; al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 1:115). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/143/9. Translation: this companion.
15. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 112 ("al-Kabāʾir"), ḥadīth 4, narrated by ʿAbd Allāh ibn Sinān from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a): "Among the major sins are *ʿuqūq al-wālidayn*, despairing of God's comfort, and feeling safe from God's plan." Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ. thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/112/4. Translation: this companion.
16. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 69, ḥadīth 9, narrated by Hishām ibn Sālim from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 8:419); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 1:88–89). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/69/9. Translation: this companion.

17. *Risālat al-ḥuqūq*, “The right of your mother” and “The right of your father.” thaqalayn.net/hadith/33/1/6/1 and thaqalayn.net/hadith/33/1/6/2. On the text, see note 8. Translation: this companion.

18. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Saying 165 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/3/165/210. Compiled text, not graded here. Translation: this companion.

19. al-Sīstānī, Question and Answer no. 15455, under the topic “Divorce.” sistani.org/english/qa/01166/.

20. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 69, ḥadīth 8, narrated by Muʿammar ibn Khallād from Imam al-Riḍā (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 8:417); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 1:88). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/69/8. “Do not know the truth” refers here mainly to Muslims outside the Imams’ following. In ḥadīth 14 of the same chapter (al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ; thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/69/14), Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) tells a man whose parents opposed the Imams’ teaching: “Be dutiful to them as you are to the Muslims who follow us.” Qurʾān 31:15 extends the duty of kindness to parents of any belief. Translation: this companion.

21. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 69, ḥadīth 13, narrated by Ibrāhīm ibn Shuʿayb from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: majhūl; al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 1:89). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/69/13. The text is vowelled *junna*, “shield.” Translation: this companion.

22. al-Sīstānī, *A Code of Practice for Muslims in the West*, “Miscellaneous: General Rules”: “It is obligatory on the son to provide for the parents”; “It is obligatory on the father to provide for the child, male as well as female.” The duty applies when the relative is poor, lacking “the basic necessities of life.” sistani.org/english/book/46/2074/.

23. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 68, ḥadīth 1, narrated by Jamīl ibn Darrāj from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 8:358); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 1:87). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/68/1. Translation: this companion.

24. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 68, ḥadīth 9, narrated by Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Abī Naṣr from Imam al-Riḍā (a), quoting Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 8:368). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/68/9. Translation: this companion.

25. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 68, ḥadīth 2, narrated by Isḥāq ibn ʿAmmār from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: muwaththaq (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 8:359). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/68/2. Paraphrased.

26. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 49 (“Ḥusn al-khuluq,” good character), ḥadīth 8, narrated by ʿAbd Allāh ibn Sinān from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 8:169). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/49/8. *Al-diyār* means homes or dwellings. Translation: this companion.

27. al-Mufīd, *al-Amālī*, majlis 2, ḥadīth 6, from Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafiyya, quoting the Prophet (s), who adds “and does not recognise our right.” thaqalayn.net/hadith/13/2/6/1. Not graded in the data. The same saying is given from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) in al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 71, ḥadīth 2; al-Majlisī: marfūʿ (unverified chain). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/71/2. Translation: this companion.

28. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 7, Kitāb al-waṣāyā, bāb 36 (on what reaches the dead), ḥadīth 1, narrated by Hishām ibn Sālim from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: muwaththaq ʿalā al-ẓāhir (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 23:92; the data reads “3/92”). thaqalayn.net/hadith/7/1/36/1. A parallel in al-Ṣadūq, *al-Khiṣāl*, is graded sound in its chain by Hādī al-Najafī (thaqalayn.net/hadith/10/4/142/1). On prayer and charity for parents, see note 20. Translation: this companion.

29. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb 111 (on the Prophet’s birth and death), al-Kulaynī’s opening account (thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/4/111/0): the Prophet’s father died when he was two months old, his mother when he was four, and his grandfather ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib when he was about eight. In ḥadīth 21 of the same chapter, the lap that raised him is named as Abū Ṭālib’s, and in one transmission also Fāṭima bint Asad’s. Al-Majlisī: its chains are majhūl and mursal (unverified chain). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/4/111/21.

30. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 6, Kitāb al-ṭalāq, bāb 1 ("Karāhiyat ṭalāq al-zawja al-muwāfiqa," on the dislike of divorcing a compatible wife), ḥadīth 2, narrated by Ibn Abī ʿUmayr from more than one transmitter, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 21:94; the data reads "1/94"). thaqalayn.net/hadith/6/2/1/2. Translation: this companion.
31. al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws*, Ruling 2476: a father may not separate a child from its mother before the age of two; the recommended precaution is not to do so before seven; and if separation would harm the child, it is not permitted. sistani.org/english/book/48/2372/. On custody, see also *A Code of Practice for Muslims in the West*, sistani.org/english/book/46/2074/. Jurists differ on details; check the rulings of your *marjaʿ*.
32. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, Kitāb al-maʿīsha, bāb 149 ("al-Ḍirār"), ḥadīth 2, narrated by Zurāra from Imam al-Bāqir (a). Al-Majlisī: muwaththaq ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 19:394; the data reads "9/394"); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 2:387). thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/2/149/2. Samura ibn Jundab kept passing through an Anṣārī's garden, where the family lived by the gate, to reach his palm tree without asking permission. He refused to ask, refused to sell and refused a palm in Paradise, so the Prophet (s) had the tree uprooted. Summarised; translation of the maxim: this companion.

CHAPTER 19 · WORK, WEALTH & ECONOMIC JUSTICE

1. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, Kitāb al-maʿīsha, bāb 4 (on the effort the Imams made to seek a living), ḥadīth 1, narrated by ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Ḥajjāj from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 19:16); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 2:292). thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/2/4/1. Retold; the dialogue is translated by this companion. Muḥammad ibn al-Munkadir, a celebrated devotee and hadith transmitter of Medina, opens the report by saying he had not thought ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn would leave a successor better than himself until he met his son. Al-Kulaynī dates al-Bāqir's death to 114 AH (*al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb 118; thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/4/118/0).
2. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, Kitāb al-maʿīsha, bāb 13 ("Working hard for one's family"), ḥadīth 1, narrated by al-Ḥalabī from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 19:37). thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/2/13/1. A parallel in the same bāb (ḥadīth 3) is graded ṣaḥīḥ by al-Bihbūdī. Translation: this companion.
3. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, Kitāb al-maʿīsha, bāb 5 (encouraging the search for provision), ḥadīth 1, narrated by ʿUmar ibn Yazīd. Al-Majlisī: ḥasan ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 19:22); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 2:294). thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/2/5/1. Translation: this companion.
4. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, Kitāb al-maʿīsha, bāb 4, ḥadīth 4, narrated by Zayd al-Shaḥḥām from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 19:17); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 2:292–293). thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/2/4/4. Where the digital data prints a *Mirʾāt* volume number short, as here ("9/17"), this and later notes give the volume corrected from neighbouring entries in the same bāb. Translation: this companion.
5. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, Kitāb al-maʿīsha, bāb 4, ḥadīth 14, narrated by Zurāra. Al-Majlisī: ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 19:21); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 2:293). thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/2/4/14. The Imam adds that the Prophet (s) himself once carried a stone on his shoulder to set it in the wall of one of his gardens. Translation: this companion.
6. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-zakāt, bāb 7 (providing generously for one's family), ḥadīth 11, narrated by ʿAbd Allāh ibn Sinān from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 16:138); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 2:45). thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/1/7/11. Abridged; translation: this companion.
7. al-Sayyid ʿAlī al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws*, Ruling 2063, items 1 (trade in intoxicating drinks and pigs) and 5 ("transactions in which there is deceit", with the examples given here). sistani.org/english/book/48/2335/.
8. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, Kitāb al-maʿīsha, bāb 54 (the etiquette of trade), ḥadīth 5, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 19:135). thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/2/54/5. Translation: this companion.

9. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Letter 53 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ), the section on merchants and craftsmen. thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/2/53/319 and /53/321. Translation: this companion.
10. al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws*, Rulings 2134 (case 2, annulment by a party who was cheated, *khiyār al-ghabn*) and 2135 (a buyer who paid a significantly inflated price), sistani.org/english/book/48/2343/; Ruling 2062, item 7 (intervening in another's transaction is *makrūh*, disapproved), sistani.org/english/book/48/2334/.
11. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, Kitāb al-maʿīsha, bāb 64 (hoarding), ḥadīth 4, narrated by Abū al-Faḍl Sālim al-Ḥannāṭ. Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 19:155); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 2:318). thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/2/64/4. Retold; the quoted words are translated by this companion. On the ruling: al-Sīstānī, *Minhāj al-ṣāliḥīn*, vol. 2, Ādāb al-tijāra, masʾala 50: the prohibition is specific to staple food; no price may be imposed on the hoarder, but a price ruinous to the public is forced down to a level that is not ruinous. sistani.org/arabic/book/15/771/.
12. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, Kitāb al-maʿīsha, bāb 146 (on employing a worker before agreeing a wage), ḥadīth 1, narrated by Sulaymān ibn Jaʿfar al-Jaʿfarī. Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 19:386). thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/2/146/1. Retold and abridged. The abridgment leaves out the narrator, Sulaymān, who had gone home with the Imam, and his question; the report's description of the worker as "a black man who was not one of them"; the Imam's remark that he had forbidden this "more than once"; and the fact that the Imam, intensely angry, turned on his servants (*ghilmān*) and struck them with a whip. The Imam's words are translated by this companion.
13. Same bāb, ḥadīth 2, narrated by Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), on porters and hired workers. Al-Majlisī: ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 19:387); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 2:384). thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/2/146/2. The orchard: ḥadīth 3, al-Majlisī: muwaththaq (19:388). thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/2/146/3. Translation: this companion.
14. al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws*, Rulings 2301 (a condition that the borrower repay more than he received is usury, *ribā*, and unlawful) and 2302 (giving interest is unlawful like taking it, though the loan itself is valid). sistani.org/english/book/48/2357/.
15. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, Kitāb al-maʿīsha, bāb 51 (ribā), ḥadīth 8, narrated by Hishām ibn Sālim. Al-Majlisī: ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 19:125); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 2:313). thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/2/51/8. In ḥadīth 7 of the same bāb (al-Majlisī: muwaththaq) the Imam gives the same reason when asked why the Qurʾan returns to ribā more than once. Translation: this companion.
16. al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws*, Ruling 2295: the lender must wait. sistani.org/english/book/48/2357/.
17. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, Kitāb al-maʿīsha, bāb 3 (using this world to reach the next), ḥadīth 10, narrated by ʿAbd Allāh ibn Abī Yaʿfūr. Al-Majlisī: ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 19:15); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 2:292). thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/2/3/10. Translation: this companion.
18. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 63 ("Contentment"), ḥadīth 6, narrated by Hishām ibn Sālim from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), who reports that Imam ʿAlī (a) used to say this. Al-Majlisī: ḥasan ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 8:325). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/63/6. Translation: this companion.
19. al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, commentary on 57:7 (vol. 19). The second reading is also the one given in al-Ṭabrisī's twelfth-century *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, commentary on 57:7.
20. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-zakāt, bāb 1, ḥadīth 12, narrated by Ṣafwān al-Jammāl from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a): the deprived is "the unlucky one who has been deprived of the fruit of his labour in buying and selling." A second version, from Imams al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq (a), describes "the man with nothing wrong with his mind, whose provision has not been made ample." Al-Majlisī: majhūl, the second version mursal (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 16:10); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 2:8). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/5/1/12. Translation: this companion.
21. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-zakāt, bāb 1, ḥadīth 9, narrated by Abū Baṣīr. Al-Majlisī: ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 16:9). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/5/1/9. Two further reports in the same bāb (ḥadīth 10–11; al-Majlisī: majhūl; al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ) likewise explain the "known right" as giving beyond *zakat*,

as much as a person can afford, to help relatives, guests and people in trouble. Translation: this companion.

22. al-Ṭabrisī, *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, commentary on 68:17, citing Saʿīd ibn Jubayr (d. 714 CE), who places the garden near Ṣanʿāʾ in Yemen (vol. 10, p. 92 in the 1995 edition). A commentator's report, not part of the Qur'anic text.

23. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-zakāt, bāb 1 (the obligation of zakat), ḥadīth 1, narrated by Zurāra and Muḥammad ibn Muslim. Al-Majlisī: ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 16:5); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 2:5–6). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/5/1/1. Excerpt; translation: this companion.

24. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Saying 328 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/3/328/405. The saying begins, "God has set the sustenance of the poor in the wealth of the rich," and ends, "and God will question them about it." Some printed editions read *muttiʿa* ("by what a rich person is indulged with") where the Thaqalayn text reads *manaʿa* ("holds back"); this companion follows Thaqalayn. Translation: this companion.

25. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-zakāt, bāb 7: ḥadīth 8, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), on neglecting dependants (al-Majlisī: ḥasan, *Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 16:137; al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ; thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/1/7/8); ḥadīth 10, from Imam Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn (a), on the meat (al-Majlisī: ḥasan, 16:138; thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/1/7/10); ḥadīth 2, narrated by Muḥammad ibn Muslim from Imam al-Bāqir (a), on the estate of three thousand dirhams (al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ, 16:136; al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ; thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/1/7/2). Paraphrased.

26. al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws*, Ruling 1871 (business goods are included "based on obligatory precaution"). sistani.org/english/book/48/2314/. Many other manuals list nine items; check the rulings of your *marjaʿ*.

27. al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws*, Ruling 1769 (khums on what remains of earnings after the year's living expenses for oneself and one's family) and Ruling 1851 (its two shares: the share of needy *sayyids*, and the share of the Imam, given to a fully qualified jurist or spent as he authorises). sistani.org/english/book/48/2306/ and /2312/. On *zakat* and the Prophet's family, compare Imam ʿAlī's words in *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 224: "Is it … zakat, or charity? That is forbidden to us, the people of the house" (thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/224/5; translation: this companion). In al-Sīstānī's Ruling 1969, a *sayyid* "cannot accept zakat from someone who is not a sayyid except in case of necessity" (sistani.org/english/book/48/2325/).

28. Muḥammad Bāqir al-Ṣadr, *Iqtiṣādunā* (Our Economics), first published 1961. Al-Ṣadr sets out three basic pillars of an Islamic economy: mixed ownership (private, public and state), economic freedom within limits, and social justice. The examples that follow are chosen by this companion.

29. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, Kitāb al-maʿīsha, bāb 149 (on causing harm), ḥadīth 2, narrated by Zurāra from Imam al-Bāqir (a). Al-Majlisī: muwaththaq ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 19:394); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 2:387). thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/2/149/2. Retold; the Prophet's words are translated by this companion. The garden's owner was one of the Anṣār, the Muslims of Medina. "No harm and no harming" (*lā ḍarar wa-lā ḍirār*) became one of the best-known maxims of Islamic law.

30. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 126 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ), spoken when he was criticised for giving equal stipends without preference for seniority or rank. thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/126/2. Translation: this companion.

31. *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 15, spoken after he returned to the public treasury lands that had been granted away as private estates under his predecessor. thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/15/2. Translation: this companion.

32. *Nahj al-balāgha*, Letter 45, to ʿUthmān ibn Ḥunayf al-Anṣārī, his governor of Basra. thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/2/45/226 and /45/229. The letter ends: "So fear God, Ibn Ḥunayf, and let your own loaves suffice you" (/45/239). Translation: this companion.

33. *Nahj al-balāgha*, Letter 53, the section on "the lowest class." thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/2/53/322. The same letter tells the governor to forbid hoarding, "for the Messenger of God (s) forbade it" (/53/320). Translation: this companion.

34. *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 224. thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/224/3, /224/4 and /224/6. The sermon says he brought the iron near ʿAqīl "so that he might take heed"; it does not say he branded him. Translation: this companion.

CHAPTER 20 · ISLAM'S VISION OF JUSTICE

1. Ibn Bābawayh al-Ṣadūq, *al-Amālī*, majlis 71, ḥadīth 6, narrated from Imam Mūsā al-Kāẓim (a), from his forefathers, from Imam ʿAlī (a). thaqalayn.net/hadith/29/1/71/6. The data records no grading (unverified chain). Retold, not translated word for word. "A person under treaty" renders *muʿāhad*: a non-Muslim living under a covenant of protection with the Muslim community. Ṭayba is an old name of Medina.
2. al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, vol. 4, bāb 19 (on the prohibition of shedding blood and taking property unlawfully), ḥadīth 1, narrated by Samāʿa from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Bihbūdī includes it as ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Faqīh*, p. 315). thaqalayn.net/hadith/37/1/19/1. Abridged; translation: this companion. In the same sermon the Prophet adds: "Whoever holds something in trust, let him return it to the one who entrusted him with it, for the blood of a Muslim and his property are lawful to no one except with his consent." The sermon addresses the Muslim community; the dignity of every human being rests on Qurʾān 17:70.
3. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 66 ("Fairness and justice"), ḥadīth 3, narrated by Jārūd Abū al-Mundhir from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: muwaththaq (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 8:341). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/66/3. The other two "masters of deeds" are sharing your wealth with your brother and remembering God in every situation. Translation: this companion.
4. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Saying 437 (Thaqalayn numbering). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/3/437/553. Translation: this companion. The formula "giving everyone their due" (*iʿṭāʾ kull dhī ḥaqqin ḥaqqahu*) is the scholars' definition, not a hadith, and the contrast drawn here between *ʿadl* and *qisṭ* is a lexical gloss. Books of law also use a related word, *ʿadāla*, in a technical sense: the probity required of a judge, a witness or a prayer leader (see al-Sīstānī, Questions and answers, "Justice", sistani.org/english/qa/01232/).
5. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Letter 53 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ, as on Thaqalayn), on those who cannot reach the governor; the word translated "fairness" is *inṣāf*. thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/2/53/323. Translation: this companion.
6. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 66 ("Fairness and justice"), ḥadīth 15, narrated by Muʿāwiya ibn Wahb from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: muwaththaq (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 8:350). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/66/15. Translation: this companion.
7. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 66 ("Fairness and justice"), ḥadīth 20, narrated by al-Ḥalabī from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 8:352). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/66/20. The same words come with another chain as ḥadīth 11 of the same bāb (muwaththaq, 8:347). Translation: this companion.
8. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 66 ("Fairness and justice"), ḥadīth 14, narrated by Rawḥ, the nephew of al-Muʿallā, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: muwaththaq (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 8:349); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 1:86). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/66/14. Translation: this companion.
9. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Letter 53 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ, as on Thaqalayn). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/2/53/287. Translation: this companion.
10. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Saying 470 (Thaqalayn numbering). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/3/470/597. In a related report a man tells Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) that "the foundation of religion is *tawḥīd* and justice" and asks for something short to remember; the Imam defines justice as "not attributing to your Creator what He has blamed you for": al-Ṣadūq, *Maʿānī al-akhbār*, bāb 10, ḥadīth 2 (marfūʿ: unverified chain), thaqalayn.net/hadith/28/1/10/2; also al-Ṣadūq, *al-Tawḥīd*, bāb 5, ḥadīth 1, thaqalayn.net/hadith/14/2/5/1. Translations: this companion.
11. The *ʿAdliyya* position and its debate with the Ashʿarī school are set out in Murtaḍā Muṭahharī, *ʿAdl-i ilāhī* (Divine Justice), the standard modern Shia account. On the five foundations of faith see Chapter 1; on God's justice and suffering, Chapter 11.

12. Ibn al-Ṭiqṭaqā (d. 709/1309), *al-Fakhrī fī al-ādāb al-sulṭāniyya*: after Hulagu took Baghdad in 656/1258 he had the scholars of the Mustanṣiriyya asked the question; they hesitated, Raḍī al-Dīn ʿAlī ibn Ṭāwūs signed first in favour of the just unbeliever over the unjust Muslim, and the others followed. Checked in the OpenITI digital text for this companion's research; page not given. This is a juristic opinion given under conquest, not a hadith. Ibn Ṭāwūs's death on 5 Dhū al-Qaʿda 664 AH (1266 CE) is recorded in al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* 104:45 (checked in the OpenITI digital text of the 2nd ed., 1403/1983).

13. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 33 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ, as on Thaqalayn), al-Raḍī's introduction, narrated by ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbbās: the meeting was at Dhū Qār, as Imam ʿAlī (a) set out against the people of Basra. thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/33/2. Translation: this companion.

14. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 216 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ, as on Thaqalayn). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/216/3. Translation: this companion.

15. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Letter 53 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ, as on Thaqalayn), on public audiences for "those in need." thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/2/53/325. Translation: this companion.

16. al-Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām* 6:293, no. 811, by his chain to Muḥammad ibn Abī Ḥamza, "from a man" who traced it to Imam ʿAlī (a). The chain is broken (mursal): unverified chain. The Tahdhīb volume is outside this companion's local corpus; the wording was checked in al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, *Wasāʾil al-Shīʿa* (Āl al-Bayt ed.), vol. 15, p. 66, no. 19996 (Abwāb jihād al-ʿaduww, bāb 19, ḥadīth 1), under the heading "The upkeep of a Christian who grows old and unable to earn comes from the public treasury." Translation: this companion.

17. al-Sayyid ʿAlī al-Sīstānī, Questions and answers, "Legal Issues": Q&A 15385 (on stealing from or defrauding non-Muslims in their countries, including in visa and residence applications: "Treachery and breach of trust directed against anybody is Haram"), 15384 (false information to government departments to obtain benefits: "not permissible because it is lying"), 15383 (breaking a visa's no-work undertaking is ḥarām) and 15033 (stealing electricity by tampering with the meter: "not permissible"). sistani.org/english/qa/01179/.

18. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 3, *al-Shiqshiqiyya* (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ, as on Thaqalayn). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/3/11. Translation: this companion.

19. The statement (*waṣiyya*) to Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafiyya has no chain of transmission. It is a historical report: unverified chain. Its earliest known source is Ibn Aʿtham al-Kūfī, *Kitāb al-Futūḥ*, vol. 5 (page not verified); it also appears in al-Khwārazmī, *Maqtal al-Ḥusayn*, and in al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* 44:329–330, where the wording translated here was checked (OpenITI digital text of the 2nd ed., 1403/1983). It could not be located in al-Mufīd's *al-Irshād* or in al-Ṭabarī's history. Al-Ḥusayn's refusal to pledge allegiance to Yazīd is reported on the same page of *Biḥār*. Translation: this companion.

20. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 131 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ, as on Thaqalayn). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/131/3. Both texts use the same word for reform, *al-iṣlāḥ*. Translation: this companion.

21. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb 116 ("The birth of al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī"), al-Kulaynī's own opening note: al-Ḥusayn was killed in Muḥarram 61 AH, aged fifty-seven and some months, in the reign of Yazīd ibn Muʿāwiya, by ʿUbayd Allāh ibn Ziyād, then governor of Kufa; the troops that fought him (*al-khayl*, literally "the horse") were led by ʿUmar ibn Saʿd, at Karbala, on the tenth of Muḥarram. In the historical accounts ʿUmar ibn Saʿd commanded the whole Kufan army, with other officers over its horse and foot (al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* 45:4, checked in the OpenITI digital text). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/4/116/0. The deaths of members of his family beside him, among them his son ʿAlī and his nephew al-Qāsim ibn al-Ḥasan, are narrated in al-Ṣadūq, *al-Amālī*, majlis 30, ḥadīth 1 (unverified chain), thaqalayn.net/hadith/29/1/30/1.

22. Ibn Qūlawayh, *Kāmil al-ziyārāt*, bāb 48, ḥadīth 3, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) through "some of our companions" (mursal: unverified chain). thaqalayn.net/hadith/24/2/48/3. A parallel (marfūʿ) is in al-Ṣadūq, *Thawāb al-aʿmāl*, bāb 147, ḥadīth 21, thaqalayn.net/hadith/23/2/147/21. The order to cut al-

Ḥusayn's camp off from the water appears in the long narrative of the events in al-Ṣadūq, *al-Amālī*, majlis 30, ḥadīth 1 (a chain of little-known narrators: unverified), thaqalayn.net/hadith/29/1/30/1. Translation: this companion.

23. al-Mufīd, *al-Amālī*, majlis 38, ḥadīth 8: the account of Ḥadhlam ibn Sutayr, who reached Kufa in Muḥarram 61 AH as the captives arrived. No grading in the data (unverified chain). thaqalayn.net/hadith/13/38/8/1. Translation: this companion.
24. Ibn Qūlawayh, *Kāmil al-ziyārāt*, bāb 79 ("The ziyāra of al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī and how it is performed"), ḥadīth 3, taught by Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), through al-Ḥusayn ibn Saʿīd, Faḍāla ibn Ayyūb, Nuʿaym ibn al-Walīd and Yūsuf al-Kunāsī. The data records no grading (unverified chain). The same testimony recurs in other ziyāras of this bāb. thaqalayn.net/hadith/24/2/79/3. The same ziyāra, with the same chain, is in al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-ḥajj, bāb 230, ḥadīth 1; al-Majlisī: majhūl (unverified chain). thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/3/230/1. Translation: this companion.

CHAPTER 21 · ISLAM & THE ENVIRONMENT

1. On Abū Dharr's exile: al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 130 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ), Imam ʿAlī's words to Abū Dharr "when he was sent out to al-Rabadha": "You were angry for God's sake… These people feared you for the sake of their world, and you feared them for the sake of your faith." thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/130/1 and /130/2. That he stayed at al-Rabadha until he died: al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* 22:399 and 31:482. Translation: this companion.
2. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 6, Kitāb al-dawājin, bāb 2 ("Rare reports on mounts"), ḥadīth 2, narrated by Sulaymān b. Khālid, "as far as I recall," from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ka-l-muwaththaq (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 22:454). thaqalayn.net/hadith/6/8/2/2. Translation: this companion.
3. al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, vol. 1, pp. 115–16 (on 2:30). Vicegerency "is not complete unless the vicegerent reflects the one who appointed him"; "what has dust to do with the Lord of lords?"; God "did not deny" the corruption and bloodshed the angels foresaw; and the vicegerency "is not restricted to the person of Adam: his children share in it," as 7:69, 10:14 and 27:62 support. Translation: this companion.
4. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, Kitāb al-maʿīsha, bāb 137 ("Reviving barren land"), ḥadīth 2, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ; al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 2:378–79). thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/2/137/2. The same bāb records the Prophet's ruling, "Whoever brings dead land to life, it is his" (ḥadīth 3; al-Majlisī: ḥasan). Jurists discuss in detail when a first owner's right lapses; for the law today, check the rulings of your marjaʿ. Translation: this companion.
5. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 167 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ), delivered "at the beginning of his caliphate." thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/167/3. Translation: this companion.
6. On *al-anām* in 55:10: al-Ṭabrisī (d. 548/1154), *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, vol. 9, p. 331, reports that Ibn ʿAbbās read it as "everything that has a spirit," and Mujāhid as "all creatures that have a spirit." Al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān*, vol. 19, p. 98, gives "people" first and also notes the reading "everything that moves on the earth." Translation: this companion.
7. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 6, Kitāb al-dawājin, bāb 2, ḥadīth 1, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ḍaʿīf ʿalā al-mashhūr, weak by the usual grading (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 22:454). thaqalayn.net/hadith/6/8/2/1. Versions in the Prophet's name are in al-Ṣadūq, *al-Khiṣāl*, Part 6, bāb 25, ḥadīth 1, through Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) and his forefathers (thaqalayn.net/hadith/10/7/25/1), and *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, vol. 2, bāb 25 ("The rights of the animal over its owner"), ḥadīth 1 (thaqalayn.net/hadith/35/3/25/1); compare al-Ṣadūq, *al-Amālī*, majlis 76, ḥadīth 2 (thaqalayn.net/hadith/29/1/76/2). All run through al-Sakūnī. Translation: this companion.
8. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 6, Kitāb al-dawājin, bāb 6 ("Branding animals"), ḥadīth 2, narrated by ʿAbd Allāh b. Sinān from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 22:466); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 3:231). thaqalayn.net/hadith/6/8/6/2. Translation: this companion.
9. al-Ṣadūq, *Thawāb al-aʿmāl wa-ʿiqāb al-aʿmāl*, the section on punishments, bāb 126 (on the punishment for killing), ḥadīth 6, narrated by Ḥafṣ b. al-Bakhtarī from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a): "A woman was punished over a cat (*hirra*) that she tied up until it died of thirst." Not graded in our sources

(unverified chain). thaqalayn.net/hadith/23/3/126/6. The site's English has "goat"; the Arabic says "cat." Translation: this companion.

10. al-Sayyid ʿAlī al-Sīstānī, *Minhāj al-ṣāliḥīn*, vol. 3 (corrected ed., 1445 AH), Kitāb al-nikāḥ, the section on maintenance owed through ownership, rulings 458–460. Ruling 460: "It is not permissible to confine an animal, whether owned or not, and leave it without food and drink until it dies." Ruling 458 reports the view of a number of jurists that an owner must supply the food, water and shelter an animal cannot obtain for itself, calls it "not free of difficulty" (*lā yakhlū min ishkāl*), and requires, as an obligatory precaution, that the owner provide for the animal's upkeep (*al-infāq ʿalayhi*) or pass it to someone who will, or slaughter an animal that may lawfully be eaten, provided that does not waste property. sistani.org/arabic/book/16/881/. Translation: this companion.

11. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-zakāt, bāb 41 ("Giving water to drink"), ḥadīth 6, narrated by Ḍurays b. ʿAbd al-Malik from Imam al-Bāqir (a). Al-Majlisī: muwaththaq (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 16:189); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 2:57–58). thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/1/41/6. Also in al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, vol. 2 (thaqalayn.net/hadith/35/1/18/2). Translation: this companion.

12. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Letter 25 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ), instructions "he used to write for whoever he appointed over the alms." thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/2/25/96 and /25/99. Abridged; translation: this companion.

13. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, Kitāb al-maʿīsha, bāb 136 ("Selling water…"), ḥadīth 2, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: muwaththaq ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ; al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 2:377–78). thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/2/136/2. Another report in the same bāb (ḥadīth 1; al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ) allows a partner in a water channel to sell a share he no longer needs, and the jurists weigh the two together; for the law, check the rulings of your marjaʿ. Translation: this companion.

14. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, Kitāb al-maʿīsha, bāb 136, ḥadīth 4 (al-Majlisī: muwaththaq; al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ), thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/2/136/4. Ḥadīth 3 of the same bāb (al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ), thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/2/136/3, adds that the water is then released to the land below. Translation: this companion.

15. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, Kitāb al-maʿīsha, bāb 149 ("Causing harm"), ḥadīth 6, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: majhūl; al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 2:388). thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/2/149/6. The report gives both rulings: between the people of Medina "over the watering of palms" (*fī mashārib al-nakhl*), that "the benefit of a thing is not to be withheld"; and between the desert people, that "surplus water is not to be withheld in order to withhold surplus pasture." On the maxim's force today, Ayatollah al-Sīstānī holds that "no harm" overrides other binding rulings, except where the Lawgiver is known to value a ruling above the harm (Q&A no. 3594, sistani.org/arabic/qa/0314/). Translation: this companion.

16. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 7, Kitāb al-waṣāyā, bāb 35 ("The charities of the Prophet, Fāṭima and the Imams"), ḥadīth 9, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 23:90). thaqalayn.net/hadith/7/1/35/9. Translation: this companion.

17. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 115 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ), "on seeking rain." thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/115/2 and /115/5. Abridged; translation: this companion.

18. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Letter 53 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ), Imam ʿAlī's charter for Mālik al-Ashtar on appointing him governor of Egypt. thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/2/53/315.

19. al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān*, vol. 19, pp. 97–98 (on 55:7–9). The balance is "everything by which a thing is weighed, whether a belief, a word or a deed"; in 55:8–9 "the apparent meaning is the familiar balance, the scale for weights." Translation: this companion.

20. al-Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ṭahāra, bāb 6, ḥadīth 70, narrated by Zurāra from Imam al-Bāqir (a): "The Messenger of God (s) used to perform wuḍūʾ with a mudd and bathe with a ṣāʿ. The mudd is a raṭl and a half, and the ṣāʿ six raṭls." Al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Tahdhīb*, p. 68); al-Ghaffārī: ṣaḥīḥ. thaqalayn.net/hadith/41/1/6/70. Compare ḥadīth 68 (thaqalayn.net/hadith/41/1/6/68). Translation: this companion.

21. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 6, Kitāb al-ziyy wa-l-tajammul, bāb 14 ("Wearing old clothes"), ḥadīth 1, narrated by Isḥāq b. ʿAmmār from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: muwaththaq (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl*

22:342); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 3:210). thaqalayn.net/hadith/6/7/14/1. Translation: this companion.

22. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, Kitāb al-maʿīsha, bāb 124 ("The excellence of farming"), ḥadīth 3, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: majhūl; al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 2:367). thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/2/124/3. Translation: this companion.
23. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, Kitāb al-maʿīsha, bāb 4 (on following the Imams in working for a living), ḥadīth 6, narrated by Zurāra from Imam al-Bāqir (a). Al-Majlisī: muwaththaq ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 19:18); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 2:293). thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/2/4/6. Retold; the dialogue is translated by this companion.
24. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Letter 24 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ), written "after his return from Ṣiffīn," with al-Raḍī's explanation of "until the land is unrecognisable with plantings." thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/2/24/90 and /24/92. Translation: this companion.
25. al-Ṣadūq, *al-Khiṣāl*, Part 6, bāb 7 ("Six things that benefit a believer after death"), ḥadīth 1, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Not graded in our sources (unverified chain). thaqalayn.net/hadith/10/7/7/1. Also in al-Ṣadūq, *al-Amālī*, majlis 32, ḥadīth 2 (thaqalayn.net/hadith/29/1/32/2). Translation: this companion.
26. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, Kitāb al-jihād, bāb 8 ("The Prophet's instructions to small expeditions"), ḥadīth 9, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 18:356); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 2:283). thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/1/8/9. The weaker report is ḥadīth 8 of the same bāb (al-Majlisī: ḍaʿīf, *Mirʾāt* 18:355; thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/1/8/8). Ayatollah al-Sīstānī's 2015 guidance to fighters quotes the Prophet's order about trees (sistani.org/arabic/archive/25034/). Translation: this companion.
27. al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān*, vol. 16, pp. 195–96 (on 30:41). Translation: this companion.
28. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Letter 53 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/2/53/314 and /53/315. Translation: this companion.
29. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 167 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/167/3. Translation: this companion.

CHAPTER 22 · APOSTASY IN ISLAM

1. al-Faḍl b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabrisī (d. 548/1154), *Majmaʿ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, on Q 16:106, vol. 6, p. 203 (10-vol. ed., 1415/1995), reporting from Ibn ʿAbbās and Qatāda: the verse came down about a group who were coerced (ʿAmmār, his father Yāsir, his mother Sumayya, Ṣuhayb, Bilāl and Khabbāb); ʿAmmār's father and mother were killed, and "it is said" they were the first two martyrs in Islam; when some said "ʿAmmār has disbelieved," the Prophet replied that ʿAmmār was "filled with faith from the top of his head to his feet"; then came ʿAmmār's tears and the Prophet's words, "If they do it to you again, say to them again what you said." Among the Shia hadith, Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) recalls the episode in al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 97 ("Taqiyya"), ḥadīth 10, where the Prophet tells ʿAmmār that God "has revealed your excuse" (al-Majlisī: ḍaʿīf ʿalā al-mashhūr, *Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 9:173; thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/97/10). Ḥadīth 15 of the same chapter says the verse "was revealed about ʿAmmār and his companions" (al-Majlisī: majhūl, *Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 9:180; thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/97/15). The chains are weak, but the occasion of the verse is very widely reported. Translation: this companion.
2. al-Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī (d. 1981), *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, on Q 2:256, vol. 2, pp. 342–344: compulsion "works only on outward actions and bodily movements," while belief has its own causes "of the kind of belief and perception," and "it is impossible for ignorance to produce knowledge." The verse "is not abrogated by the verse of the sword," because the reason it gives, that the right course has become distinct from error, does not change once fighting is commanded. English: *al-Mīzān*, WOFIS translation, vol. 4, on 2:256–257. Translation: this companion.
3. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 170 ("Doubt"), ḥadīth 3, narrated by Muḥammad b. Muslim. Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 11:182). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/170/3. Abū Muḥammad is Abū Baṣīr's kunya. Translation: this companion.

4. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 165 (“Disbelief”), ḥadīth 15, narrated by Muḥammad b. Muslim from Imam al-Bāqir (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ; al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 1:121). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/165/15. Translation: this companion.
5. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 187 (“Whispering and the self’s inner talk”), ḥadīth 3, narrated by Muḥammad b. Muslim from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a); the Imam’s explanation comes through ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. al-Ḥajjāj. Al-Majlisī: ḥasan ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 11:268); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 1:128). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/187/3. Translation: this companion.
6. Ibn Bābawayh al-Ṣadūq, *al-Tawḥīd*, bāb 56 (“Capability”), ḥadīth 24, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), quoting the Prophet (s). The nine things are mistakes, forgetfulness, what people are forced into, what they cannot bear, what they do not know, what necessity drives them to, envy, evil omens, and brooding over intrusive thoughts about creation “so long as the lips do not utter it.” Hādī al-Najafī: sound in its chain (*Mawsūʿat aḥādīth Ahl al-Bayt* 2:198). thaqalayn.net/hadith/14/2/56/24. Translation: this companion.
7. al-Sayyid ʿAlī al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws*, Chapter One, “Following a Jurist (Taqlīd),” Ruling 1. sistani.org/english/book/48/2117/.
8. al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān*, vol. 4, pp. 130–131, in his essay on Muslim society that follows Q 3:200 (*Kalām fī al-murābaṭa fī al-mujtamaʿ al-islāmī*), section 14. Islam, he writes, “allows people complete freedom of thought”; if a doubt arises about any of its truths, “there is no harm in it”; the one who has it should bring it to the Book of God, and then to the Messenger “or the one who stands in his place,” until it is resolved or its error becomes plain. He distinguishes this freedom from spreading a contrary view among people before it has been examined. Translation: this companion.
9. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb faḍl al-ʿilm, bāb 9 (“Asking the scholar”), ḥadīth 2, said by Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) to Ḥumrān b. Aʿyan. Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 1:129); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 1:5). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/2/9/2. The verb, *yahliku*, is the one the frightened man used of himself (*halaktu*, “I am ruined”). Translation: this companion.
10. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 7, Kitāb al-mawārīth, bāb 46 (“Inheritance of an apostate”), ḥadīth 4, narrated by Muḥammad b. Muslim from Imam al-Bāqir (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 23:229); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ. thaqalayn.net/hadith/7/2/46/4. The words “after judicial due process,” found in one English translation online, are not in the Arabic. Ḥadīth 2 and 3 of the same chapter (ṣaḥīḥ and ḥasan) add that the estate is divided “according to the Book of God,” and that the wife inherits from him if he dies within her waiting period. Translation: this companion.
11. al-Sīstānī, *Minhāj al-ṣāliḥīn*, vol. 3 (corrected ed., 1445 AH), Kitāb al-mīrāth, masʾala 967. sistani.org/arabic/book/16/930/. On whether repentance lifts the three effects (execution, separation from his wife and division of his estate), the well-known view says it does not, “but it is problematic (*maḥall ishkāl*),” so precaution must be observed; on everything else, “the correct view is that his repentance is accepted inwardly and outwardly.” Translation: this companion.
12. Ibn Bābawayh al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, vol. 3, “Chapters on legal cases and rulings,” bāb 54 (“Apostasy”), ḥadīth 7. No chain is given (unverified chain); al-Bihbūdī did not include it in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Faqīh*. thaqalayn.net/hadith/36/1/54/7. Translation: this companion.
13. On the *fiṭrī* and the condition of discernment (*tamyīz*): al-Sīstānī, *Minhāj al-ṣāliḥīn*, vol. 3, masʾala 967 (see note 11). The standard classical statement of both categories is al-Muḥaqqiq al-Ḥillī, *Sharāʾiʿ al-Islām*, Kitāb al-ḥudūd, vol. 4, pp. 170–171 (as cited in WikiShia, “Apostasy”; see note 16). The three days: al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, vol. 3, bāb 54, ḥadīth 2, from al-Sakūnī, through Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) from his forefathers; ungraded in the data, and not included by al-Bihbūdī. thaqalayn.net/hadith/36/1/54/2.
14. al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, vol. 3, bāb 54, ḥadīth 4, from Ghiyāth b. Ibrāhīm, through Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), from Imam ʿAlī (a): “If a woman renounces Islam, she is not killed, but she is imprisoned permanently.” Al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Faqīh*, p. 209). thaqalayn.net/hadith/36/1/54/4. The jurists read “permanently” as until she repents or dies, and accept her repentance (Muḥammad Ḥasan al-Najafī, *Jawāhir al-kalām* 41:611–613, as cited in WikiShia, “Apostasy”; see note 16). Al-Sīstānī, *Minhāj al-ṣāliḥīn*, vol. 3, masʾala 967: “the female

apostate is confined, pressed hard and beaten to make her pray, until she repents; if she repents, her repentance is accepted," whether she was born a Muslim or converted. Ḥadīth 3 of the same chapter, from al-Ḥalabī, describes the hardships of her confinement; its verbs are feminine, though one English translation online renders it "he." Translation: this companion.

15. al-Sīstānī, *Minhāj al-ṣāliḥīn*, vol. 3, masʾala 968: the conditions are "adulthood, full sanity, intention and free choice." Coerced apostasy "is void," and so are words spoken heedlessly or inattentively, in jest, by a slip of the tongue, in an anger in which one has no control of oneself, or in ignorance of their meaning. sistani.org/arabic/book/16/930/. Compare the things that are "lifted" (note 6). Translation: this companion.

16. As summarised in WikiShia, "Apostasy" (en.wikishia.net/view/Apostasy, consulted 28 October 2026), citing al-Shahīd al-Awwal, *al-Durūs al-sharʿiyya* 2:52, and al-ʿAllāma al-Ḥillī, *Taḥrīr al-aḥkām* 5:397.

17. al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, vol. 4, bāb 17 ("Rare cases of legal punishments"), ḥadīth 12, from the Prophet (s), given without a chain (unverified chain). thaqalayn.net/hadith/37/1/17/12. The jurists apply it as a general principle (*qāʿidat al-darʾ*). Translation: this companion.

18. al-Sīstānī, "Advice and Guidance to the Fighters on the Battlefields," 12 February 2015, point 6. sistani.org/english/archive/25036/. The same point links the practice of declaring Muslims unbelievers to the early Kharijites.

19. al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, vol. 3, bāb 54, ḥadīth 1, narrated by ʿAmmār al-Sābāṭī from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), about "any Muslim born of two Muslims" who renounces Islam and denies the prophethood of Muḥammad (s). Ungraded in the data; al-Bihbūdī did not include it. thaqalayn.net/hadith/36/1/54/1. The report adds that the Imam does not offer such a man repentance. Al-Kulaynī and al-Ṭūsī transmit the same report (al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, *Wasāʾil al-Shīʿa*, Āl al-Bayt ed., 28:324, no. 34865). Translation: this companion.

20. Al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī (d. 1104/1693) collects this report in a chapter headed "that killing the apostate *ʿan fiṭra* is permissible for anyone who hears him" (*qatluhu mubāḥ li-kull man samiʿahu*): *Wasāʾil al-Shīʿa*, Āl al-Bayt ed., 28:323, Abwāb ḥadd al-murtadd, bāb 1. Fāḍil Hindī (d. 1137/1725) held that anyone certain of the apostasy may kill (*Kashf al-lithām* 10:662). Al-Shaykh al-Mufīd (*al-Muqniʿa*, p. 810), al-Shahīd al-Awwal (*al-Durūs al-sharʿiyya* 2:53) and Abū al-Qāsim al-Khūʾī (*Mabānī takmilat al-minhāj* 2:83) give the apostate's penalty to the Imam or his deputy, and al-Shahīd al-Awwal rejects the view that his blood is lawful to anyone who learns of his apostasy. These four works are cited as summarised in WikiShia (Persian), "Mahdūr al-dam" (fa.wikishia.net, consulted 28 October 2026). Translation: this companion.

21. al-Sīstānī, *Minhāj al-ṣāliḥīn*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-amr bi-l-maʿrūf wa-l-nahy ʿan al-munkar, masʾala 1273: "it is not permitted to proceed to wounding and killing"; only "the Imam (a) or his deputy" may, where the wrong would lead to a greater harm. sistani.org/arabic/book/23720/4743/. Translation: this companion.

22. al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, vol. 3, bāb 54, ḥadīth 5–8. thaqalayn.net/hadith/36/1/54/5 to thaqalayn.net/hadith/36/1/54/8. Their chains are weak or missing, and al-Bihbūdī included none of them in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Faqīh*.

23. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* 3017 and 6922, narrated by ʿIkrima from Ibn ʿAbbās. Sunni source, sound by Sunni standards; cited only to show where the saying comes from. sunnah.com/bukhari:3017. It does not occur in the thirty-nine Shia hadith books of the Thaqalayn library, or in *Biḥār al-anwār* or *Wasāʾil al-Shīʿa*, searched for this edition.

24. al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, vol. 4, bāb 17, ḥadīth 1, narrated by Ḥafṣ b. Ghiyāth from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Ungraded in the data; al-Bihbūdī did not include it. thaqalayn.net/hadith/37/1/17/1. Translation: this companion.

25. As summarised in WikiShia (Persian), "Iqāma-yi ḥudūd" (fa.wikishia.net, consulted 28 October 2026): Ibn Idrīs, *al-Sarāʾir* 2:25 (only the infallible Imam; he claims consensus); al-Muḥaqqiq al-Ḥillī, *Sharāʾiʿ al-Islām* 1:313 and *al-Mukhtaṣar al-nāfiʿ*, p. 115 (he reports permission for the jurists without endorsing or rejecting it). For the jurists' authority, see Abū al-Qāsim al-Khūʾī, *Mabānī takmilat al-minhāj* 1:224–226, and Muḥammad Ḥasan al-Najafī, *Jawāhir al-kalām* 21:394–398.

26. As summarised in WikiShia, "Apostasy" (see note 16): Mūsawī Ardabīlī, *Fiqh al-ḥudūd wa-l-taʿzīrāt* 4:151; al-Fayyāḍ, *Risāla-yi tawḍīḥ al-masāʾil*, p. 626; Jawādī Āmulī, *Tasnīm* 12:183–184; and, for al-Ḥakīm, a Shafaqna report titled "Punishing apostates is not our duty." WikiShia adds that al-Ḥakīm held the apostate's great punishment to belong to the hereafter. On the traditional ruling, WikiShia calls death for the male *fiṭrī* apostate "the famous view of jurists"; its standard classical statement is al-Muḥaqqiq al-Ḥillī, *Sharāʾiʿ al-Islām*, Kitāb al-ḥudūd, vol. 4, pp. 170–171 (note 13). For the ruling as kept today, see al-Sīstānī, *Minhāj al-ṣāliḥīn*, vol. 3, masʾala 967, which restates it but calls "problematic" the well-known view that repentance leaves the penalty in place (note 11).

27. United States Code, Title 18, § 2381 ("Treason"): whoever "levies war against them or adheres to their enemies, giving them aid and comfort… shall suffer death, or shall be imprisoned not less than five years." law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/18/2381.

28. al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān*, vol. 4, pp. 125–126, section 13 of the essay cited in note 8: "The frontier of the Islamic realm is belief, not natural or conventional borders"; Islam "built society on belief, not on ethnicity, nationality or homeland." Translation: this companion.

29. al-Ṭabrisī, *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on Q 3:72, vol. 2, p. 322. He gives two accounts from the early commentators: a group of Jewish scholars (twelve, according to al-Ḥasan and al-Suddī) who agreed to profess Islam in the morning and renounce it in the evening to sow doubt; or, according to Mujāhid, a plan connected with the change in the direction of prayer.

30. As summarised in WikiShia, "Apostasy" (see note 16), which attributes this view to "some researchers": the penalty belongs among the changeable discretionary punishments (*taʿzīr*) and governmental rulings, its form left to the ruler.

31. Bible quotations in this chapter are from the King James Version (standard text of 1769), the public-domain translation available for this edition. Deuteronomy 13:1–5 applies the same penalty to a prophet or dreamer who calls people to "go after other gods."

32. Mishnah, *Makkot* 1:10. Hebrew text and English (William Davidson edition) at sefaria.org/Mishnah_Makkot.1.10. Translation: this companion.

33. al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān*, vol. 4, p. 117, section 9 of the essay cited in note 8 ("What does freedom mean in Islam?"). He denies that 2:256 establishes a modern "freedom of belief," since Islam's law rests on *tawḥīd*. Belief as such, he argues, "is not a voluntary act" that can be forbidden or permitted; what can be is acting on it, such as "calling to the belief, persuading people of it, writing and spreading it." He adds that there is "another freedom": stating one's belief in the course of inquiry. Translation: this companion.

34. See note 18.

35. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 36 ("I had forbidden you this arbitration, but you refused me"), thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/36/2; and Sermon 58, spoken to the Kharijites "when they withdrew over the arbitration and cried, 'No judgement but God's'": "After my faith in God and my striving alongside the Messenger of God, am I to bear witness against myself of disbelief?" thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/58/1 and thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/58/2 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). Translation: this companion.

36. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Saying 420 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/3/420/533 and thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/3/420/534. The Kharijite's exclamation, *qātalahu Allāh*, is literally "may God fight him." Translation: this companion.

37. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 61 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/61/2. Thaqalayn's text reads *lā taqtulū* ("do not kill"); many printings read *lā tuqātilū* ("do not fight"). Al-Raḍī adds that by "one who sought falsehood and found it" Imam ʿAlī meant Muʿāwiya and his followers. Translation: this companion.

38. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 68 ("Keeping ties of kinship"), ḥadīth 30, narrated by al-Jahm b. Ḥumayd. Al-Majlisī: ḍaʿīf (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 8:386). Weak chain: quoted as an illustration, not as proof. thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/68/30. Translation: this companion.

39. al-Sīstānī, Questions and Answers, no. 22134 (sistani.org/arabic/qa/22134/), on a wife who had converted to Islam and wished to return to Christianity: the marriage contract "is dissolved by the

wife's apostasy from Islam, unless she returns before her waiting period ends." See also no. 11132. On inheritance, see *Minhāj al-ṣāliḥīn*, vol. 3, masāʾil 958 and 967. Translation: this companion.

40. al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān*, vol. 4, p. 131, section 14 of the essay cited in note 8. Translation: this companion.

41. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 182 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ): "Where are my brothers who took the road and went forward on the truth? Where is ʿAmmār?" thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/182/15. Translation: this companion.

CHAPTER 23 · WHY DID ISLAM ALLOW SLAVERY?

1. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, Kitāb al-maʿīsha, bāb 33 ("The crafts"), ḥadīth 4, narrated by Isḥāq ibn ʿAmmār from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: muwaththaq (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 19:72). thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/2/33/4. The slave-dealer is the *nakhkhās*. Five trades, four of them the same (a goldsmith takes the money-changer's place), with the same verdict brought by Gabriel ("the worst of your community are those who sell people"), appear as the Prophet's own advice to a father in al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-maʿīsha, bāb 1, ḥadīth 17 (thaqalayn.net/hadith/36/2/1/17) and *al-Khiṣāl*, the chapter of fives, "Five jobs are undesirable" (thaqalayn.net/hadith/10/6/38/1); neither is graded in the data. Translation: this companion.

2. al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, the discussion "On slavery and enslavement" (*Kalām fī al-riqq wa-l-istiʿbād*) following Qurʾān 5:118, Arabic ed. vol. 6, pp. 338–358; the quotation and the list of ancient peoples are on p. 343. Checked in the OpenITI digital text (edition not stated). The Torah's laws were checked in the King James Version. Translation: this companion.

3. al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān*, Arabic ed. vol. 6, pp. 343–346. He names the three historical causes of enslavement as war, domination (*taghallub*) and guardianship (*wilāya*, as of fathers over children), and says that Islam "abolished two of the three from their root." On pp. 345–346 he defends the third. An unbeliever at war with God, His Messenger and the believers may be taken captive and enslaved once the Muslim army prevails. His reasons: human nature does not count an enemy bent on destroying people as a member of society with its rights; and Islam, which builds society on *tawḥīd*, counts one who rejects it and has no covenant of protection or treaty as outside that society. Fighting between believers brings no captivity at all. Translation: this companion.

4. al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, vol. 4, bāb 12 ("The punishment for theft"), ḥadīth 29, narrated by Ṭarīf ibn Sinān al-Thawrī from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Not graded in the data; al-Bihbūdī did not include it (unverified chain). thaqalayn.net/hadith/37/1/12/29. A report from the Prophet (s) counts selling a free person among the wrongs God will not forgive on the Day of Resurrection: al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, Kitāb al-nikāḥ, bāb 48, ḥadīth 17; al-Majlisī: ḍaʿīf ʿalā al-mashhūr (weak chain). thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/3/48/17.

5. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, Kitāb al-jihād, bāb 10, ḥadīth 1, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), quoting Imam al-Bāqir (a): once the war is over, the Imam may free captives by grace, ransom them or enslave them. Al-Majlisī: ḍaʿīf ka-l-muwaththaq, that is, weak in its chain but treated as close to a reliable (*muwaththaq*) report (weak chain). thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/1/10/1.

6. al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, vol. 3, bāb 46 ("Emancipation and its rulings"), ḥadīth 9. Not graded in the data (unverified chain). thaqalayn.net/hadith/36/1/46/9. In the same bāb, ḥadīth 2 recommends drawing near to God on the eve and the day of ʿArafa "by freeing slaves and giving charity" (thaqalayn.net/hadith/36/1/46/2). Translation: this companion.

7. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-ṣiyām, bāb 22, ḥadīth 1, narrated by ʿAbd Allāh ibn Sinān from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 16:272); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 2:72). thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/2/22/1. Where the digital data prints a *Mirʾāt* volume number short, as here ("6/272"), this and later notes give the volume corrected from neighbouring entries in the same bāb. The Imam adds: "If he cannot, he gives what charity he can." Translation: this companion.

8. al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān*, commentary on Qurʾān 4:92, Arabic ed. vol. 5, p. 40 (OpenITI digital text). Translation: this companion.

9. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-zakāt, bāb 38, ḥadīth 3, narrated by ʿUbayd ibn Zurāra from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). The graders differ: al-Majlisī: ḍaʿīf (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 16:104); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ

(*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 2:36). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/5/38/3. Told here as an illustration. Translation: this companion.

10. al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, vol. 3, bāb 48 ("The contract of emancipation"), ḥadīth 23, narrated by Muḥammad ibn Muslim from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Faqīh*, p. 205). thaqalayn.net/hadith/36/1/48/23. Translation: this companion.
11. al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, vol. 3, bāb 48, ḥadīth 1. Not graded in the data; its chain includes Muḥammad ibn Sinān, and al-Bihbūdī did not include it (unverified chain). thaqalayn.net/hadith/36/1/48/1.
12. al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, vol. 3, bāb 46, ḥadīth 3, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Faqīh*, p. 199). thaqalayn.net/hadith/36/1/46/3. The report also names male relatives whom a man could own; the automatic freedom covers parents and children, and women within the forbidden degrees of marriage.
13. al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, vol. 3, bāb 46, ḥadīth 8, narrated by Muḥammad ibn Muslim from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Faqīh*, p. 199). thaqalayn.net/hadith/36/1/46/8.
14. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Letter 24 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ, as on Thaqalayn), Imam ʿAlī's will on his property, written after his return from Ṣiffīn. thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/2/24/91. Translation: this companion.
15. al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-nikāḥ, bāb 47 ("Breastfeeding"), ḥadīth 26, in the narration of al-Sakūnī from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), from his father. Al-Bihbūdī did not include it (unverified chain). thaqalayn.net/hadith/36/3/47/26. Translation: this companion.
16. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 8 (*al-Rawḍa*), ḥadīth 175, narrated by Muʿāwiya ibn Wahb from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ. thaqalayn.net/hadith/8/1/175/1. "Blistered" renders *dabirat*, used of skin rubbed raw. Translation: this companion.
17. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, Kitāb al-maʿīsha, bāb 4, ḥadīth 4, narrated by Zayd al-Shaḥḥām from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 19:17); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 2:292–293). thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/2/4/4. Al-Ṣadūq, *al-Amālī*, majlis 47, ḥadīth 14, from Imam al-Bāqir (a); not graded in the data (unverified chain). thaqalayn.net/hadith/29/1/47/14. A further parallel, with his brow sweating, is *al-Kāfī*, vol. 8, ḥadīth 173 (al-Majlisī: majhūl; al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ), thaqalayn.net/hadith/8/1/173/1. Translations: this companion.
18. Imam ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn (a), *Risālat al-ḥuqūq*, "the right of the one you own" (*ḥaqq al-mamlūk*). thaqalayn.net/hadith/33/1/5/4. Al-Ṣadūq transmits the treatise with a chain through Abū Ḥamza al-Thumālī in *al-Khiṣāl* (thaqalayn.net/hadith/10/24/1/1) and in *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, vol. 2 (thaqalayn.net/hadith/35/3/165/1), where this line reads "you do not own him because you made him"; neither is graded in the data. Translation: this companion.
19. *Risālat al-ḥuqūq*, "the right of the master who freed you." thaqalayn.net/hadith/33/1/7/1. The next right, of the one you freed, calls freeing someone "a means to God and a screen from the Fire" (thaqalayn.net/hadith/33/1/7/2). Translation: this companion.
20. al-Ahwāzī, *Kitāb al-zuhd*, ch. 7 ("What has come concerning slaves"), ḥadīth 2, narrated by Dāwūd ibn Farqad from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), who speaks of "my father." Not graded in the data (unverified chain). thaqalayn.net/hadith/31/2/7/2. A well-known Sunni parallel has the Prophet tell Abū Dharr that those under one's hand are "your brothers… feed them from what you eat, clothe them from what you wear, and do not burden them beyond their strength; if you do, help them": al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, no. 30 (Sunni source). Translation: this companion.
21. al-Ṣadūq, *al-Amālī*, majlis 47, ḥadīth 14 (see note 17). The word for servant is *ghulām*, which can mean a young slave or a servant.
22. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 7, Kitāb al-shahādāt, bāb 8, ḥadīth 5, narrated by ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Ḥajjāj from Imam al-Bāqir (a). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan. thaqalayn.net/hadith/7/5/8/5. The armour had belonged to Ṭalḥa and was taken from the spoils at Basra without right. Abridged; translation: this companion.

23. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 8 (*al-Rawḍa*), ḥadīth 26, narrated by Muḥammad ibn Jaʿfar al-ʿAqabī, who "raised" it (*rafaʿahu*): that is, the chain is broken, with links missing between him and the event (*marfūʿ*). The Thaqalayn English renders the word as "with an unbroken chain", which reverses its meaning. Al-Majlisī: ḍaʿīf (weak chain). thaqalayn.net/hadith/8/1/26/1. In the sermon Imam ʿAlī (a) adds that "God has placed some of you in the charge of others" and that in the coming distribution "we make the black and the fair-skinned equal." His last words are literally: "I looked in the Book of God and found no preference for the children of Ishmael over the children of Isaac." Translation: this companion.

24. al-Ahwāzī, *Kitāb al-zuhd*, ch. 7, ḥadīth 4, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a); the man was of the tribe of Banū Fahd. Not graded in the data (unverified chain). thaqalayn.net/hadith/31/2/7/4. Retold, not translated word for word.

25. al-Ahwāzī, *Kitāb al-zuhd*, ch. 7, ḥadīth 1 (Abū Baṣīr from Imam al-Bāqir) and ḥadīth 5 (from Imam Abū al-Ḥasan). Neither is graded in the data (unverified chains). thaqalayn.net/hadith/31/2/7/1 and thaqalayn.net/hadith/31/2/7/5. Retold, not translated word for word.

26. al-Ṣadūq, *al-Khiṣāl*, Part 7, ch. 63 ("The Prophet's seven children"), ḥadīth 1, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a): Ibrāhīm was born "of Māriya the Copt… an *umm walad*." Not graded in the data (unverified chain). thaqalayn.net/hadith/10/8/63/1. Translation: this companion.

27. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ḥujja, al-Kulaynī's own opening notes to bābs 120–124 (the births of Imams al-Kāẓim, al-Riḍā, al-Jawād, al-Hādī and al-ʿAskarī). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/4/120/0, /121/0, /122/0, /123/0 and /124/0. These are biographical notes, not hadith. Al-Kulaynī gives Ḥudayth's other name as Sawsan, and adds that Sabīka "is said to have been of the household of Māriya." This Umm al-Banīn is not the wife of Imam ʿAlī (a) who bore the same name. Other reports add two mothers who had come as captives: Imam al-Sajjād's, a daughter of the Persian king Yazdajird brought before ʿUmar with the spoils (*al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb 117, ḥadīth 1; al-Majlisī: ḍaʿīf; thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/4/117/1), and the twelfth Imam's, Narjis, bought from the boats of captives at Baghdad (al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, bāb 39, ḥadīth 1; not graded in the data; thaqalayn.net/hadith/39/2/39/1). Translation: this companion.

28. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, Kitāb al-nikāḥ, bāb 22, ḥadīth 4, narrated by Yazīd ibn Ḥātim. Al-Majlisī: majhūl (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 20:38): unverified chain. thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/3/22/4. Abridged; translation: this companion.

29. al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān*, Arabic ed. vol. 6, pp. 347–348 (Islam's method) and p. 348 (the historians' account of captives once killed, then kept alive). On the 24:33 reading, see note 10.

30. al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, vol. 3, bāb 50 ("Mothers of children"), ḥadīth 6, from Imam Mūsā al-Kāẓim (a): she may be sold for that debt "and no other." Not graded in the data (unverified chain). thaqalayn.net/hadith/36/1/50/6. Translation: this companion.

31. al-Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-zakāt, bāb 38, ḥadīth 12 (spoils of a raid made without the Imam's permission "all belong to the Imam"; al-Ghaffārī: majhūl), thaqalayn.net/hadith/44/1/38/12; and bāb 39, ḥadīth 23 ("we have made the mothers of our followers lawful to their fathers, so that they may be pure"; al-Ghaffārī: ṣaḥīḥ), thaqalayn.net/hadith/44/1/39/23; see also ḥadīth 21 (al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ; al-Ghaffārī: majhūl), thaqalayn.net/hadith/44/1/39/21. Translations: this companion.

32. Willem Floor, "Barda and Barda-dārī iv. From the Mongols to the abolition of slavery," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. III, fasc. 7 (1988), pp. 768–774 (iranicaonline.org, checked 28 Oct 2026). The article also records Anglo-Iranian treaties against the sea trade (1851, 1857, 1882) and Iran's adherence to the 1926 Slavery Convention.

33. For the permission and its limits: Qurʾān 23:5–6 and 24:33; *Nahj al-balāgha*, Letter 24 (note 14). For the *umm walad*: note 30; *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, vol. 3, bāb 50, ḥadīth 8 (her child frees her when her master dies, since she passes into the child's share; al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Faqīh*, p. 208), thaqalayn.net/hadith/36/1/50/8; and, if her child died first, she was a slave who could be sold: al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, *Wasāʾil al-Shīʿa* (Āl al-Bayt ed.), vol. 23, p. 172, Abwāb al-istīlād, bāb 5 (OpenITI digital text). For al-Sīstānī, see note 34. For the kidnapper, see note 4.

34. al-Sayyid ʿAlī al-Sīstānī, *Minhāj al-ṣāliḥīn*, vol. 3 (corrected ed., 1445 AH), Kitāb al-mīrāth, masʾala 977: slavery bars inheritance "with details that need not be addressed" (*ʿalā tafṣīl lā ḥājata li-l-taʿarruḍ lahu*), sistani.org/arabic/book/16/932/; expiations, masʾala 746, sistani.org/arabic/book/16/905/. Both checked 28 Oct 2026. The *Minhāj* has no book of manumission. Translation: this companion.

35. International Labour Organization, Walk Free and International Organization for Migration, *Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage* (Geneva, September 2022), as summarised at walkfree.org (checked 28 Oct 2026).

36. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Letter 31 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ), to his son al-Ḥasan (a). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/2/31/163. Translation: this companion.

CHAPTER 24 · WHAT DOES JIHAD MEAN?

1. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb 113 ("The birth of Amīr al-Muʾminīn"), al-Kulaynī's opening note: Imam ʿAlī (a) was killed in Ramaḍān 40 AH, with nine nights of the month remaining, aged sixty-three. thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/4/113/0. That Ibn Muljam struck him with a sword: the heading of *Nahj al-balāgha*, Letter 47 (note 2), and al-Kāfī, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb 47, ḥadīth 4 (al-Majlisī: ḍaʿīf), thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/4/47/4.

2. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Letter 47 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ, as on Thaqalayn), his will to al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn (a) "when Ibn Muljam struck him." Jihad "with your wealth, your lives and your tongues": thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/2/47/250. "No one is to be killed for me except my killer": thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/2/47/252. "One blow for his blow" and "even of a rabid dog": thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/2/47/253. Compiled text, not graded here. Translation: this companion.

3. al-Ṭabrisī (d. 548/1154), *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on Q 25:52, vol. 7, p. 303: "with it," that is, with the Qurʾān (citing Ibn ʿAbbās); "this shows that among the most exalted kinds of jihad, and the greatest in rank with God, is the jihad of the theologians in resolving the doubts" of opponents. On the sura as Meccan, vol. 7, p. 278. Checked in the OpenITI digital text of the 1st ed. (1415/1995). Translation: this companion.

4. Imam ʿAlī's will: *Nahj al-balāgha*, Letter 47 (note 2). The saying: *Nahj al-balāgha*, Saying 374 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ, as on Thaqalayn): all good deeds, and jihad in God's way, beside commanding right and forbidding wrong, are "like a breath blown into a deep sea… and better than all of that is a word of justice before a tyrannical ruler." thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/3/374/466. Compiled text, not graded here. Translation: this companion.

5. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 69 ("Kindness to parents"), ḥadīth 10, narrated by Jābir from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ḍaʿīf (weak chain; *Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 8:422). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/69/10. The same story, by a chain that shares al-Kāfī's narrators from Aḥmad ibn al-Naḍr onward (ʿAmr ibn Shimr from Jābir), is in al-Ṣadūq, *al-Amālī*, majlis 70, ḥadīth 8 (ungraded), thaqalayn.net/hadith/29/1/70/8. Retold; the Prophet's words translated by this companion.

6. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, Kitāb al-jihād, bāb 3 ("The kinds of jihad"), ḥadīth 3, narrated by al-Sakūnī from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ḍaʿīf ʿalā al-mashhūr (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 18:336). thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/1/3/3. An independent chain, through Mūsā ibn Ismāʿīl, from his father, from Imam Mūsā al-Kāẓim (a), from his father Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) and his forefathers, from Imam ʿAlī (a), so that the two chains meet only at Imam al-Ṣādiq, is in al-Ṣadūq, *Maʿānī al-akhbār*, bāb 117, ḥadīth 1 (thaqalayn.net/hadith/28/1/117/1), and *al-Amālī*, majlis 71, ḥadīth 9 (thaqalayn.net/hadith/29/1/71/9, with the chain of ḥadīth 6 of that majlis). Both are ungraded in the data. They add: «أفضل الجهاد من جاهد نفسه التي بين جنبيه». In the same bāb of al-Kāfī, ḥadīth 1 (al-Majlisī: ḍaʿīf) calls a person's struggle against his own sins «مِنْ أَعْظَمِ الْجِهَادِ», "among the greatest jihad": thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/1/3/1. Translation: this companion.

7. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, Kitāb al-jihād, bāb 6 ("Under whose command obligatory jihad takes place"), ḥadīth 1, narrated by Samāʿa from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: muwaththaq (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 18:347); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 2:277–278). thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/1/6/1. Reliable

chain. Where the digital data prints a *Mirʾāt* volume number short, as here ("8/347"), this and later notes give the volume corrected from neighbouring entries in the same bāb. Translation: this companion.

8. In Qurʾān 9:112, *al-sāʾiḥūn*, literally "those who travel," is rendered "who fast." This is the first reading al-Ṭabrisī gives, from Ibn ʿAbbās, Ibn Masʿūd, al-Ḥasan, Saʿīd ibn Jubayr and Mujāhid, with a saying ascribed to the Prophet (s): "The travelling of my community is fasting" (*Majmaʿ al-bayān*, vol. 5, p. 130, OpenITI digital text). He also records readings that take it as those who travel the earth to learn from God's wonders, or as seekers of knowledge. Translation: this companion.
9. al-Ṭabrisī, *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on Q 22:39, vol. 7, p. 156: the polytheists kept harming the Muslims, who came to the Prophet wounded and beaten, "and he would say to them, 'Be patient, for I have not been commanded to fight,' until he emigrated, and God revealed this verse to him in Medina. It is the first verse revealed about fighting." On the four houses of worship, vol. 7, pp. 156–157. Checked in the OpenITI digital text. Translation: this companion. The thirteen years are approximate: the Prophet's mission began about 610 CE.
10. al-Ṭabrisī, *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on Q 33:9 ("The story of the Battle of the Trench"), vol. 8, pp. 125–126: Quraysh and their allies marched on Medina, and the Prophet had a trench dug around the city on the advice of Salmān al-Fārisī. Checked in the OpenITI digital text.
11. al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, on Q 2:256 (Arabic, vol. 2, pp. 343–344 in the OpenITI digital text): the verse "is not abrogated by the verse of the sword," and the fighting Islam calls to is "not for the goal of gaining the upper hand and spreading the religion by force and compulsion, but for reviving the truth and defending the most precious possession of human nature, *tawḥīd*." On 9:5, *al-Mīzān*, Arabic vol. 9, pp. 151–152 (OpenITI digital text): the "sacred months" of 9:5 are the four months of grace of 9:2, and "wherever you find them" makes the command general, in any place or month. The classical sequence of Islam, then the *jizya*, then fighting appears in a weak report in al-Kāfī, vol. 5, Kitāb al-jihād, bāb 8, ḥadīth 8 (al-Majlisī: ḍaʿīf), thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/1/8/8. Translations: this companion.
12. WikiShia (Persian), "Jihād-i ibtidāʾī" (fa.wikishia.net, consulted 28 October 2026), which calls the condition of the infallible Imam's presence and permission "the famous view of Shia jurists," so that initiatory jihad is not permitted in the occultation. It adds that al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, Abū al-Ṣalāḥ al-Ḥalabī and Sallār al-Daylamī did not make his presence a condition, and that some contemporary jurists, Abū al-Qāsim al-Khūʾī among them, hold initiatory jihad obligatory in the occultation when its conditions are met. Translation: this companion.
13. al-Sīstānī, Questions and answers (Arabic), "al-Jihād," Q&A 2622: «هل الجهاد في سبيل الله واجب؟» Answer: «الجهاد مع المعصوم (عليه السلام) أو نائبه الخاص واجب وهو حكم شرعي». sistani.org/arabic/qa/2622/ (consulted 28 October 2026). Translation: this companion. The doctrine has deep roots: al-Kāfī, vol. 5, Kitāb al-jihād, bāb 6, is titled "Under whose command obligatory jihad takes place," and al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī (d. 1104/1693), *Wasāʾil al-Shīʿa* (Āl al-Bayt ed.), vol. 15, p. 45, Abwāb jihād al-ʿaduww, bāb 12, is headed: "That the obligation of jihad depends on the Imam's command and permission, and that jihad with anyone other than the just Imam is forbidden" (checked in the OpenITI digital text).
14. al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, nos. 365 and 367: days before the death of the fourth deputy, ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad al-Samarrī, a final letter told him not to appoint anyone to take his place, "for the complete occultation has begun"; he died in 329 AH (941 CE). thaqalayn.net/hadith/27/1/46/6 and thaqalayn.net/hadith/27/1/46/8. Ungraded in the data. On the occultation, see Chapter 8. Translation: this companion.
15. al-Sīstānī, *Minhāj al-ṣāliḥīn*, vol. 1 (corrected ed., 1445 AH), table of contents: the books of purity, prayer, fasting (with iʿtikāf), zakat, khums, and commanding right and forbidding wrong, followed by new issues. sistani.org/arabic/book/23720/ (consulted 28 October 2026). Vols. 2 and 3 (sistani.org/arabic/book/15/ and sistani.org/arabic/book/16/) and the English *Islamic Laws* (sistani.org/english/book/48/) have no section on jihad either (consulted 28 October 2026).
16. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, Kitāb al-jihād, bāb 5 ("Going out with people when there is fear for Islam"), ḥadīth 2, narrated by Yūnus from Imam al-Riḍā (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl*

18:346); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 2:277). thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/1/5/2. The frontiers the questioner names are Qazvin, Daylam and ʿAsqalān. Retold, with the Imam's words translated by this companion.

17. *al-Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya*, Supplication 27 ("For the people of the frontiers"), paragraphs 1 and 14. Arabic checked at al-islam.org/sahifa-al-kamilah-al-sajjadiyya-imam-ali-zayn-al-abidin/27-his-supplication-people-frontiers. Compiled text, not graded here. Translation: this companion. On the killing of Imam al-Ḥusayn (a) in the reign of Yazīd ibn Muʿāwiya, by the army of his governor ʿUbayd Allāh ibn Ziyād, see al-Kāfī, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb 116, al-Kulaynī's opening note (thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/4/116/0), and Chapter 20.

18. Statement of al-Sīstānī's office on his meeting with Pope Francis, 6 March 2021: "the terrorists seized vast areas in several Iraqi provinces." sistani.org/english/statement/26508/.

19. Friday sermon of al-Sīstānī's representative, Shaykh ʿAbd al-Mahdī al-Karbalāʾī, in the courtyard of the shrine of Imam al-Ḥusayn, Karbala, 14 Shaʿbān 1435 / 13 June 2014: «عليهم التطوع للانخراط في القوات الأمنية»; «واجب على المواطنين بالوجوب الكفائي»; «دفاع مقدس»; «لا يختص بطائفة دون أخرى». sistani.org/arabic/archive/24918/. A week later, on 21 Shaʿbān 1435 / 20 June 2014, his representative Sayyid Aḥmad al-Ṣāfī clarified that the call was to join the official security forces, not to form armed militias outside the law: sistani.org/arabic/archive/24915/. Translation: this companion.

20. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, Kitāb al-jihād, bāb 8 ("The instructions of the Messenger of God and the Commander of the Faithful to expeditions"), ḥadīth 9, narrated by Muḥammad ibn Ḥumrān and Jamīl ibn Darrāj from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 18:356); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 2:283). thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/1/8/9. The briefing continues with the protection of any polytheist a Muslim "looks toward" until he hears the word of God: if he follows them, he is "your brother in your religion"; if he refuses, they are to "seek God's help against him" and escort him to "his place of safety" (compare Q 9:6). A parallel is ḥadīth 1 of the same bāb (al-Majlisī: ka-l-ḥasan). Translation: this companion.

21. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, Kitāb al-jihād, bāb 8, ḥadīth 3, narrated by ʿAbbād ibn Ṣuhayb from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a): «مَا بَيَّتَ رَسُولُ اللهِ (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِه) عَدُوّاً قَطُّ». Al-Majlisī: muwaththaq (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 18:353); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ. thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/1/8/3. Reliable chain. Translation: this companion.

22. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, Kitāb al-jihād, bāb 8, ḥadīth 8, narrated by Masʿada ibn Ṣadaqa from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ḍaʿīf (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 18:355). thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/1/8/8. It protects the devotee "on a mountaintop" and forbids burning or flooding palms, cutting fruit trees, burning crops and killing livestock except for food. Weak chain; paraphrase by this companion.

23. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Letter 14 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ, as on Thaqalayn), "to his army before meeting the enemy at Ṣiffīn." thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/2/14/51 and thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/2/14/52. A parallel with a chain is in al-Kāfī, vol. 5, Kitāb al-jihād, bāb 15, ḥadīth 3 (al-Majlisī: mursal majhūl), thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/1/15/3. The letter goes on to explain the restraint toward women in the idiom of its age. Compiled text, not graded here. Translation: this companion.

24. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, Kitāb al-jihād, bāb 8, ḥadīth 5, narrated by Yaḥyā ibn Abī al-ʿAlāʾ from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan aw muwaththaq (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 18:354); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 2:283). thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/1/8/5. Reliable chain. He also said that at that hour "the gates of heaven open, mercy draws near and help comes down." Translation: this companion.

25. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, Kitāb al-jihād, bāb 9 ("Granting safe conduct"), ḥadīth 4, narrated by Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥakam from Imam al-Ṣādiq or Imam al-Kāẓim (a); the narrator was unsure which. Al-Majlisī: majhūl (unverified chain; *Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 18:358); al-Bihbūdī includes it in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* (2:284). thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/1/9/4. In the same bāb, ḥadīth 2 (al-Majlisī: ḍaʿīf) reports that Imam ʿAlī (a) honoured the safe conduct a slave had given the people of a fortress, saying, "He is one of the believers": thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/1/9/2. Translation: this companion.

26. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, Kitāb al-jihād, bāb 9, ḥadīth 3, narrated by ʿAbd Allāh ibn Sulaymān from Imam al-Bāqir (a). Al-Majlisī: majhūl (unverified chain; *Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 18:357); al-Bihbūdī includes it

in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* (2:283–284). thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/1/9/3. Translation: this companion.

27. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Letter 53 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ, as on Thaqalayn), to Mālik al-Ashtar on his appointment as governor of Egypt. thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/2/53/336. The next passage tells him to keep every pledge, even to an enemy: thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/2/53/337. Compiled text, not graded here. Translation: this companion.

28. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, Kitāb al-jihād, bāb 13 ("Kindness to the captive"), ḥadīth 2, narrated by Zurāra from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 18:364); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 2:284–285). thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/1/13/2. Reliable chain. The report takes for granted that a captive might still be executed; see note 28. Translation: this companion.

29. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 8 (*al-Rawḍa*), ḥadīth 244, narrated by Muʿāwiya ibn ʿAmmār from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), on Q 8:70. Al-Majlisī: ḥasan; al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 3:393). thaqalayn.net/hadith/8/1/244/1. The Prophet had forbidden his men to kill any of his clan, Banū Hāshim, at Badr; al-ʿAbbās was told to ransom himself and his nephew. "All the captives went back polytheists, except al-ʿAbbās, ʿAqīl and Nawfal." Translation: this companion.

30. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, Kitāb al-jihād, bāb 10, ḥadīth 1, narrated by Ṭalḥa ibn Zayd from Imam al-Ṣādiq, quoting his father Imam al-Bāqir (a). Al-Majlisī: ḍaʿīf ka-l-muwaththaq (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 18:359), that is, weak in its chain but treated as close to a reliable (*muwaththaq*) report; hence "weak" in the text. thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/1/10/1. While the fighting lasts, the Imam's choice is between beheading the captive and cutting off a hand and a foot from opposite sides, the wounds left unstaunched until he dies; the report cites Q 5:33 for the second. Muhammad Sarwar's English translation (on Thaqalayn) renders «عَلَى شَيْءٍ وَاحِد وَهُوَ الْكُفْرُ» as "that is execution"; the Arabic says that the Imam's choice concerns "one thing, namely unbelief," not several different things. Summarised from the Arabic by this companion.

31. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, Kitāb al-jihād, bāb 8, ḥadīth 6, narrated by Ḥafṣ ibn Ghiyāth from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ḍaʿīf (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 18:354). thaqalayn.net/hadith/5/1/8/6. Weak chain. It adds that no blood money or expiation is owed for the Muslim prisoners killed (*wa-lā diya … wa-lā kaffāra*). The same report explains that women owe no *jizya* because the Prophet forbade fighting them. Translation: this companion.

32. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Letter 53 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ, as on Thaqalayn). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/2/53/339. Compiled text, not graded here. Translation: this companion.

33. al-Sīstānī, *Minhāj al-ṣāliḥīn*, vol. 1 (corrected ed., 1445 AH), Kitāb al-amr bi-l-maʿrūf wa-l-nahy ʿan al-munkar, ch. 3 ("Its levels"), masʾala 1273: «لم يجز الانتقال إلى الجرح والقتل» … «نعم يجوز للإمام (عليه السلام) ونائبه ذلك إذا كان يترتّب على معصية الفاعل مفسدة أهمّ من جرحه أو قتله». sistani.org/arabic/book/23720/4743/. Translation: this companion.

34. Office of al-Sīstānī, "Advice and guidance to the fighters on the battlefields" (*Naṣāʾiḥ wa-tawjīhāt li-l-muqātilīn fī sāḥāt al-jihād*), 22 Rabīʿ al-Ākhir 1436 / 12 February 2015, no. 5: «الله الله في حرمات عامّة الناس ممن لم يقاتلوكم، لاسيّما المستضعفين من الشيوخ والولدان والنساء» … «حتّى إذا كانوا من ذوي المقاتلين لكم». Arabic: sistani.org/arabic/archive/25034/; English: sistani.org/english/archive/25036/. No. 2 applies the Prophet's rules for armies; no. 4 quotes Imam ʿAlī's Letter 53; no. 13 recalls that the Imams «كانوا لا يبدؤون أهل حربهم بالقتال حتى يبدؤوا هم بالقتال». Translation: this companion.

35. Office of al-Sīstānī, "Advice and guidance to the fighters on the battlefields," 12 February 2015, no. 7: «وإياكم والتعرّض لغير المسلمين أيّاً كان دينه ومذهبه فإنّهم في كنف المسلمين وأمانهم» … «فمن تعرّض لحرماتهم كان خائناً غادراً»; no. 6: «واعلموا إنّ من شهد الشهادتين كان مسلماً يُعصم دمُه ومالُه». sistani.org/arabic/archive/25034/. Translation: this companion.

36. Office of al-Sīstānī, "Advice and guidance to the fighters on the battlefields," 12 February 2015, no. 12: «ولا يظنّن أحدٌ أن في الجور علاجاً لما لا يعالج بالعدل». sistani.org/arabic/archive/25034/. Translation: this companion.

37. Statements of al-Sīstānī's office on the bombing of the Kucha Risaldar mosque in Peshawar during Friday prayers on 4 March 2022 (issued 5 March 2022; sistani.org/english/statement/26547/) and on the attack on travellers from Parachinar to Peshawar (issued 22 November 2024;

sistani.org/english/statement/26925/; Arabic, statement 26920). Each calls the attack a "horrific crime."

38. Statement of al-Sīstānī's office on his meeting with Pope Francis, 6 March 2021, which thanks the Pope for travelling to Najaf. sistani.org/english/statement/26508/.

CHAPTER 25 · THE LEGACY OF ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION

1. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb 118 ("The birth of Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī"), ḥadīth 2, narrated by Abān ibn Taghlib from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: "weak by the usual standard, sound in my view" (*ḍaʿīf ʿalā al-mashhūr, ṣaḥīḥ ʿindī*), in his commentary *Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl*; al-Bihbūdī does not include it. thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/4/118/2. The report calls Jābir "the last who remained of the Companions of the Messenger of God." Retold and abridged; quoted words translated by this companion.
2. Two Shia reports name the opening of Sūra 96 as the first revelation. (1) al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb faḍl al-Qurʾān, bāb 14 ("Rare reports"), ḥadīth 5, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a); al-Majlisī: *majhūl* (unverified chain). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/3/14/5. (2) al-Ṣadūq, *ʿUyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, vol. 1, bāb 30, ḥadīth 12, from Imam al-Riḍā (a), from his forefathers; not graded. thaqalayn.net/hadith/11/2/30/12. Al-Ṭabrisī (d. 1154) writes that "most commentators" hold this sūra was revealed first, its first five verses taught to the Prophet on Ḥirāʾ: *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, commentary on Sūra 96 (10:398 in the 1415/1995 edition). Al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī agrees: *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, commentary on Sūra 96 (20:322 in the OpenITI digital text). On the Prophet's yearly retreat at Ḥirāʾ, where "I would see him, and no one else would": al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 192 ("al-Qāṣiʿa") (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/192/39.
3. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb faḍl al-ʿilm, bāb 5 ("The qualities of scholars"), ḥadīth 1, narrated by Muʿāwiya ibn Wahb from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: *ṣaḥīḥ* (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 1:118); al-Bihbūdī: *ṣaḥīḥ*. thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/2/5/1. Translation: this companion.
4. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb faḍl al-ʿilm, bāb 1 ("The obligation of knowledge and the duty to seek it"), ḥadīth 1, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), quoting the Prophet (s). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/2/1/1. Al-Majlisī grades this chain, and that of ḥadīth 2 ("Seeking knowledge is an obligation," from Imam al-Ṣādiq), *majhūl* (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 1:98–99). But al-Bihbūdī accepts ḥadīth 2 as *ṣaḥīḥ* (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 1:3), and al-Muḥsinī counts the Prophet's wording reliable (*muʿtabar*): *Muʿjam al-aḥādīth al-muʿtabara*, Book of Intellect and Knowledge, ch. 3, no. 7, thaqalayn.net/hadith/9/1/3/7. The same chapter of *al-Kāfī* goes on to urge deep understanding of the religion (*tafaqquh*), citing Qurʾān 9:122. *Al-Kāfī* opens with Kitāb al-ʿaql wa-l-jahl (the Book of Intellect and Ignorance), then Kitāb faḍl al-ʿilm. Translation: this companion.
5. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb faḍl al-ʿilm, bāb 2 ("The nature and excellence of knowledge, and the excellence of scholars"), ḥadīth 8, narrated by Abū Ḥamza from Imam al-Bāqir (a). Al-Majlisī: *ṣaḥīḥ* (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 1:108). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/2/2/8. Translation: this companion.
6. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb 32 ("The Imams are the heirs of knowledge, inheriting it one from another"), ḥadīth 2, narrated by Zurāra and al-Fuḍayl from Imam al-Bāqir (a). Al-Majlisī: *ḥasan* (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 3:12). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/4/32/2. The report ends, "…or as God willed." A shorter version in the same chapter (ḥadīth 5) is graded *ṣaḥīḥ* (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 3:13). Translation: this companion.
7. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 192 ("al-Qāṣiʿa") (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/192/39. Translation: this companion.
8. al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, *al-Irshād*, the chapter on Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), reports that the scholars of hadith gathered the names of the trustworthy narrators from him, whatever their opinions and doctrines, and that they numbered four thousand. A nearly identical statement appears in al-Ṭabrisī, *Iʿlām al-warā bi-aʿlām al-hudā*, as quoted by the editors of the Āl al-Bayt edition of al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, *Wasāʾil al-Shīʿa*. Paraphrased; page references are not given because no print edition was checked. The figure counts narrators, not pupils in a single class.

9. Al-Ḥasan ibn Ziyād's report from Abū Ḥanīfa, cited from a *Musnad Abī Ḥanīfa* by Ibn Shahrāshūb (*Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib*) and reproduced in al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* (2nd ed., Beirut, 1403/1983), 47:217–218. Translation: this companion. Sunni sources: Ibn ʿAdī, *al-Kāmil fī ḍuʿafāʾ al-rijāl*, entry on Jaʿfar ibn Muḥammad, has Abū Ḥanīfa say, "I have seen no one more learned in law than Jaʿfar ibn Muḥammad"; compare al-Dhahabī, *al-Kāshif*, entry on Jaʿfar ibn Muḥammad. These are Sunni sources, graded by their own tradition; the story is told here for what it shows about how other schools regarded the Imam.

10. Mālik ibn Anas, *al-Muwaṭṭaʾ* (recension of Yaḥyā ibn Yaḥyā), e.g. Kitāb al-jumuʿa, ḥadīth 21: "Mālik, from Jaʿfar ibn Muḥammad, from his father…" sunnah.com/malik/5/21. The recension has fourteen reports with this chain. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-ḥajj, no. 1218 (ʿAbd al-Bāqī numbering), from Jaʿfar ibn Muḥammad, from his father, who visited Jābir ibn ʿAbd Allāh as a young man: "Welcome, my nephew. Ask what you wish." sunnah.com/muslim:1218a. Sunni sources.

11. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb faḍl al-ʿilm, bāb 4 ("The reward of the scholar and the learner"), ḥadīth 1, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), quoting the Prophet (s). Al-Majlisī: it has two chains, "the first *majhūl*, the second *ḥasan* or *muwaththaq*, neither falling short of *ṣaḥīḥ*" (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 1:113). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/2/4/1. Translation: this companion.

12. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb faḍl al-ʿilm, bāb 4, ḥadīth 2, narrated by Muḥammad ibn Muslim from Imam al-Bāqir (a). Al-Majlisī: *ṣaḥīḥ* (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 1:115); al-Bihbūdī: *ṣaḥīḥ*. thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/2/4/2. The Arabic *ikhwānakum* ("your brethren") is rendered "your brothers and sisters." Translation: this companion.

13. For an overview from within the tradition, including schools, libraries and endowments, see S. H. Nasr, *Science and Civilization in Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968).

14. On astronomy for the direction of prayer, prayer times and the calendar, see David A. King, *Astronomy in the Service of Islam* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1993). Al-Khwārizmī's ninth-century book of algebra, *al-Kitāb al-mukhtaṣar fī ḥisāb al-jabr wa-l-muqābala*, gives a long section to working out inheritance shares.

15. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sayings 79 and 80 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/3/79/96 and thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/3/80/97. Translation: this companion.

16. Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early ʿAbbāsid Society* (London: Routledge, 1998).

17. On Ibn al-Haytham, see A. I. Sabra (trans.), *The Optics of Ibn al-Haytham, Books I–III* (London: Warburg Institute, 1989). On the "Ṭūsī couple," see F. J. Ragep, *Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī's Memoir on Astronomy* (New York: Springer, 1993), and George Saliba, *Islamic Science and the Making of the European Renaissance* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), who also discuss the debate over its route to Copernicus.

18. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Saying 315 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ), addressed to his secretary ʿUbayd Allāh ibn Abī Rāfiʿ. thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/3/315/388. The "tuft" (*līqa*) is the wad of raw silk or cotton placed in an inkwell so that the pen takes up ink evenly. Translation: this companion. On calligraphy and illumination, see Sheila S. Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006).

19. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Saying 81 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/3/81/98. Translation: this companion.

20. ʿAḍud al-Dawla, "ruler of Persia and Iraq from 949 to 983 and founder of hospitals in both Baghdad and Shīrāz," and al-Majūsī's *Kāmil al-ṣināʿa al-ṭibbiyya* ("The Complete Book of the Medical Art," also called *al-Kitāb al-Malakī*, "The Royal Book"), dedicated to him: U.S. National Library of Medicine, *Islamic Medical Manuscripts*, biography of al-Majūsī. On its Latin versions, see Charles Burnett and Danielle Jacquart (eds.), *Constantine the African and ʿAlī ibn al-ʿAbbās al-Majūsī: The Pantegni and Related Texts* (Leiden: Brill, 1994). On the Buyid age, see Joel L. Kraemer, *Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam: The Cultural Revival during the Buyid Age* (Leiden: Brill, 1986). On Sābūr's *dār al-ʿilm*, see C. E. Bosworth, "Sābūr b. Ardashīr," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed.

21. On al-Azhar (founded 970, first prayers 972) and the Cairo *dār al-ʿilm*, see Heinz Halm, *The Fatimids and Their Traditions of Learning* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1997), and Farhad Daftary, "Ḥākem be-Amr-Allāh," *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (2003), which dates the Dār al-ʿIlm to 395/1005. On Shaykh Maḥmūd Shaltūt's ruling, dated in different sources to 1958 or 1959, see Rainer Brunner, *Islamic Ecumenism in the 20th Century: The Azhar and Shiism between Rapprochement and Restraint* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

22. George E. Lane, "Ṭusi, Naṣir-al-Din i. Biography," *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (2018): born in Ṭūs in 1201, died in Baghdad in 1274; years in the Ismaili fortresses of Alamūt and Maymūndez; Maragha funded from libraries and endowment (*waqf*) revenues; Bar Hebraeus among those who used it; the *Zīj-i Īlkhānī* popular "for at least two hundred years"; the *Tajrīd al-iʿtiqād* drew "over 400 commentaries and glosses"; burial near the tomb of Imam Mūsā al-Kāẓim (a). Lane notes that al-Ṭūsī's role in the fall of Baghdad is debated.

23. Dimitri Gutas, "Ibn Sina [Avicenna]," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2016): dates c. 970–1037; the Latin *Canon* "formed the basis of medical instruction in European universities until the 17th century." On al-Ṭūsī's defence of Avicenna, see Ahmed H. al-Rahim, "The Twelver-Shīʿī Reception of Avicenna in the Mongol Period," in David C. Reisman (ed.), *Before and After Avicenna* (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

24. M. Plessner, "Jābir ibn Ḥayyān," *Complete Dictionary of Scientific Biography*: "Jābir is by no means the author of all the writings which bear his name." Paul Kraus, *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān* (2 vols., Cairo, 1942–43), dated most of the corpus to a later school; Fuat Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*, vol. 4 (Leiden: Brill, 1971), argued for an eighth-century core.

25. Etan Kohlberg, "Bahāʾ-al-Dīn ʿĀmelī," *Encyclopaedia Iranica* III/4 (1988), 429–430: born near Baalbek in 953/1547 (other dates are given); *shaykh al-islām* of Isfahan under Shah ʿAbbās I; died 1030/1621 (or 1031/1622) and buried in Ṭūs; author of *Khulāṣat al-ḥisāb* (German translation by G. H. L. Nesselmann, 1843); turned his home into a refuge for orphans, widows and the poor.

26. Shaykh al-Ṭūsī (385–460/995–1067) studied under al-Shaykh al-Mufīd and al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā and compiled *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām* and *al-Istibṣār*. His house and library in Baghdad were burned in the sectarian conflicts of 449/1057 (some sources say 448); he spent his last years in Najaf, where his teaching circle grew into the Najaf seminary. See "Al-Shaykh al-Tusi," *WikiShia* (en.wikishia.net), which draws on Āghā Buzurg al-Ṭihrānī.

27. On the many causes of decline, and against the idea that Muslim science stopped in the twelfth century, see George Saliba, *Islamic Science and the Making of the European Renaissance* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007). On al-Ṭūsī and Shaykh Bahāʾī, see notes 22 and 25.

28. Murtaḍā Muṭahharī, "Farīḍa-yi ʿilm" ("The Duty of Knowledge"), a lecture of 18 February 1962, published in *Dah guftār*; English trans. Reza Farajian, "Duty of Acquiring Knowledge," *Message of Thaqalayn* 11:3 (messageofthaqalayn.com, checked 28 October 2026). In that translation the obligation "is absolutely dependent on the measure of society's needs"; "practicing medicine is a shared obligation which itself is impossible without acquiring medical knowledge"; farming, industry and trade are among his examples; and Islam seeks a society that is "independent and self-relying." Paraphrased, not quoted.

29. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Letter 31 (to Imam al-Ḥasan) (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/2/31/144. Translation: this companion.

30. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Saying 147 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ), Kumayl ibn Ziyād's account. thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/3/147/179 and thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/3/147/180. The evening prayer in the mosque of Kufa and the silent walk are in al-Mufīd's version: *al-Amālī*, majlis 29, ḥadīth 3, not graded. thaqalayn.net/hadith/13/29/3/1. Translation: this companion.

31. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Saying 147. thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/3/147/181. The words to Kumayl are also transmitted with chains in al-Ṣadūq, *al-Khiṣāl*, thaqalayn.net/hadith/10/4/201/1, and in al-Mufīd's *al-Amālī* (note 30). *Hamaj*, rendered "drifting swarm," means gnats or midges. Translation: this companion.

32. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Saying 147. thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/3/147/182. Translation: this companion.

1. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 193 ("What God gave Adam at the time of repentance"), ḥadīth 1, narrated by Ibn Bukayr from Imam al-Ṣādiq or Imam al-Bāqir (a); the narrator was unsure which. Al-Majlisī: ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 11:311). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/193/1. The narrator also gives two wordings for the last promise, "I have made repentance" (*jaʿaltu*) or "I have laid repentance open" (*basaṭtu*); the opener follows the second. Compare Qurʾān 56:83 on the soul reaching the throat. Translation: this companion.
2. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §§404–405. vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/__P1C.HTM. Other Christian traditions describe what is inherited from Adam in other terms; the Catechism is quoted as one carefully worded statement.
3. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 6 ("God created people with knowledge of His oneness in their nature"), ḥadīth 4, narrated by Zurāra from Imam al-Bāqir (a), who quotes the Prophet (s). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 7:57); al-Bihbūdī includes it in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī*. thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/6/4. In ḥadīth 3 of the same bāb (al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ), Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) explains Qurʾān 30:30: God "made them all with a nature disposed to His oneness" (thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/6/3). Translation: this companion.
4. al-Ṣadūq, *ʿUyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, vol. 1, bāb 14 (Imam al-Riḍā's answers to ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Jahm on the protection of the prophets), ḥadīth 1. thaqalayn.net/hadith/11/2/14/1. Not graded in the data (unverified chain). The same passage is in al-Ṣadūq, *al-Amālī*, majlis 20, ḥadīth 3 (thaqalayn.net/hadith/29/1/20/3). The Imam goes on to link Adam's protection with his role as God's proof on earth, citing Qurʾān 3:33, "God chose Adam and Noah…". On how Shia theology reads the Garden episode, see note 5. Translation: this companion.
5. al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, commentary on Qurʾān 2:35–39. He argues that the prohibition was advisory (*irshādī*) rather than a binding law (*mawlawī*), so that no sin in the legal sense took place, and gives the analogy of the doctor and the patient, who may return "to a better and nobler state." Shia theologians often call such an act *tark al-awlā*, "leaving the better course." The classical defence of the prophets' protection from sin, beginning with Adam, is al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā (d. 436/1044), *Tanzīh al-anbiyāʾ*. Translation: this companion.
6. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 91 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ), the sermon known as al-Ashbāḥ: "He sent him down after the repentance, to populate His earth with his offspring." thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/91/23. Translation: this companion.
7. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 193 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ), Imam ʿAlī's description of the God-conscious, given to his companion Hammām. thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/193/2. Translation: this companion.
8. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 111 ("Sins"), ḥadīth 13, narrated by Abū Baṣīr from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: muwaththaq ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 9:412); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 1:106). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/111/13. Translation: this companion.
9. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 111 ("Sins"), ḥadīth 20, narrated by Zurāra from Imam al-Bāqir (a). It adds that every heart begins with a white spot. Al-Majlisī: majhūl (unverified chain) (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 9:417); al-Bihbūdī includes it in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī*. thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/111/20.
10. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 113 ("Belittling sins"), ḥadīth 1, narrated by Zayd al-Shaḥḥām from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ and muwaththaq (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 10:68). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/113/1. A sin that is never taken seriously is never repented of, which is why it stays unforgiven. Translation: this companion.
11. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 113 ("Belittling sins"), ḥadīth 3, narrated by Ziyād from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: majhūl (unverified chain) (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 10:69). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/113/3. Retold, not translated word for word. The point itself rests on ḥadīth 2 of the same bāb (al-Majlisī: muwaththaq), from Imam Abū al-Ḥasan (a), most likely Imam Mūsā al-Kāẓim: "Do not think little of a few sins, for a few sins gather until they are many" (thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/113/2). Translation: this companion.

12. Duʿāʾ Kumayl. It is found in al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī, *Miṣbāḥ al-mutahajjid*, among the rites of the night of mid-Shaʿbān, and in Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Iqbāl al-aʿmāl*. ʿAbbās al-Qummī, *Mafātīḥ al-jinān*, quotes al-Majlisī calling it the best of supplications, taught by Imam ʿAlī (a) to Kumayl ibn Ziyād and recited on the night of mid-Shaʿbān and on Thursday nights. It has no chain of narrators and is accepted on the authority of these compilers. Translation: this companion.

13. al-Ṭabrisī, *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, commentary on Qurʾān 2:186, section on the occasion of revelation, citing al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī with no chain back to the Prophet; Qatāda gives a different occasion. The report is told here as a story, not as evidence. Translation: this companion.

14. al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, commentary on Qurʾān 2:186. He notes that God "removed the intermediary in the answer," saying "I am near" rather than "Say: He is near," and that the first person is repeated seven times, "the only verse in the Qurʾān of this description." Compare 2:189, 2:215, 2:217, 2:219, 2:220, 2:222, 5:4, 7:187, 8:1, 17:85, 18:83, 20:105 and 33:63, each answered with "Say." Translation: this companion.

15. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 191 ("Repentance"), ḥadīth 1, narrated by Muʿāwiya ibn Wahb from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 11:295). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/191/1. Translation: this companion.

16. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 189 ("Concealing sins"), ḥadīth 1–2: "The one who broadcasts a bad deed is forsaken, and the one who keeps it covered is forgiven." Al-Majlisī: ḍaʿīf (weak chain) and majhūl (unverified chain) (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 11:286). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/189/1 and /2. Translation: this companion.

17. Duʿāʾ Kumayl; on its sources, see note 12. Translation: this companion.

18. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Saying 417 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/3/417/520 (the saying continues to segment 528). *Thakilatka ummuk*, "may your mother lose you," is an idiom of rebuke or alarm, not a literal wish. Translation: this companion.

19. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 188 ("Admitting sins and regretting them"), ḥadīth 1, narrated by ʿAlī al-Aḥmasī from Imam al-Bāqir (a). Al-Majlisī: majhūl (unverified chain); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 1:129). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/188/1. The second saying is also in al-Ṣadūq, *al-Khiṣāl*, bāb 49, ḥadīth 1 (thaqalayn.net/hadith/10/2/49/1). Translation: this companion.

20. *al-Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya*, Supplication 31 ("In mentioning and asking for repentance"), vv. 118–119, verse numbering of thaqalayn.net/duas/sahifa-sajjadiya-in-mentioning-and-asking-for-repentance. Verse 120 continues: "If seeking forgiveness sheds sins, then I am among those who seek Your forgiveness." Translation: this companion.

21. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 148 ("Backbiting and slander"), ḥadīth 4, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a): asked how to make amends for backbiting, the Prophet (s) said, "Ask God's forgiveness for the one you backbit, whenever you remember him." Al-Majlisī: majhūl (unverified chain). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/148/4. Translation: this companion. Al-Sīstānī's office, asked whether one must tell the person and seek their forgiveness, answers: "If there is no harm [any further aggravation of the situation]… as an [obligatory] precaution they should seek forgiveness." sistani.org/english/qa/01135/ (Backbiting, question 4). Under an obligatory precaution, a follower either keeps it or follows the next most learned jurist on that point (al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws*, Ruling 6, sistani.org/english/book/48/2117/). On returning what was taken: al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws* (English ed.), Ruling 2566, sistani.org/english/book/48/8216/.

22. al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws* (English ed.), Rulings 1355 (missed daily prayers must be made up, even if one slept through their time) and 1357 (one must not be negligent about them, though they need not be made up at once), sistani.org/english/book/48/2266/. On missed fasts, see the section "Laws of a lapsed (qaḍāʾ) fast," sistani.org/english/book/48/2294/.

23. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 191 ("Repentance"), ḥadīth 4. Al-Majlisī: ḥasan ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 11:299); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 1:129). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/191/4. *Mufattan*, "tested," is one tried again and again; *tawwāb* is one who turns back again and again. Translation: this companion.

24. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 191 (“Repentance”), ḥadīth 6. Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 11:302); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ. thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/191/6. Translation: this companion.
25. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 191 (“Repentance”), ḥadīth 8, narrated by Abū ʿUbayda al-Ḥadhdhāʾ from Imam al-Bāqir (a). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ. thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/191/8. Translation: this companion.
26. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 112 (“The major sins”), ḥadīth 4, narrated by ʿAbd Allāh ibn Sinān from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), who also names mistreating one’s parents. Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ. thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/112/4. On feeling safe from God’s plan, compare Qurʾān 7:99. Translation: this companion.
27. al-Ṣadūq, *al-Amālī*, majlis 37, ḥadīth 2, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). thaqalayn.net/hadith/29/1/37/2. Not graded in the data (unverified chain); told here as an image, not a proof.
28. Duʿāʾ Kumayl, opening line; on its sources, see note 12. It echoes Qurʾān 7:156, “My mercy embraces all things.” Translation: this companion.
29. al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, vol. 1, bāb 24, ḥadīth 9, “in the last sermon he gave,” reported without a chain (unverified chain); al-Bihbūdī does not include it. thaqalayn.net/hadith/34/1/24/9. A shorter version without the hour is in al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 193, ḥadīth 2 (al-Majlisī: mursal), which ends, “whoever repents before he sees [what lies beyond]” (thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/193/2). Retold. Translation: this companion.
30. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 193 (“What God gave Adam at the time of repentance”), ḥadīth 3, narrated by Zurāra from Imam al-Bāqir (a), who pointed to his throat as he spoke. Al-Majlisī: ḥasan ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 11:314). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/193/3. On “in ignorance” (*bi-jahāla*) in Qurʾān 4:17, al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī suggests that anyone who stakes their soul on a sin acts, in that moment, in ignorance (*al-Mīzān*, commentary on 4:17–18). Translation: this companion.
31. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Saying 435 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/3/435/550. Translation: this companion.

CHAPTER 27 · WHY MUSLIMS PRAY

1. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Saying 136 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/3/136/167. The same words are reported from Imam al-Riḍā (a) in al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-ṣalāt, bāb 1 (“The excellence of prayer”), ḥadīth 6, al-Majlisī: majhūl (unverified chain) (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 15:8), thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/4/1/6; and in al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, vol. 1, bāb 31, ḥadīth 16, thaqalayn.net/hadith/34/1/31/16. *Qurbān* comes from the root *q-r-b*, “to be near.” The Thaqalayn data print some of al-Majlisī’s volume numbers short (“5/8” for 15:8); they are corrected in this chapter’s notes. Translation: this companion.
2. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-ṣalāt, bāb 1 (“The excellence of prayer”), ḥadīth 1, narrated by Muʿāwiya ibn Wahb from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), quoting Qurʾān 19:31. Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 15:5); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 1:255). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/4/1/1. Translation: this companion.
3. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Letter 47 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ), his will to al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn after Ibn Muljam struck him. thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/2/47/248; the orphans, the neighbours and the Qurʾān come just before, in segments 245–247. That prayer is “the pillar of the religion” and the first deed to be examined is reported from Imam ʿAlī (a), quoting the Prophet (s), in al-Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-ṣalāt, bāb 12, ḥadīth 5. Al-Ghaffārī: majhūl (unverified chain). thaqalayn.net/hadith/42/1/12/5. Translation: this companion.
4. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 199 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ), advice Imam ʿAlī (a) used to give his companions. thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/199/3. It opens: “Take care of prayer, guard it, do much of it and draw near to God through it” (thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/199/2). *Ribaq* are the looped ropes that tether young animals. Translation: this companion.

5. al-Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-ṣalāt, bāb 12, ḥadīth 23, narrated by Zurāra from Imam al-Bāqir (a). Al-Ghaffārī: ṣaḥīḥ (his edition, 2:257). thaqalayn.net/hadith/42/1/12/23. The same report is in al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-ṣalāt, bāb 3, ḥadīth 1 (thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/4/3/1), and al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, vol. 1, bāb 30, ḥadīth 1 (thaqalayn.net/hadith/34/1/30/1). The Imam reads Qurʾān 11:114 and 2:238 the same way; the "middle prayer" of 2:238, he says, is Ẓuhr, the first prayer the Prophet (s) prayed.
6. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-ṣalāt, bāb 9 ("Joining two prayers"), ḥadīth 1, narrated by Zurāra from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: muwaththaq (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 15:51). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/4/9/1. Also al-Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-ṣalāt, bāb 4, ḥadīth 4 (al-Ghaffārī: muwaththaq ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ), thaqalayn.net/hadith/42/1/4/4. Translation: this companion.
7. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb Ṣalāt al-musāfirīn, no. 705 (narrations 705a–b in sunnah.com numbering), from Ibn ʿAbbās. sunnah.com/muslim:705b. Sunni source, ṣaḥīḥ in its own tradition. Another narration (705d) reads "without fear or rain." Sunni scholars interpret the report in different ways. Translation: this companion.
8. al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws* (English ed.), Ruling 717 (Ẓuhr and ʿAṣr: from midday until sunset, Ẓuhr first), sistani.org/english/book/48/2209/; Rulings 722–723 and 726 (Maghrib once the redness in the eastern sky has passed overhead; Maghrib and ʿIshāʾ in order, until midnight), sistani.org/english/book/48/2212/. Compare Imam al-Bāqir (a): "When the sun passes noon, the two times enter, Ẓuhr and ʿAṣr; when the sun sets, the two times enter, Maghrib and ʿIshāʾ": al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, vol. 1, bāb 33, ḥadīth 3 (unverified chain), thaqalayn.net/hadith/34/1/33/3. Translation: this companion.
9. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-ṣalāt, bāb 5 ("The time of Ẓuhr and ʿAṣr"), ḥadīth 3: asked when to pray Ẓuhr, Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) said, "Pray the eight at noon, then pray Ẓuhr, then pray your voluntary prayer, long or short, then pray ʿAṣr." Al-Majlisī: ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 15:32). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/4/5/3. On praying early in each prayer's "prime time" (*waqt al-faḍīla*), see al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws*, Ruling 738, sistani.org/english/book/48/5418/. Translation: this companion.
10. al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws*, Ruling 716 and the opening of "Prayers of a Traveller": only Ẓuhr, ʿAṣr and ʿIshāʾ are shortened, to two units each, when the conditions set out there are met. sistani.org/english/book/48/2208/ and sistani.org/english/book/48/2264/.
11. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-ṭahāra, bāb 17 ("The description of wuḍūʾ"), ḥadīth 3, narrated by Muḥammad ibn Muslim from Imam al-Bāqir (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 13:74). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/1/17/3. When Zurāra asked how he knew that only part of the head and feet is wiped, the Imam laughed and explained it from the wording of Qurʾān 5:6: *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-ṭahāra, bāb 19, ḥadīth 4 (al-Majlisī: ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ; al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ), thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/1/19/4. Translation: this companion.
12. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-ṣalāt, bāb 20, ḥadīth 8, narrated by Ḥammād ibn ʿĪsā. Al-Majlisī: ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 15:101). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/4/20/8. Also al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, vol. 1, bāb 46, ḥadīth 1 (thaqalayn.net/hadith/34/1/46/1), and al-Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-ṣalāt, bāb 8, ḥadīth 69 (al-Ghaffārī: ḥasan), thaqalayn.net/hadith/42/1/8/69. The book Ḥammād knew by heart was the prayer manual of Ḥarīz, another of the Imam's students. The eighth point is the nose, which the Imam called *sunna*, recommended practice. The Imam's rebuke is general ("a man among you"), not a statement of Ḥammād's age. Retold and abridged, not translated word for word. Translation: this companion.
13. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-ṣalāt, bāb 16 ("Humility in prayer"), ḥadīth 1, narrated by Zurāra from Imam al-Bāqir (a). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 15:74). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/4/16/1. Al-Sīstānī treats placing one hand over the other as a gesture of humility as invalidating the prayer, by obligatory precaution: *Islamic Laws*, Ruling 1112, the third invalidator, sistani.org/english/book/48/2247/. For the Sunni practice see, for example, al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-Adhān, no. 740 (Sahl ibn Saʿd: people were told to place the right hand on the left forearm in prayer), sunnah.com/bukhari:740; Sunni source.

14. al-Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-ṣalāt, bāb 11, ḥadīth 133, Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam asking Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Ghaffārī: ṣaḥīḥ (his edition, 2:251). thaqalayn.net/hadith/42/1/11/133. The reasons are in the fuller version: al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, vol. 1, bāb 42, ḥadīth 1 (al-Bihbūdī does not include it), thaqalayn.net/hadith/34/1/42/1. The rule alone is also in bāb 41, ḥadīth 3, from Ḥammād ibn ʿUthmān (al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ), thaqalayn.net/hadith/34/1/41/3. Translation: this companion.

15. The Prophet's *khumra*: al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-ḥayḍ, bāb 25, ḥadīth 1, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a): his wives would hand him the *khumra* (al-Majlisī: ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ; al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ), thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/2/25/1; and, as a Sunni source, al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-Ṣalāt, no. 381 (Maymūna: "The Prophet used to pray on the *khumra*"), sunnah.com/bukhari:381. The mat and the pebbles: *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-ṣalāt, bāb 27, ḥadīth 11, narrated by Ḥumrān from "one of the two," Imam al-Bāqir or Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), speaking of his father. Al-Majlisī: ḥasan or muwaththaq (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 15:149); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 1:281). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/4/27/11. Translation: this companion.

16. al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws*, Rulings 1062 (earth, and what grows from it that is neither eaten nor worn, such as wood and leaves), 1067 (limestone and gypsum) and 1069 ("The best thing on which to perform sajdah is the turbah of His Eminence Sayyid al-Shuhadāʾ", then earth, stone and grass). sistani.org/english/book/48/2236/. A report without a chain says that prostrating on the clay of al-Ḥusayn's grave "gives light down to the seventh earth": al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, vol. 1, bāb 41, ḥadīth 2, thaqalayn.net/hadith/34/1/41/2. Translation: this companion.

17. al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, vol. 1, bāb 46, ḥadīth 16: a man asked Imam ʿAlī (a) the meaning of the first prostration. Reported without a chain (unverified chain); al-Bihbūdī does not include it. thaqalayn.net/hadith/34/1/46/16. Translation: this companion.

18. al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws*, "The Obligatory Daily Prayers," sistani.org/english/book/48/2208/.

19. al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws*, Rulings 235–236, 242, 244, 248–249 and 251, sistani.org/english/book/48/2154/; on intention (it need not be spoken, Ruling 281) and on wiping the left foot after the right (by obligatory precaution), "Conditions for the validity of wuḍūʾ," sistani.org/english/book/48/8295/.

20. al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws*, Ruling 928 (the obligatory parts of prayer), sistani.org/english/book/48/2229/; Ruling 964 (al-Fātiḥa and a complete sūra in the first two units) and Ruling 991 (al-Fātiḥa or a set of praises in the third and fourth), sistani.org/english/book/48/2233/; Ruling 1086 (the testimony), sistani.org/english/book/48/2239/.

21. Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) teaching the call to prayer to Abū Bakr al-Ḥaḍramī and Kulayb al-Asadī: al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, vol. 1, bāb 45, ḥadīth 34 (al-Bihbūdī does not include it). thaqalayn.net/hadith/34/1/45/34. On the call to prayer in Shia practice, see also Chapter 8. Translation: this companion.

22. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-ṣalāt, bāb 32, ḥadīth 6 (reciting "the glorification of Fāṭima al-Zahrāʾ" after an obligatory prayer) and ḥadīth 8 (Imam al-Ṣādiq counting thirty-four *Allāhu akbar*, thirty-three *al-ḥamdu lillāh* and thirty-three *subḥān Allāh*). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ for both (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 15:173). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/4/32/6 and thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/4/32/8. The story of how the Prophet (s) taught it to Fāṭima and ʿAlī (a), when she asked for help with the housework, is in al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, vol. 1, bāb 46, ḥadīth 33 (unverified chain), thaqalayn.net/hadith/34/1/46/33, and in al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, no. 3113 (Sunni source).

23. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-ṣalāt, bāb 64 ("The very old and the sick"), ḥadīth 11, narrated by Abū Ḥamza from Imam al-Bāqir (a), on Qurʾān 3:191: "The healthy pray standing; 'sitting' is the sick, who pray seated; and 'on their sides' is one weaker than the sick who pray seated." Al-Majlisī: ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 15:335). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/4/64/11. Asked about a frail old man who could neither bow nor prostrate, al-Ṣādiq (a) said he should pray with a nod of the head toward the *qibla*: al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, vol. 1, bāb 51, ḥadīth 20 (al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ), thaqalayn.net/hadith/34/1/51/20. Translation: this companion.

24. al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws*, Rulings 983–984: one who cannot yet recite al-Fātiḥa correctly recites it as well as he can and must keep trying to learn it; praying in congregation is recommended meanwhile. sistani.org/english/book/48/2233/.

25. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-ṣalāt, bāb 16 ("Humility in prayer"), ḥadīth 1, narrated by Zurāra from Imam al-Bāqir (a). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 15:74); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 1:267). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/4/16/1. The ḥadīth continues with further instructions, among them "do not fold your arms" (*lā tukaffir*). Translation: this companion.

26. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-ṣalāt, bāb 16, ḥadīth 4 (the tree trunk: Imam al-Ṣādiq quoting his father; al-Majlisī: majhūl, unverified chain) and ḥadīth 5 (his colour and his sweat, from Imam al-Ṣādiq; al-Majlisī: majhūl ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ; al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 1:267). *Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 15:77. thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/4/16/4 and thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/4/16/5. Translation: this companion.

27. al-Ṣadūq, *al-Amālī*, majlis 44, ḥadīth 12, narrated by Ibn Abī Yaʿfūr from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Not graded in the data (unverified chain). thaqalayn.net/hadith/29/1/44/12. The same report advises looking at the place of prostration. Translation: this companion.

28. al-Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-ṣalāt, bāb 15, ḥadīth 233, narrated by Muʿāwiya ibn Wahb from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Tahdhīb*, p. 223); al-Ghaffārī: ṣaḥīḥ (his edition, 2:358). thaqalayn.net/hadith/42/1/15/233. Retold, not translated word for word.

29. From the poem "A Visit from St. Nicholas," which begins "'Twas the night before Christmas."

30. al-Ṣadūq, *al-Khiṣāl*, part 1 (qualities that come singly), bāb 16, ḥadīth 1, narrated through Ibn Abī ʿUmayr and ʿAbd Allāh ibn Sinān from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a): "The believer's honour is his prayer at night, and his dignity is keeping harm away from people." Not graded in the data. thaqalayn.net/hadith/10/2/16/1. A version in al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-ṣalāt, bāb 100, ḥadīth 9, is graded majhūl by al-Majlisī (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 15:482) and ṣaḥīḥ by al-Bihbūdī (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 1:348). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/4/100/9. Translation: this companion.

31. al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws*, Ruling 760: most jurists date the night prayer from midnight; al-Sīstānī holds it "not farfetched" that it begins at nightfall and lasts until the dawn call to prayer, and "better" near dawn. sistani.org/english/book/48/2216/.

32. *al-Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya*, Supplication 6 ("In the morning and evening"), vv. 30–31, verse numbering of thaqalayn.net/duas/sahifa-sajjadiya-his-supplication-in-the-morning-and-evening. Translation: this companion.

33. The "Fifteen Whispered Prayers" (*al-Munājāt al-khams ʿashara*): al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* 91:142, who says he found them "narrated from him in some books of our companions," without naming the books or giving a chain. They are not part of *al-Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya*. Translation: this companion.

34. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-kufr, bāb 203 ("Taking account of deeds"), ḥadīth 2, from Abū al-Ḥasan al-Māḍī, Imam Mūsā al-Kāẓim (a). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 11:358). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/1/203/2. Translation: this companion.

35. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Saying 208 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/3/208/256. *Rabiḥa*, "gains," is a trader's word for profit. Translation: this companion.

36. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Saying 74 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/3/74/89. Translation: this companion.

37. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-ṣalāt, bāb 92, ḥadīth 5: "Whoever purifies himself and then goes to his bed spends the night with his bed like his place of prayer." Al-Majlisī: majhūl (unverified chain) (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 15:448). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/4/92/5. Also al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, vol. 1, bāb 64, ḥadīth 1, thaqalayn.net/hadith/34/1/64/1. The reports that "sleep is worship" speak of a person who is fasting: e.g. al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, vol. 2, bāb 2, ḥadīth 14, thaqalayn.net/hadith/35/2/2/14. Translation: this companion.

38. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-duʿāʾ, bāb 48 ("What is said morning and evening"), ḥadīth 12, from Imam ʿAlī (a), to be said three times. Al-Majlisī: marfūʿ (unverified chain) (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 12:236). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/2/48/12. A fuller formula, for after each obligatory prayer, adds

"the Kaʿba as my *qibla*" and names the Imams: al-Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-ṣalāt, bāb 8, ḥadīth 180 (al-Ghaffārī: ḍaʿīf, weak chain), thaqalayn.net/hadith/42/1/8/180. Translation: this companion.

CHAPTER 28 · THE MONTH OF RAMADAN

1. al-Ṣadūq, *ʿUyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, vol. 1, bāb 28 ("Various traditions from Imam al-Riḍā"), ḥadīth 48, narrated by Imam al-Riḍā (a) through his forefathers from Imam ʿAlī (a). Graded *muʿtabar* (reliable) by al-Muḥsinī (*Mashraʿat Biḥār al-anwār* 2:458); its chain runs through the Banū Faḍḍāl, whose reports Shia scholars accept despite their divergent beliefs. thaqalayn.net/hadith/11/2/28/48. Parallel: al-Ṣadūq, *al-Amālī*, majlis 20, ḥadīth 4 (thaqalayn.net/hadith/29/1/20/4). "The most wretched" (*ashqā*) echoes Qurʾān 91:12; the sermon calls the assassin a brother to the man who hamstrung the she-camel of Thamūd (91:11–14). The sermon's closing words on ʿAlī's Imamate belong to Chapter 8. Abridged; translation: this companion.
2. al-Ṭabrisī (d. 548/1154), *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, commentary on Qurʾān 2:185 (vol. 2, p. 12) and on 9:36 (vol. 5, p. 51), page numbers from the OpenITI digital text of the ten-volume first edition (1415/1995). The root *r-m-ḍ* names the scorch of the sun on sand; the Arabs, he says, named their months after the seasons in which they fell. On 9:36 he adds that the month is so called "because it burns away sins." A report in *al-Kāfī* asks believers to say "the month of Ramadan" rather than "Ramadan" alone, calling Ramaḍān one of God's names (al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-ṣiyām, bāb 4, ḥadīth 2; al-Majlisī: ḍaʿīf, weak chain; thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/2/4/2). A lunar year has about 354 days.
3. Pew Research Center, *How the Global Religious Landscape Changed From 2010 to 2020* (9 June 2025): Muslims made up 25.6 per cent of the world's population in 2020, having grown by 347 million since 2010. pewresearch.org/religion/2025/06/09/how-the-global-religious-landscape-changed-from-2010-to-2020/.
4. Reported from the Prophet (s) without a chain by al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, vol. 2, bāb 2 ("The virtue of fasting"), ḥadīth 4 (unverified chain; thaqalayn.net/hadith/35/2/2/4), and from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) by al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-ṣiyām, bāb 1, ḥadīth 6 (al-Majlisī: majhūl, unverified chain; thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/2/1/6). It is also in al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, no. 1904, and Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, no. 1151 (Sunni sources, graded ṣaḥīḥ in their tradition). A ḥadīth qudsī is judged for authenticity like any other report. Translation: this companion.
5. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Saying 252 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ, as on thaqalayn.net; the Arabic text there carries the number ٢٥١, a misprint, since the sayings before and after it are 251 and 253). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/3/252/303. The saying gives a purpose for each duty, including "fasting as a trial of people's sincerity" (*al-ṣiyāma ibtilāʾan li-ikhlāṣ al-khalq*). Translation: this companion.
6. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Saying 136 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/3/136/167. The same saying calls prayer "the offering of every God-fearing person" (see Chapter 27). A similar saying, "the zakat of bodies is fasting," is in al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-ṣiyām, bāb 1, ḥadīth 4 (al-Majlisī: weak, but reliable, *ḍaʿīf lākinnahu muʿtabar*; thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/2/1/4). Translation: this companion.
7. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Letter 31 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ), Imam ʿAlī's counsel to his son al-Ḥasan (a). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/2/31/163. Paraphrased in part; the last sentence is translated: this companion. On intention, al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws* (English ed.), Rulings 1529–1531, sistani.org/english/book/48/2278/.
8. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-ṣiyām, bāb 11 ("Disciplines during fasting"), ḥadīth 1, narrated by Muḥammad ibn Muslim from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 16:247; the data prints "6/247"); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 2:65). thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/2/11/1. Also in al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, vol. 2, bāb 12, ḥadīth 3 (thaqalayn.net/hadith/35/2/12/3), and al-Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām*, vol. 4, bāb 9, ḥadīth 2 (thaqalayn.net/hadith/44/2/9/2), both graded ṣaḥīḥ by al-Bihbūdī. Translation: this companion.

9. *al-Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya*, Supplication 44 (“On the coming of the month of Ramadan”), ¶¶6–7, paragraph numbering of al-islam.org/sahifa-al-kamilah-al-sajjadiyya-imam-ali-zayn-al-abidin/44-his-supplication-coming-month-ramadan. The same paragraphs ask that hands, feet, stomachs and tongues keep the fast as well. Translation: this companion.
10. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-ṣiyām, bāb 11, ḥadīth 3, narrated by Jarrāḥ al-Madāʾinī from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: majhūl (unverified chain); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 2:65–66). thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/2/11/3. The Imam cites Qurʾān 19:26 for Mary’s fast. *Jāriya* can mean a maidservant or an enslaved girl. Told as a story; translation: this companion.
11. al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws* (English ed.), Ruling 1551, sistani.org/english/book/48/2279/. The eight are eating and drinking; sexual intercourse; masturbation; ascribing lies to God, the Prophet (s) or the Imams (a) (by obligatory precaution); letting thick dust reach the throat (by obligatory precaution); remaining in a state of major ritual impurity (*janāba*), menstruation or post-natal bleeding until dawn; a liquid enema; and deliberate vomiting. Doing any of them by genuine mistake does not break the fast (Ruling 1623, sistani.org/english/book/48/2289/).
12. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Saying 145 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/3/145/176. The words “hunger and” are bracketed in the thaqalayn text and missing from some copies. A shorter version from the Prophet (s) is in Ibn Mājah, *Sunan*, no. 1690 (Sunni source; al-Albānī: ṣaḥīḥ). Translation: this companion.
13. The sermon cited in note 1. Translation: this companion.
14. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-ṣiyām, bāb 2 (“The excellence of the month of Ramadan”), ḥadīth 4, in which Imam al-Bāqir (a) describes a sermon of the Prophet (s) “on the last Friday of Shaʿbān.” The word is *muwāsāt*, sharing one’s means with others. Al-Majlisī: ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 16:206; the data prints “6/206”). thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/2/2/4. Translation: this companion.
15. al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, vol. 2, bāb 1 (“The reason for the obligation of fasting”), ḥadīth 1, given without a chain (thaqalayn.net/hadith/35/2/1/1). Al-Ṣadūq gives it with a full chain from Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam in *Faḍāʾil al-ashhur al-thalātha*, the month of Ramadan, bāb 1, ḥadīth 38 (thaqalayn.net/hadith/40/3/1/38). Not graded in the data (unverified chain). Translation: this companion.
16. Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), “GAZA STRIP: Famine conditions offset, but situation remains critical,” *Countries in Focus*, issue 142 (analysis period 16 October–30 November 2025; amended 19 December 2025). It compares conditions after the ceasefire of 10 October 2025 with “the August 2025 analysis, which detected Famine.” ipcinfo.org/ipcinfo-website/countries-in-focus-archive/issue-142/en.
17. Karbala: 10 Muḥarram 61 AH (October 680 CE). On the water: al-Ṣadūq, *al-Amālī*, majlis 30, ḥadīth 1, in which the commander besieging Imam Ḥusayn (a) is ordered to “come between him and the water,” and a soldier taunts his camp with the glinting Euphrates (thaqalayn.net/hadith/29/1/30/1; not graded in the data, unverified chain). Remembered here as devotion, not as part of Ramadan.
18. “Half a date” and “a drink of water”: the sermon cited in note 1. “A little milk thinned with water”: the report cited in note 14. Translation: this companion.
19. On breaking the fast with dates: al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-ṣiyām, bāb 66, ḥadīth 5 (al-Majlisī: weak by the usual standard “but strong,” *ḍaʿīf ʿalā l-mashhūr lākinnahu qawī*; thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/2/66/5) and ḥadīth 6 (al-Majlisī: majhūl, unverified chain). On the two joys: al-Ṣadūq, *al-Faqīh*, vol. 2, bāb 2, ḥadīth 4 (see note 4), and al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, no. 1904 (Sunni source).
20. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-ṣiyām, bāb 18 (“What dawn is, and when eating becomes unlawful”), ḥadīth 4, narrated by Abū Baṣīr from Imam al-Bāqir or Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 16:266; the data prints “6/266”); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 2:70–71). thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/2/18/4. Retold, not translated word for word.
21. al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws* (English ed.), Rulings 1711–1712, sistani.org/english/book/48/2298/. On travellers, Rulings 1683 and 1690–1692, sistani.org/english/book/48/2295/.

22. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-ṣiyām, bāb 38, ḥadīth 1, narrated by Muḥammad ibn Muslim from Imam al-Bāqir (a). Al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 2:80); no grading by al-Majlisī in the data. thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/2/38/1. Al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws*, Rulings 1697–1698, sistani.org/english/book/48/2296/. The measure (*mudd*) is about 750 grams of food (Ruling 1630, sistani.org/english/book/48/2292/). Translation: this companion.

23. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-ṣiyām, bāb 37, ḥadīth 4, narrated by Muḥammad ibn Muslim from Imam al-Bāqir (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 16:303); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 2:80). thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/2/37/4. The last clause, *fa-in lam yaqdirā* ("if they are unable"), does not say what they are unable to do. Al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws*, Rulings 1694 and 1696, sistani.org/english/book/48/2296/. Ruling 1696 speaks of "an illness that makes him very thirsty": one for whom fasting is excessively difficult gives one *mudd* a day, and one who cannot bear the thirst at all owes nothing. Translation: this companion.

24. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-ḥayḍ, bāb 18, ḥadīth 3, narrated by Zurāra from Imam al-Bāqir (a). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 13:248; the data prints "3/248"); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 1:220). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/2/18/3. On maturity: al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws*, Ruling 1541, sistani.org/english/book/48/2278/.

25. al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws* (English ed.): intention, Rulings 1529–1531 (sistani.org/english/book/48/2278/); what breaks the fast, Ruling 1551 (sistani.org/english/book/48/2279/); genuine mistakes, Ruling 1623 (sistani.org/english/book/48/2289/); the time of maghrib, Ruling 722 (sistani.org/english/book/48/2212/); expiation, Ruling 1630 (sistani.org/english/book/48/2292/); making up missed fasts and the penalty for delay, Rulings 1663–1682, especially 1674 (sistani.org/english/book/48/2294/); the new moon, Rulings 1699–1704 (sistani.org/english/book/48/2297/); harm, Rulings 1711–1712 (sistani.org/english/book/48/2298/). On some points the marājiʿ differ. Al-Sīstānī rates plunging the whole head under water as only disliked (Ruling 1627, sistani.org/english/book/48/2290/); Ayatollah Khamenei treats it, by obligatory precaution, as breaking the fast; Ayatollah Makārim Shīrāzī rules, by obligatory precaution, that a fasting person must not do it; and Ayatollah Waḥīd Khurāsānī holds that it breaks the fast (ijtihadnet.com/allowed-swim-fasting).

26. al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī (d. 1402/1981), *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, commentary on Sūrat al-Qadr, vol. 20, p. 331 in the OpenITI digital text. He argues from the present tense of *yufraqu* (44:4), supported by *tanazzalu* (97:4), that the night returns every year.

27. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-ṣiyām, bāb 69 ("The Night of Destiny"), ḥadīth 6, narrated by Ḥumrān from Imam al-Bāqir (a), who adds that the night comes "every year, in the month of Ramadan, in the last ten nights," and that God's will remains in what is decreed. Al-Majlisī: ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 16:385; the data prints "6/385"). thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/2/69/6. In the same report, and in ḥadīth 4 (al-Majlisī: ḥasan; thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/2/69/4), "better than a thousand months" means that good deeds on that night are better than deeds in a thousand months without it. Translation: this companion.

28. al-Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-ṣiyām, bāb 33, ḥadīth 110, narrated by Rifāʿa from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a): "The head of the year is the Night of Decree; in it is written what will be from one year to the next." Al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Tahdhīb*, p. 386); al-Ghaffārī: majhūl. thaqalayn.net/hadith/44/2/33/110. Translation: this companion.

29. al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān*, vol. 20, p. 334: the reports of the Ahl al-Bayt "agree that it remains, recurring every year," and that it is "one of the three nights," while Sunni reports "differ remarkably," the best known among them being the twenty-seventh.

30. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-ṣiyām, bāb 69, ḥadīth 9, narrated by Zurāra from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: muwaththaq ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 16:388; the data prints "6/388"); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 2:94). thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/2/69/9. Translation: this companion.

31. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-ṣiyām, bāb 69, ḥadīth 1, narrated by Ḥassān ibn Mihrān from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 16:380); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 2:93). thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/2/69/1. Translation: this companion.

32. al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān*, vol. 20, p. 333: some reports point to the twenty-third, and the night "was not named, to magnify its standing, so that it would not be taken lightly" through sin.

33. al-Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-ṣiyām, bāb 33, ḥadīth 100, from Imam al-Bāqir (a). Al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Tahdhīb*, p. 385); al-Ghaffārī: majhūl. thaqalayn.net/hadith/44/2/33/100. The name "night of al-Juhanī," and his home "far from Medina," are in bāb 10, ḥadīth 2 (see note 34). Al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī names al-Juhanī as ʿAbd Allāh ibn Unays and notes that Sunni collections also tell the story (*al-Mīzān* 20:333). Retold.

34. al-Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-ṣiyām, bāb 10 ("Sunnas of the month of Ramadan"), ḥadīth 2, narrated by Zurāra from Imam al-Bāqir or Imam al-Ṣādiq (a): the ritual bath (*ghusl*) is recommended on the nineteenth, twenty-first and twenty-third nights. The same report says that on the twenty-first night Jesus was raised up, the successor of Moses died, and the Commander of the Faithful died. Al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Tahdhīb*, p. 359); al-Ghaffārī: majhūl. thaqalayn.net/hadith/44/2/10/2.

35. ʿAbbās al-Qummī, *Mafātīḥ al-jinān*, the rites (*aʿmāl*) of the Nights of Qadr: the ritual bath, keeping vigil, laying the Qurʾān on the head, and *Duʿāʾ al-Jawshan al-Kabīr*, which has a hundred sections of ten divine names each. Al-Qummī notes that al-Majlisī, in *Zād al-maʿād*, cites "some reports" for reciting the Jawshan on these three nights.

36. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-ṣiyām, bāb 69, ḥadīth 3, narrated by Muḥammad ibn Muslim from Imam al-Bāqir or Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 16:383); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 2:94). thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/2/69/3. Translation: this companion.

37. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-duʿāʾ, bāb 3 ("Supplication turns back misfortune and the decree"), ḥadīth 3, narrated by Bisṭām al-Zayyāt from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ; al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 1:137). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/2/3/3. The words are *wa-qad ubrima ibrāman*. Translation: this companion.

38. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb 41 ("Sūrat al-Qadr and its interpretation"), ḥadīth 6–7, from Imam al-Bāqir (a). The whole bāb shares one chain through al-Ḥasan ibn al-ʿAbbās ibn al-Ḥarīsh, which al-Majlisī grades ḍaʿīf (weak chain) (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 3:61, on ḥadīth 1). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/4/41/6 and thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/4/41/7. The yearly return of the night rests on stronger grounds (notes 26, 27 and 29); the link to the Imam is given here as the tradition's teaching, not as proof.

39. al-Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022), *al-Irshād*, vol. 1, p. 16, as given in Muḥammad Rayshahrī, *Encyclopedia of Imam ʿAlī*, §535 (hadith.net/en/post/68326/contactus.aspx). His words on being struck, *fuztu wa-rabbi l-Kaʿba*, are given there (§537) from al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, *Khaṣāʾiṣ al-aʾimma*, p. 63. Al-Majlisī quotes the *al-Irshād* passage in *Biḥār al-anwār* 42:225–226, and Ibn Shahrāshūb (d. 588/1192) gives the words on being struck in *Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib*, as quoted in *Biḥār al-anwār* 41:2. Later accounts add many details; this chapter follows these sources and Letter 47.

40. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Letter 47 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ), his will to al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn (a) after Ibn Muljam's blow. thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/2/47/245, thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/2/47/252 and thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/2/47/253. The will also asks them to stand with the oppressed against the oppressor (thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/2/47/243) and quotes the Prophet (s): "Setting things right between people is better than all [voluntary] prayer and fasting" (thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/2/47/244). Abridged; translation: this companion.

41. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb 113 ("The birth of Amīr al-Muʾminīn"), opening note: he was killed "in the month of Ramadan, with nine nights of it remaining," in 40 AH, aged sixty-three. thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/4/113/0. This is al-Kulaynī's own historical note, not a ḥadīth. The report in note 34 names the twenty-first as the night he died.

42. al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws* (English ed.), Rulings 2003 and 2005 (who gives it, for whom, and how much), sistani.org/english/book/48/2328/. On giving it before the Eid prayer, Imam al-Ṣādiq (a): "giving it before the [Eid] prayer is better; after the prayer it is [ordinary] charity" (al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-ṣiyām, bāb 75, ḥadīth 1; al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ; thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/2/75/1). Chapter 29 gives the details. Translation: this companion.

43. al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws* (English ed.), Ruling 1707, sistani.org/english/book/48/2298/.

1. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-zakāt, bāb 19 ("Giving charity after a request"), ḥadīth 3, narrated by al-Yasaʿ ibn Ḥamza, who was present. Al-Majlisī: majhūl, an unverified chain (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 16:151). thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/1/19/3. Retold; the dialogue is translated by this companion. The pilgrim says he is "not a proper recipient of charity" (*lastu mawḍiʿa ṣadaqa*), that is, he is not poor at home. The Imam goes on to quote the Prophet (s), "Whoever conceals a good deed, it equals seventy pilgrimages," and an old line of poetry: "Whenever I come to him one day to ask for something, I return to my family with my face's honour still in it."
2. A count made for this companion from the Tanzil text of the Qurʾān: the word *zakāt* occurs in thirty-two verses, and twenty-six of them also name prayer, for example 2:43, 2:110, 9:71, 19:31 (Jesus: "He has enjoined on me prayer and zakat as long as I live") and 98:5. In 18:81 and 19:13 the word means "purity."
3. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-zakāt, bāb 1 ("The obligation of zakat"), ḥadīth 2, narrated by ʿAbd Allāh ibn Sinān from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 16:6); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 2:6). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/5/1/2. The verse is Qurʾān 9:103. The report ends with the Prophet sending out the collectors of alms. Abridged; translation: this companion.
4. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 199 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ), the passage on zakat. thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/199/6. *Qurbān*, here "an offering by which [they] draw near," is any act that brings a person near to God. Translation: this companion.
5. al-Sayyid ʿAlī al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws* (English ed.), Ruling 1871 (zakat is due on ten things, business goods "based on obligatory precaution"), sistani.org/english/book/48/2314/; Rulings 1880 (crops: a threshold of about 847 kg) and 1891 (one tenth if watered by rain or a stream, one twentieth if by buckets or pumps), sistani.org/english/book/48/2316/; Ruling 1912 (gold: twenty legal *mithqāl*s, 69.12 g; one fortieth), sistani.org/english/book/48/2317/; Rulings 1913 (silver), 1915 (only minted gold and silver coins in use as money) and 1918 (owned for eleven months), sistani.org/english/book/48/2318/. Many older manuals list nine items. Check the rulings of your *marjaʿ*.
6. al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws*, Ruling 1768 (the seven things liable to khums: surplus earnings, mined products, treasure, lawful property mixed with unlawful, gems from diving, spoils of war, and, on the majority view, land a *dhimmī* buys from a Muslim), sistani.org/english/book/48/2305/; Ruling 1769 (earnings beyond the year's living expenses for oneself and one's family), sistani.org/english/book/48/2306/.
7. al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws*, Ruling 2003 (one *ṣāʿ*, about three kilograms per person, of a local staple such as wheat, barley, dates, raisins, rice or millet, due at sunset on the eve of ʿĪd al-Fiṭr; its value in money suffices; the poor are exempt) and Ruling 2005 (it is given for all one's dependants), sistani.org/english/book/48/2328/.
8. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-zakāt, bāb 21 ("The virtue of kindness"), ḥadīth 2, narrated by Muʿāwiya ibn Wahb from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), from the Prophet (s). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 16:153); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ. thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/1/21/2. Translation: this companion.
9. al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, commentary on 8:41 (vol. 9, pp. 89–91 and 106 in the digital OpenITI edition). *Ghunm*, he writes, is any gain "from trade, work or war"; the verse came down about war, but its occasion "does not restrict" its ruling; and the Sunni reports generally confine khums to the spoils of war, unlike the reports from the Imams.
10. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb 130 ("Fayʾ, anfāl and khums"), ḥadīth 11, in which Samāʿa asks Abū al-Ḥasan, Imam Mūsā al-Kāẓim (a) (al-Majlisī: ḥasan or muwaththaq, *Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 6:273; al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ; thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/4/130/11), and ḥadīth 13, in which Ibn Abī Naṣr writes to Abū Jaʿfar, Imam Muḥammad al-Jawād (a) (al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ, 6:274; al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ; thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/4/130/13). Translation: this companion.
11. al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws*, Ruling 1851 (the *sayyids*' half is for a poor, orphaned or stranded *sayyid*; the Imam's half "must either be given to a fully qualified jurist or spent for purposes that he authorises," by precaution the most learned *marjaʿ*) and Ruling 1854 (the *sayyid* must be a Twelver Shia), sistani.org/english/book/48/2312/; Ruling 1969 (a *sayyid* may not take zakat from a non-

sayyid except in necessity), sistani.org/english/book/48/2325/. In *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb 130, ḥadīth 7 (al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ; thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/4/130/7), Imam al-Riḍā (a) explains that the shares of God and of the Messenger pass to the Imam.

12. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb 130, ḥadīth 27, narrated by ʿAlī ibn Ibrāhīm from his father, who was present. Al-Majlisī: ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 6:286); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ. thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/4/130/27. The steward, Ṣāliḥ ibn Muḥammad ibn Sahl, managed the Imam's endowments in Qum; the report does not name the coin. The groups the Imam lists echo Qurʾān 8:41. Translation: this companion.

13. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-zakāt, bāb 1, ḥadīth 8, narrated by Samāʿa ibn Mihrān from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a): the known right "is other than zakat. It is something a man imposes on himself in his wealth… according to his capacity and the extent of his wealth." Al-Majlisī: muwaththaq (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 16:8; the data prints "6/8"). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/5/1/8. Chapter 19 quotes a parallel report (ḥadīth 9 of the same bāb). Al-Ṭabrisī (d. 1154 CE) records both readings, zakat first, in *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, commentary on 70:24–25 (vol. 10, pp. 124–125 in the 1995 edition). Translation: this companion.

14. al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, commentary on 70:24–25 (vol. 20, pp. 15–16 in the digital OpenITI edition): the asker is "the poor person who asks," and the deprived "the poor person who refrains out of self-respect and does not ask." He adds that the context supports the Imams' reading, since zakat has the recipients named in 9:60 and "is not limited to the asker and the deprived." Al-Ṭabrisī defines the deprived in the same words (*Majmaʿ al-bayān*, vol. 10, p. 125). Chapter 19 quotes another report from the Imams, describing the deprived as one whose honest work does not yield enough.

15. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-zakāt, bāb 1, ḥadīth 4, narrated by Ibn Muskān and others from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 16:7); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ. thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/5/1/4. The same teaching appears in ḥadīth 1 and 7 of this bāb; Chapter 19 quotes ḥadīth 1, and Imam ʿAlī's parallel saying in *Nahj al-balāgha*. Translation: this companion.

16. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-zakāt, bāb 3 ("Why zakat was set at its amount"), ḥadīth 1, narrated by al-Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī al-Washshāʾ from Imam al-Riḍā (a), who reports the question put to Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 16:19; the data prints "6/19"); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 2:10). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/5/3/1. Twenty-five in a thousand is 2.5 percent, the rate on gold and silver. Translation: this companion.

17. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-zakāt, bāb 2 ("Withholding zakat"), ḥadīth 17, narrated by Abū Ḥamza from Imam al-Bāqir (a), who says: "We found in the Book of ʿAlī…" Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 16:17). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/5/2/17. Translation: this companion.

18. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-zakāt, bāb 2, ḥadīth 10, narrated by Muḥammad ibn Muslim, who asked Imam al-Bāqir (a) about Qurʾān 3:180. The Imam answers that zakat withheld becomes, on the Day of Resurrection, "a serpent of fire coiled around his neck." Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 16:16; the data prints "6/16"). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/5/2/10. Translation: this companion.

19. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-zakāt, bāb 1, ḥadīth 8, narrated by Samāʿa ibn Mihrān from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). The report also names lending to God (57:18), spending "secretly and openly" (14:31) and keeping the ties God commanded (13:21). Al-Majlisī: muwaththaq (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 16:8). thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/5/1/8. Translation: this companion.

20. On the change from "for" (*li-*) to "in" (*fī*), see al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, commentary on 9:60 (vol. 9, pp. 312–313 in the digital OpenITI edition), who weighs several explanations, including al-Zamakhsharī's. Of the one given here (what is spent "in" freeing slaves or debtors goes to owners and creditors on their behalf), he says it is "not without merit," though strained for the stranded traveller.

21. al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws*, Ruling 1940 (the eight groups; the poor person "does not possess the means to meet his and his family's expenses for one year"; the fourth group can include non-Muslims; "the way of Allah" covers works of public benefit, such as building mosques and religious schools, keeping towns clean, and building and widening roads), sistani.org/english/book/48/2324/.

22. al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws*, Ruling 1955 (a stranded traveller may receive zakat if the journey is not sinful and he cannot reach his destination by borrowing or selling something), sistani.org/english/book/48/2324/.

23. al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws*, Ruling 1950 (if a poor person is ashamed to take zakat, it is recommended to give it with the intention of zakat "but without disclosing" it), sistani.org/english/book/48/2324/.

24. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, Kitāb al-zakāt, bāb 1, ḥadīth 17, narrated by Isḥāq ibn ʿAmmār from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), on Qurʾān 2:271: "It is other than zakat. Zakat is open, not secret." Al-Majlisī: ḥasan or muwaththaq (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 16:12; the data prints "6/12"); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ. thaqalayn.net/hadith/3/5/1/17. The Thaqalayn English labels the verse 2:273. In ḥadīth 7 of the same bāb (al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ) the Imam says no blame attaches to someone who pays zakat openly. Translation: this companion.

25. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-zakāt, bāb 4 ("Giving charity by night"), ḥadīth 3, narrated by al-Muʿallā ibn Khunays. Al-Majlisī: majhūl, an unverified chain (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 16:133; the data prints "6/133"). thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/1/4/3. Al-Muʿallā followed Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) one rainy night as he left a loaf or two beside each of a group of sleeping strangers. Asked whether they were Shia, the Imam said that if they were, "we would share even our salt with them," and added: "God created nothing without a keeper to keep it, except charity: the Lord takes charge of it Himself." He then described his father's custom. Translation: this companion.

26. al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws*, Ruling 1871, sistani.org/english/book/48/2314/; Ruling 1912 (gold: 69.12 g), sistani.org/english/book/48/2317/; Rulings 1915 (coins in use as money) and 1918 (eleven months), sistani.org/english/book/48/2318/; compare Ruling 1873 (zakat falls due as the twelfth month begins), sistani.org/english/book/48/2315/. Money left unspent at the end of one's khums year is liable to khums instead (Ruling 1769).

27. al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws*, Rulings 1769 (khums on earnings beyond the year's living expenses), 1771 (*mahr* and ordinary inheritance exempt), 1782–1783 (the khums year; a solar year may be used), 1795 (pilgrimage counts as living expenses) and 1797 (provisions left over at the year's end are liable), sistani.org/english/book/48/2306/; Ruling 1851, sistani.org/english/book/48/2312/.

28. al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws*, Rulings 1957 (the recipient of zakat must be a Twelver Shia) and 1962 (zakat for the poor may not be used for the upkeep of those one must already support), sistani.org/english/book/48/2325/. The share for "those whose hearts are to be won over" can go to non-Muslims (Ruling 1940, sistani.org/english/book/48/2324/).

29. On who gives it, for whom and how much, al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws*, Rulings 2003 and 2005 (see note 7); Ruling 2005 covers "all those who are considered his dependants" at sunset, young or old. On when: Ruling 2038 (one who attends the Eid prayer gives it before the prayer, by obligatory precaution; one who does not may delay it until the time of the Ẓuhr prayer), sistani.org/english/book/48/2330/. Imam al-Ṣādiq (a): you must give it "for everyone you have taken into your household," and "giving it before the [Eid] prayer is better" (al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-ṣiyām, bāb 75, ḥadīth 1; al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ; thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/2/75/1); he also called it part of "completing the fast" (al-Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-zakāt, bāb 29, ḥadīth 48; al-Ghaffārī: *mursal ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ*; thaqalayn.net/hadith/44/1/29/48). On recipients, Ruling 2023 (by obligatory precaution, poor Shia Muslims; where there are none in one's town, other poor Muslims, but never one hostile to the Imams), sistani.org/english/book/48/2329/. Translation: this companion.

30. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb 64 (on the explicit designation of the Imams), ḥadīth 4, narrated by Zurāra, al-Fuḍayl ibn Yasār, Bukayr ibn Aʿyan, Muḥammad ibn Muslim, Burayd ibn Muʿāwiya and Abū al-Jārūd from Imam al-Bāqir (a). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 3:250). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/4/64/4. The report continues with Qurʾān 5:67 and Ghadīr Khumm (see Chapters 1 and 8). See also *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb 8, ḥadīth 7, where Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) names the Prophet's successors (*awṣiyāʾ*) as those meant in 4:59 and 5:55 (al-Majlisī: ḥasan ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ, *Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 2:326; al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ; thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/4/8/7). Translation: this companion.

31. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-duʿā', bāb 34 ("Mubāhala"), ḥadīth 1, narrated by Abū Masrūq. Al-Majlisī: ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 12:185). thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/2/34/1. Abū Masrūq reports similar replies about 4:59 and 42:23. The Imam told him to invite such opponents to a *mubāhala*, a solemn mutual prayer for God's judgement. Translation: this companion.

32. Shia versions: Ibn Bābawayh al-Ṣadūq, *al-Amālī*, majlis 26, ḥadīth 4, from Imam al-Bāqir (a) through Abū al-Jārūd and Kathīr ibn ʿAyyāsh (ungraded; a weak chain), thaqalayn.net/hadith/29/1/26/4; al-Ṣadūq, *al-Khiṣāl*, on the seventy merits of Imam ʿAlī (a), ḥadīth 1, the sixty-fifth merit, which ʿAlī tells in the first person ("I handed him the ring from my finger"; ungraded, a long chain through Makḥūl), thaqalayn.net/hadith/10/25/1/1. The *al-Kāfī* reports that tell of the gift or quote "while they are bowing" are graded weak or unknown by al-Majlisī (vol. 1, Kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb 64, ḥadīth 3, where the gift is a robe; bāb 8, ḥadīth 16; bāb 108, ḥadīth 76). A version in the commentary of ʿAlī ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qummī, from Imam al-Bāqir (a) through Ṣafwān, Abān ibn ʿUthmān and Abū Ḥamza al-Thumālī, has a chain of well-regarded narrators but is not graded in our sources (quoted in al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, *Wasāʾil al-Shīʿa*, Āl al-Bayt ed., 9:478; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* 35:186; al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān* 6:17). Sunni source: al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, commentary on 5:55, reports 12210 (from al-Suddī) and 12214 (from Mujāhid) in the Shākir numbering; the editor marks a narrator of 12214 as weak and judges that these reports "cannot serve as proof in religion." Al-Ṭabarī glosses *walī* as "helper" (*nāṣir*); the reading of *rākiʿūn* as "humbly submissive to their Lord" is the editor's, not al-Ṭabarī's. Checked at quran.ksu.edu.sa. Translation: this companion.

33. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-zakāt, bāb 4 ("Giving charity by night"), ḥadīth 1, narrated by Hishām ibn Sālim. Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 16:132; the data prints "6/132"). thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/1/4/1. Translation: this companion.

34. al-Ṣadūq, *al-Khiṣāl*, part 20, ch. 4 ("Twenty-three praiseworthy traits of al-Sajjād"), ḥadīth 1, narrated by Ḥumrān ibn Aʿyan from Imam al-Bāqir (a), describing his father. Ungraded (unverified chain). thaqalayn.net/hadith/10/21/4/1. The same passage says he "supported a hundred households of the poor of Medina." A short report in al-Ṣadūq's *ʿIlal al-sharāʾiʿ*, without a full chain, tells of the marks on his back (quoted in al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* 46:66). Translation: this companion.

35. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-zakāt, bāb 5 ("Charity increases wealth"), ḥadīth 1, narrated by Ghiyāth ibn Ibrāhīm. Al-Majlisī: muwaththaq (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 16:134); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ. thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/1/5/1. Translation: this companion.

36. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sayings 146 and 7 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/3/146/177 and thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/3/7/8. Translation: this companion.

37. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-zakāt, bāb 14 ("The one who distributes charity shares its reward"), ḥadīth 2. Al-Majlisī: mursal, an unverified chain. thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/1/14/2. The better-supported ḥadīth 3 says the same of someone given money to distribute: "He receives what the giver receives, and the giver's reward is not reduced at all" (al-Majlisī: majhūl ka-l-ḥasan; al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ; thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/1/14/3). Translation: this companion.

38. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 7, Kitāb al-waṣāyā, bāb 36 ("What reaches the dead after death"), ḥadīth 5, narrated by Abū Kahmas from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). The six are "a child who asks forgiveness for him, a copy of the Qurʾān he leaves behind, a tree he plants, a well he digs, a charity he sets flowing, and a good practice others follow after him." Al-Majlisī: majhūl ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ (an unidentified narrator, but treated as sound). thaqalayn.net/hadith/7/1/36/5. Translation: this companion.

39. Ibn Bābawayh al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, vol. 1, bāb 27 (on condolence, visiting graves and mourning), ḥadīth 56, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), without a chain (unverified). thaqalayn.net/hadith/34/1/27/56. The report before it (ḥadīth 55) adds: "Whoever among the Muslims does a good deed on behalf of someone who has died, God doubles its reward for him, and benefits the dead by it" (thaqalayn.net/hadith/34/1/27/55). Translation: this companion.

1. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-ḥajj, bāb 27 ("The Hajj of the Messenger of God"), ḥadīth 4, narrated by Muʿāwiya ibn ʿAmmār from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ. thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/3/27/4. The same report says that Qurʾān 2:199, "Then press on from where the people press on," was revealed about Quraysh's station. Retold and abridged; the Prophet's words are this companion's translation.
2. General Authority for Statistics (Saudi Arabia), "GASTAT: Total number of pilgrims for Hajj 2026 reaches (1,707,301)," 26 May 2026: 1,546,655 pilgrims from abroad and 160,646 from inside the Kingdom. stats.gov.sa/en/w/news/194.
3. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-ḥajj, bāb 7 ("The Hajj of Abraham and Ishmael and their building of the House"), ḥadīth 1, narrated by Abū al-ʿAbbās from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 17:32); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ. thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/3/7/1. The report says the House "in those days was a red hillock of earth," and that Mecca then had *salam* and *samur*, thorny acacias. The exchange with Hagar comes in a second report that al-Kulaynī appends to this one ("and in another ḥadīth from him too"), with no chain of its own. Ḥadīth 2 of the same bāb (note 23; al-Majlisī: ḥasan) has the same exchange, with Abraham's answer "To God." "This House" renders *hādhihi al-baniyya*, "this building." Translation: this companion.
4. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-ḥajj, bāb 7, ḥadīth 2, narrated by Muʿāwiya ibn ʿAmmār from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 17:33). thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/3/7/2. Reports that Adam (a) first built the House have weak chains; see, for example, vol. 4, Kitāb al-ḥajj, bāb 2, ḥadīth 1 (al-Majlisī: ḍaʿīf ʿalā al-mashhūr), thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/3/2/1.
5. al-Sīstānī, *Islamic Laws* (English ed.), Ruling 2045 (the Hajj is obligatory "once in his lifetime" on whoever meets its conditions, including the six marks of ability) and Ruling 2055 (one who was able to go for some years and did not "must go for hajj even if it entails difficulty"), sistani.org/english/book/48/2331/. On going again: al-Sīstānī, *Hajj Rituals* (English ed.), Rule 130 (recommended "each year for those who can afford it"), sistani.org/english/book/47/2087/.
6. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Saying 136 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/3/136/167. The same saying calls prayer "the offering of every God-fearing person." Translation: this companion.
7. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 192, the sermon known as al-Qāṣiʿa (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ). thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/192/21 and thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/192/23. The Thaqalayn text misprints *fa-jaʿalahā* as *fa-ʿajalahā*. An earlier copy of the passage is in al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-ḥajj, bāb 6 ("Testing people by means of the Kaʿba"), ḥadīth 2 (al-Majlisī: mursal, unverified chain; *Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 17:23), thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/3/6/2. Translation: this companion.
8. Compare Imam al-Ṣādiq's answer to the sceptic Ibn Abī al-ʿAwjāʾ, who mocked people for worshipping "this House of brick and clay": through it God "asks His creatures for service, to test their obedience in coming to it," and it is "a road that leads to His forgiveness." al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-ḥajj, bāb 6 ("Testing people by means of the Kaʿba"), ḥadīth 1. Al-Majlisī: majhūl (unverified chain) (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 17:22). thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/3/6/1. Translation: this companion.
9. al-Sīstānī, *Hajj Rituals* (English ed.), "Sacrificing an animal at Mina," on distributing the sacrifice: one third "must be given in charity to the needy among the faithful" (an obligatory precaution); a third may be kept and a third given as gifts. sistani.org/english/book/47/2108/.
10. al-Sīstānī, *Hajj Rituals* (English ed.), Rules 147–149 (the order of the ʿumra and the Hajj of *tamattuʿ*), sistani.org/english/book/47/2089/; "Obligations of Tawaf" ("the Holy Kaʿba must be to the left of the pilgrim"; "Hijr Ismail must be included in tawaf"), sistani.org/english/book/47/2097/; Rules 403–404 (shaving and trimming), sistani.org/english/book/47/2109/; Rules 417 and 425 (*ṭawāf al-nisāʾ* is "obligatory on both males and females"), sistani.org/english/book/47/2110/. The Prophet (s) joined the ʿumra to the Hajj, interlacing his fingers: "The ʿumra has entered into the Hajj until the Day of Resurrection" (al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-ḥajj, bāb 27, ḥadīth 4; al-Majlisī: ḥasan ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ; thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/3/27/4).

11. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-ḥajj, bāb 27 (“The Hajj of the Messenger of God”), ḥadīth 7, narrated by ʿAbd Allāh ibn Sinān from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 17:117); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ. thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/3/27/7. The *mīqāt* was al-Shajara, the mosque by the tree at Dhū al-Ḥulayfa. Abridged; translation: this companion.
12. al-Sīstānī, *Hajj Rituals* (English ed.), “Ihram procedure,” Rule 189 (the two pieces) and Rule 195 (the obligation to wear the two pieces “is confined to males only”; women “may wear as ihram their usual clothes”), sistani.org/english/book/47/2092/; Rule 266 (a woman in ihram may not cover her face with a veil), sistani.org/english/book/47/2093/.
13. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-ḥajj, bāb 27, ḥadīth 7, narrated by ʿAbd Allāh ibn Sinān from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 17:117). thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/3/27/7. He said it “whenever he met a rider, climbed a hillock or went down into a valley,” at the end of the night and after prayers. Translation: this companion.
14. Ibn Shuʿba al-Ḥarrānī, *Tuḥaf al-ʿuqūl*, ed. ʿAlī Akbar al-Ghaffārī (2nd ed., 1404 AH), “His sermon in the Farewell Pilgrimage,” pp. 30–34 (OpenITI pagination; check against print), given without a chain, as throughout that book; also al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* 73:350. The sermon quotes Qurʾān 49:13. A Sunni version, which al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī quotes from *al-Durr al-manthūr* (*al-Mīzān* 18:334; Sunni source, not graded here), adds “nor a non-Arab over an Arab, nor black over red, nor red over black, except by mindfulness of God.” Translation: this companion.
15. Malcolm X with Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York: Grove Press, 1965), ch. 17, “Mecca.” Only the phrase quoted is given here.
16. al-Sīstānī, *Hajj Rituals* (English ed.), “Prohibitions during Ihram” (“Once ihram is worn twenty five things become forbidden”), Rules 199 (hunting), 237 (perfume), 247 (a mirror “for the purpose of beautification”), 249 (*fusūq*: “lying, swearing, and unlawful boasting”), 250 (quarrelling) and 253 (lice; for mosquitoes and gnats, “it, as a matter of precaution, is better to avoid killing them, so long as they do not harm the pilgrim”), sistani.org/english/book/47/2093/; “Matters forbidden within (The Haram)”: “Uprooting grass or cutting down trees in the Haram is forbidden,” with exceptions such as palms, fruit trees and what one planted oneself, sistani.org/english/book/47/2094/.
17. al-Sīstānī, *Hajj Rituals* (English ed.), “Obligations of Tawaf” (eight obligations), sistani.org/english/book/47/2097/.
18. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-ḥajj, bāb 7, ḥadīth 15, narrated by Muʿāwiya ibn ʿAmmār from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ; al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 2:105). thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/3/7/15. The Imam adds, “and in it are the graves of prophets.” Translation: this companion.
19. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 1 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ), the passage on the Hajj. thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/1/16. The passage goes on to quote Qurʾān 3:97 (thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/1/1/17). Translation: this companion. Some reports say the Kaʿba stands in line with the angels’ House in heaven, “the much-frequented House” of Qurʾān 52:4, but they are weak and disagree with one another: al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-ḥajj, bāb 2, ḥadīth 1 (al-Majlisī: ḍaʿīf ʿalā al-mashhūr, weak chain), placing it in the sixth heaven, thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/3/2/1, and ḥadīth 2 (al-Majlisī: ḍaʿīf), thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/3/2/2; al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, vol. 2, bāb 1, ḥadīth 2, without a chain, thaqalayn.net/hadith/35/3/1/2. Al-Ṭabrisī, *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on Qurʾān 52:4 (vol. 9, p. 272, OpenITI pagination), gives the fourth heaven on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās and Mujāhid, and a Sunni report the seventh (al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, no. 3207).
20. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-ḥajj, bāb 1 (“The beginning of the Stone”), ḥadīth 1, narrated by Muʿāwiya ibn ʿAmmār from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 17:3). thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/3/1/1. Translation: this companion.
21. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-ḥajj, bāb 27, ḥadīth 7, narrated by ʿAbd Allāh ibn Sinān from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 17:117). thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/3/27/7. He prayed it facing the Kaʿba. Translation: this companion.

22. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-ḥajj, bāb 27, ḥadīth 4, narrated by Muʿāwiya ibn ʿAmmār from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ. thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/3/27/4. The report adds that he stood on Ṣafā in praise and prayer for as long as it takes to recite Sūrat al-Baqara unhurried. Translation: this companion.

23. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-ḥajj, bāb 7, ḥadīth 2, narrated by Muʿāwiya ibn ʿAmmār from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 17:33). thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/3/7/2. Hagar's call is literally "Is there any companion in the valleys?" Retold; translation: this companion.

24. al-Sīstānī, *Hajj Rituals* (English ed.), Rule 149 (ʿArafāt is "about twelve miles from Makkah"; the stay runs "from noon on the ninth of Thil Hijjah" to sunset), sistani.org/english/book/47/2089/; "Wuquf at Arafat": "Presence there is one of the requirements, not wuquf throughout the period," sistani.org/english/book/47/2105/.

25. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-ḥajj, bāb 7, ḥadīth 9, narrated by Abū Baṣīr from Imams al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 2:104); no grading by al-Majlisī is recorded in the data. thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/3/7/9. The end of this long report implies that the son on the altar was Isaac; see note 33. Translation: this companion.

26. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-ḥajj, bāb 28 ("The excellence of the Hajj and the ʿumra"), ḥadīth 37, narrated by Muʿāwiya ibn ʿAmmār from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), who relates the Prophet's answer to a man of the Anṣār. Al-Majlisī: ḥasan ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ. thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/3/28/37. ʿĀlij is a vast expanse of sand dunes in Arabia. In the same answer the Prophet says that after the ṭawāf and the saʿy "you turn away from your sins as on the day your mother bore you." Translation: this companion.

27. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-ḥajj, bāb 28, ḥadīth 2, narrated by ʿAbd al-Aʿlā from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: majhūl ka-l-ḥasan, that is, a chain with an unidentified narrator that he nonetheless treats as close to ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 17:121); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Kāfī* 2:119). thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/3/28/2. Translation: this companion.

28. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-ḥajj, bāb 212 ("Rare reports"), ḥadīth 7, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) through an unnamed narrator. Al-Majlisī: mursal ka-l-ḥasan (unverified chain). thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/3/212/7. The rites he lists are the standing at ʿArafa and Muzdalifa, the saʿy, the ṭawāf and the prayer behind the Station of Abraham. Translation: this companion.

29. al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* 95:213–214 (OpenITI pagination; check against print), quoting al-Kafʿamī's *al-Balad al-amīn* and Ibn Ṭāwūs's *Miṣbāḥ al-zāʾir* for the account of Bishr and Bashīr al-Asadī, with no further chain. The line quoted is at 95:221. At 95:227 al-Majlisī notes that the final section of the prayer, beginning "My God, I am poor in my wealth," is missing from *al-Balad al-amīn*, from *Miṣbāḥ al-zāʾir* and from some old manuscripts of Ibn Ṭāwūs's *Iqbāl al-aʿmāl*, and that its wording "suits the taste of the Sufis." The prayer is printed in ʿAbbās al-Qummī, *Mafātīḥ al-jinān*, among the rites of Dhū al-Ḥijja. Translation: this companion.

30. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-ḥajj, bāb 165 ("Staying at ʿArafāt and its boundaries"), ḥadīth 7, narrated by ʿAlī ibn Ibrāhīm from his father. Al-Majlisī: ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 18:123). thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/3/165/7. Retold; the quoted words are this companion's translation.

31. al-Sīstānī, *Hajj Rituals* (English ed.), Rules 372–374 ("Women, children, the fearful, the weak, the aged, the sick, and those caring for them are exempt" from staying until dawn), sistani.org/english/book/47/2106/; Mina is "about three miles from Makkah" (Rule 149, sistani.org/english/book/47/2089/). On the pebbles: al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-ḥajj, bāb 172, ḥadīth 3, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a): "Take the pebbles for the pillars from Jamʿ [Muzdalifa]; if you take them from your camp at Mina, that is enough." Al-Majlisī: ḥasan; al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ. thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/3/172/3. Al-Sīstānī requires seven pebbles, picked up within the Ḥaram (Rule 378), sistani.org/english/book/47/2107/.

32. al-Ṣadūq, *ʿIlal al-sharāʾiʿ*, as quoted in al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, *Wasāʾil al-shīʿa* (Āl al-Bayt ed.), vol. 14, p. 263, no. 19153 (OpenITI pagination; check against print), from ʿAlī ibn Jaʿfar from his brother Imam Mūsā al-Kāẓim (a). Not graded in the data. Al-Ṣadūq gives the same explanation without a chain in *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, vol. 2, bāb 1, ḥadīth 27, thaqalayn.net/hadith/35/3/1/27. Translation: this companion.

33. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-ḥajj, bāb 7, ḥadīth 9, narrated by Abū Baṣīr from Imams al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ; no grading by al-Majlisī is recorded in the data. thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/3/7/9. The report sets the scene by the middle pillar; ḥadīth 10 of the same bāb (al-Majlisī: ḥasan, *Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 17:44; al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ) also names the middle pillar (thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/3/7/10; Thaqalayn's English for that number belongs to the end of ḥadīth 9). Al-Kulaynī's text calls the tempter only "the wicked old man"; a parallel in the *Tafsīr* of ʿAlī ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qummī, from Muʿāwiya ibn ʿAmmār from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), names him as Iblīs and the boy's mother as Sarah (quoted in al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* 12:125–127, OpenITI pagination; check against print). A caution: the end of ḥadīth 9 has the boy's mother pray, "Lord, do not hold against me what I did to the mother of Ishmael," and names her as Sarah, which would make the boy Isaac. Ḥadīth 4 of the same bāb (al-Majlisī: majhūl) ends with a remark, given without a chain, that Abū Baṣīr heard Imams al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq (a) say the son was Isaac, while Zurāra held that he was Ishmael (thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/3/7/4). Retold; the quoted words are this companion's translation.

34. al-Ṣadūq, *ʿUyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, vol. 1, bāb 18 (on the Prophet's saying "I am the son of the two who were offered"), ḥadīth 1. Not graded in the data. thaqalayn.net/hadith/11/2/18/1. In his comment on the report, al-Ṣadūq notes that the reports differ, some naming Isaac and some Ishmael, and reconciles them: Ishmael was the one offered, and Isaac, born later, wished it had been him. Genesis 22:2 (KJV): "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest." On the early reports, see note 33.

35. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-ḥajj, bāb 27, ḥadīth 4, narrated by Muʿāwiya ibn ʿAmmār from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ. thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/3/27/4. Ali (a) had come from Yemen and entered ihram as the Prophet had. Retold; translation: this companion.

36. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-ḥajj, bāb 203 ("Bidding farewell to the House"), ḥadīth 1, narrated by Muʿāwiya ibn ʿAmmār from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 18:228); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ. thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/3/203/1. Translation: this companion.

37. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-ḥajj, bāb 203, ḥadīth 1, narrated by Muʿāwiya ibn ʿAmmār from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan ka-l-ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 18:228). thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/3/203/1. The pilgrims' words are *āʾibūna tāʾibūna ʿābidūna li-rabbinā ḥāmidūna, ilā rabbinā rāghibūna, ilā Allāhi rājiʿūna in shāʾa Allāh*. Translation: this companion.

38. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb 64, ḥadīth 1, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 3:213). thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/4/64/1. On the setting, "when the Messenger of God returned from the Farewell Pilgrimage," see al-Ṣadūq, *al-Khiṣāl*, thaqalayn.net/hadith/10/3/81/1, graded *muʿtabar* (reliable) by al-Muḥsinī, *Muʿjam al-aḥādīth al-muʿtabara*, thaqalayn.net/hadith/9/3/48/2. Sunni source: al-Tirmidhī, *Jāmiʿ*, no. 3713 (al-Tirmidhī: ḥasan gharīb; al-Albānī: ṣaḥīḥ). For his taking ʿAlī by the hand on the way back from his pilgrimage: Ibn Mājah, *Sunan*, al-Muqaddima, no. 116, narrated by al-Barāʾ ibn ʿĀzib. sunnah.com/ibnmajah:116. Sunni source: graded ṣaḥīḥ by al-Albānī and ṣaḥīḥ li-ghayrihi (authentic through corroboration) by Shuʿayb al-Arnaʾūṭ; Zubayr ʿAlī Zaʾī judged its chain weak. For Khumm by name: Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, no. 2408a, narrated by Zayd ibn Arqam, which places the Prophet's sermon "at a water called Khumm, between Mecca and Medina." sunnah.com/muslim:2408a. Sunni source (ṣaḥīḥ). See Chapter 8.

39. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-ḥajj, bāb 214 ("The Hajj followed by visits"), ḥadīth 1, narrated by Zurāra from Imam al-Bāqir (a). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 18:258); al-Bihbūdī: ṣaḥīḥ. thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/3/214/1. A parallel report ends with Abraham's prayer, "make people's hearts long for them" (Qurʾān 14:37): vol. 1, Kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb 96, ḥadīth 1 (al-Majlisī: ḥasan, *Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 4:285), thaqalayn.net/hadith/1/4/96/1. On meeting the Imam as part of the Hajj's completion: Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), "When one of you makes the Hajj, let him end it by visiting us, for that is part of the Hajj's completion" (al-Ṣadūq, *ʿUyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, vol. 2, bāb 36, ḥadīth 28; not graded; thaqalayn.net/hadith/12/1/36/28); and Imam al-Bāqir (a), "Part of the Hajj's completion is meeting the Imam" (al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, vol. 2, bāb 156, ḥadīth 4, without a chain; thaqalayn.net/hadith/35/3/156/4). Translation: this companion.

40. On the reward of the visit: al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, Kitāb al-ḥajj, bāb 213, ḥadīth 1, in which Ibn Abī Najrān puts the question to Abū Jaʿfar. Al-Majlisī: ṣaḥīḥ (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 18:257); al-Bihbūdī:

ṣaḥīḥ. thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/3/213/1. Ibn Qūlawayh gives the same report, through the same chain, as a question to "Abū Jaʿfar the Second," that is, Imam Muḥammad al-Jawād (a), the ninth Imam (*Kāmil al-ziyārāt*, bāb 2, ḥadīth 2; thaqalayn.net/hadith/24/2/2/2). The one report that ties this visit to the Hajj itself, "Whoever comes to Mecca for the Hajj and does not visit me in Medina, I will turn from him on the Day of Resurrection," has a weak chain (bāb 213, ḥadīth 5, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), quoting the Prophet (s); al-Majlisī: ḍaʿīf; thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/3/213/5). On the garden: bāb 217, ḥadīth 3, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), quoting the Prophet (s). Al-Majlisī: ḥasan (*Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* 18:266). thaqalayn.net/hadith/4/3/217/3. On the greeting: Ibn Qūlawayh, *Kāmil al-ziyārāt*, bāb 2, ḥadīth 17, through Imam Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn (a); not graded (unverified chain). thaqalayn.net/hadith/24/2/2/17. A Sunni report adds that he returns every greeting: "No one greets me without God returning my soul to me so that I return his greeting" (Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, no. 2041; al-Albānī and al-Arnaʾūṭ: ḥasan). Translation: this companion.

41. al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (comp.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, Letter 47 (numbering of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ), his will to al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn after he was struck. The sentence ends, "for if it is abandoned, you will be given no respite." thaqalayn.net/hadith/32/2/47/249. Translation: this companion.

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Hadith. Shia hadith are quoted from the standard collections in the edition of the Thaqalayn digital library (thaqalayn.net). Locators give the volume, the book (*kitāb*), the chapter (*bāb*) and the number of the hadith, followed by the web address. The gradings come from the classical scholars recorded there, chiefly ʿAllama Muhammad Baqir al-Majlisi's *Mir'at al-ʿuqul* (for al-Kafi), with Muhammad Baqir al-Bahbudi's *Sahih al-Kafi* where relevant. *Nahj al-Balagha* is numbered as in the edition of Subhi al-Salih. *Al-Sahifa al-Sajjadiyya* is cited by supplication number, with paragraph or verse numbers as given at the website the note links to (al-islam.org numbers paragraphs; thaqalayn.net numbers verses). Sunni hadith are cited by the numbering of sunnah.com.

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◆

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Tasneem Institute helps Muslims, and everyone curious about Islam, deepen their understanding of the faith through accessible courses, thoughtful videos, publications and gatherings that bring people together. Its scholars and teachers draw on the Qur'an and the teachings of the Prophet's family, and they present them with clarity, care and intellectual honesty.

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