

THE BOOK OF CHARACTER

*Writings on Character and Virtue
from Islamic and Other Sources*

Selected and Edited by
Camille Adams Helminski



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Notes on Translation

In most cases we have attempted to transliterate Arabic words as they are pronounced. In quoted material, the spelling may vary according to the custom of the author. Throughout this book, references to the Qurʾān are in brackets. These refer to the name of the *sūrah*, the *sūrah* number, and verse (*āyah*). The first time the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ is mentioned in a paragraph, his mention is followed by the calligraphic symbol for *ṣalla Allāhu ʿalayhi wa sallam*, “May the peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him.” When Muḥammad’s companions are mentioned, they are followed with the symbol for *raḍīallāhu ʿanhu* (may Allāh be pleased with him) or *raḍīallāhu ʿanha* (may Allāh be pleased with her). In material that is being quoted, we have used the symbols to replace these blessings, but have not added them if they were not present in the original text.

When quoting the Qurʾān or referring in the text to God, exalted is He, we have used the masculine pronoun. Please be aware that this is merely a limitation of language and that within the universe and understanding of the Qurʾān, God is without gender and far beyond any words or manner by which we might try to describe Him/Her. *Subḥān Allāhi Rabb il-ʿālamīn!*

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Preface

*Truly, in the Messenger of God
you have a beautiful standard
for anyone whose hope is in God and the Last Day
and who remembers God unceasingly.*
[Sūrah al-Aḥzāb 33:21]

*And indeed, after the reminding,
We wrote in all the books of wisdom:
“My righteous servants shall inherit the earth.”
Truly, in this is a Message
for people who would worship God.
We have sent you as a mercy for all creatures.
Say: “What has come to me by inspiration
is that your God is One God:
will you then surrender yourselves to Him?”*
[Sūrah al-Anbiyāʿ 21:105-108]

*Consider the soul and the order and proportion given to it,
and its enlightenment as to that which is wrong and right:
truly, the one who purifies it shall reach a happy state
and the one who corrupts it shall truly be lost!*
[Sūrah ash-Shams 91:7-10]¹

The Prophets, peace and blessings be upon them all, are gifted to humanity by our Most Gracious Sustainer and enjoined with a responsibility to convey a Way of Being in response to a need that wells up

¹ The above quotes from the Qurʾān and those that preface each chapter are either excerpted from *The Light of Dawn, A Daybook of Verses from the Holy Qurʾān*, selected and rendered by Camille Adams Helminski, or are based upon the verses from Muhammad Asad’s *The Message of the Qurʾān*.

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within a community. The *dīn*, the Way, the primordial religion has been repeatedly revealed in new unfoldings in response to the need of humankind. These messengers come to us as human beings like ourselves, yet shining brightly with the Light of Divine inspiration as a grace and a mercy to draw us closer to the Truth.

Fourteen hundred years ago the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ conveyed the revelation of the Qurʾān renewing the monotheistic religion of Abraham and bringing together the law of the Prophet Moses and the love of Jesus into the manifestation of a harmonious way of life balanced within nature and all realms of human society. Muḥammad is referred to as the “seal of the prophets,” the confirmation and completion of prophethood, so we should be able to find in the Book that he conveyed, and the example of his life and ways of being, the keys to being and behavior in our own time as well. As we question what it really means to be a human being and what the finest proportion of character for a human being is, we can look to both the words of the revelation, the Qurʾān, and the example and sayings of Muḥammad for instruction, inspiration, and guidance.

In one of the earliest surahs, God speaks to Muhammad, ﷺ reassuring him, *Truly, you are of the noblest of character!* [*Sūrah al-Qalam* 68:4]

Regarding Muḥammad ﷺ, Umm Maʿbad al-Khuzāʿiyya said:

I saw him to be a man of evident cleanliness, fine in character, his face handsome, slim in form, his head not too small, elegant and good looking, his eyes large and black, his eyebrows long, his voice deep, very intelligent, his eyelids brown, his brows high and arched, his hair in plaits, his neck long and his beard thick. He gave an impression of dignity when silent and of high intelligence when he talked. His logic was impressive, he was decisive, not trivial, not trite, his ideas like pearls moving on their string. He seemed the most splendid and fine-looking man from a distance and the very best of all from close-by, medium in height, the eye not finding him too tall nor too short. A tree-branch, as it were, between two others, but he was the finest-

PREFACE

looking of the three, the best proportioned. He was the centre of his companions' attention. When he spoke, they listened well, and if he ordered, they hurried to obey, a man well helped, well served, never sullen, never refuted.”²

When ʿĀʾishah رضي الله عنها was asked what Muḥammad صلى الله عليه وسلم was like, she replied that he was the living Qurʾān.

ʿAlī رضي الله عنه describes the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم:

God's Messenger was the most generous of people in giving out and the mildest and foremost of them in patience and perseverance. He was the most truthful of people in speech, and the most amiable and congenial in companionship and the noblest of them in family. Whoever sees him first is stricken by awe of him but whoever knows him closely is attracted to him deeply, and whoever attempts to describe him says: “I have, either before him or after him, never seen the like of him, upon him be peace and blessings.”³

[Ibn Kathīr comments] that when first built, the mosque of the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم had no *minbar*⁴ from which to address the congregation. He would speak while leaning against a palm tree trunk in the wall next to the *qibla* near where he prayed. Eventually he began to use a *minbar*. . . . As he moved over towards it to make his address from it and passed by that tree trunk, it

² Imām Abū'l-Fidā' Ismā'il ibn Kathīr, *The Life of the Prophet Muḥammad*, translated by Prof. Trevor Le Gassick (Reading, United Kingdom: Garnet Publishing Limited, 1998, 2000), Vol. II, p. 172. This and other excerpts from *The Life of the Prophet Muḥammad* included within this volume are reprinted by permission from Garnet Publishing.

³ M. Fethullah Gulen, *Prophet Muḥammad, the Infinite Light* (London: Truostar London, Ltd., 1996, <http://www.fgulen.org>), Vol. II, p. 147.

⁴ A *minbar* is a pulpit from which the *imām* gives a short sermon, at times such as Friday midday prayers. Usually it is a moveable staircase. The first *minbar* of the prophet had three steps.

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moaned like a love-lorn camel because it had always heard his speeches delivered near itself. And so the Prophet ﷺ returned to it and hugged it until it settled down, just like a baby, and became quiet. Details of this will be given hereafter through various lines, from Sahl b. Saʿd al-Saʿīdi, Jābir, ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿUmar, ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAbbās, Anas b. Mālīk, and Umm Salama, God be pleased with them.

What more appropriate than the comment made by Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī after relating this story, from Anas b. Mālīk, “O Muslims! A piece of wood so pining for the Messenger of God ﷺ! Do not men hoping to meet him have even more right to yearn for him?”⁵

*The human being can have nothing
but that for which he strives.*

[Sūrah an-Najm 53:39]

The Prophet was asked what was the best thing a Muslim could be given, and he replied, “Good character.”⁶

Aṣ-Ṣādiq relates that a man came to the Prophet saying, “O Messenger of Allāh, which people have the most perfect faith?” “Those of them who have the best character,” he replied.⁷

It is related on his [Aṣ-Ṣādiq’s] authority that the Messenger of Allāh said, ‘Most of my people who gain entry to the Garden will gain entry by having *taqwā* (fearful awareness of Allāh) and good character.’⁸

With the example of the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ before us and the

⁵ Ibn Kathīr, *The Life of the Prophet Muḥammad*, Vol. II, p. 205.

⁶ Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri, *Prophetic Traditions of Islam: On the Authority of the Family of the Prophet* (London, United Kingdom: Zahra Publications, 1999), p. 164 (*al-Khisāl*, I, 30). This and other excerpts from *Prophetic Traditions of Islam* included within this volume are reprinted by permission of Zahra Publications.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 164 (*Mishkāt*, 221-224).

⁸ *Ibid.*

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light of the Qur^ʾān to guide us, may we strive towards the meeting with our Lord. May we find ourselves in the best possible condition when we come to meet our Maker, our most Trusted, Most Compassionate, and Truest Friend.

I.
OUR ESSENTIAL NATURE,
ESSENTIAL FAITH,
TRUSTWORTHINESS,
TRUTHFULNESS, AND SINCERITY

OUR ESSENTIAL NATURE (*Fiṭrah*)

*In the Name of God, the Infinitely Compassionate and Most Merciful
Consider the fig and the olive, and Mount Sinai,
and this city of security!*

*Truly, We have created human beings in the best proportion.
Then We reduce them to the lowest of the low—
except those who have faith and act rightly:
For they shall have an unceasing reward!*

*What, then, could from now on cause you to deny this moral law?
Is not God the Wisest of Judges?*

[*Sūrah at-Tīn*, 95:1-8 complete]

*Always remember the blessings
which God has bestowed on you,
and the solemn pledge by which He bound you to Himself
when you said, “We have heard, and we pay heed.”⁹
And so, remain conscious of God:
truly, God has full knowledge of what is within hearts.*

[*Sūrah al-Mā'idah*, 5:7]

*Witness, the only true religion in the sight of God
is self-surrender to Him.*

[*Sūrah Āl 'Imrān*, 3:19]

*Say: “My Sustainer has but urged the doing of what is right;
and He wants you to put your whole being into every act of worship,
and to call Him, sincere in your faith in Him alone.
As it was He who brought you into being in the beginning,
so also to Him will you return.”*

[*Sūrah al-A'rāf*, 7:29]

⁹ See also *Sūrah Al-Baqarah* 2:285.

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Imām ʿAlī has said, “Increase your remembrance of Allāh, for it is the best of remembrances, and desire what has been promised to those who live their lives fearing Him—for His promise is the truest of promises. Model yourselves according to your Prophet, for his is the best guidance.”¹⁰

The word “character” in English originally meant a sign, a brand, or a stamp. “A man of that stamp” means a man of this or that particular character. The letters and image stamped on a coin give it its *character*. According to Al-Ghazālī, “A trait of character . . . is a firmly established condition of the soul, from which actions proceed easily without any need of thinking or forethought.”

A thing’s character is its essence, its true nature. Yet we talk about building human character, as if character were something that could develop over time. If our character is our true nature, isn’t it something we were born with? Why do we have to develop it?

To say that someone “has character” means that he or she has taken some real steps toward becoming a true human being. To have character means to be fully formed; to have no character, or a bad character, is to be undeveloped, or developed in an unbalanced way. Just as a body-builder who builds certain muscle groups but not others is not really well developed, someone who develops his mind but not his feelings, or his will but not his mind, will be unbalanced. He will have flaws and weaknesses in his character.

So character is something we have to work on. But we need to develop it on the basis of who we really are as God made us. God “stamped” us with our true character before we were ever born; our job is to develop, to actualize, what God has stamped us with. Just as to “envelop” means to wrap something up, to “develop” means to unwrap something. Character development, then, is the process of *unpacking* what God has provided us for our journey through this world, and into the next. Various experiences during this life may *stamp* us and mold our character. But since all experiences ultimately come from God, everything we encounter in this life is part of God’s knowledge of the character

¹⁰ Haeri, *Prophetic Traditions in Islām*, p. 101 (*Nahj*, IV, 712).

He has stamped us with, in eternity, before we came into this world.

In Arabic the word for character, with the connotation of good character, is *khuluq*, which is related to the word *khalq*, creation. Character is the form in which God has created us; our responsibility is to live up to it—to conform ourselves, in time, to the shape in which God has created us, in eternity.¹¹

The Soul's Longing

The journeys of spiritual teachers of humanity, prophets, and messengers of God towards Truth are eternal sources of inspiration for all souls who long for meaningfulness on all levels. Their experiences enlighten the way of humanity forever. Deep reflections on their journeys could inspire the modern world with so many meanings that our era lacks. Learning from them does not imply going back to the past; it is an invitation to humanity to refresh its memory of how a human being can fulfill his or her humanity with the hope that we might have a better future. Of course we are not to handle the life of great spiritual teachers with the assumption that we would be able to absorb them fully. This is not possible because the part cannot encompass the whole. Even though a drop of the ocean carries its entire characteristics, it can never be the ocean. So, a soul who longs for truth is a glimmer of the Light of great teachers, and with that quality he or she is qualified to derive some wisdom from his or her journey.

The great teachers longed for a truthful life during times when the majority of people were satisfied by a false one. They longed for knowledge during times when ignorance and superstition were overwhelming. They longed for the spreading of peace during times when conflict was commonplace. They longed for the prevailing of justice during times

¹¹ Charles Upton, contributor.

~ “The Soul's Longing,” by Aisha Rafea, is excerpted from *Women of Sufism, A Hidden Treasure*, selected and edited by Camille Helminski (Boston, Massachusetts: Shambhala Publications, 2003), pp. 199-204.

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when oppression was legitimized. They longed for spiritual freedom while the majority accepted the constraints of matter.

From that perspective, I share with you some reflections on how the Holy Qur^ʿān presented their stories with the focus that all of them sought surrender to Allāh, and thus they are all termed “Muslim.” Namely, the word “Islām” is used in the Holy Qur^ʿān with a deeper dimension than a creed to be compared to other creeds, or a set of social or cultural customs and traditions of certain societies who carry this label. Rather, Islām in the Holy Qur^ʿān points to a living Truth that transcends names, labels, languages, and/or religious affiliations. It is the Law of full surrender to Allāh as existentially experienced and sought by all souls who search for a truthful life infinitely. The Revelation to the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ clarifies that this potential for surrender to Allāh is embedded in the primordial nature of the soul and stamped on its texture since God breathed of His Spirit into humankind. It is what the Holy Qur^ʿān terms “*fiṭrah*,” asserting that if human beings communicated with their *fiṭrah*, it would lead them to the fulfillment of their souls’ longing, to life according to the Law of creation. The Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ said, “Islām is the Religion of the Primordial nature (*fiṭrah*). Every newborn baby is born according to *fiṭrah*, then parents give him a name of a religious affiliation (Christianity, Judaism, Magus . . . etc.).¹²

However, to live according to *fiṭrah*; to surrender to Allāh fully, is not taken for granted, for the human soul is susceptible to being imprisoned in the “vessel of clay” of the body with all its limitations, and to forgetfulness about his or her primordial nature (*fiṭrah*). So, living according to *fiṭrah* is an expression of the highest degree of spiritual awareness. It is an objective to be sought, and a fruit of great spiritual struggle. That is to say, Islām as revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ clarifies that even though each human soul has a potentiality to feel his or her longing for submission to Allāh by giving the chance to his or her *fiṭrah* or spiritual origin to be awakened, a human soul needs to be liberated from the constraints of matter to be able to communicate with his or her *fiṭrah*.

¹² *Fiṭrah* is not to be confused with “instinct” since instinct is related to the attributes of the physical body, while *fiṭrah* is the primordial nature of the soul that carries the spiritual awareness and quality.

The Holy Qur^ʿān reveals that the pure nature (*fiṭrah*) has led great souls to a common Path that has fulfilled their longing. That common Path is a language of a spirit who longs for full surrender to the Eternal Law of Life.

Primordial Nature (*Fiṭrah*) Leads to a Common Path

Even though great teachers of humanity were living in different times and places, and confronted different challenges, they had something in common: 1) a natural deep inner light that made them feel the existence of the Transcendent Supreme, and pushed them to reject the widespread dogmas and practices of their people; 2) they all sought guidance from within and from a higher source, and they prepared themselves to receive that guidance; 3) the Supreme responded to their striving and revealed to them from within and from the Beyond a path by which to lead a truthful life; a path that made of their whole life a language of spirit. They were guided to present the fruit of their experiences to other searching souls.

Rejection of Dogmas

The Holy Qur^ʿān reveals that Prophets can see that people's projection of physical or mental images towards God reflects a direct deficiency of realization and conceptualization of the Supreme Transcendent. As great souls, they can see that such practices lead human beings to being encased in dense layers of falsity through which they can never reach Truth. Prophets are reluctant to be like those people who commit a fatal mistake by being captured in worshiping images of several kinds, those who put limits to what is limitless, and measure what is eternal, absolute, and perfect with the yardstick of what is transient, relative, or imperfect. These lose their link to the really Divine. To take an idol as Divine is not merely an outward practice; it is also an inner attitude of rigidity and stagnation that blocks the human being's capability to be spiritually free. It is an attitude that captures the soul in illusions created by limited existence. From that perspective, we read in the Holy Qur^ʿān that Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muḥammad, and most prophets were not satisfied with the dogmas of their time. Abraham, for instance says to his father,

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“Takest thou idols for gods? For I see thee and thy people in manifest error.” [Sūrah al-An‘ām 6:74]. *“O my father! Why worship that which hears not, and sees not, and can profit thee nothing?”* [Sūrah Maryam 19:42]

False deities that great souls reject, the Holy Qur’ān clarifies, are not only stone idols, they are stagnant traditions, labels, and dogmas. Joseph, for instance says, *“If not Him, you worship nothing but names which you have named, you and your fathers, for which Allāh has sent down no authority.”* [Sūrah Yūsuf 12:40]

The Holy Qur’ān quotes prophets criticizing those who stick to blind imitation and bestow divinity on stagnant traditions. Prophets try to direct their attention to that deficiency, but the common response is: *Nay! they say: “We found our fathers following a certain religion, and we do guide ourselves by their footsteps.”* [Sūrah az-Zukhruf 43:22]

Another false deity that prophets never have worshiped is what the Holy Qur’ān refers to as *hawā*, which means the lust for something of the material realm that a human is apt to adore or bestow an absolute value to. The Holy Qur’ān says to Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ that one who worships his *hawā* is not qualified to discern the truth. *Then do you see the one who takes as his god his own vain desire? Allāh has, knowing [him as such], left him astray, and sealed his hearing and his heart [and understanding], and veiled his sight: Who, then, will guide him after Allāh [has withdrawn guidance]? Will you not then receive admonition?* [Sūrah al-Jāthiyah 45:23].

The Holy Qur’ān relates parables of people who were not ready to receive guidance because they were fully involved in worshiping their *hawā*. It gives the parable of Qārūn who lived at the time of Moses and had such a great lust for money that he could feel no divine dimension in life. The Pharaoh at the time of Moses also lusted for authority so much that he made of himself a god, and consequently could not feel the existence of God. In the time of Muḥammad, some people adored physical existence so much that they could not feel any spiritual depth in life. They were so captured within the constraints of matter that the paramount dogma with which they lived in accordance was denial of a coming life: *And they say: “What is there but our life in this world? We shall die and we live, and nothing but Time can destroy us.” But of that they have no knowledge; they merely conjecture* [Sūrah al-Jāthiyah 45:24]. *No vision can grasp*

Him. But His grasp is over all vision: He is above all comprehension, yet is acquainted with all things [Sūrah al-Anʿām 6:103]. Glory to Him! He is high above all that they say! Exalted and Great [beyond measure]! [Sūrah al-Isrā 17:43]. Praise and glory be to Him! [For He is] above what they attribute to Him! [Sūrah al-Anʿām 6:100]. Glory to Him, and far is He above having the partners they ascribe unto Him! [Sūrah an-Naḥl 16:1]. There is nothing whatever like unto Him [Sūrah ash-Shūrā 42:11].

The Holy Qurʾān also clarifies that it is part of the *fiṭrah* that the soul is liberated from dogmas and false deity when he believes in the Unseen, *Al-Ghayb*. To believe in the Unseen in the Holy Qurʾān is an inner certainty within a human that makes him sure that whatever he might come to know, there is always more that is beyond the known and the knowable. When this certainty exists, souls do not become imprisoned in dogmas, nor do they bestow divinity on anything in the transient realm. Rather, they continuously move forward towards greater knowledge and freedom ceaselessly.

But how can a human being be liberated from all dogmas and false deities? This takes us to the second point.

Seeking Guidance from Within and from a Higher Source

Since they were not satisfied with other people's practices and approach to life, the prophets began to search within and beyond. They were guided from within to open to listen to what their hearts would tell them. They naturally wanted to distance themselves from the noise of a corrupt life and the negative energy of the overwhelming darkness. They spent time in seclusion purifying the whole of their existence by controlling the physical body's desires. The vibrant *fiṭrah* guided them to allow the divinity within to come to the surface of consciousness. In the meantime, they would also direct their faces to the Supreme Transcendent, seeking guidance from a higher source. We read in the Holy Qurʾān that Abraham said: *I will go to my Lord! He will surely guide me!* [Sūrah aṣ-Ṣaffāt 37:99]. *And I will turn away from you [all] and from those whom you invoke besides Allah: I will call on my Lord* [Sūrah Maryam 19:48].

The Holy Qurʾān gives us an example of the search of a soul longing for a source of guidance in the story of the experience of Abraham. The

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story reveals his longing for his Lord whom he recognizes first in a star, then in the moon, and then in the sun. The moment Abraham came to be fully certain that Allāh transcends any of His manifestations was the very moment he realized that he was receiving guidance and support from his Lord. Namely, Abraham reached a moment of receiving great divine knowledge in which he could realize with no confusion that Allāh is both Unseen and also Manifest because all aspects of nature sign to Him, and also because He manifests Himself to man from within himself as well as all around him. The guidance was not letters or words; it was a superb power of enlightenment that made Truth in Abraham's heart clearer than the rays of the sun. Abraham could evidently discern his own *fiṭrah*, and God's closeness and guidance.

So also did We show Abraham the power and the laws of the heavens and the earth, that he might [with understanding] have certitude. When the night covered him over, he saw a star. He said: "This is my Lord." But when it set, he said: "I love not those that set." When he saw the moon rising in splendour, he said: "This is my Lord." But when the moon set, he said: "Unless my Lord guide me, I shall surely be among those who go astray." When he saw the sun rising in splendour, he said: "This is my Lord; this is the greatest [of all]." But when the sun set, he said: "O my people! I am indeed free from your [guilt] of giving partners to Allāh. For me, I have set my face, firmly and truly, towards Him Who created the heavens and the earth, and never shall I give partners to Allāh." [Sūrah al-An'ām 6:75-79]

Muḥammad

Since Muḥammad ﷺ is the archetype of sainthood, it is in strict conformity to his *sunna*, and by taking nourishment from his example, that the aspirant manages to restore his original nature of *imago Dei*.

"God created Adam in His own image," says a famous *ḥadīth*. Like-

~ This selection on Muḥammad is excerpted by permission of the Islamic Texts Society from their publication *Ibn Arabi: The Voyage of No Return* by Claude Addas. English language translation © The Islamic Texts Society 2000, pp. 23-24.

wise, man has virtually all the Divine Names engraved in the very clay of his being. It is because of this divine similitude that God has called him to be His *khalīfa*, his “vicegerent” on earth. “Vicegerency (*khilāfa*) was assigned to Adam, to the exclusion of the other creatures of the universe, because God created him according to His image. A vicegerent must possess the attributes of the one he represents; otherwise he is not truly a vicegerent.”¹³ But these two favours granted exclusively to man, his divine form and his governance, simultaneously expose him to the greatest danger of his existence: the illusion of sovereignty. As the Shaykh al-Akbar [Ibn al-^cArabī] points out on a number of occasions, being conscious of his original theomorphism leads man to forget that he was created from clay—the most humble of substances and a symbol of his “ontological servitude” (*‘ubūdiyya*). The power and the authority that his mandate grant him lead him to consider himself autonomous. He appropriates sovereignty, which rightfully belongs only to Him Whom he represents and he betrays the oath of vassalage that he made when he replied to the question “Am I not your Lord?” with “Certainly, we are witnesses!”¹⁴

When he refuses to assume his status as “servant of God” (*‘abd Allāh*), he is henceforth unworthy of being “God’s vicegerent” (*khālifāt Allāh*). “The homeland of man is his servitude; he who leaves it is forbidden to take on the Divine Names.”¹⁵ To regain his original nobility, he must reactivate the divine characteristics inscribed in his primordial form; characteristics that his pretension and ignorance had covered up. The Prophet ﷺ said, “I have come to complete the ‘noble character traits’.” He who lives in accordance with the “noble character traits” follows a law of God even if he is not aware of it [...] To perfect one’s character means to strip it of all that tends to give it a vile status. Actually, vile characteristics are vile only by accident, while noble characteristics are noble by essence, for what is vile has no foundation in the divine [...], while noble characteristics do have foundation in the divine. The Prophet

¹³ Muḥyīuddīn Ibn al-^cArabī, *Futūḥāt I*, p. 263.

¹⁴ *Sūrah Al-A‘rāf* 7:172.

¹⁵ Ibn al-^cArabī, *Futūḥāt I*, pp. 362, 367.

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perfected the noble character traits to the extent that he established the ways through which a character can maintain a noble status and be exempt from a vile status.”¹⁶

★ ★ ★

*Consider the soul and the order and proportion given to it,
and its enlightenment as to that which is wrong and right:
truly, the one who purifies it shall reach a happy state
and the one who corrupts it shall truly be lost!*

[*Sūrah ash-Shams* 91:7-10].

Muḥammad ﷺ is the Complete Man, *al-Insān al-Kāmil*. He is the exemplar of our *fiṭrah*, of the human form in its original nature as God created it. The love Muslims feel for the person of the Prophet ﷺ has to do with the fullness of his humanity—not in any sentimental sense, but rather because in him is revealed an unfailing and providential capacity to bring out the full humanity of any and every situation, and then act upon it.

In the Islamic view, humanity is both *‘abd*, God’s servant, and *khalīfah*, God’s fully-empowered representative in this world. This is our *fiṭrah*. And our central example of what it is to be *‘abd* and *khalīfah* is Muḥammad ﷺ. His submission to God was perfect, not because, like some of the greatest saints, he intensely desired to submit to God in a passionate and self-sacrificial way, but because he was one with the nature of things. According to the nature of things, in the face of the Absolute Reality of God, the creature is as nothing; whatever reality he has is a pure gift from the Absolute Reality, nor can he ever break out of, or wander away from, the sovereign Will of God. Whether or not he submits *willingly*, he always submits *actually*. Muḥammad knew this, and therefore submitted *willingly*, and perfectly, thus becoming a perfect representative and messenger.¹⁷

Not only does the messenger who is a [servant] subordinate his own will to that of his Lord; there is nothing in his mind or

¹⁶ Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Futūḥāt II*, p. 562. This is the close of the selection by Addas.

¹⁷ Charles Upton, contributor.

in his memory that could obstruct the free passage of revelation. Muḥammad is *‘abd* and *rasūl*; he is also *nabī al-ummi*, the unlettered Prophet; a blank page set before the divine pen. On this page there is no mark made by any other pen, no trace of profane or indirect knowledge. A prophet does not borrow knowledge from the human store, nor is he a man who learns in the slow human way and then transmits his learning. His knowledge derives from a direct intervention of the Divine in the human order, a *tajalli*, or pouring out of the truth upon a being providentially disposed to receive it and strong enough to transmit it. The purity of the stream of revelation remains un sullied in its course from the spring which is its origin to the lake into which it flows; in other words, the Qur’ān exists in written form exactly as it issued from the Divine Presence.¹⁸

It was out of this perfect submission that Muḥammad ﷺ became the complete *khalīfah* of God. He was like a mirror turned to face all of God’s Names and Attributes. The mirror itself does nothing, and (as it were) is nothing. It is because of this submission, this *Islām*, that all the forms of life can appear within it. The Prophet was a shepherd, a businessman, a caravan-leader, a contemplative, a warrior, a diplomat, a legislator, a judge, a ruler, a man of his clan and his family, a father . . . but he was not thereby a “Renaissance man,” a person who seeks diversity of experience for its own sake, who develops and over-develops many and diverse talents because he is basically in flight from his true nature, and from the God who made him. He never departed from his Center in order to develop this or that side, or fragment, of his character. His character was unified, and beautiful, because it reflected the Unity of God.¹⁹

Allāh has created the intellect from a stored-up light which was hidden within His fore-knowledge, and neither emissary,

¹⁸ Reprinted by permission from *Islam and the Destiny of Man*, p. 64, by Charles Le Gai Eaton, the State University of New York Press © 1985, State University of New York. All rights reserved.

¹⁹ Charles Upton, contributor.

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prophet, nor high-ranking angel has seen it. Then He has made knowledge its self, understanding its spirit, doing-without (*zuhd*) its head, modesty (*ḥayāʿ*) its eyes, wisdom its tongue, compassion (*raʿfah*) its purpose, and mercy its heart. Then He filled and strengthened it with ten things: certainty, faith, truthfulness, tranquility (*sakīnah*), sincerity, kindness (*riḥq*), generosity (*ʿafīyyah*), contentment (*qanūʿ*), submission (*taslām*), and patience. Thereupon He spoke to it saying, “Go back,” and it went back; “Come forward,” and it came forward; then, ‘Speak!’ and it replied, “Praise belongs to Allāh, Who has neither enemy nor rival, to Whom there is not likeness and no comparison and no equal, before Whose might everything is submissive and humbled.”²⁰

We develop character by practicing and realizing the *virtues*. The word “virtue” is related to the word “virility” (similar in meaning to *shahama*, manliness.) We used to talk about the “virtues” of herbs and stones—by which we meant their power to heal us, to make us complete. Virtue is power. It is the power to be who we really are, to attain and maintain the human state God has commanded us to embody. The virtues are what allow us to live up to the Trust God has placed upon us, which we as a race have willingly assumed (*Sūrah al-Aḥzāb* 33:72). They are what allow us to be *ʿabd*, God’s servant, and *khalīfah*, God’s fully-empowered representative in this world—not only in our essential nature, by which we are *ʿabd* and *khalīfah* from all eternity, but consciously and intentionally. Virtue is the power which allows our intent to match our nature.

According to the Qurʾān [*Sūrah al-Fāḥir* 35:15], “O men! It is you who stand in need of God, whereas He alone is Self-sufficient, the One to Whom all praise belongs.” Only God is the Rich (*Al-Ghanī*) because Being itself can be attributed only to Him (*Al-Qayyūm*); we are so poor that we can’t even claim Being for ourselves. If our very being is a gift from God, we certainly can’t attribute any of the virtues to ourselves. All the virtues, all the powers, belong to God alone; they are His Names and Qualities.

²⁰ Haeri, *Prophetic Traditions in Islam*, p. 143.

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When we practice a virtue until we have fully embodied it, then our soul has been qualified with the Divine Name which corresponds to that virtue. We have been *stamped* by God with that Name.

Virtues are the actions we must perform in the greater *jihād*, the struggle against the commanding self;²¹ but they are also *truths*, penetrating insights, new ways of looking at things. To practice a virtue is to transform our experience of ourselves, society, and our fellow human beings in very specific ways. To acquire a particular virtue is to train ourselves in how to see the signs of a specific Name of God in the world around us.

The virtues, or constellations of virtues, elucidated in this text are clearly visible in the character of Muḥammad ﷺ. . . . There is no virtue, no Name of God, which is not reflected in the character of the Prophet. All virtues are Muslim, just as all virtues are Hindu or Jewish or Christian or Buddhist. But since every revelation of God is unique, Islamic virtue carries its own particular “fragrance,” which is unmistakable.²²

²¹ *Nafsi ammārah*.

²² Charles Upton, contributor.

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*Such is God, your Sustainer: there is no god but Hu,²³
the Creator of everything: then worship Him alone—
for it is He who has everything in His care.
No vision can encompass Him, but He encompasses all human vision:
for He alone is Subtle Beyond Comprehension, All-Aware.
Means of insight have now come to you
from your Sustainer[through this divine Message]
Whoever, then, chooses to see,
does so for the benefit of his own soul;
and whoever chooses to remain blind,
does so to his own harm.
[Sūrah al-Anʿām 6:102-104]*

*The parable of those who take protectors other than God
is that of the spider who builds itself a house;
but truly, the spider's house is the flimsiest of houses
if they only knew.
Truly, your Sustainer knows what they call upon besides Him
and He is Most Exalted, the All-Wise.
And such are the parables We offer humankind
but only those of inner knowing understand them.
In true proportions God created the heavens and the earth:
truly, in that is a sign for those who have faith.
[Sūrah al-ʿAnkabūt 29:41-44]*

23 Hū: the pronoun of Divine Presence. All words in Arabic have a gender grammatically ascribed to them as they do in French and Spanish, etc. Although Allāh is referred to with the third person masculine pronoun Hū (Huwa), it is universally understood that Allāh's Essence is beyond gender or indeed any qualification, far beyond all our attempts at definition, limitless in subtle glory.

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*And know that among you is God's Messenger:
were he in many matters to follow your inclinations,
you would surely fall into misfortune;
but God has caused faith to be dear to you,
and has made it beautiful within your hearts,
and He has made hateful to you lack of faith, wickedness,
and rebellion against that which is good.
Such indeed are those who walk in righteousness—
through God's grace and favor;
and God is All-Knowing, Truly Wise.*

[Sūrah al-Hujurāt 49:7-8]

From an early age it seems that Muḥammad ﷺ had a strong sense of connection with his Creator and sought to know His Source better through the witnessing of creation, solitary retreat, and inner listening and prayer. His earliest years were spent in the desert under the care of his foster mother, Ḥalīma. As he grew older, his grandfather, ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, and then his uncle, Abū Tālib, took him along on trading journeys where he spent many days and nights encompassed by the wide expanse of the desert and the vast dome of sky and stars.

As a young man, Muḥammad ﷺ began to retreat periodically to a cave in the hills overlooking the town of Mecca. Here he would fast during the month of Ramaḍān and deepen in prayer and contemplation, seeking to know better his Creator and to fathom His creation of human-kind and worlds within worlds.

Later, after his marriage to Khadijah رضي الله عنها, it was here that the revelation of the Qurʾān began to be conveyed:

This occurred when he was forty years of age. . . . Al-Bukhārī stated that Yaḥyā b. Bukayr related to him . . . from ʿĀʾishah رضي الله عنها who said, “The first indication of revelation to the Messenger of God ﷺ came in the form of true visions in his sleep. Every vision he had came like the breaking of dawn.

“He then developed a liking for solitude. He would spend time alone in the cave Ḥirāʾ, where he would seek religious pu-

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rification through devotions. He would stay there many nights and then return to his family for more provisions to continue doing so; then he would come down to Khadijah and repeat the same.

“Eventually the truth came to him while he was there in that cave Ḥirā’. The angel came and told him, ‘Read!’ He replied, ‘I don’t read.’ He then said, ‘The angel then overpowered me and choked me until I could bear it no more, and then he released me. Again he said, ‘Read!’ Again I replied, ‘I don’t read.’ Once more he overpowered me and choked me till I could bear it no more, then he released me and said, ‘Read!’ I replied, ‘I don’t read.’ Again he overpowered me and choked me a third time until I could bear it no more. Then he released me and said, ‘*Read in the name of your Lord who created; He created man from a clot.*’²⁴ *Read! Your Lord is the most noble, He who taught by the pen. He taught man what he did not know*’ [Sūrat al-‘Alaq 96:1-5].

“The Messenger of God ﷺ returned home with this, his heart palpitating. He went in to Khadijah, daughter of Khuwaylid, and said, ‘Wrap me up! Wrap me up!’ They did so until the terror left him.

“He then spoke to Khadijah, telling her what had happened, saying, ‘I was afraid for myself.’

“Khadijah replied, ‘Oh no! I swear by God He would never abuse you. You maintain family ties, you are hospitable to guests, you support the weak, provide for the poor, and help out when tragedy strikes.’

“Khadijah then hurried off with him to Waraqa b. Nawfal b. Asad b. ‘Abd al-‘Uzzā, who was her cousin. He had earlier become a Christian, and used to write the Hebrew script, copying out from the Bible in Hebrew whatever God inspired him to write. He was an old man by then, and he was blind.

²⁴ ‘Alaq, often translated as “clot” is rather a clinging, connecting substance or hooked cell; it indicates our innate connection with the Divine and subsistence through God, as well as the first moments of life in the womb.

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“Khadijah told him, ‘O cousin! Listen to your nephew!’ Waraqa then addressed him, ‘O nephew, what did you see?’ The Messenger of God ﷺ then told him what he had seen. Waraqa commented, ‘This was the angel Gabriel who used to come down to Moses. How I wish I were a young man again! I hope I am still alive when your people exile you!’ The Messenger of God ﷺ exclaimed, ‘Are they to exile me?’ ‘Yes,’ he replied, ‘no one has ever received what you have without being treated as an enemy. If I am alive when your time comes, I will give you every help.’”²⁵

*The faithful are those
whose hearts tremble with awe whenever God is mentioned,
and whose faith is strengthened
whenever His signs are conveyed to them,
and who place their trust in their Sustainer—
those who are constant in prayer
and spend on others out of what We provide for them as sustenance:
In truth, these are the faithful!
They shall have stations of dignity with their Sustainer,
and forgiveness, and a most generous provision.*
[Sūrah al-Anfāl 8:2-4]

The Fear of God manifested by the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ was not a fear for the future, but rather an awe and terror in the face of God’s Majesty in this present moment.²⁶ According to Anṣārī, “Daqqāq says: ‘Awe is a precondition of knowledge of God. As God says, *God warns you to beware of Him* [Sūrah Āl ‘Imrān 3:28].’ (Resala-ye qoshayriya). The fear of the elect resides in their awe of Majesty, not in their fear of chastisement. Fear of chastisement is to worry for oneself and one’s welfare, but awe of Majesty is reverence for God and forgetfulness of self.”²⁷

²⁵ Ibn Kathīr, *The Life of the Prophet Muḥammad*, Vol. I, pp. 278–279.

²⁶ Charles Upton, contributor.

²⁷ Javad Nurbakhsh, *Sufism II: Fear and Hope, Contraction and Expansion, Gathering and Dispersion, Intoxication and Sobriety, Annihilation and Subsistence*, translated by

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We have noticed that there is a shared Path among all revelations and words of wisdom. Teachings are diverse in their means of expression and each revelation has its distinct character but they all guide man to a kind of life where the evolvement of spirit is the focus. They all teach him how to make of his life on earth a fruitful journey where he gains truthful life. We call that Path, Way, Road the Primordial Religion. In all of them man is guided to be on the Path by being linked to the Origin of all existence within and around. He is also taught how to gain real life by turning all aspects of his earthly life into means for his spiritual growth. In other words, revelations guide man to live according to the Eternal Law of Life. The more he evolves spiritually, the more he gets in harmony with the Law, and the more capable he becomes of making his earthly life a profound expression of the spiritual goals.²⁸

*God is the Protector of those who have faith,
leading them out of the depths of darkness into the light.*

[Sūrah al-Baqarah 2:257]

*The messenger, and the faithful with him,
have faith in what has been revealed to him by his Sustainer:
they all have faith in God, and His angels,
and His revelations, and His messengers,
making no distinction between any of His messengers;
and they say: "We have heard, and we pay heed.
Grant us Your forgiveness, O our Sustainer,
for with You is all journeys' end!"*

[Sūrah al-Baqarah 2:285]

In the Old Testament, revelations guide man to go beyond diversities in order to see the underlying unity and order. That is the way to realize the existence of the Transcendent Unseen Supreme Power. This Supreme Power is called God. Even though God manifests Himself in His creation, God remains Transcendent, Unknown, and Unseen. If man is

William Chittick (London and New York: Khaniqahi Nimatullahi Publications, 1982), p. 3.

²⁸ Rafea. *Beyond Diversities: Reflections on Revelation* (2000), p. 11.

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not aware of that truth, he is either confused between God and His manifestations or distracted by the manifestations and cannot discern the existence of the One Beyond.

Torah means Law; the guidance of Moses led his people to recognize the Divine Law which governs everything. The Ten Commandments themselves reveal the ethical law that is believed to be universal. Moses reveals to his people the epitome of the Law, to know God: “You will find Him if you look for Him.” (The Bible, Deuteronomy 4:29)

Allāh is the Omnipresent, yet cannot be seen; He is everywhere and in no particular place.²⁹

*No vision can grasp Him. But His grasp is over all vision:
He is above all comprehension, yet is acquainted with all things.*

[*Sūrah al-An‘ām* 6:103]

*To Allah belong the East and the West:
wherever you turn, there is the face of God.
For Allah is All-Embracing, All-Knowing.*

[*Sūrah al-Baqarah* 2:115]

*And if My servants ask you about Me—witness, I am near;
I respond to the call of the one who calls,
whenever he calls Me:
let them, then, respond to Me, and have faith in Me,
so that they may follow the right way.*

[*Sūrah al-Baqarah* 2:186]

Khadījah

Khadījah bint Khuwaylid was known in the community of Mecca³⁰ as *aṭ-Ṭāhira*, “the pure one.” A woman of great integrity, intelligence,

²⁹ Ibid., p. 25.

~ This biographical sketch of Khadījah is excerpted from *Women of Sufism, A Hidden Treasure*, pp. 5-7, selected and edited by Camille Helminski.

³⁰ Mecca is the locale where Muḥammad was raised. It is here that the Ka‘bah is

and spiritual depth, she became the wife of the Prophet Muḥammad, peace and blessings be upon them both, before the responsibility of Prophethood came to him. Before marrying Muḥammad, she had previously been married and widowed, and had developed and been conducting her own business in caravan trade. She was forty years old, when, being aware of Muḥammad’s sincere trustworthiness and skillfulness, she hired him to oversee one of her trading caravans. At the time, Muḥammad was twenty-five and of meager financial means. When her caravan returned from a very successful trading venture under his charge, through her cousin Khadijah proposed marriage to Muḥammad. At first Muḥammad was hesitant to believe such a match was possible for someone of his financial state and limited tribal status—he had been orphaned at an early age and taken under the wing of his uncle.³¹ However, he was of the noble tribe of the Banū Hāshim, who held the honorable responsibility of providing water to the pilgrims visiting the Ka‘bah.

Muḥammad accepted Khadijah’s offer, and a very happy marriage unfolded. More independent now that he was supported by Khadijah’s love as well as her wealth, Muḥammad would often retire to a nearby cave to meditate and pray for long periods. It was here, during the month of Ramaḍān in 610 A.D., that he received the first revelation of the Qur’ān.³² Overwhelmed and concerned that perhaps he was losing his mind, he rushed home to Khadijah and told her to cover him with a blanket. She held him close and reassured him that a man such as he did

located, the temple which was dedicated to the one God by Abraham, and originally, before him, it is said, built by Adam, which was then later cleansed and rededicated by Muḥammad. Mecca is in Saudi Arabia near the Red Sea and is the direction toward which all Muslims turn in prayer five times a day.

³¹ The Prophet was born after the death of his father, ‘Abdullāh (“the servant of the One God”). When he was six, his mother, Āmina, died, and he became the ward of his grandfather, ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib. When he was nine, his grandfather also died, and he was taken in by his father’s brother, Abū Ṭālib. Abū Ṭālib loved the Prophet dearly and often took him with him on his trading journeys; his wife, Fāṭimah, gave Muḥammad a mother’s love. He grew into manhood alongside their sons, including the young ‘Alī.

³² *Sūrah Al-‘Alaq* 96:1: “Recite, in the Name of your Sustainer who created. . . .”

not suddenly go crazy but that indeed what had taken place was a tremendous spiritual experience. She went to her cousin, Waraqa, a Christian who was well-versed in Jewish and Christian prophecy, and he confirmed for her that indeed Muḥammad must be the messenger whose coming was referred to in the Jewish and Christian scriptures and that this must be the opening of his mission as a Prophet. Khadijah was the first to have faith in his mission as a prophet who had come to renew the message of monotheism of the whole Abrahamic tradition, coming both to the peoples of Arabia and *as a mercy to all the worlds*.³³

Through the early years of prophecy, Khadijah supported Muḥammad when many in the community were against him. Even though she and her family were eventually ostracized and forced to endure great hardship, she never waived in her support of Muḥammad and his mission. She was his constant companion and confidant and welcomed and helped to support all who joined with them in the newly awakening faith.

After years of deprivation due to the intensity of the boycott against the emerging Muslim community, Khadijah died at the age of 65 in 619 A.D. just before permission came for the *hijrah*.³⁴ She and Muḥammad had lived contentedly together for 25 years. Together she and Muḥammad had two sons, Qāsim and ʿAbd Allāh, who both died in infancy and four daughters, Zaynab, Ruqayyah, Umm Kulthūm, and Fāṭimah, who were the only children of the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ to live past infancy. She raised them all with a strong sense of Spirit, and reliance upon their Sustainer. She was known for her purity, her wisdom, her generosity, and her kindness. Khadijah was buried in the al-Mala' cemetery in Mecca.

Even after remarrying, Muḥammad long mourned his devoted wife.

³³ *Sūrah Al-Anbiyāʿ* 21:107.

³⁴ *Hijrah*, the emigration in 622 A.D. of the beleaguered new Muslim community from Mecca 260 miles north to the settlement of Yathrib, subsequently known as Medina, where they were received by Arab and affiliated Jewish tribes who were looking to Muḥammad to help them establish peace among their warring tribal factions. This year of the emigration is the year 0 in the Muslim lunar calendar, i.e., the year of 2001 C.E. is the same year as 1422 A.H.

ESSENTIAL FAITH

“Khadījah had been for the Holy Prophet ﷺ more than a wife. She had placed all her wealth, which was considerable, at his disposal. She had given him love. She was the first person to be converted to Islām, and had been a pillar of strength for the Holy Prophet ﷺ as well as the Muslims.”³⁵ When his later wife, ‘Ā’ishah, questioned him about the extent to which he continued to remember and miss her, he said, “She embraced Islām when people disbelieved me, and she helped me in her person and her wealth when there was none else to lend me a helping hand. I had children only from her.”³⁶

³⁵ *Alīm 6.0: The World’s Most Useful Islamic Software* (Silver Spring, MD: ISL Software Corporation, www.alim.org, © 1986-2002).

³⁶ Musnad Aḥmad 6:117, 118.

TRUST AND
TRUSTWORTHINESS,
TRUTHFULNESS,
AND SINCERITY
(*Tawwakul, Amānah, Ṣidq, Ikhlāṣ*)

*Truly, We offered the Trust
to the heavens, and to the earth, and to the mountains;
but they refused to undertake it, as they were afraid of it—
but the human being undertook it
though he was indeed unjust and foolish,
so that God must chastise the hypocrites, men and women,
and the deniers, men and women,
yet God turns in mercy to the faithful, men and women:
for God is Ever-ready to Forgive, Infinitely Merciful.*

[*Sūrah al-Aḥzāb* 33:72-73]

Put your trust in God if you are of the faithful.

[*Sūrah al-Mā'idah* 5:23].

Whosoever puts his trust in God, He will suffice him.

[*Sūrah al-Mā'idah* 65:3]

*Let there be no compulsion in religion;
right wayfaring stands clearly apart from error.
Whoever turns away from the powers of evil and has faith in God
has grasped the most trustworthy handhold
which shall never give way.
And God is All-Hearing, All-Knowing.*

[*Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:256]

*Whoever submits his or her whole self to God and is a doer of good
has indeed grasped the most trustworthy hand-hold:
for with God rests the final outcome of all endeavors.*

[*Sūrah Luqmān* 31:22]

TRUST AND TRUSTWORTHINESS, TRUTHFULNESS, AND SINCERITY

*And put your trust in God,
for God is sufficient as your Guardian.*

[*Sūrah al-Aḥzāb* 33:3]

On the authority of Anas b. Mālik, it is told that a man came riding his camel, and he asked, “O Messenger of God, shall I leave my camel untied and trust [*tawwakul*] in God?” He replied, “Both tie your camel and trust in God.”

Ibrāhīm al-Khawwas commented, “Whoever genuinely trusts in God when dealing with himself will also trust in God when dealing with others.”³⁷

When Hamdun was asked about trust in God, he answered, “This is a degree I have not reached yet, and how can one who has not completed the state of faith speak about trust in God?” It is said, “The one who trusts in God is like an infant. He knows of nothing in which he can seek shelter except his mother’s breast. Like that is the one who trusts in God. He is guided only to his Lord Most High.”³⁸

The most common title of the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ is *al-Amīn*, “the Trustworthy,” based on the uprightness of his behavior as a youth and on his reputation as a merchant and caravan-leader. Frequently people entrusted their affairs to him, confident of his truthfulness and trustworthiness. Continually he trusted in his Sustainer.

*O you who have attained to faith!
Remain conscious of God,
and be among those who are true to their word!*

[*Sūrah at-Tawbah* 9:119]

³⁷ Al-Qushayri, *Principles of Sufism*. Translated from the Arabic by B. R. Von Schlegell. (Oneonta, New York: Mizan Press, 1990), p. 116. This and other excerpts from *Principles of Sufism* included within this volume are reprinted by permission of Mizan Press.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

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*Follow those who ask no reward from you
and are themselves rightly guided.*

[*Sūrah Yā Sīn* 36:21]

Every word of the Qurʾān had to pass through the purified being of Muḥammad ﷺ. It had to be received by him in order to be conveyed.

In the *ḥadīth al-ʿifk* [ʿĀʾishah رضي الله عنها] stated, “By God, the Messenger of God ﷺ did not get up, nor did any member of the family leave, until revelation came down to him. He underwent the agony that used to seize him (on such occasions) with sweat emerging like pearls from him, even though it was a winter’s day, because of the heavy burden of the revelation that came down upon him.”

. . . “I [ʿUrwa b. ʿAbd ar-Raḥmān b. ʿAbd al-Qārī] heard ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb say, ‘When revelation came down to the Messenger of God ﷺ, it would be heard like the buzzing of a bee near his face.’”³⁹

Hussain Abbās comments:

When we understand something from the depth of our being, we sometimes lose control. We burst out. We’re happy for days. We are in a daze. We know of poets, who having come up with something really wonderful are then unable to continue . . . this joy that bubbles up, the sight that you get into the nature of reality. Consider all this and consider this is the person on whom the Qurʾān came line by line. This is the person on whom it kept coming for twenty three years, ten months and five days. So crushing was this experience that he said that he would burst out in a cold sweat even if it were winter. If he were sitting on a camel, the camel would sit down. Consider the pulverizing nature of the divine revelation. And now consider that he never had a gap in his day to day activities.

³⁹ Ibn Kathīr, *The Life of the Prophet Muḥammad*, Vol. I, p. 306.

TRUST AND TRUSTWORTHINESS, TRUTHFULNESS, AND SINCERITY

This is trustworthiness incarnate and the guardians of trustworthiness are “veracity” and “sincerity.” According to Javad Nurbakhsh, Veracity (*ṣidq*) is “being truthful with God and the creation, both outwardly and inwardly, and being what one shows oneself to be”⁴⁰; while Sincerity (*ikhhlās*) “is that, without paying attention to any creature or taking into account the gratification of your own self, you think, do, and act for God.”⁴¹

Whoever possesses the virtues of veracity and sincerity will be trustworthy in his dealings with others, keeping his or her promises and fulfilling his or her responsibilities. In Shakespeare’s words, “to thine own self be true/And it must follow, as the night the day/Thou canst not then be false to any man.” To be true to yourself is not to follow the passions of your commanding *nafs*, but to be true to your *fiṭrah*.⁴²

*For all those who listen to God and the Messenger
are among those on whom God has bestowed His blessings:
the prophets, and those who never deviated from the truth,
and those who with their lives bore witness to the truth,
and the righteous ones; and what a beautiful friendship this is.
Such is the abundance of God—
and it suffices that God is All-Knowing.*

[*Sūrah an-Nisā* 4:69-70]

Sufyān ibn ʿAbdullāh al-Thaqafi asked the Messenger of Allāh to teach him so that he need never ask anyone again. The Messenger of Allāh answered, “Say that you believe in Allāh; then always be truthful.”⁴³

⁴⁰ *Sufism: A Journal* V:91.

⁴¹ *Sufism: A Journal* IV:105

⁴² Charles Upton, contributor.

⁴³ From *The Way of Sufi Chivalry*, p. 40, by Ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Sulamī, Inner Traditions International, Rochester, Vermont 05767 www.InnerTraditions.com; copyright © 1983, 1991 Tosun Bayrak al-Jerrahi. This and other excerpts from

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*On the Day of Reckoning God will say:
“Today, their truthfulness shall benefit
all who have been true to their word.
Theirs shall be gardens through which running waters flow,
there to dwell beyond the count of time;
well-pleased is God with them,
and well-pleased are they with Him: this is the ultimate success.”*
[Sūrah al-Mā'idah 5:119]

Is it not to God that sincere devotion is due?
[Sūrah az-Zumar 39:3]

An authentic tradition states that the Prophet ﷺ related, on the authority of Gabriel (peace be upon him), who related about God (may He be exalted!) that He said, “Sincerity is a secret taken from My secret. I have placed it as a trust in the hearts of servants I love.”⁴⁴

Yūsuf b. al-Ḥusayn commented, “The dearest thing on earth is sincerity. How many times have I struggled to rid my heart of hypocrisy, only to have it reappear in another guise!”⁴⁵

*O you who have faith! Why do you say that which you do not do?
It is most displeasing in God's sight
that you say that which you do not do.*
[Sūrah aṣ-Ṣaff 61:2-3]

*If one of you trusts another,
then he who is trusted should deliver his trust.*
[Sūrah al-Baqarah 2:283]

The Way of Sufi Chivalry included within this volume are reprinted by permission from Inner Traditions.

⁴⁴ Al-Qushayri, *Principles of Sufism*, p. 187.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

Never make a promise while intending not to keep it. This is forbidden as it falls within lying and hypocrisy. Al-Bukhārī and Muslim narrated that the Prophet ﷺ said, “Three traits single out a hypocrite, even if he prays or fasts and claims to be Muslim: If he speaks, he lies. If he makes a promise, he does not keep it. If he is entrusted, he betrays the trust.”

Imām Al-Ghazālī in *al-Iḥyā'*^c explains that this *ḥadīth* is applicable to those who promise while intending not to fulfill it, or those who, without an excuse, decide later not to fulfill the promise. Those who promise but could not fulfill their promise due to a proper excuse are not hypocrites. But we should be careful not to present a false excuse, as Allāh knows our inner thoughts and intentions.⁴⁶

The word *ṣādiq* (truthful one) is derived from truthfulness. The word *ṣiddīq* (exceedingly truthful, veracious) is the intensified form of it, being he who is pervaded by truthfulness. . . . The lowest degree of truthfulness is that one's inner being and outward actions are in harmony. The *ṣādiq* is one who is truthful in word. The *ṣiddīq* is one who is truthful in all his words, deeds, and inward states.

Aḥmad b. Khidrūya instructed, “Let one who wishes God to be with him adhere to truthfulness, for God Most High has said, *Surely God is with the truthful ones.*”⁴⁷

Abū Bakr ؓ, the first free man to accept Islām⁴⁸ was known for his trustworthy truthfulness. After the *Mi'rāj* of the Prophet ﷺ when others

⁴⁶ Shaykh ʿAbdul Fattah Abū Ghudda, *Islamic Manners*, translated by Muḥammad Zahid Abū Ghudda and edited by S.M. Ḥasan al-Banna (Swansea, United Kingdom: Awakening Publications, 2001), pp. 37-38.

⁴⁷ Al-Qushayri, *Principles of Sufism*, pp. 190-191.

⁴⁸ The first person to accept Islām was Khadijah, then her slave Zayd ibn Ḥāritha, and Muḥammad's young nephew ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, then followed by Abū Bakr.

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derided Muḥammad, it was Abū Bakr who immediately acknowledged what must be the truth of the Prophet's experience. Abū Bakr trusted in the truthfulness of Muḥammad. He said, "I believe that he is communicating revelation from God, early in the day or in the evening; so how should I not believe him regarding this?" From then on Abū Bakr was referred to as Abū Bakr aṣ-Ṣiddīqī, the "trusting."

The best livelihood is trust in God. ~ Mevlana Jalālu'ddin Rūmī

Your livelihood is seeking you more than you are seeking it. ~ Imām ʿAlī

In reply to the question, "What is the best that people can possess, what brings them truest happiness, what is the sweetest of the sweet, and what is the pleasantest way to live?" the Buddha answered: "Trust is the best that people can possess; following the way brings truest happiness; truth is the sweetest of the sweet; and the practice of insight is the pleasantest way to live."⁴⁹

*The Originator of the heavens and the earth—
He has made for you pairs from among yourselves
and pairs among cattle:
by this means He multiplies you; there is nothing whatever like Him
and He is the All-hearing, the All-Seeing.
To Him belong the keys of the heavens and the earth;
He grants abundant sustenance
or bestows it in meager measure to whom He wills:
for He knows well all things.
The same clear Path has He established for you
as that which He enjoined on Noah,
that which We have sent by inspiration to you,
and that which We designated for Abraham, Moses, and Jesus:
that you should steadfastly uphold the Faith
and make no divisions within it.*

⁴⁹ Anne Bancroft, editor, *The Pocket Buddha Reader (Sutta Nipata)*, (Boston, Massachusetts: Shambhala Publishing, 2001), pp. 23-24.

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*To those who worship other things than God,
the way to which you call them may appear difficult.
God draws to Himself those who are willing
and guides to Himself everyone who turns to Him.*

[*Sūrah ash-Shūrā* 42:11-13]

With reference to numerous verses from the Qurʾān, Aisha Rafea elucidates in her essay on “The Soul’s Longing” how all the prophets of the Abrahamic tradition have sought guidance from within and from a higher source, and have prepared themselves to receive that guidance; “the Supreme responded to their striving and revealed to them a path that made of their whole life a language of spirit.” She indicates how longing souls have the possibility of becoming accessible to God’s graces if they follow the paths of the prophets, and concludes that this journey is of benefit not just for the individual soul, but for the whole community of which He is a part. She proposes that it is the resulting greater spiritual awareness and the dissemination of spiritual knowledge that could lead to increased creativity in solving the problems and challenges of the modern age, and that it is in the development and continued sharing of this essential “Language of Spirit,” rather than deified dogmas, that our hope lies.⁵⁰

The greatest trust is that which is between us and our Most Gracious Sustainer. It is that which gives us strength and enables us to be trustworthy according to our *fiṭrah*, our essential nature, and our essential bond with God. May we learn each day to be more truthful and trustworthy and connect ever more deeply with our essential sincerity.

Abū Bakr

When Abū Bakr accepted Islām and announced this fact, he prayed to God the Almighty and Glorious. Abū Bakr was a man

⁵⁰ Aisha Rafea, “The Soul’s Longing,” in *Women of Sufism, A Hidden Treasure*, selected and edited by Camille Helminski, pp. 199-214. Excerpted from a talk delivered at the annual Sufism Symposium held by the International Association of Sufism in Fremont, California in 2001. © Aisha Rafea.

admired by his people, a well-liked and easy-going man. He knew more than anyone about the genealogy of Quraysh and of the good and bad in their history. He was a business man of fine character and charity.

His people would come and consult with him on all kinds of matters because of his knowledge, his business experience, and the pleasantness of his company. He soon began inviting those he trusted of his friends and associates to join him in accepting Islām.

I have been told that those who accepted Islām through him were: az-Zubayr b. al-ʿAwwām, ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān, Ṭalḥa b. ʿUbayd Allāh, Saʿd b. Abū Waqqāṣ and ʿAbd ar-Raḥmān b. ʿAwf, God be pleased with them.

They all went, accompanied by Abū Bakr, to the Messenger of God ﷺ who explained Islām and its correctness to them and recited to them from the Qurʾān; they then believed. These eight men were the earliest to accept Islām. They prayed and believed in the Messenger of God ﷺ and in the mission he had received from God.⁵¹

Ṭalḥa b. ʿUbayd Allāh said, “I attended the trade fair at Buṣrā and there, in his cell, was a monk who called out, ‘Ask the Meccans at the fair whether any man of them is from the holy quarter.’”

Ṭalḥa stated, “I replied, ‘Yes; I am.’ The monk then asked, ‘Has Aḥmad come forth yet?’ I asked, ‘Who is Aḥmad?’ He responded, ‘He is the son of ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib; this is the month during which he will appear. He is the last of the prophets. He will come forth from the holy quarter and go into exile to a place of date-palms, stony tracts, and salty earth. Be sure not to let anyone precede you to him.’”

Ṭalḥa went on, “His words deeply impressed me. So I left quickly for Mecca. There I asked, ‘Is there any news?’ People

⁵¹ Ibn Kathīr, *The Life of the Prophet Muḥammad*, Vol. I, p. 317.

replied, ‘Yes indeed; Muḥammad son of ‘Abd Allāh, “the trustworthy,” has declared himself a prophet. And he has Abū Bakr b. Abū Quḥāfa as a follower.’”

Ṭalḥa continued, “So I went off to Abū Bakr and asked him, ‘Have you really become a follower of this man? “Yes,’ he replied. ‘And you should go off to him, see him, and follow him. He is calling to the truth.’” Then Ṭalḥa told him what the monk had said.

Abū Bakr then took Ṭalḥa with him and they went in to see the Messenger of God ﷺ. Ṭalḥa then accepted Islām and told the Messenger of God ﷺ what the monk had said; he was delighted to hear this.⁵²

After years of persecution, when divine permission was finally received for the Muslims to emigrate to Medina, Abū Bakr ﷺ remained behind until the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ was ready to depart:

“And, as I have been told, no one knew of the departure of the Messenger of God ﷺ except ‘Alī b. Abū Ṭālib and Abū Bakr, “the Trusting,” and his family.

“‘Alī was ordered to remain behind to return to people the items they had deposited with the Messenger of God ﷺ; anyone in Mecca who had concerns about things they owned would leave them in his care, such was his reputation for honesty and trustworthiness.

“Having decided to leave, the Messenger of God ﷺ went to the house of Abū Bakr b. Abū Quḥāfa and they made their exit via a window at its rear.”

Abū Nu‘aym recounted, through Ibrāhīm b. Sa‘d from Muḥammad b. Ishāq, who said, “I have been informed that as he was about to leave Mecca as an emigrant to Medina for God, he said, ‘Praise be to God who created me when I had been nothing. O God, protect me from earthly terrors, misfortunes,

⁵² Ibid., Vol. I, pp. 317-318.

and mishaps in the nights and days to come. O God, accompany me on my journey and keep my family safe. Bless me in what You have granted me and humble me before Yourself. Raise me to the finest qualities in my character. Endear me to You, O Lord. And do not entrust (my fate) to people.

“O Lord of the frail, you are my Lord. I take refuge in Your noble visage before which the heavens and the earth rejoice, the dark shadows dissipate, and the troubles of those who are first and those who are last are made right. (I pray) that You spare me your anger and discontent. I appeal to You not to cease your favours and to spare me your sudden wrath, removal of your favour, and all your anger. I will repay as best I can all your favours to me. And there is no power nor strength except in You.”⁵³

The first night of their journey to Medina, the Prophet ﷺ and Abū Bakr ؓ hid themselves in a cave on the outskirts of Mecca. Not long after their entry into the cave, suddenly a spider wove a large web across the opening and a dove nested in the ledge of rock beside the cave door. When the Meccans who were pursuing them approached the cave and witnessed the spider web and the nesting dove they assumed that such settled creatures could not have been disturbed by human beings in flight and so they left the cave and continued their search elsewhere. Truly our protector is God.

Later, after the death of the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ, Abū Bakr ؓ was chosen as the first caliph, the first leader of the new Muslim state. He presided as head of the community for two years until his death in 634 when ʿUmar ؓ succeeded him.

Al-Bayhaqī stated, “The *ḥāfiẓ* Abū ʿAbd Allāh informed us . . . quoting Muḥammad b. Sīrīn, as follows, ‘Some men were talking during the period of the rule of ʿUmar and apparently expressed their preference for ʿUmar over Abū Bakr. This

⁵³ Ibid., Vol. II, p. 155.

reached ʿUmar and he commented, “By God, a single night or a single day of Abū Bakr would be better than the whole clan of ʿUmar! On the night when the Messenger of God ﷺ went to the cave with Abū Bakr, the latter would walk in front for a while, then walk behind. Eventually the Messenger of God ﷺ realized this and asked, ‘Abū Bakr, why do you walk behind for a while, then go and walk ahead?’ He replied, ‘O Messenger of God, I think of pursuit and walk behind you, but then I think of ambush and so walk ahead of you.’ The Messenger of God ﷺ then asked, ‘You mean if something happened you’d rather it be to you than to me?’ ‘Yes indeed, by Him who sent you with the truth,’ he replied.

“When they reached the cave Abū Bakr said, ‘Stay outside, O Messenger of God, until I make sure the cave is safe for you.’ He went inside and made sure it was safe, but then remembered he had not checked out the crevice. So he said, ‘Stay where you are, O Messenger of God, while I check again.’ He then went back in, made sure the crevice was safe and said, ‘Come on down, O Messenger of God.’ And he did so.

“ʿUmar then commented, ‘By Him who holds my soul in His hand, that night was better than the whole clan of ʿUmar!’”⁵⁴

Combining these various accounts we see that Khadijah was the first woman to accept Islām, the leader of the pack, as it were, and also she preceded the men. Among slaves, the first to accept Islām was Zayd b. Ḥāritha. And the first boy to accept Islām was ʿAlī b. Abū Ṭālib; he was young then and had not reached puberty—as generally believed. These were then the family of the Prophet ﷺ. The first free man to accept Islām was Abū Bakr, “the trusting.” . . .

Ibn Ishāq stated that Muḥammad b. ʿAbd ar-Raḥmān b. ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Ḥusayn of Tamīm related to him that the Mes-

⁵⁴ Ibid., Vol. II, p. 157.

senger of God ﷺ said, “I never called upon any man to embrace Islam without him expressing reluctance, hesitation, and argument except Abū Bakr. He did not *‘akam* (“hold back”) from Islam when I told him of it, nor did he hesitate at all.”⁵⁵

The Shield of Trust

The Prophet carried a shield . . . whoever puts his hand on the grip of the shield must do so in the way of the Prophetic practice, in order that it may be a refuge and a recompense.

If asked: With whom did the shield originate? Say: With Kayūmarth, the son of Adam. It is also said that he was Adam’s grandchild and that Adam made him king of his [descendants]. Kayūmarth loved hunting.

One day when he was hunting, he suddenly came upon an animal said to be a wolf. However much Kayūmarth struck it with his weapon, his blows had no effect. He reflected that the animal’s skin would be of good use against instruments of warfare, so he ordered that the animal be taken by means of a charm and killed. He cut the skin into the shape of a shield and hung it up. At times of battle, he carried it in front of his body and head. After him, alterations were made until the shield attained the form it now has.

If asked: How many are the kinds of shields? Say: Four:

1. The shield of caution
2. The shield of destiny
3. The shield of patience
4. The shield of meekness

If asked: What is the explanation of each of these? Say: The shield of

⁵⁵ Ibid., Vol. I, p. 314.

~ “The Shield of Trust” is excerpted from Ḥusayn Wā‘iz Kāshifī Sabzawārī, *The Royal Book of Spiritual Chivalry* (Chicago, Illinois: Great Books of the Islamic World, Inc., KAZI Publications, 2000), pp. 345-347. This and other excerpts from *The Royal Book of Spiritual Chivalry* included within this volume are reprinted by permission from Kazi Publications.

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caution is a shield woven of silk and cord in the customary manner. One carries it to ward off the wounds of arrow and sword.

As for the shield of destiny, it can repel some of the divine decrees; it is prayer and alms, as the Prophet said: “Nothing repels destiny except canonical prayer.” Another time he said: “Giving alms repels calamity and increases one’s lifespan.” This refers to conditional fate, not inescapable fate.

As for the shield of patience, it is to be sewn from the pains of the arrows of misfortune. Whoever makes patience his calling will achieve his desire.

The shield of meekness is that which wards off the blows of the sword of anger, for the meek are safe from the sparks of the fire of wrath.

If asked: What is the truth of the shield? Say: Taking refuge in God and knowing Him to be the (Uncaused) Cause.

If asked: How many are the rules of conduct for taking up the shield? Say: Five.

1. One must trust in God, not the shield; for if God wishes, He will protect His servants even without a shield. Should He not, a shield cannot save him. As Sa[‘]di said: “You have put the shield on your shoulder against the arrow of fate; if the arrow strikes your liver, what is its use?”
2. One should not touch the grip of the shield in a state of impurity.
3. Whenever one takes up the shield, he should invoke God.
4. When taking it up, he should kiss the grip and, some say, the covering of the shield.
5. After removing the shield from the neck, it should be stored respectfully.

If asked: What does the shield and its handgrip resemble? Say: A circle.

If asked: What is the significance of the circle and its center? Say: It signifies that whoever holds the shield must remain firmly within the circle of moral reasonableness and compassion, as does the center. Just as the shield protects him, he, too, should protect the poor and the afflicted in order to be worthy of that handgrip.

