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THE ORIGINS OF SUFISM

Abū Bakr Sirāj al-Dīn (Martin Lings)

In this revised version of “The Origins of Sufism,” with additional documentation, the article is rich in providing deep insights into the Qur’ānic origins and *taṣawwuf* and its manifestation during the Prophetic era. Citing several verses of the Qur’ān, Shaykh Abū Bakr shows the subtle initial manifestation of *taṣawwuf* in the lives of the Companions. The article is concerned with essentials of *taṣawwuf* and it elaborates on how the remembrance of Allah (*dhikru’Llāh*) and Sufi insistence of following the Path of the Messenger of Allah have remained the unchanging central foundations of Islamic *taṣawwuf*. The article also points out some of the more significant errors in the understanding of *taṣawwuf* by certain Orientalists.

Keywords: Sufism; *taṣawwuf*; Islam; Mystic Path; Making of Islamic Sufism; Early Mystics; Qur’ān and Sufism.

In considering the origins of Sufism—and it is not the origin of the name but of the thing itself which is to be considered here, that is, mysticism in its Islamic form—it is necessary to distinguish its essential features from certain unessential characteristics which it may or may not have. For a brief general definition perhaps we cannot do better than take the two terms *qurb*¹ (nearness to God) and *dhawq*² (taste; that is, direct intellectual intuition) with which al-

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1. *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl*, “Ṭuruq al-ṣūfiyya” (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadītha, n.d.), p. 178.
 2. *Ibid.*, p. 180. See also Montgomery Watt, *The Faith and Practice of al-*

Abū Bakr Sirāj al-Dīn (24 January 1909-12 May 2005), also known by his original name, Martin Lings, had a unique gift of writing precisely and clearly, but despite this, he was never satisfied with his published works and had the habit of revising them over long periods of time. His widely read *Sīrah*, first published in 1983, is perhaps one of the best examples of this deep involvement with his own text. Every reprint of this exceptional work had subtle revisions. This is also true of “The Origins of Sufism”, which was first published in the *Islamic Quarterly* 13, no. 1 (1956): pp. 53-64, and was updated by Shaykh Abū Bakr in 1995 for inclusion in a volume containing his essays; it will be posthumously published by Sohail Academy, Lahore as *Islamic Essays*.

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Ghazālī characterizes *taṣawwuf*. The aspiration to ‘nearness’ may be described as an inward fire or as an inward light or as something between the two, according to whether the individual nature in question is more predisposed to spiritual love (*mahabbā*) or spiritual knowledge (*maʿrifā*). Respectively, *dhawq* may be described as a taste of the fragrance of the Divine Beauty, a taste which irresistibly impels the believer to seek to draw near to God; or, since strictly speaking the nearness is already there, it may be described as a taste of the truth that God is *nearer to him than his jugular vein*.³

Essential to Sufism are the doctrine, the grace of *dhawq* (which the doctrine corroborates and clarifies), the spiritual aspiration (which is produced by the doctrine together with an initial degree of *dhawq*, and which gradually increases as the ‘taste’ grows more intense), and all the spiritual practices which constitute the individual effort of the mystic himself.

The composing of mystical treatises or poems has never been an essential aspect of Sufism or of any other form of mysticism. Without belittling the many inspired Sufi writings which have come down to us and which are unquestionably among the great outward glories of Islam, it should be remembered that they are, in relation to the essential, as sparks thrown out by the fire or the light; and it is not every fire which throws out sparks,⁴ nor every light. Moreover, there is the question of time and place to be considered: when the Qurʾān was still being revealed, when the Prophet was still present,

Ghazālī (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1951), pp. 54-61. Mental knowledge even in its highest form, that is, theoretical understanding of the doctrine, is only an indirect perception. The word *dhawq* expresses, by contrast, a direct perception of the mysteries of the next world, and it should be noted that as a translation of *ṣūfī* or *mulaṣawwif*, the word ‘mystic’ is only adequate if used in its original sense, denoting one who perceives, or aspires to perceive, these mysteries. It is used here throughout in this universal sense only, freed from all the narrowing associations by which it has gradually come to be limited in Western Europe. All believers must become mystics sooner or later, in the next life if not in this, and Sufism might be defined as the Islamic way of anticipating the next life in this.

3. Q 50:16.

4. If Nicholson, for example, had kept this in mind, he could never have written of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (21-110/642-728): “*There can be no doubt* [the italics are mine] that his mysticism—if it deserves that name—was of the most moderate type, *entirely lacking* in the glow and exaltation which we find in the saintly woman, Rābiʿa al-ʿAdawiyya, with whom legend associates him”; see his *A Literary History of the Arabs*, p. 227. For a most valuable account of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, based on all the available sources, see Louis Massignon, *Essai sur les origines du lexique technique de la mystique Musulmane*, rev. ed. (Paris: Vrin, 1954), pp. 174-201.

it was clearly not the time for others to be speaking; nor was it, if one may say so, in accordance with the economy of Providence, that when the mission of the Prophet had been fulfilled, the ensuing silence should be immediately broken;⁵ nor can the first Muslims have been in themselves readily disposed to seek expression for their spiritual experiences. If ever a community was imbued with a sense of the impotence of human utterance, it must have been the community of the Companions and of the generation which came after them. Thus for subsequent Muslim mystics, or, in other words, for those best qualified to make a pronouncement upon Sufism, the absence of first-century mystical treatises has not the least weight in the scale against their conviction that the great Companions were Sufis in all but name; and a Prophet is pre-eminently a mystic, for holiness is nothing other than the fullest realization of

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5. The more explicit and analytical formulations such as those to be found in the Sufi treatises of the third century Hijra and afterwards were providentially reserved for an age when the lapse of time had made men less sharply conscious of the presence, behind them, of the Prophet and his Companions, and when fresh spiritual impetus was called for. Such formulations were also more in accordance with the mental needs of the generations for whom they were made. The inevitable movement from concentrated synthesis to differentiated analysis, which brought about the formation of the four 'Legal Schools' (*madhāhib*) and, on another plane, the definite organization of the Sufi brotherhoods, was in fact bound to produce at the same time a corresponding change in the human soul. Nicholson is referring to this change—which he clearly did not understand—when he says, 'Neither he (the Prophet) nor his hearers perceived, as later Moslems did, that the language of the Koran is often contradictory' (*ibid.*, p. 223). It would have been truer to say that later Muslims were in general less able to make, of two antinomical statements—as for example the Qur'ānic affirmation that man is responsible for his actions and that his actions are predestined—a synthesis through which they might perceive the spiritual truth in question. In other words, serene intellectual activity had given way to feverish mental activity, and it was to meet the needs of this general rationalistic ferment, and also in particular to counteract certain heresies which had sprung from it, that scholastic theology (*kalām*) was developed; and since those who aspired to follow the mystic path were inevitably more mentally dilated than their first-century counterparts had been, it was necessary that the Sufi Shaykhs also should make ample formulations of doctrine in their own domain. It should be added, however, that the Sufis have never set too great a store by these attempts to express what is universally admitted to be inexpressible. 'Take knowledge from the breasts of men, not from words' and 'Whoso knoweth God, his tongue flaggeth' (*man 'arafa Rabbahu kalla lisānuhu*) are among the most often repeated of Sufi sayings.

‘nearness’. But passing for the moment even as far back as the very threshold of Islam, there can be no doubt, that, historically speaking, the roots of Sufism lie in the Prophet’s practice of spiritual retreats⁶ in the cave on Mount Ḥirā’ during the month of Ramadan in the years immediately preceding the first Qur’ānic revelation, a practice which he resumed, if indeed he had ever abandoned it, in the latter part of his life when he used to go into retreat in his Mosque at Medina,⁷ as did also some of the Companions.⁸

The different spiritual practices upon which the Sufic path (*ṭarīqa*) is based may be summed up under the general term *dhikru’lLāh* (remembrance of God), and they have not changed *in any fundamental respect* from the time of the Prophet until the present day. The *dhikr* comprises what is obligatory for all Muslims and what is performed as a voluntary rite (*nāfila*), which includes, in addition to rites in the ordinary sense, such practices as fasting in months other than Ramadan and keeping vigil, every consecrated act being a more or less direct means of remembering God. The Qur’ān uses the word *dhikr* sometimes in this general sense, and sometimes in the more particular sense of *dhikru’ smi’lLāh* (mention of the Name of God), which it enjoins with special insistence. It is this form of *dhikr*, the invocation of the Divine Name Allah, which has always been considered by the Sufis as the most direct means of approach to God. The verse *Invoke in remembrance the Name of thy Lord, and devote thyself to Him with an utter devotion*,⁹ one of the first injunctions received by the Prophet, is in a sense an epitome of Sufi practice, expressing as it does the chief ritual means (*idhkuri’ sma Rabbik*), the whole-hearted effort of the individual soul (*tabattal*) and the end in view (*ilayhi*).¹⁰

6. In virtue of following this practice of the Ḥunafā’, Muḥammad was already, before his mission, a representative of all that was left of the Abrahamic tradition. In other words this practice is a thread of continuity between Abrahamic mysticism and Islamic mysticism.
7. ‘The Prophet was wont to make a spiritual retreat (*Kāna ya’takif*) during the middle ten days of Ramadan. Then, one year, having remained in retreat until the twenty-first night, which was the night preceding the dawn on which he was wont to leave his retreat, he said, “Whoever hath been keeping retreat with me, let him keep it for the last ten days of the month” (Bukhārī, *Tarāwīḥ*, 7).
8. In this connection it may be noted that ‘Umar was told by the Prophet to make a spiritual retreat in fulfilment of a vow which he had made as a Jāhili before entering Islam; see Bukhārī, *Tarāwīḥ*, 6.
9. Q 73:8.
10. Massignon writes: ‘Contrary to the Pharisaical opinion of many *fuqahā’*, an opinion which has been accepted for the last sixty years by many Arabists, I have had to admit, with Margoliouth, that the Qur’ān contains real seeds of mysticism, seeds capable of an autonomous

In addition to the Supreme Name *Allāh*, other Divine Names are also invoked in fulfilment of the injunction *God's are the most Beautiful Names, so call on Him by them;*¹¹ and a *dhikr*, as it were parallel to the invocation, is the recitation of the Qurʾān.

There are also numerous litanies (*awrād*) which consist for the most part of Divine Names¹² or short formulae, interspersed with passages from the Qurʾān.¹³ The repetition of formulae a specific number of times is based on

development without being impregnated from any foreign source' (*La passion d'Al-Hallaj, martyr mystique de l'Islam* [Paris: P. Geuthner, 1922], p. 480). This is refreshing compared with what is often said on the same subject; but it is, to say the least, an understatement. When we read the early Meccan Surahs we are conscious of a small spiritual elite whose lives were utterly dedicated to God and whose intensity of worship reached far beyond the norm. *Flee unto God* (Q 51:50); *Prostrate thyself and draw nigh* (Q 96:19); *Glorify Him the livelong night* (Q 76:26); and *Keep vigil all the night save a little* (Q 73:32) strike the keynote of the period. The path of Islam was still the purely mystical path of doing one's utmost, unalleviated as yet by the establishment of a legal minimum. *Thy Lord knoweth that thou keepest vigil nearly two thirds of the night, or half the night or a third thereof, thou and a group of those that are with thee* (Q 73:20); *Their sides shrink away from their beds, and they call upon their Lord in fear and in longing* (Q 32:16); *They seek His Face* (Q 6:52; 18:29). Such verses as these—and one could go on quoting in the same way at considerable length—would be for the Sufis, even if they had no other criteria, the clearest indication of the full flower of mysticism; for we have here the Divine acknowledgement of whole-hearted and sustained spiritual effort, to which, as they well know, God never fails to respond. For the reasons why a new religion leaps as it were to its spiritual zenith which it attains with relative instantaneousness, and not by gradual development, see Abu Bakr Siraj ed-Din, "The Islamic and Christian Conceptions of the March of Time," *Islamic Quarterly* 1, no. 4 (December 1954): pp. 233-34.

11. Q 7:180. It is no exaggeration to say that calling on the Name of God has been one of the chief practices of the mystics of all the religions that history can account for.
12. Often a sequence of 99 Names is recited in accordance with the *ḥadīth*, 'God hath Ninety-nine Names, He that telleth them (*man aḥsāhā*) shall enter Paradise' (Muslim, *Dhikr*, 2).
13. The *wird* can only be called a later introduction in that its component parts are woven together into one whole, in that it is usually recited with a rosary, which is no more than a convenience, and in that it is prescribed, according to the disciplines of the Sufi orders, for regular daily recitation at certain times, often after the dawn and sunset prayers, regularity being a necessary safeguard against human

aḥādīth such as, ‘Verily each day there is a mist over my heart until I have asked forgiveness of God one hundred times.’¹⁴ It will be sufficient to consider here, by way of example, one of the most widely practiced of these *awrād*, one which, in addition to being the principal *wird* of several different brotherhoods, constitutes the essence of other more elaborate recitations, and represents principles which are fundamental to all mysticism. The first of the three main formulae of this *wird* is in fact the *istighfār*, asking forgiveness of God. The second formula is *al-ṣalāt ‘alā-l-Nabī*, the invocation of blessings and peace upon the Prophet,¹⁵ to which is appended the invocation of blessings and peace upon his Family and Companions. The third formula is an affirmation of *tawḥīd*: ‘There is no god but God, alone, unseconded. His is the Kingdom and His the Praise, and each thing He determineth.’¹⁶

In relation to the first formula, which is a means of purification from faults, the second marks the aspiration to the plenitude of virtue, to the summit of created perfection, affirming the ideal expressed in the verse, *Verily ye have a fair pattern in God’s Apostle*¹⁷, whereas the third formula represents the Transcendent Perfection of the Divinity. The ‘alchemy’ of the second formula may also be understood in the light of those many *aḥādīth* which state that whole-hearted love of the Prophet is an indispensable condition for obtaining faith, as, for example: ‘Not one of you believeth until I am dearer to him than his son and his father and all men together.’¹⁸ It is clear from such formulations

weakness in degenerate times. The various formulae in themselves must have been recited assiduously by the Prophet and many of his Companions, since they are prescribed either by the Qur’ān or in Traditions.

14. Muslim, *Dhikr*, 12; cf. Bukhārī, *Da‘wāt*, 2.

15. Enjoined in Q 33:56. Cf. also the following *aḥādīth*: ‘Of all men he hath most claim upon me on the Day of Resurrection who invoked most blessings upon me’ (Tirmidhī, *Witr*, 21); ‘An Angel came unto me and said: “God saith: None of thy people invoceth blessings upon thee but I invoke blessings upon him tenfold”’ (Dārimī, *Riqāq*, 58); cf. Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 12: 520 §1 7561.

16. This particular arrangement of the Qur’ānic phrases is taken from a *ḥadīth* which says of him who recites the formula two times: ‘None is better than this to bring before God except a man who reciteth it yet more often’ (Bukhārī, *Da‘wāt*, 66).

17. Q 33:21.

18. Muslim, *Īmān*, 16. Cf. also those *aḥādīth* which mention love of the Prophet together with love of God, as, for example: ‘He in whom are three things hath found thereby the sweetness of faith: he unto whom God and His Apostle are dearer than aught else besides, and who, loving another, loveth him only for the sake of God, and who hateth that he

that *Īmān* in its original sense far transcends the current conception of faith. Moreover, the Prophet's manner of expression, inasmuch as he speaks of 'the sweetness of faith' (*ḥalāwatu-l-īmān*) and uses elsewhere such phrases as 'he hath tasted the flavor of faith' (*dhāqa ta'ma-l-īmān*),¹⁹ shows that he is speaking of a degree of direct intellectual perception of Truth. Now in every act of perception the object perceived is reflected in the eye as in a mirror; and the gist of the above-quoted Traditions is that the imperfect self-centred soul is only capable, at the most, of vague and fragmentary reflection. The purpose of the reiterated invocation of blessings upon the Prophet is, to bring about a shifting of the center of one's consciousness from the limited ego to the universal soul²⁰ which he typifies. Only this soul, of which every part is, after its own fashion,²¹ a mirror for the Truth, can be the perfect organ of faith. Thus the second formula of this *wird* is a means of attaining to the highest degree of faith accessible to the created being as such; and the third formula stands for the Faith which God, the Supreme *Mu'min*, has in His Own Divinity—Faith to which the creature can only attain through utter extinction (*fanā'*).²²

should return unto disbelief after God hath saved him from it even as he hateth that he should be thrust into the fire' (Muslim, *Īmān*, 15; Bukhārī, *Īmān*, 13).

19. Muslim, *Īmān*.

20. It is only from this universal center of consciousness, from which oneself and one's neighbor are both viewed objectively, that it is possible to achieve the spiritual altruism that accords with the saying of Christ: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself', and with the *ḥadīth*: 'Not one of you believeth until he loveth for his brother what he loveth for himself' (Muslim, *Imān*, 17).

21. Faith is not only in the intelligence but also in the character; or, in other words, it may be said that the whole psychic substance of the spiritual man is permeated by his intelligence, so that he has faith not only through what he knows but also through what he is. Thus, for example, the virtue of mercy in the soul is as an eye which perceives the Mercy of God, whereas the virtue of patience perceives His Eternity, and the virtue of purity His Holiness.

22. The words addressed by Kharrāz (d. 286 AH) to the Prophet: 'Forgive me, but love of God hath made me forget love of thee', and similar utterances by Rābī'a and other Sufis—to which may be added the words spoken by Abu Bakr at the death of the Prophet—are not a denial of the necessity of loving the Prophet, nor a belittlement of the importance of invoking blessings upon him. They are an expression of *tawḥīd*, and mark, as it were, a passage from the second to the third formula of the *wird*, a passage, moreover, which everyone must make. It should be noted, nonetheless, that Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī, who went to greater lengths than Kharrāz in his expressions of *tawḥīd*, said from

One of the chief aids to concentration during the *dhikr* has always been solitude reinforced by fasting, that is, the already mentioned spiritual retreat (*i'tikāf* or *khalwa*). Another aid, the complement of this, is its opposite pole, namely the performance of the *dhikr* in the company of others, that is, in the 'session of remembrance' (*majlis al-dhikr*), which takes its name from such *aḥādīth* as: 'God—Blessed and Exalted is He—hath Angels, a glorious company of travelers, who seek out the sessions of remembrance, and when they find men assembled that they may remember God they stay with them and make a canopy of their wings one over another until they fill all the space that is between them and the lowest heaven.'²³

This summary account²⁴ of the chief spiritual practices of the Sufis may be taken as a commentary on the words of Junayd: 'All the mystic paths (*turuq*)

another point of view: 'If a single atom of the Prophet manifested itself to creation, naught that is beneath the Throne would endure it' (Kalabādhi, *Ta'arruf*, Ch. 24; in Arberry's translation, *The Doctrine of the Sūfīs* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977], p. 54). It is impossible not to be misled by the writings of the mystics if one is not prepared for this continual shifting from one point of view to another, each standpoint being adopted with that whole-heartedness of which the mystic alone is capable, and often being affirmed with the tone of the absolute, as if no other point of view were possible.

23. Muslim, *Dhikr*, 8. Cf. Bukhārī, *Da'wāt*, 68. While there have been no fundamental changes of spiritual practice, there have inevitably been certain developments as regards unessential features of the communal *dhikr*. An extreme example of such development is to be found in the ritual dance of the Mawlawi dervishes; but it must be remembered that the subjection of the body to a rhythmic motion is no more than an auxiliary; its purpose is simply to facilitate that which constitutes the *dhikr* in the fullest sense, namely the concentration of all the faculties of the soul upon the Divine Truth, represented by the Supreme Name or by the *Shahāda*, or some other formula which is uttered aloud or silently by the dancers. We do not know exactly what the Companions did in their 'circle of remembrance' (*ḥalaqatu-l-dhikr*) (see Muslim, *Dhikr*). There can be little doubt that their *majālis* were more informal and less organized than those of the subsequent mystics. Nonetheless, in virtue of the genius for rhythm which the Companions, inasmuch as they were Arabs, undoubtedly possessed, it is difficult to believe that they did not make some spontaneous rhythmic movements of the body while repeating the words of the *dhikr*.
24. Despite—or perhaps because of—its summary nature, it may claim to give a far sounder impression than do many other more detailed and encyclopaedic accounts, in which rare practices, even some which are condemned by the great majority of Sufis, are listed side by side and on an equal footing with practices of universal importance.

are utterly barred except to him who followeth in the steps of the Apostle', 'Our school (*madhhab*) is bound up with the principles of the Book and the Wont', and 'This our lore (*ilm*) is anointed with the sayings of God's Apostle.'²⁵

The Qur'ān was revealed as a means of grace for the whole Islamic community, not only for an elect, nor yet only the generality of Muslims. It has therefore, providentially, an aspect of unfathomable synthesis in virtue of which it is like a vast treasury, both as a whole and also in single verses (*āyāt*, miraculous signs) a treasury from which everyone is free to carry off as much as he has strength to bear. The entire path of the mystics lies virtually in the words, *Lead us along the straight path*,²⁶ and *Verily we are for God, and verily unto Him are we returning*,²⁷ and *Prostrate thyself and draw nigh*²⁸—words which are only limited in so far as the intelligence of him who recites them is limited. The same immense possibilities lie ready to be opened up by such words as *...that they may increase in faith upon faith*²⁹ and *God leadeth to His Light whom He will*.³⁰ Moreover, the single words *īmān* and *nūr* as also *yaqīn* (certainty), comprise a boundless range of spiritual vision, just as a boundless vista for the vision is comprised in the words *ākhirā* (the Hereafter) and *janna* (Paradise); and side by side with the Qur'ān, confirming and clarifying this vista, the Night Journey of the Prophet, which is for Islam the prototype of the mystic path, actualizes the whole hierarchy, from the state of earthly existence to the Divine Presence Itself.

In speaking to his closest followers, Christ said: 'It is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.'³¹ In speaking to the whole community of Muslims, the Qur'ān generalizes the same idea in the words: *We exalt in degree whom We will; and above each one that hath knowledge is one that knoweth more*,³² and just as Christ spoke to the multitude in parables, the Qur'ān presents great mysteries by means of aphorisms which

25. Qushayrī, *Risāla* (Cairo: Dār Jawāmi' al-Kilām, 1940), p. 20.

26. Q 1:6.

27. Q 2:156.

28. Q 96:19.

29. Q 98:47.

30. Q 24:35.

31. Matthew 13:11.

32. Q 12:76. 'Alī said: 'Relate traditions unto men according to their knowledge. Desire ye that they should belie God and His Apostle?' (Bukhārī, *Ilm*, 50); and Abū Hurayra said: 'I have treasured in my memory two stores of knowledge which I had from God's Apostle. One of them I have divulged, but if I divulged the other, my throat would be cut' (Ibid., 42).

are too elliptic to 'cause offence', but which have miraculously, at the same time, an overwhelming directness, as, for example, the already quoted words: *We are nearer to him than his jugular vein*, and also: *Wheresoe'er ye turn, there is the Face of God*,³³ and *There is no god but He: all things are perishable but His Face*.³⁴ There is no question here of any divergence of interpretation; the difference between exoterism and esoterism³⁵ as regards such statements as these is in depth and fullness of interpretation, as between one who takes them 'as a manner of speaking', allowing them to pass over his head, and one who takes them with all seriousness, meditating deeply upon them, and following them up to their imperative conclusions. Such also is the difference between exoterism and esoterism as regards the capacity to take in the significance of the Divine Names. The same applies to many Traditions, such as the *ḥadīth qudsi*: 'My slave seeketh unremittingly to draw nigh unto Me with devotions of his free will (*nawāfil*) until I love him; and when I love him, I am the Hearing wherewith he heareth, and the Sight wherewith he seeth, and the Hand wherewith he smiteth, and the Foot whereon he Walketh.'³⁶

Over and against the opinion of most Orientalists, according to whom the great spiritual lights of Islam scarcely begin to appear before the third

33. Q 2:115.

34. Q 27:88.

35. Generally speaking, the Qurʾān represents the faithful as one long-drawn-out hierarchy consisting of innumerable degrees, but on occasion these degrees are resolved into two groups, the higher of which may clearly be termed esoteric in relation to the lower. We have seen that the Sūrat al-Muzammil (Q 73:20) makes a distinction between the generality of believers and a small nucleus which followed the practices of the Prophet with special fidelity, *ṭāʾifatun mina-lladhīna maʿak* (a group of those that are with thee). In the Sūrat al-Wāqīʿa (Q 56:8-10), the higher and the lower group of the faithful are named respectively *as-sābiqūn* (the foremost, who are further described as *al-muqarrabūn*, those brought near to God), and *aṣḥābu-l-yamīn* (those of the right), the rest of mankind being accounted for in a third group, *aṣḥābu-l-shimāl* (those of the left, the damned). The Sūrat al-Muṭaffifīn (Q 83:7, 18, 21) makes an analogous threefold division: *al-muqarrabūn*, *al-abrār* (the righteous), and *al-fujjār* (the iniquitous). Similarly the Sūrat al-Insān (Q 76: 4-6) makes a distinction between *ʿibādu-llāh* (the slaves of God), *al-abrār*, and *al-kāfirūn* (the infidels). Sacred texts, however, cannot be subjected to any system, and it would be wrong to consider these three threefold divisions of mankind as corresponding to each other exactly. For a fuller consideration of the terms in question see Chapter 18 of my *Book of Certainty* (London: Islamic Texts Society; Reissue edition, 1996).

36. Bukhārī, *Riḳāq*, 37.

generation,³⁷ there stands the opinion of Muslims in general and of the Sufis in particular that starting from the spiritual summit represented by the Prophet and his Companions there could be no question of further advancement but only of falling away, and that although there have been many holy men and women scattered throughout the later generations, sanctity has never been so general in Islam as it was at the beginning. Thus Ibn Khaldūn says, in speaking of the mystic path:

Our great ancestors, that is, the Companions and the Successors and the generation which followed them, ever held this path to be the path of truth and right guidance. It is based on unfailing perseverance in worship, utter devotion to All-Highest God, turning away from the adornments of this world, renunciation of what most men seek after in the way of pleasure and dignity, and isolating oneself from all mankind in spiritual retreat (*khalwa*) for the sake of worship. Now these were the general practices of the Companions and the Muslims of old (*al-salaf*). Then in the second generation and afterwards, when worldliness spread and men tended to become more and more bound up with the ties of this life, those who dedicated themselves to the worship of God were distinguished from the rest by the title *al-Ṣūfiyya* (Sufis) and *al-Mutaṣawwifa* (those who aspire to be Sufis).³⁸

This passage is well known to Western scholars, and one might have expected them to pay more heed to it. Still more, one might expect them to be guided, in what concerns Islamic mysticism, by those whom they all admit to be its masters. Yet the ‘official’ Orientalist thesis³⁹ runs directly counter to

37. Even Massignon, in speaking of the second generation (*al-Tābiʿīn*), says: ‘The asceticism of this period is still very simple; the interiorization of the cult is still rudimentary; at the most one finds evidence of abstinences, spiritual retreats and supererogatory prayers’ (*Essai*, p. 165). This brings us to the very heart of the divergence in question: for the *Mutaṣawwif* the words ‘at the most...spiritual retreats’ amount to a contradiction in terms, since he knows that the *khalwa* or *iʿtikāf* is of infinite possibility.

38. Abū Zayd ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddima*, ed. Khalīl Shaḥāda (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1408/1988), chapter 17, *fī ʿilm al-taṣawwuf*.

39. The accumulated bias of four centuries of humanism, aggravated by one of evolutionism, coupled with the fact that from the third generation of Islam onwards there is a gradual increase of outspokenness on the part of the mystics, makes it difficult for most western scholars not to see in this crescendo a kind of progress, despite what they may know, in theory, of the ‘goldenness’ of silence, and despite the opinions of the Sufis themselves.

the convictions of Muḥāsibī, for example, Ṭustarī, Junayd, Ḥallāj,⁴⁰ Sarrāj, Makkī, Kalābādhī, Qushayrī, Hujwīrī, Ghazālī, Ibn al-ʿArabī, not to speak of those who came before and after them. Not only are the heads of the Sufis bowed before the Prophet, but also they are reverently devoted to the first four Caliphs and the other great Companions,⁴¹ upon whom they daily invoke a multitude of blessings, tracing back through them to the Prophet their mystic lineage,⁴² and looking back to them as to patterns of spiritual perfection and

40. ‘The lights of all prophethood shone forth from his [Muḥammad’s] light...

His existence was before the nothingness (which preceded creation); his name was before the Pen. All sciences are as a drop from his sea and all wisdoms as a sip from his river, and all time is but as an hour of his enduring. In him is Reality (*al-ḥaqq*) and in him is Truth (*al-ḥaqīqa*). He is the first in Union and the last in Prophethood; the inward in Truth and the outward in Knowledge’ (Ḥallāj, *Ṭā-Sīm al-Sirāj*).

41. Especially to the six who, together with the first four Caliphs, make up *al-ʿashara al-mubashshara*, the ten who were given the good news of Paradise by the Prophet in their lifetime. Ṭustarī maintained that love of the Companions was a legal obligation. The words of Junayd: ‘The noblest utterance upon *Tawḥīd* is the saying of Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq: “Glory be to Him who hath made for His creatures no means of attaining unto Knowledge of Him save through their impotence to attain (in themselves) unto that Knowledge”’ is quoted by Sarrāj, Qushayrī, and Hujwīrī. The fact that Ibn al-ʿArabī finds fault with this particular formulation (*Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, ch. II) does not alter his general attitude. Moreover, in a Qur’ānic commentary attributed to him (Bulaq, 1283), which, if not directly his, is none the less the work of his followers, the affirmation that of the saints of the highest category (*as-sābiqūn*) there are *many among the earlier generations and few among the later generations* (Q 56:13-14) is glossed: ‘Many among the earliest members of this community, that is, those who saw the Prophet and were born in time to benefit from the spiritual vigor of the Revelation during his life, and those of the second generation who were born shortly after his death and who saw his Companions, whereas the later generations are those between whom and the Revelation “much time had elapsed so that their hearts were hardened”’.

42. In his *Essai*, Massignon points out ‘defects’ in some of the usually accepted chains of spiritual descent from the Prophet; nonetheless, this book serves above all to affirm the unbroken continuity of Islamic mysticism by showing that in every generation there were spiritual masters, each with a group of disciples. It also serves, incidentally, to furnish complete historical ‘chains’ for the first three centuries of Islam, as, for example: al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī > Thābit al-Bunūnī > Bakr ibn Khunays > Maʿrūf al-Karkhī > Sari al-Saqāṭī > Junayd. These last three links are in the chain most often given by the Sufis

to their times as to the Golden Age of Islamic mysticism.

When the Jews criticized Christ's disciples for not fasting, he replied: 'Can the children of the bride-chamber fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast. But the days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days.'⁴³ These words express the universal truth that during a period of Divine intervention spiritual conditions upon earth are quite abnormal as compared with the general conditions of the times which immediately precede and follow that intervention. It is true that the special conditions which marked the presence of Christ on earth differed in secondary details⁴⁴ from those which marked the twenty-two years of the Prophet's mission. But in their fundamental privileges both periods were alike. *It is not God's wont that He should send a folk astray after He hath guided them until He hath made clear unto them that against which they should be upon their guard.*⁴⁵ Until a new religion is firmly established, the people for whom it has been revealed are safeguarded against serious error. It is true that there is spiritual guidance at all times for those who seek it; but at a time of Prophetic mission guidance is thrust upon many who do not seek it,⁴⁶ whereas for those who do seek it there is guidance upon guidance. Now certain factors such as asceticism (*zuhd*) and reliance upon God (*tawakkul*) enter into every mystic path. But although a change of spiritual conditions will not eliminate one of these constants, it may bring about a change of predominance from one to the other. It is clear that

themselves. No less historical are the opening links, 'Alī (d. 40) > al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110) > Ḥabīb al-'Ajāmī (d. 156) > Dā'ūd al-Ṭā'ī (d. 165) > Ma'rūf etc. The criticisms to which these links have been subjected by Dhahabī and others are purely conjectural. Moreover, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (*Ithāf al-firqa fi rafw al-khirqā* in *al-Hāwī li 'l-fatāwā*, II, p. 102) has most convincingly shown that Ḥasan al-Baṣrī had ample opportunity of receiving spiritual instruction from 'Alī. Massignon maintains (p. 179), contrary to the generally accepted opinion, that Ḥasan al-Baṣrī was not the direct disciple of 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (at whose death he was barely 20) but of 'Imrān ibn Ḥusayn al-Khuzā'ī (d. 52). However that may be, al-Ḥasan could have met seventy of the men of Badr; and though he never saw 'the two lords of the elders of the people of Paradise', he was for many years the contemporary of 'the two lords of the youth of the people of Paradise'.

43. Mark II:19; cf. Matthew IX:15; Luke V:34.

44. To take the nearest example, they differed as regards fasting.

45. Q 9:115.

46. The abnormal strength of the pull of truth at such a time measures out the full extent of the perversity of those who resist it. Hence the extreme guilt of such persons as Abū Lahab and Abū Jahl.

at a time of guidance upon guidance, a time of acute consciousness that *there is no living creature but He graspeth it by its forelock*,⁴⁷ the virtue of *tawakkul* will be in such evidence⁴⁸ as to impose itself upon *zuhd*, which will thus tend to take the form not so much of deliberately regular ascetic practices as of reliance upon God to indicate, through the course of events and through other signs, what sacrifices He demands.⁴⁹ The life of one who takes part in the founding of a new religion is, in the very nature of things, a tissue of renunciations.

The aspect of the mystic path which concerns individual effort is summed

47. Q 11:36.

48. The Companions of Christ, who did not deliberately fast, were told, on being sent out to preach, ‘Take nothing for your journey, neither staves, nor scrip, neither bread nor money; neither have two coats apiece’ (Luke ix:3); and the same virtue of *tawakkul*, in a more Islamic mode, was demanded again and again of the Companions of the Prophet.

49. This must not be taken to imply that there was no regular asceticism among the Companions apart from the fulfilment of the obligations of the *Sharī‘a*. But they were clearly less free to plan their lives in advance than were other generations. Also it was required of them that they should partake to a certain extent in the function of the Prophet. Since their actions were precedents, they were not free to go beyond certain bounds, just as they were not free to affirm openly anything which, according to the limited intelligence of some believers, would be misunderstood and might cause a deviation. It would be wrong to say, however, that whereas the later saints of Islam unfurled the standard of their sanctity the first saints were unable to do so. The standard of sanctity is always unfurled, but it may take many different forms. The first four Caliphs, for example, have left upon history the indelible impression of men who, while fulfilling the worldly obligations imposed on them by Providence, had realized the Prophet’s own extreme objectivity and detachment as expressed in his saying, ‘What have I to do with this world? Verily I and this world are as a rider and a tree beneath which he taketh shelter. Then he goeth his way and leaveth it behind him’ (Ibn Mājah, *Zuhd*, 3). The impression of men who succeeded pre-eminently in fulfilling his injunction, ‘Be in this world as a stranger or a passer-by’ (Bukhārī, *Riḳāq*, 3); ‘pre-eminently’, because, although it is difficult to generalize, have we not also, from that generation, an unmistakable impression of psychic compactness, of close-knit integration of the soul’s elements? This does not mean that some of the later Sufis did not achieve a full-souled sincerity equal to that of the greatest of the Companions, but it may well be that, living in a far more disintegrated age, they had a greater struggle to bring in the ‘lost sheep’ of the soul—*wa ‘Ilāhu a‘lam*.

up in the already quoted *ḥadīth qudsī*: ‘My slave seeketh unremittingly to draw nigh unto Me with devotions of his free will until I love him.’ Mysticism is in fact nothing other than the art of pleasing God,⁵⁰ since to succeed in this means an unveiling of the mystery of nearness.

To earn the right to say, as did the Companions of Christ and of the Prophet, ‘We are the helpers of God’ (*nahmu anṣāruʾllāh*)⁵¹ clearly means pleasing God in an exceptionally high degree.

The Sufis of the second and third centuries knew that the Companions of the Prophet had gone forward upon the crest of a great spiritual wave and that they themselves were in the backwash of that wave, at a time of general disintegration, of cosmic reaction against ‘guidance upon guidance’, when the normal conditions of the age had resumed their course quite literally ‘with a vengeance’. Struggling against this current, weighed down by the rest of the community, they went to lengths of asceticism hitherto unknown in Islam.⁵² Yet they none the less envied the owners of such *nawāfil* as the initial migration from Makka and fighting at the Battle of Badr. The following *ḥadīth* is often quoted in their treatises: ‘How knowest thou that God hath not looked upon the men of Badr and said: “Do what ye will, for I have forgiven you”?’⁵³

Laylatu-l-Qadr is better than a thousand months, inasmuch as the Angels and the Spirit descend therein,⁵⁴ and the superiority of that night may be extended, in a certain measure, to the whole period of the Qurʾān’s revelation⁵⁵ and,

50. This is, considering all its implications, a full definition of what Sufis—but not always Orientalists—mean by *taṣawwuf*.

51. Q 3:52; 61:14.

52. It must be remembered that even those of them who had come to the end of the mystic path could not share the universal Prophetic responsibility in the way that the Companions had done, for the principles of Islam were already firmly established and the precedents set. Nonetheless, apart from their immediate responsibility to their disciples, they were not without their function as regards the community as a whole. Yaḥyā b. Maʿādh said, ‘The hunger of the penitents is an essay, the hunger of the ascetics is policy and the hunger of the saints (*al-ṣiddīqīn*) is bounty’ (Qushayrī, *Risāla*, p. 17). The extreme asceticism of many of the later great Sufis in Islam was a bountiful affirmation—much needed at a time of spiritual shortcoming—of the transcendence of the next world over this.

53. Muslim, *Faḍāʾil al-Ṣaḥāba*, 36.

54. Q 97:3-4.

55. Umm Ayman was seen in tears and was asked if she was weeping for the death of the Prophet. She replied: ‘Not for him do I weep. Know I not that he hath gone to that which is better for him than this world? But I

analogously, to the whole period of any other Prophetic mission. In such times it is 'natural' that the boundaries between Heaven and earth should be much less rigorously defined and that the earth should lie more open to the descent of spiritual influence,⁵⁶ which means, inversely, that Heaven is more open to human aspiration, the two great outward signs⁵⁷ of this mutual receptivity being, as far as Islam is concerned, the descent of the Qur'ān and the Night Journey. The Companions of the Prophet—and the same must apply to the Companions of other Prophets—lived in an atmosphere that was vibrant with spirituality, an atmosphere of 'sober intoxication', in virtue of which mysticism was too much of a norm to have a special name. Huǵwīrī quotes

weep for the tidings of heaven (*akhbār al-samā'*) that have been cut off from us' (Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt* IV:127). These words clearly refer not only to the Qur'ān itself but also to the pageant of tidings that came to the Companions through the *aḥādīth*, general tidings as in the Prophet's descriptions of Paradise, to which a whole book is devoted in most of the canonical collections, and particular ones as in such sayings as 'For three doth Paradise long, for 'Alī, 'Ammār, and Salmān' (Tirmidhī, *Manāqib*, 33), and 'Shall I not be abashed before a man [Uthmān] at whose purity the Angels themselves are abashed?' (Muslim, *Faḍā'il al-Ṣaḥāba*, 26), and in his answers to questions as in the following: "The mother of Ḥāritha ibn Surāqa came unto the Prophet and said, "O Prophet of God, wilt thou not tell me of Ḥāritha"—now Ḥāritha had been slain on the day of Badr, smitten by an arrow that came none knew from whence—"so that if he is in Paradise I may bear my loss with patience, and if not, I may do penance for him by weeping." The Prophet said: "O Mother of Ḥāritha, in Paradise are many gardens, and verily thy son hath gained the all-highest: *al-Firdaws*"" (Bukhārī, *Jihād*, 14).

56. One might almost say that there is a certain normality in, for example, the cry of Anas ibn al-Naḍr as he advanced to his death at the Battle of Uḥud: 'Paradise! By the Lord of Naḍr, I scented the perfume of Paradise coming from the other side of Uḥud' (Ibid., 12).
57. There was also a profusion of other lesser signs, for it is a 'scientific' necessity that during the mission of a Prophet the nearness of Heaven should cause the natural laws that govern the state of earthly existence to be continually eclipsed; and the canonical books of *aḥādīth* do in fact record a continual flow of wonders, great and small. A curious reason sometimes given by Western scholars—and westernized Orientals—for sweeping aside all those miracles accepted by Bukhārī, Muslim, and others is that the Prophet himself disclaimed—so they say—any supernatural powers. It is true that the Qur'ān bids him tell the Quraysh that he cannot perform the particular wonders they demanded of him. But it is totally untrue, for obvious reasons, that he ever denied the power of God to work a miracle at his hands.

Abū al-Fushanjī (d. 348) as having said: ‘Today *taṣawwuf* is a name without a reality but formerly it was a reality without a name,’ and Hujwīrī himself adds, ‘In the times of the Companions and their successors—may God have mercy on them!—this name did not exist but the reality thereof was in every one.’⁵⁸

Dhūn-Nūn al-Miṣrī said: ‘The repentance of the generality is from sins, whereas the repentance of the elect (*al-khawāṣṣ*) is from heedlessness (*ghafla*).⁵⁹ Spiritual vigilance, the opposite of *ghafla*, was forced on the Companions both by the hopeful and dreadful expectancy of further Revelation and by the sense of being doubly scrutinized, not only inasmuch as no detail escapes the Divine Omniscience, but also in that a special intervention was being made on their behalf,⁶⁰ as was demonstrated to them again and again by verses which bore directly upon their lives, both public and private, as well as by the march of events. Also, apart from such particular verses, considering the Qurʾān as a whole, it must be remembered that no less a thing than the very establishment of Islam depended upon the force of the impact of the Revelation upon those who received it. Therefore it may be concluded that the Revelation took that particular form which, of all others, was most calculated to move that particular generation of Arabs;⁶¹ and since no two generations are exactly alike, it may be said—generally speaking—that no later generation has quite equaled the Companions as regards perfect receptivity to the Qurʾān. Without too much insisting on this last point, we should none the less remember that no later Muslim souls have been subjected to hearing the newly revealed verses from the mouth of the Prophet himself, or from one who had just heard them from the Prophet. It is understandable that many of the Companions would continually throw themselves down upon their faces, weeping; it is also understandable that such a generation did not need an amply formulated doctrine of *fanāʾ* (extinction).

Besides the Revelation and other supernatural signs, there is the miracle

58. Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, Nicholson’s translation (NY: Pir Press, 1999), p. 44.

59. Qushayrī, *Risāla*, p. 9.

60. The Prophet was told, *Verily thou art beneath Our Eyes* (Q 52:48), just as Noah had been told to build the ark *beneath Our Eyes* (Q 11:37). The virtue of *ihsān* as defined in the *ḥadīth Jibrīl*: ‘Worship thy Lord as if thou sawest Him; for if thou seest Him not, verily He seeth thee’ (Muslim, *Īmān*, 1), has always been the very compass of Sufi orientation, and it is clear that conditions can never be so generally favorable for realizing that virtue as at a time when everything conspires to proclaim the truth ‘Verily He seeth thee’.

61. Or that Providence caused to be born into the world at that time and place a nucleus of men preeminently fitted to receive the Qurʾān.

of nature itself to be considered. This is shared alike by the mystics of all religions, and has always been one of their most trusted stepping-stone to spiritual vision.⁶² But there is one 'sign' of nature, the highest of all, which is witnessed only by those who are privileged to live at one of the great cyclic moments of history. Apart from the function of a Prophet as transmitter of Revelation, and as an immediate oracle for the solution of every spiritual problem, it can be no light thing to stand in the presence of one who has been providentially endowed with all-surpassing beauty and majesty of soul and body that he may be the magnetic center of a new religion, the presence of one who is *ʿalā khuluqin ʿazīm...*⁶³

In short the life of the Companions was a series of spiritual impacts for which there is no counterpart in later years, and to which the nearest equivalent *in effect* is to be found in the regular disciplines comprised within the meaning of the term *Taṣawwuf*.

62. Passionate love of nature was one of the great qualities of the pre-Islamic Arabs, and it would seem that the immediate purpose of some of the most overwhelming passages of the Qurʾān, specifically and searchingly addressed in many cases to those endowed with intellectual intuition (*ūlu ʾl-abṣār*, *ūlu ʾl-albāb*, and the like) was to bring to perfection, in the best of those Arabs, the rare qualifications which they already virtually possessed for reading the book of nature, or in other words, it was to enable their passion to burn up with the flame of spiritual recognition of the mysteries which lay behind *the signs on the horizons*.

63. Qurʾān 68:4.

THE RESTORATION OF WEALTH:
INTRODUCING IBN ABĪ AL-DUNYĀ'S *IṢLĀḤ AL-MĀL*.

Adi Setia

Ibn Abī al-Dunyā's work, *Iṣlāḥ al-Māl* (Restoration of Wealth), provides a wealth of insight into various attitudes towards wealth and property prevalent among Muslims in the first few centuries of the establishment of Islam as a world religion and civilization. This article introduces the recently published English translation of the work and maps out the general contours of those attitudes.

Keywords: Ibn Abī al-Dunyā; *hifẓ al-māl*; wealth, poverty.

Muslims generally know (or should know) that the preservation of wealth (*hifẓ al-māl*) is among the injunctions of the religion of Islam, and one of the five *maqāṣid* or over-riding objectives of the Revealed Law (*al-sharī'ah*).¹ But have they given due thought to questions such as: What is the definition of wealth? How is it defined the way it has been defined by the *fuqahā'* and '*ulamā'*', and why? How do we actually go about implementing the principle of wealth preservation in all our social and commercial activities and transactions in today's world? What is the whole purpose of this preservation anyway? These are some of the key questions that should spring to mind in any serious understanding of the concept of wealth in Islam.

The word *ghinā'* in Arabic means both wealth and independence, just as, in contrast, the word *faqr* means both poverty and dependence. In Islam, wealth (as both *ghinā'* and *māl*) is seen as an aspect of well-being (*ʿāfiyah*), but

1. See, for instance, Wahbah al-Zuhaylī, *Usūl al-Īmān wa al-Islām* (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 2009), 2:720-722; trans., Nicholas Mahdi Lock, "The 41st Foundation from the Foundations of Faith: Thrift in Expenditure and the Prohibition of Consuming Wealth by False Means," as Appendix II in Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *The Restoration of Wealth: Iṣlāḥ al-Māl*, trans., Nicholas Mahdi Lock and Adi Setia (Kuala Lumpur: IBFIM, 2015).

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only if it is earned licitly and expended judiciously to provide for the needs of oneself and his or her family, so that they remain independent of people, avoid beggary and thereby preserve their dignity, self-worth and self-respect. This financial independence will in turn provide them with the peace of mind and emotional tranquility required for nurturing their inner spiritual growth and purification.² Moreover, the rich are encouraged to reinvest their surplus wealth into uplifting the socio-economic situation of the poor and needy in their communities. This reinvestment of surplus wealth into promoting the common good (*maṣlahah ʿammah*) is achieved through various means, such as charity (*ṣadāqah* and *zakāt*), endowments (*awqāf*), gift-giving (*hibah*), and bequests (*wasīyyah*). It can also be achieved even more effectively through various forms of direct people-to-people (P2P) funding and investment based on venture capital (*mudārabah*), business partnership (*mushārahah*), contract production (*salam, istiṣnāʿ*), including the goodly loan (*qard ḥasan*).³

Such direct community investment into substantively serving the real productive economy through various instruments and contractual forms of risk-sharing and equity-financing will facilitate a balanced circulation and recirculation of surplus wealth through all strata of society, so that all can live a dignified, productive life of independence, self-reliance and self-respect, thus pre-empting wealth from being something that only circulates amongst the affluent in society—so that it won't circulate merely among the rich in your midst.⁴ In this regard, Ibn Abī al-Dunyā's work, *Iṣlāḥ al-Māl* (*Restoration of Wealth*), provides an authentic primary resource for Muslims to derive theories and strategies for their contribution towards the current vibrant discourse on realising an economy of true wealth, wellbeing and plenitude for all. As Mufti Musa Furber puts it, “*The Restoration of Wealth* thus provides the raw material and foundation for a theory of Islamic finance and economics.”⁵

Who is Imām Ibn Abī al-Dunyā?⁶

2. See, for instance, the section on “Life, Work, and Wealth” in Nuh Ha Mim Keller, *Sea Without Shore: A Manual of the Sufi Path* (Amman: Sunna Books, 2011), 202-217.
3. See the section on “Trade,” in Nuh Ha Mim Keller, *Reliance of the Traveller: A Classic Manual of Islamic Sacred Law*, new ed. (Beltsville, Maryland: Amana Publications, 1997), 371-459.
4. Qurʾān, *al-Ḥashr*, 59:7.
5. His foreword to *The Restoration of Wealth: Iṣlāḥ al-Māl*, trans., Nicholas Mahdi Lock and Adi Setia (Kuala Lumpur: IBFIM, 2016, forthcoming).
6. This section is largely based on Muṣṭafā Mufliḥ al-Qudāh's long introduction to his meticulous edition of *Iṣlāḥ al-Māl* (Manṣūrah: Dār

He is the Imām, ‘Abdullāh ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Ubayd ibn Sufyān ibn Qays Abū Bakr al-Qurashī al-Umawī al-Baghdādī, well known as Ibn Abī al-Dunyā. He was born in Baghdad in the year 208/823 during the reign of Caliph al-Ma’mūn (d. 281/894). Baghdad at that time was the most affluent and prosperous metropolis of Islam and the seat of the Caliphate, as well as the center of Islamic learning, and thus he grew up in an ambience that was both rich in intellectual and economic enterprise. From an early age he learnt the Qur’ān, ḥadīth, *fiqh* (jurisprudence) and Arabic linguistic sciences, benefitting from the many and diverse circles of scholarship in the mosques of Baghdad.⁷

His high standing as a scholar is attested by his intellectual output of an estimated two hundred and twenty eight books and the positive testimonies of many notable scholars such as Ibn al-Jawzī (508-597/1115-1201),⁸ Ibn Bāṭīsh (574-655/1179-1257),⁹ Ibn Shākīr al-Kutubī (686-764/1287-1363),¹⁰ Ibn Abī Ḥātim (240-327/854-938)¹¹ and Ibn Kathīr (701-774/1300-1373).¹² Ibn Nadīm (d. ca. 330/990)¹³ says of him that he was a conscientious man (*raḥūl wari’*). Likewise, Ibn Kathīr, who says, “He is a conserver and compiler in every discipline, well-known for his many beneficial works....” As for Ibn Taghrī Bardī (813-874/1411-1470),¹⁴ he says, “People after him are his dependents with

al-Wafā’, 1990), 15-136 passim, where he gives the various standard classical sources for his information.

7. al-Quḍāh, 20.
8. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Abū al-Faraj ibn al-Jawzī, a renowned Ash‘arī Ḥanbalī scholar; see his detailed biography in Merlin Swartz, *A Medieval Critique of Anthropomorphism: Ibn al-Jawzi’s Kitāb Akhbār al-Ṣifāt* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 3-32.
9. Abū Majd Ismā‘īl ibn Ḥibat Allāh al-Mawṣilī al-Shāfi‘ī, author of, among others, *Al-Tamyīz wa al-Faṣl* and *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi‘iyyah*.
10. Muḥammad Ibn Shākīr al-Kutubī, author of *‘Uyūn al-tawārīkh* and *Fawāt al-wafayāt*.
11. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī, a famous ḥadīth master; for a sketch of his life and works, see Erik Dickinson, *The Development of Early Sunnite Ḥadīth Criticism: The Taqdimā of Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 11-40; see also Rif‘at Fawzī ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, *Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī wa Atharuhu fī ‘Ulūm al-Ḥadīth* (Maktabat al-Khanjī, 1994).
12. Abū l-Fidā’ Ismā‘īl ibn ‘Umar ibn Kathīr, famous tafsīr expert and historian.
13. Abū al-Faraj Muḥammad bin Ishāq al-Nadīm al-Warrāq, famous author of *Kitāb al-Fihrist*.
14. Jamāl al-Dīn Abū al-Maḥāsīn Yūsuf ibn Taghrī Bardī, a noted historian and biographer.

regard to the disciplines he has compiled.”¹⁵

He studied with many teachers; al-Dhahabī (673-748/1274-1348)¹⁶ enumerated ninety-four, which was by no means exhaustive. The teachers from whom he narrated directly in his *Iṣlāḥ al-Māl* numbered up to a hundred and eighty.¹⁷ Among his major teachers were Abū ‘Ubayd al-Qāsim ibn Sallām¹⁸ (d. 224); Khalaf ibn Hishām ibn Tha‘lab al-Bazzār¹⁹ (d. 229); ‘Alī ibn al-Ja‘d ibn ‘Ubayd al-Jawharī²⁰ (d. 230); Zuhayr ibn Ḥarb ibn Shaddād Abū Khaythamah²¹ (d. 234); Muḥammad al-Ḥusayn ibn Abī Shaykh al-Burjulān²² (d. 238); Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal²³ (d. 241); Aḥmad ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Kathīr al-Dawraqī²⁴ (d. 236); Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Zuhayr al-Bazzār²⁵ (d. 255).²⁶

As an accomplished scholar, he, in his turn had many students, some of the more well-known of whom include Muḥammad ibn Khalaf ibn al-Marzabān ibn Bassām²⁷ (d. 309); Muḥammad ibn Ishāq ibn Khuzaymah al-Nisābūrī²⁸ (d. 311); ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Rāzī²⁹ (d. 328); and Aḥmad

15. al-Quḍāh, 21-22.

16. Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn ‘Uthmān ibn Qaymaz ibn ‘Abd Allāh Shams al-Dīn Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Dhahabī al-Shāfi‘ī, famous ḥadīth master and historian.

17. A list of them is given in al-Quḍāh, 452-457.

18. Author of the famed *Kitāb al-Amwāl* (The Book of Revenues) on the administration of public revenues.

19. One of the ten imams of Qur’ānic recitation (*al-qurrā’ al-‘asharah*).

20. One of the chief ḥadīth scholars of Iraq.

21. A major ḥadīth authority from whom Muslim narrated more than a thousand ḥadīth in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*.

22. A major authority on ḥadīths pertaining to the subject of *zuhd* (abstinence).

23. Well known as the eponymous founder of the Ḥanbalī school of jurisprudence.

24. An authority for Muslim, Abū Dawūd, al-Tirmidhī, Ibn Mājah and al-Bughawī.

25. Known as Sā‘iqah, an authority in ḥadīth.

26. al-Quḍāh, 23-30.

27. A close companion of Ibn Abī al-Dunyā.

28. Prolific author and an authority for al-Bukhārī and Muslim;

29. Well known as Ibn Abī Ḥātim, an expert on the science of ḥadīth authorities (*al-rijāl*), and author of *Kitāb al-Jarḥ wa al-Ta’dil*.

ibn Marwān al-Dīnūrī al-Mālikī³⁰ (d. 333); and Qāsim ibn Aṣḥab al-Qurṭubī³¹ (d. 340).³²

Ibn Abī al-Dunyā wrote many works in the various Islamic sciences, with a marked predilection for ethico-spiritual themes such as the religious virtues (*al-faḍā'il*), detachment from worldly concerns (*zuhd*), and ethical comportment (*adab*).³³ He also wrote on the science of Qur'ānic recitation (*al-qirā'āt*), ḥadīth, *fiqh* and creed (*al-'aqā'id*). Some biographers have estimated his scholarly output to be in excess of a hundred works. Al-Dhahabī himself has enumerated some one hundred and sixty four works.

Al-Quḍāh, in his exemplary edition of *Iṣlāḥ al-Māl*, provided a list of the titles of two hundred and twenty eight works attributed to Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, including *al-Aḥādīth al-Arba'in* (Forty Ḥadīths), *al-Adab* (Ethics), *al-Amr bi al-Ma'rūf wa al-Nahy 'an al-Munkar* (Enjoining the Good and Forbidding the Wrong), *al-Amwāl* (On Wealth), *al-Ayyām wa al-Layālī* (Days and Nights), *al-Taqwā* (Piety), *al-Bukā'* (Weeping), *al-Tawakkul* (Reliance on Allāh), *al-Tawbah* (Repentance), *al-Khayr* (Goodness), *al-Zuhd* (Detachment), *Dhamm al-Ribā* (Castigation of Usury), *al-Sahāb wa al-Ra'd wa al-Barq* (On Cloud, Thunder and Lightning), *al-Ṣabr* (Patience), *al-Ṣumt wa Ādāb al-Lisān* (Silence and the Comportment of the Tongue), *al-Ṣalāt 'alā al-Nabī, ṣallallāhu 'alayhi wassalam* (Invoking Blessings on the Prophet, Allāh's blessing and peace be on him), and *al-Marwt* (On Death).³⁴

Most of the biographers concur that he passed away in the month of *Jamādī al-Ūlā* in the year two hundred and eighty one (281) of the Hijrah,³⁵ which corresponds to the year eight hundred and ninety four (894) of the Common Era.

The Significance of *Iṣlāḥ al-Māl* (The Restoration of Wealth)

The book, *Iṣlāḥ al-Māl*, is mentioned in many of the biographical and related sources as among the many works of Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, while the title "*Iṣlāḥ al-Māl*" is mentioned at the end of the unique manuscript³⁶ itself. This consideration has lead the editor, Muṣṭafā Muḥliḥ al-Quḍāh, to conclude

30. A long time *qāḍī* (judge) of the city of Aswān in Egypt.

31. The ḥadīth authority of Andalusia.

32. al-Quḍāh, 31-34.

33. al-Quḍāh, 53-55.

34. al-Quḍāh, 35-52 passim.

35. al-Quḍāh, 57.

36. al-Quḍāh, 125-132.

unequivocally that the work can be safely attributed to Ibn Abī a-Dunyā.³⁷

The *Iṣlāḥ al-Māl* can be situated in the general context of the rise of the systematic articulation of *taṣawwuf* or ṣūfism as a science, or as a genre of intellectual discourse directed towards inner or spiritual transformation distinct from the hitherto more established sciences like ḥadīth, *‘aqā‘id* (creed) and *fiqh* (jurisprudence). We may roughly say that this genre as a systematic discourse has its beginnings in al-Shaybānī’s (132–189/729–804) *Kitāb al-Kasb* (Book of Earning a Livelihood),³⁸ which as he says, was actually or essentially about *zuhd* (detachment from the world).³⁹ This brings us to another observation, which is, that many of the early systematic treatises on cultivating the inner virtues of the heart were embedded in the immediate context of the everyday challenges of earning a living (*kasb*) or the economic life in general, and thereby of ascertaining and correcting one’s proper attitude towards both the attraction of property and the privation of poverty.⁴⁰

This early period (roughly from ca 150/770 to ca 235/850) also coincided with the height of ‘Abbāsīd power, opulence and prestige and the worldly riches all that brought to the caliphial capital, Baghdad, which so happens to be also the main intellectual center from which this systematic *taṣawwuf* arose.⁴¹ As al-Quḍāh puts it:

The scholars disseminated their sciences in the midst of the masses who were captivated by the embellishments of the world which enveloped them totally, and so they endeavoured in exhorting their people to avoid being deluded by these

37. al-Quḍāh, 61-62.

38. Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Shaybānī, *Kitāb al-Kasb*, ed. ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghuddah (Aleppo: Maktab al-Maṭbū‘at al-Islāmiyyah, 1417H), trans. Adi Setia as *The Book of Earning a Livelihood* (Kuala Lumpur: IBFIM, 2012); see also Adi Setia, “Imām Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥasan al-Shaybānī on Earning a Livelihood: Seven Excerpts from his *Kitāb al-Kasb*,” in *Islam & Science* 10, no. 2 (Winter 2012), 99-116.

39. Trans. Adi Setia, *The Book of Earning a Livelihood* (Kuala Lumpur: IBFIM, 2011), xxi.

40. A discussion on the rise of early sufism is Harith Ramli, “The Rise of Early Sufism: A Survey of Recent Scholarship on Its Social Dimensions,” in *History Compass*, 8/11 (2010), 1299-1315.

41. Al-Quḍāh, 53-55. For an overview of the era, see Hugh Kennedy, *When Baghdad Ruled the Muslim World: The Rise and Fall of Islam’s Greatest Dynasty* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2006); and of course the section on the ‘Abbāsīds in Al-Mas‘ūdī, *Muruj al-Dhahab wa Ma‘ādin al-Jawāhir*, trans., Paul Lunde and Caroline Stone, *Masūdī, the Meadows of Gold: The Abbasids* (London: Routledge, 2010).

distractions and inclining to them, and reminded them of the felicity of the Afterlife. And hence, there arose, in the course of this, treatises on abstinence (*al-zuhd*) and sensitivities of the soul (*al-raqā'iq*), such as the books on abstinence (*Kitāb al-Zuhd*) by 'Abdullāh ibn Mubārak (d. 181 H), Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241 H) and Hannād ibn al-Sarī (d. 243 H).⁴²

It appears that, when the Caliphate arrived at its so-called Golden Age,⁴³ these conscientious scholars disdained, as it were, to see it as such, but instead responded by planting the seeds of what was later to be known as the science of *taṣawwuf*. Hence, it can be said that the gradual formalization of *taṣawwuf* as a science and praxis has its roots in this intellecto-spiritual, proactive response to the enveloping socio-economic prosperity, affluence and abundance. It was a *taṣawwuf* or an asceticism (*zuhd*, *wara'*, and *taqwā*) that was outwardly embedded in world while inwardly detached from it.

The *kasb-zuhd* texts are, on the one hand, about the economics of the world, but, on the other hand, and at a deeper level, about the economics of the soul—an economics of the material in service of the spiritual, of this Life for the sake of the Afterlife. It was as if, on witnessing the opulence of the civilization of Islam of their time, these conscientious scholars were worried that their fellow Muslims would be seduced into preoccupation with worldly increase (*takāthur*) and hence they felt the need to remind them of their transcendental identity and destiny, of the truth that this worldly life, with all its attractions and tribulations, was but a seedbed to the Afterlife. So, though later observers have looked and still look at the era of the 'Abbāsids in the time of Hārūn al-Rashīd and al-Ma'mūn as the Golden Age of Islam, it might just as well have been viewed as the Age of Admonishment, by virtue of the appearance of so many treatises during this period seeking to remind Muslims of their true transcendental calling in order that their engagement with the world should never lead to their attachment to it, much less to its glorification—they were to be *in* the world but not *of* it.⁴⁴

Al-Shaybānī's *Kitāb al-Kasb* was followed, among others, by al-Muḥāsibī's (165–243/781–857) *al-Makāsib wa al-Wara'*,⁴⁵ al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī's (ca. 133–

42. al-Quḍāh, 53.

43. Maurice Lombard, *The Golden Age of Islam* (Marcus Wiener, 2003); cf. Benson Bobrick, *The Caliph's Splendor: Islam and the West in the Golden Age of Islam* (Simon & Schuster, 2010).

44. See also al-Quḍāh, 63.

45. 'Abdullāh al-Ḥārith ibn Asad al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Makāsib wa al-Wara'*, ed., 'Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad 'Aṭā (Mu'assasat Kutub al-Thaqāfiyyah, 1987), trans. Adi Setia, *The Book of Livelihoods and Scrupulousness* (Kuala

255/750-869) *Ādāb al-Murīdīn wa Bayān al-Kasb*,⁴⁶ al-Khallāl's (234–311/849–923) *al-Hathth 'alā al-Tijārah*,⁴⁷ Ibn Abī al-Dunyā's (208–281/823–894) *Iṣlāḥ al-Māl*, Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī's (d. 386/996) *Qūt al-Qulūb*,⁴⁸ al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī's (d. 443/1060) *al-Dharī'ah ila Maḥāsīn al-Sharī'ah*,⁴⁹ leading up to the concise yet masterful synthesis of al-Ghazālī's *Kitāb Ādāb al-Kasb wa al-Ma'āsh*,⁵⁰ which constitutes the thirteenth book of his celebrated *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*.

These and other similar classical texts that came later⁵¹ comprise what may be called the *kasb* ethico-juristic genre in Islamic economic thought, which aims to provide a clear vision and understanding of the proper relationship between detachment (*zuhd*) from worldly wealth and engagement in the seeking of it (*kasb*); and of the meaning, function, and purpose of working for a living (*kasb/iktisāb/takassub*), the imperative of wholesome sources of incomes and revenues (*ṭīb al-maksīb*), the moral obligation to avoid, even denounce, whatever is illicit (*ḥarām/maḥzūr*) and of doubtful provenance (*shubḥah*), and the fine distinction between provisioning (*infāq*) and squandering (*isrāf*)

Lumpur: IBFIM, 2015). A new study on his life and works is Gavin N. Picken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam: The Life and Works of al-Muḥāsibī* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

46. Ed., 'Abd al-Fattāḥ 'Abdullāh Barakah (Matba'at al-Sa'ādah, 1986).
47. Abū Bakr Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Khallāl, *al-Hathth 'alā al-Tijārah wa al-Ṣinā'ah wa al-Amal*, ed. 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghuddah (Aleppo: Maktab al-Maḥbū'at al-Islāmiyyah, 1995); trans. Gibril Fouad Haddad, *The Exhortation to Trade, Industry and Work* (Kuala Lumpur: IBFIM, 2013).
48. *Qūt al-qulūb fī mu'āmalat al-maḥbūb wa wasf ṭarīq al-murīd ilā maqām al-tawḥīd* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1997). A study of his life, thought, and influence is Saeko Yazaki, *Islamic Mysticism and Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī* (New York: Routledge, 2013).
49. See the study by Yasien Mohamed, *The Path to Virtue* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 2006).
50. Trans., Adi Setia, *The Book of the Proprieties of Earning and Living* (Kuala Lumpur: IBFIM, 2013).
51. Such as by Ja'far al-Dimashqī (fl. 6th/12th cent.) with his *al-Ishārah ila Maḥāsīn al-Tijārah*, trans. Adi Setia, *The Indicator to the Virtues of Commerce* (Kuala Lumpur: IBFIM, 2011); Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273) with his *Qam' al-Hirṣ bi al-Zuhd wa al-Qanā'ah*, ed. Mas'ad 'Abd al-Ḥamid Muḥammad al-Sa'dānī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1994); and 'Alā' al-Dīn 'Alī al-Lubūdī (ca.900/1500) with his *Faḍl al-Iktisāb wa Aḥkam al-Kasb wa Ādāb al-Mā'ishah*, trans. Adi Setia and Mahdi Lock, *The Virtue of Working for a Living* (Kuala Lumpur: IBFIM, 2012).

tabdhīr), and thereby integrating the private devotional (*‘ibādāt*) and the public transactional (*mu‘āmalāt*) dimensions of the religious life.⁵²

Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, like his teacher, Abū ‘Ubayd, was also tutor to the princes of the caliphs, some of whom later on became caliphs themselves, like al-Mu‘taḍid (d. 289 H) and his son ‘Alī (d. 295 H), who, by virtue of their office, became responsible for the proper administration of public revenues. So in this context Ibn Abī al-Dunyā’s *Iṣlāḥ al-Māl* can be compared to Abū ‘Ubayd’s more well known *Kitāb al-Amwāl* as a detailed manual of administration of wealth, property and public revenues rooted in the ethico-legal precepts of the Qur‘ān, Sunnah and traditional wisdom.⁵³ Nevertheless, it needs to be said that we do not find Ibn Abī al-Dunyā explicitly expressing his objectives for compiling his books,⁵⁴ but these can be inferred from a close look at the socio-intellectual context of his writings.

In general, as the title indicates, the subject matter of *Iṣlāḥ al-Māl* is wealth, property and the proper management thereof, and related issues pertaining to work, livelihoods, commerce and occupations, prosperity, food, clothing, and inheritance. The edited book is well organized into two parts. The first part, comprising eleven chapters, concerns itself with licit acquisition of wealth, virtue of wealth, organization of livelihoods, real estate, commercial dealings and manual work. The second part of the book, comprising six chapters, is concerned with moderation in wealth, food, and clothing; and inheritance, and the problem of abundant wealth and poverty. He restricts his discussion of these various themes to what has been said in regard thereof in the Prophetic ḥadīths and the sayings and anecdotes of the Companions and Followers, and traditional wisdom of the sages (*al-hukamā’*). In the edition of al-Quḍāh, there are altogether five hundred and nine ḥadīths, wise sayings (*aqwāl*) and anecdotes of the Companions and the *Salaf*, and poems (*abyāt shi‘riyyah*).

A close, thorough reading of the *Iṣlāḥ al-Māl* will provide for the discerning reader an integrated view of both the tangible and intangible dimensions of wealth as understood and cultivated during the epoch when the civilization of Islam lived through its “golden age.”⁵⁵ And today, when many concerned people in the East and West are rethinking the meaning and expression of wealth in the aftermath of the 2008 credit crunch, the insights derived from

52. See also the discussion in al-Quḍāh, 71-78.

53. al-Quḍāh, 63-65.

54. al-Quḍāh, 67.

55. A well-received review of the period is Maurice Lombard, *The Golden Age of Islam* (Marcus Weiner, 2003).

the *Iṣlāḥ al-Māl* will help in this collective search for *true wealth*⁵⁶ and its re-discovery.

What can We Learn from the *Iṣlāḥ al-Māl*?

What follows may serve as a preliminary conceptual exploration into the meaning, significance and function of wealth and property inasmuch as these can be gleaned by a careful perusal of Ibn Abi al-Dunya's *Iṣlāḥ al-Māl* and other relevant classical texts and scholarly studies on the topic.

1. What is *māl* (wealth)?⁵⁷

The Arabic term *māl* literally means anything that one is naturally inclined to acquire, own and possess.⁵⁸ In the *Majallat al-Aḥkām al-ʿAdliyyah*,⁵⁹ the technical term *al-māl* is defined as “something, movable or immovable to which human nature is inclined and which can be stored for a time when it is needed.”⁶⁰ For Imām al-Shafiʿī, *māl* is “a thing that has a material value, with which it can be sold.”⁶¹

It is also defined in general as “everything that is owned by an individual or by a community, such as useful things, trade goods, real estate, money or animals.”⁶² And ‘ownership’ (*al-milk*) is defined by the jurists as “a legal connection between a person and a thing that allows him the exclusive right of disposal over it, such that others are preempted

56. For example, Juliet Schor, *Plenitude: The New Economics of True Wealth* (Scribe, 2010).

57. See also the concise yet informative treatment in Muhammad Wohidul Islam, “The Concept of Property in Islamic Legal Thought,” in *Arab Law Quarterly*, vol. 14 no. 4 (1999), 361-368; and the longer, economic discussion by al-Dimashqī in Appendix 3 at the end of this translation. See also the section on the concept of *māl* in Islamic Law in Mahdi Zahraa and Shafaai M Mahmor, “Definition and Scope of the Islamic Concept of Sale of Goods,” in *Arab Law Quarterly*, vol. 16, no. 3 (2001), 215-238, on 217-222.

58. Saʿdī Abū Jayb, *Al-Qāmūs al-Fiqhī*, 344; *Encyclopedia of Islam*, new ed. (1986), s.v. ‘*māl*’; Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, s.v. ‘*māl*’.

59. See the English translation in C. R. Tyser, *The Mejelle* (Kuala Lumpur: The Other Press, 2000), article 126.

60. Cited in Saʿdī Abū Jayb, *Al-Qāmūs al-Fiqhī*, 344.

61. Al-Suyuti, *al-Ashbāh wa al-Nazāʾir*, 258, cited in Mahdi Zahraa and Shafaai M. Mahmor, “Definition and Scope of the Islamic Concept of Sale of Goods,” in *Arab Law Quarterly*, vol. 16 no. 3 (2001), 215-238 on 219.

62. Saʿdī Abū Jayb, *Al-Qāmūs al-Fiqhī*, 344.

from disposing of it.”⁶³

Hence in relation to ownership (*milk*), a person’s wealth (*māl*) is something useful and beneficial that he has properly earned (and hence his *proper-ty*⁶⁴), and thereby acquired ownership (*milk*) of and right of disposal (*taṣarruf*) over as he deems fit, within the ethico-legal parameters of Revealed Law (*al-sharī‘ah*).⁶⁵ In short, wealth or property is something valuable that is owned or ownable by way of lawful acquisition. The first chapter in the *Iṣlāḥ al-Māl* is on the theme of the rightful acquisition of wealth, in which the following ḥadīth appears:

Whoever takes wealth rightfully will be blessed therein, and whoever takes wealth without right is like someone who eats and is never satiated.⁶⁶

Most of the *fuqahā’*² make a distinction between wealth as corpus and wealth as usufruct. Nicholas Mahdi Lock (my co-translator of *Iṣlāḥ al-Māl*) clarifies the conceptual and legal distinction and connection between wealth as corpus (*‘ayn*) or the concrete property itself, and wealth as usufruct or the beneficial use (*manfa‘ah*) derived from the corpus, as follows:

...*manfa‘ah* and *‘ayn* are both property, and this is why the term ‘owner’ (*ṣāḥib*) is applied to both, and their categorisation as property precludes any interference in the disposal thereof on the part of a non-owner. For example, in *waqf* (charitable endowment), if I dedicate a fiqh book to a madrasah for the benefit of the students there, Allāh becomes the *ṣāḥib al-‘ayn* (owner of the corpus) and the students are the *ṣāḥib al-manfa‘ah* (owner of the usufruct); they can read the book and study it, etc., but they can’t sell it, give it away or let someone inherit it. In the case of rent (*ijārah*), if I rent a car or house from you then I am the *ṣāḥib al-manfa‘ah* and you are the *ṣāḥib al-‘ayn*. I have the right to drive the car or live in the house for however long the contract is in force. However, like the *waqf* above, I can’t sell the car or house, give it away or include it in my will to be inherited by my heirs. As owner of the corpus of the house or car, you can only enter the house or use the car after the rental period has ended, but not during the said period, as that would

63. Sa‘dī Abū Jayb, *Al-Qāmūs al-Fiqhī*, 340 (citing al-Jurjānī).

64. i.e., proper to his control or right of disposal; thus wealth acquired wrongfully is properly speaking, “*im-proper-ty*”!

65. See also the discussion of wealth in relation to ownership in al-Quḍāh, 82-83.

66. *Iṣlāḥ al-Māl*, §1; al-Quḍāh, 137.

be an infringement upon my (albeit abstract) property, which is the *manfaʿah*.⁶⁷

From the brief overview above we may, from a general conceptual standpoint, concisely say that wealth or property is essentially constituted of the following six elements, namely (i) value, (ii) relevance, (iii) goodness, (iv) licitness, (v) beneficialness, and (vi) ownability. It is interesting to note that, in general, these six elements are also constitutive of what can be validly the subject matter of a sale (*bayʿ*) transaction, in which there is consideration of countervalue or payment, as well as a gift (*hibah*) transaction, in which there is no such consideration.⁶⁸

2. What is earning a livelihood (*al-kasb*)?

From the the above definition of wealth, we can then see that earning a livelihood means ethically and lawfully acquiring the ownership of wealth by which a person can provide (*infāq*) for himself and his family, and by extension, for his community⁶⁹; and this provisioning is an aspect of *jihād* or striving in the path of Allāh, as pointed out in a ḥadīth:

Seeking the lawful is a *jihād*, and indeed Allāh, Mighty and Majestic, loves the slave who practices a profession.⁷⁰

The emphasis on ethico-legal means of acquiring of wealth points to the fact that in Islam wealth is seen ultimately as a trust bestowed by the Creator on humankind for their wellbeing on earth, as alluded to in the verse:

*Believe in Allāh and in the Messenger of Allāh, and give provisions out of what We have made you inheritors to.*⁷¹

Hence, the manner in which wealth is used and disposed of has to be within the ethico-legal parameters of the Revealed Law (*al-sharīʿah*), for humankind will be held accountable for the manner in which they acquire and expend it. {*And then you will, that day, be questioned about your*

67. Clarification by personal communication through email, August 15, 2015.

68. See also the interesting article by Colin Turner, “Wealth as an immortality symbol in the Qur’an: a reconsideration of the *māl amwāl* verses,” in *Journal of Qur’anic Studies*, 8:2 (2006), 58-83.

69. Al-Quḍāh, 84-85.

70. *Iṣlāḥ al-Māl*, §202; al-Quḍāh, 239.

71. *al-Ḥadīd*, 7.

enjoyment}).⁷² In this respect, Ibn Abī al-Dunyā cites the ḥadīth:

On the Day of Resurrection, the feet of the son of Ādam will not move from before his Lord, Mighty and Majestic, until he has been asked about his wealth, where he earned it from and what he spent it on.⁷³

In his *Kitāb Ādāb al-Kasb wa al-Ma'āsh*⁷⁴ and *Kitāb al-Ḥalāl wa al-Ḥarām*,⁷⁵ Imām al-Ghazālī has well clarified in comprehensive detail these ethico-legal parameters pertaining to the manner wealth should be judiciously acquired and disposed of in the course of earning and provisioning of livelihoods.⁷⁶

3. Various Ways of Wealth Acquisition

The ownership of the wealth required for livelihood is by way of acquisition (*kasb*) through ethical, lawful and productive work ('amal). The Prophet, Allāh's blessing and peace be on him, said:

Whoever goes to bed exhausted from seeking the lawful, goes to bed and Allāh, Mighty and Majestic, is pleased with him.⁷⁷

Work by one own's effort is the direct way for acquiring wealth; and there are many types of work, such as working for a wage, hiring out one's services, practicing a craft, vocation or profession, cultivating the earth, animal husbandry, or by way of commercial and business dealings through various legitimate forms of sale transaction and of active or passive commercial partnership.

In contrast, the indirect avenue to the acquisition of wealth or property is by way of inheritance, gift or donation. It is indirect because it does not require one's personal labour and exertion, but rather, it is acquired as a bestowal by others. The importance of inheritance as a source of wealth

72. *al-Takāthur*, 8.

73. *Iṣlāḥ al-Māl*, §30; al-Quḍāh, 156-157.

74. Trans. Adi Setia, *The Book of the Proprieties of Earning and Living* (Kuala Lumpur: IBFIM, 2013).

75. Trans. Nicholas Mahdi Lock, *The Book of the Lawful and the Unlawful* (Kuala Lumpur: IBFIM, 2013).

76. An overview is Adi Setia, "Al-Ghazālī on the Proprieties of Earning and Living: Insights and Excerpts from His *Kitāb Ādāb al-Kasb wa al-Ma'āsh* for Reviving Economies for Communities," in *Islamic Sciences* (Summer 2013).

77. *Iṣlāḥ al-Māl*, §207 and §208; al-Quḍāh, 242-243.

is recognised in Islam, so much so that Ibn Abī al-Dunyā devotes a whole chapter to the subject,⁷⁸ in which he cites the following ḥadīth:

That you leave your inheritors wealthy is better than you leaving them dependent, begging people.⁷⁹

And by extension we may reason that our current use of the earth's resources should be constrained by prudence in order that we do not deprive future generations—*our inheritors*—of their rightful inheritance of the earth's bounty. We must always bear in mind through every decision and action “our responsibility to the seventh generation.”⁸⁰

4. Motivations for Earning a Livelihood

These motivations can be divided into two, namely, those pertaining to (i) personal good (which includes the good of one's immediately family members), and those pertaining to (ii) the common good (the good of the community and people in general). Those pertaining to personal good include overcoming poverty⁸¹ and avoiding dependence on others for one's livelihood, and to provide for one's family and dependents. Those pertaining to the common good include cultivating a vocation or undertaking a business venture in order to cater to some need in society or in one's community.⁸² All these legitimate motivations are well summarized and integrated in the following enlightening words of al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī:

Therefore, when you wish to go out to your market or do something for your livelihood, or take up a craft or become an agent (*wakālah*), or engage in some other vocations in order to seek the licit, and to imitate the practice of Allāh's Messenger—Allāh bless him and grant him peace—and to seek recompense (*thawāb*) for yourself and your dependents, to earn provisions for them, and in order to be independent of people, while

78. al-Quḍāh, 342-345.

79. *Iṣlāḥ al-Māl*, §416; al-Quḍāh, 342.

80. Linda Clarkson, Vern Morrissette and Gabriel Regallet, *Our Responsibility to the Seventh Generation* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: International Institute for Sustainable Development, 1992); cf. Musa Furber, *Obligations to Future Generation: A Shari'ah Perspective* (Abu Dhabi: Tabah Foundation, 2012).

81. al-Quḍāh, 94.

82. For further discussion, see Adi Setia, “*Farḍ al-Kifāyah*, Community and the Common Weal: Reconnecting Economics and the Economy to Communities,” in *Islamic Sciences* (Summer 2013).

showing compassion to brethren and neighbours, and to pay the obligatory alms and discharge every obligatory right, then hold out hope through these efforts that you shall meet Allāh—glorified and exalted be He—while your countenance is as the moon on the night when it is full.⁸³

5. Prosperity (*al-ghinā*) and Poverty (*al-faqr*)

The Arabic term *ghinan* means both affluence and independence from being in need of others, whereas the term *faqr* denotes both indigence and dependence. Both the states of affluence and indigence, or prosperity and poverty, if not handled properly (as outlined by al-Ghazālī in his *Ādāb al-Kasb*), can be a source of tribulation, hence the ḥadīth in which the Prophet, Allāh’s blessing and peace be on him, prayed:

O Allah, I seek refuge in You from the evil of the tribulation of wealth, and from the evil of the tribulation of poverty.⁸⁴

The tribulation of wealth is when it leads one into wantonness, hubris and vanity in the way one disposes of it; while the tribulation of poverty is when it leads one into discontentment with the decree of Allah respecting the manner He apportions His bounty amongst people.

Poverty is deemed to be evil and hence to be avoided if it leads to dependence on people through beggary, which destroys one’s innate (*fiṭrī*) sense of self-worth and personal dignity. Islam also sees a close connection between poverty (*faqr*) and infidelity (*kufī*). This connection arises when the poor harbour doubts about divine justice when they compare their straitened circumstance with the opulence of the rich. Poverty may also drive people to commit crimes like prostitution, stealing, robbery, lying and cheating, or lead them into depression, despair or constant worry, all of which divert them from upholding the dictates of the religion and nurturing the spiritual life.⁸⁵ Hence, as Yūnus ibn ‘Ubayd has said, “When poor and in need one should have strong faith and a powerful intellect.”⁸⁶

In general, one’s poverty should not be debilitating in a manner that destroys one’s dignity or diverts one’s attention from inner spiritual growth or renders one unable to provide for dependents. For most people, this means they need to acquire wealth up to the degree of sufficiency

83. al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Makāsib wa al-Waraʿ*, ed., ‘Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad ‘Aṭā (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Kutub al-Thaqāfiyyah, 1987), 66-67.

84. *Iṣlāḥ al-Māl*, §441; al-Quḍāh, 351.

85. See the discussion in al-Quḍāh, 96-97.

86. *Iṣlāḥ al-Māl*, §462; al-Quḍāh, 360.

(*kifāyah*), which is that amount which suffices for their material wellbeing in terms of food, clothing and dwelling, beyond which their attention is to be directed towards inner, spiritual growth.⁸⁷ It is in this sense that “wealth is part of health” (*al-ghinā min al-‘āfiyah*),⁸⁸ and {righteous wealth for a righteous person is a wonderful thing = *ni‘ma al-māl al-ṣāliḥ li al-mar’ al-ṣāliḥ*}.⁸⁹

6. The Meaning of ‘Economy’ (*qasḍ, iqtisād*)

Here, we may do well to briefly revisit the meaning of the term ‘economy’ or ‘economics’, which, I think, has been much abused and corrupted in the modern secular science of economics and finance.

The word, of Greek provenance, originally means household management (*tadbīr al-manzil*), or the management of the family or household, as distinct from ethics (management of the self or ‘ilm al-*akhlāq, tadbīr al-sakhs, tadbīr al-nafs*) and politics (management of the city or *siyāsah, tadbīr al-madīnah*). In household management, the overriding concern of the head of the household is the prudent, judicious management or stewardship of the resources, income and expenditure of the household so as to provide for the needs of all the members, humans and non-humans, of the household. In a typical household, relatively more concern and resources are devoted to the care and provision of the needs of the disabled and the weak (babies, children, the elderly, those with handicaps), while the less dependent and independent members (grown-ups and the able bodied) are pretty much left alone to fend for themselves, or are even expected to contribute to the overall economy and general wellbeing of the household.

Now, the city and the country as a whole can be seen as an extended household in which the head is called the government, and the same principle of relatively more concern for the weak (i.e., the poor and the disadvantaged of the population) applies here as well. So the ‘economy’

87. A good exposition of the relation between securing one’s livelihood and the spiritual life is Nuh Ha Mim Keller, *Sea Without Shore: A Manual of the Sufi Path* (Amana, 2011), 218-233 on “Life, Work and Wealth.”

88. al-Khallāl, *Exhortation to Trade*, trans. Gibril Fouad Haddad, §8, 7n15, a saying of the Follower, Abū Qilābah al-Baṣrī; see also *Iṣlāḥ al-Māl*, §222; al-Qudāh, 251.

89. Ḥadīth narrated by Imām Aḥmad and Imām Abū Yalā’, cited by Gibril Fouad Haddad in his translation of al-Khallāl, *Exhortation to Trade*, page facing the copyright page; see also *Iṣlāḥ al-Māl*, §43; al-Qudāh, 164.

extends from the family (*tadbīr al-manzil*) to the city (*tadbīr al-madīnah*) and even to the whole earth as the macro-household (*khilāfat al-ard*). From this perspective, economics and ecology—and moreover, since etymologically they share the same root—are essentially one science and one discipline, not two separate disciplines at loggerheads with each other, as is currently the case in the secular modern academia and in policy making. There is no tradeoff between economy and ecology, but rather, *economy must conform to ecology*.

Moreover, the fact of the matter is that economics (*al-iqtisād* = the seeking of what is judicious) in the Islamic understanding is the science of earning and provisioning (*‘ilm al-iktisāb wa al-infāq*), and hence it is the study of how people earn their livelihoods by drawing upon the divine bounty in nature (*faḍl Allāh fi al-ard*), and thereby, *a healthy economy is dependent upon a healthy ecology*. Now, since economics is the science of household management, or rather, the science of household stewardship, and the end of this stewardship is the wellbeing of the household, then any economic system that leads, wittingly or unwittingly, to the dissolution of the household, or to the earth as the macro-household, can only be an elaborate nihilistic inversion of the true and real meaning and purpose of economics and the economy.

The above thinking and conceptualising on the true meaning of ‘economy’, ‘economics’ and the ‘economical’ can be gleaned from a close reading of *Iṣlāḥ al-Māl* and other classical texts on work, livelihood and similar topics. As a matter of fact, Ibn Abī al-Dunyā devotes three chapters on *qasḍ* (prudence, thriftiness, moderation, frugality) in wealth, food and clothing.⁹⁰ The following saying of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (21-110/642-728) captures very well in concrete terms this understanding of what constitutes a true economy:

Indeed the signs of a believer are: strength of religion, prudence in gentleness, that he be a guide when certainty is required, discernment in knowledge, intelligence with wealth, giving when it is right, thrift when one is rich, forbearance when one is poor, beneficence when one is able, carefulness when one has desire, restraint in exertion, patience in hardship, strength in adversities, that he be steadfast in prosperity, that he be thankful and not overwhelmed by anger, that his endurance be to defend not deviate, that he not be frivolous, that he not be arrogant or presumptuous, that he not harm his neighbours, that he not rejoice at others’ affliction, that his passions do not overwhelm

90. al-Quḍāh, 301-341.

him, his desire does not ruin him, his tongue does not squander him, his sight does not get ahead of him, his private parts do not overwhelm him, he does not incline towards his caprice, his stomach does not disgrace him, his greed does not provoke him, his house does not confine him, he is not stingy, he does not waste, he does not squander, he is not tight-fisted, he is the same person when he is wealthy, and he is like everyone else in hope, there is no ambiguity to be seen in his character or faith, there is no hubris in his joy, there is no anxiety in his grief, he guides those who seek his advice and his companions are happy with him.⁹¹

Conclusion

The term *iṣlāḥ* in the title *Iṣlāḥ al-Māl* means rectification and restoration, which is to put right what is wrong and to make whole and productive again what has been fragmented and corrupted. So perhaps the purpose of the book and its author is already obvious from its title, which is to restore or reinstate the original holistic, integrative understanding of wealth and its economic (i.e., *qaṣḍī* = judicious) management.⁹² This understanding goes a long way towards redefining and redirecting the modern science of economics away from its current obsession with growth and scarcity towards *again* showing true concern for the *judicious acquisition and disposition of wealth for material and spiritual wellbeing*.

91. *Iṣlāḥ al-Māl*, §333; al-Quḍāḥ, 305.

92. al-Quḍāḥ, 116-122; *Iṣlāḥ al-Māl*, Chapters 12-14, §322-§415.

ON THE MAKING OF *THE STUDY QURAN*

Seyyed Hossein Nasr

The publication of *The Study Quran* has been hailed as a ground-breaking event in Qurʾānic studies. A team of four scholars led by Seyyed Hossein Nasr produced a new English translation of the Qurʾān along with a verse-by-verse commentary based on classical scholarship. Each *sūra* begins with a short introduction that situates it within a broader thematic and historical context and provides an overview of its content. Essays by fifteen internationally renowned scholars on how to read and understand the Qurʾān and its role in shaping Islamic civilization further enhance the usefulness of the *The Study Quran*. Maps, a timeline of historical events, comprehensive indices, biographical notes and index of *ḥadīth* citations are other important features of this work which brings to the readers of English a vast amount of classical scholarship. *Journal of Islamic Sciences* is pleased to provide excerpts from a conversation with the Editor-in-Chief of this landmark publication. Seyyed Hossein Nasr sheds light on how the project was conceived and carried out over a period of ten years; he responds to some of the criticism that has appeared in social media and talks about the importance of this publication in the context of academic studies on the Qurʾān.

Keywords: *The Study Quran*; Qurʾānic Studies; Muslim understanding of the Qurʾān; Qurʾān and the modern world; classical commentaries on the Qurʾān.

JIS: How was the project for *The Study Quran* conceived? By whom? When?

SHN: *Bismiʾllāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm*. During the last two decades, Harper, which is also my publisher now, has brought out the *Study Bible* and the *Study Torah*. Both have become very successful and are being used in not only universities by students, but also in churches, synagogues, and so forth. About 11 years ago, they contacted me, and asked if I would edit a *Study Quran* along the lines of the previous two works. They wanted me to be its chief editor. I knew how important it would be both for Islamic

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Studies in the Western academy and also for the Islamic community in the English speaking world, but told them I am not a Qurʾān scholar. I have written about Islam in general, Islamic philosophy, Islamic science, and so on, but I am not a scholar of Qurʾānic studies *per se*, so, I turned it down. But when I went home, I had pangs of conscience. I told myself, what will God say on the Day of Judgment. He will say that that he put My Book down and did not undertake the task concerning it! So, I felt very unhappy.

The next day, they called again and they said that if you do not take the project, it will perhaps never happen and they will discontinue this idea. So, this was an added incentive for me to take this matter seriously. But still, I told them that there are many fine scholars of the Qurʾān you could invite, but they said no and added that if you do not do it, we are not going to undertake this project.

Over the last fifty years, I have written and edited some 50 or 60 books and hundreds of articles, but I am not a Qurʾān scholar as such. I say this but I need to add that everything I wrote pertains, in some way, to the Qurʾān, in fact, everything authentically Islamic relates to the Qurʾān. My books on the Islamic science and philosophy, or Sufism or spirituality, all are rooted in the Qurʾān, but I had never written on the Qurʾān except in some of my books such as *Ideas and Realities of Islam* and *The Heart of Islam* and I am not an expert of the Qurʾān. So I prayed to God for help and very reluctantly accepted the project, praying to Him that I would be worthy of carrying out such a task.

I started meditating on how to carry out the project. For the record, I must state that one condition I made to Harper was that the *Study Quran* would be done only by Muslims. There are so many Western scholars or orientalist who claim to be Qurʾānic scholars, but their work does not represent the “Islamic” Qurʾān, because most deny the authenticity of the Qurʾān as the Word of God and they do not look at the Qurʾān from an Islamic point of view. When I said that the people at Harper were a bit shocked, saying, but this is the West! We have free scholarship. I said in this case no; I do not see any Muslim or Jewish names among the collaborators in the *Study Bible*, or any Christian or Muslim names in the *Study Torah*, and I respect that very much. The *Study Quran* should also be done by Muslims only, but as chief editor, I will choose across the spectrum of Islamic scholarship and you have to leave that up to my choice. They accepted this proposal. It was a very important step. So I began to think about the structure of the board of editors. In the middle of all this, I had my open heart surgery and I did not know if I was going

to survive or not.

Before the anesthesia, I invoked the *shahādah* and prayed to God to do something about this project in case I did not come through. And so after I got well, *al-ḥamdu li-llāh*, the project began. I chose three editors, all born in the United States, all three being most gifted scholars of Islamic studies; all very young, all among my students in different ways over the years, all with very good command of Arabic, one of them with a PhD from Yale, the other two from Princeton. So they had academic training and fluency in Arabic at the highest level as far as Western scholarship is concerned. And all three are Muslims, one born Muslim, the other two having embraced Islam, and they are very devout Muslims as well as being very knowledgeable. So we formed a team of four people, and that is how the work began.

JIS: Was the overall structure of the *Study Quran* to follow the same pattern as that of the *Study Torah* and *Study Bible*? That is, was it conceived to be a verse by verse commentary, with explanatory notes and essays?

SHN: That is right. It is a verse by verse commentary on the whole of the Qurʾān.

JIS: Is that your conception, or was that already the pattern chosen by the publisher?

SHN: No, I do not know what the publisher had in mind. They never spoke with me about this matter. Maybe they also had this idea in mind; I do not know. But it was my own idea to choose this method.

JIS: Can you say something about the selection of the sources, some forty-one main exegeses listed at the beginning of the *Study Quran*, representing a broad spectrum of scholarship across the centuries and geographical regions. Was there any special consideration other than being inclusive and representing both Shiʿa and Sunni sources?

SHN: That is a very good question. Let me give you the major criteria that I and my colleagues used, on the basis of which we chose the commentaries. First of all, I told Harper and everybody else, that this is a contemporary work but it would represent traditional Islam and therefore it excludes both modernistic interpretations and fundamentalist interpretations of the Qurʾān. Therefore, it is not going to have figures like Sayyid Ahmad Khan or Mawdūdī in it; nor people like Muhammad Abduh. In fact, many of the well-known commentators of the late 19th century are not traditional.

Yet, we wanted to be as inclusive as possible. We tried to think about the categories of commentaries which were traditionally understood

to be important in Islamic civilization, that is, *lughawī* (linguistic or philological), *tārīkhī* (historical), *nahwī* (grammatical), which is closely related to the linguistic, commentaries dealing with *kalām*, *fiqh*, *falsafā*, with Sufism (*ʿirfān*) and other categories. Taking these criteria into consideration, we chose some forty of the most important and basic *tafāsīr* that have been the backbone of the scholarly and also pious study of the Qurʾān over the centuries. And it was not a question of the time period when a commentary was written; we chose not only medieval *tafāsīr* but also *al-Mizān* of ʿAllāmah Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī (1321-1402/1904-1981), probably the most important *tafāsīr* written in the 20th century.

We tried to be as inclusive as possible, and we consulted these different *tafāsīr*, but, of course, we did not have to consult every *tafāsīr* for every verse of the Qurʾān. For example, there are verses which deal with legal matters; for such *fiqhī* verses, such as the laws of inheritance, we did not have to consult mystical *tafāsīr*s. So, depending on the verse, we consulted the appropriate commentaries. Some verses we knew required a broad spectrum of interpretation. In such cases we consulted more *tafāsīr* and included the widest possible range within the traditional commentaries.

JIS: Two questions arise from this. One is related to the overall work. As your “Introduction” indicates, the work was divided between editors; so translations and commentaries have been written by different persons. How was a harmonious outcome achieved for this single-volume work? Second, what was your methodology to make it look like a unified vision is being presented although the text is written by four different people?

SHN: The work is without a seam; it is unified and you cannot find a “crack” in it, although it is written by four persons. In this respect it is like the King James version of the Bible. Let me start with that example. I have in mind this example because it is so famous in the English language. The King James version of the Bible is the most beautiful translation of the Bible in English. Many people think that after Shakespeare, it is the most important literary prose of the English language from the Elizabethan period—the peak of English eloquence. And the general public does not know who the translators were, but everybody knows that they were a team that worked together.

The translation displays an incredible unity. Whether you are reading the Book of John or the Book of Matthew, it is not like an ordinary collected book concerning which it is said that this was translated by Mr. A, this by Mrs. B, and you cannot tell that there were different translators. There is a unity. So, I knew that this was possible. In summary what I did consisted

of three things: The most important of all is that—in contrast to most works with multiple editors, each of whom has a different worldview of his or her own, not to talk about personal tendencies and so on—the people whom I chose as editors for this enterprise are not only my students, who intellectually all belong to the same world together with myself, but also they are spiritually close to me and we share the same spiritual universe. And so there existed a remarkable unanimity of worldview among us, but within that unity, oftentimes there were clashes over various verses, even letters, and in those cases, in fact, I would have the final say. They would come to me and I would make the final decision. The third thing, which helped to bring about this unity, was that before we began the translation, we went over the translation of some three to four hundred key Qurʾānic words. Different editors had their own views about how to translate them. We went over them and finalized the translation of these terms together. Again, the final responsibility was on my shoulders, but I did try to bring peace and accord between them. When they could not agree, however, I had to put my foot down, I said jokingly, that this text is to be composed on the basis of both democracy and dictatorship! As the chief editor, I had to dictate sometimes, but there was also a lot of consultation. For instance, we had discussion over several days on how to translate the word *laqwa*. Once we decided on such key words—and words which are related to them because of their common root—we had a pool of shared vocabulary.

So, these are three ways in which we tried to bring unity. Just to conclude this part of our discussion, I must add that the three editors were given specific parts of the Qurʾān and the details of who did what are in the work; the fourth editor, Muhammad Rustom, whom I brought on board towards the end, because things were being delayed, also did a lot of work and he helped with the last *sūras* during the last couple of years of the project. But the others worked for years, each one working on his or her one part of the Qurʾān. Each person would translate one particular *sūra*, send it over to the others, who would then comment on it and once what they thought was the final version was ready, they would send it to me and I would go over it and make any final corrections that I deemed to be necessary. If there was no agreement, then my opinion was needed to finalize the translation. I also had to intercede in case of differences of opinion, especially about certain sensitive phrases. So we had a criss-crossing of scholarly opinions. Since human beings are human beings, sometimes we had clashes, and academic clashes often become personal clashes, but this is something that we minimized. *Al-ḥamdu li-llāh* everyone came out of the process unscathed, and all the editors remain good friends.

JIS: *Al-ḥamdu li-llāh.* Was this process for both the commentary and the translation?

SHN: For both. The commentary would be sent to all the editors, who would make suggestions, but with the commentary, sometimes there would be fewer suggestions, because it was technical and one person was working with all the different *tafāsīr*, and so these would not usually be radical differences, but sometimes they would disagree on the commentary of certain verses. And then, again, the commentary would be sent to me and I would have the final say.

JIS: You mentioned a very important aspect, at the very beginning of our conversation—humility toward the Book of Allah *subḥānahu wa taʿālā*, the feeling that we are inadequate; even the greatest commentators on the Book have the same feeling. You said, you told the publishers that you are not a Qurʾān scholar *per se*, that is, you have not been trained in the sciences of the Qurʾān and you were hesitant to undertake the project. In this light, what to make of some of the criticism that has appeared in the social media about *The Study Quran*. For instance, there are several inaccurate *fiqhī* statements that have been pointed out. In particular, the statement about the position of various *madhāhib* about the recitation of the *basmalah* in the ritual prayer, which appears on page 5, the commentary on Q 2:158, stating, “The *ʿumrah* is a supererogatory visit to perform a shortened form of pilgrimage...”, whereas the Shāfiʿī and the Ḥanbali position is that it is a personal obligation (*fard/wājib*)....

SHN: Actually, we are assembling all the different criticisms that have been made. There are very few, but, we are assembling them. And I am going to talk to my editors about them when there is going to be a new edition. Of course, there are also a few typographical errors—in a 2000 page work, that is quite remarkable.

JIS: This is the first work in the English language that actually presents the source material in a scholarly manner—sources which are Islamic and which are not mixed up with Orientalism and non-Islamic material. So in this respect, *The Study Quran* is a very important project. But at the same time, there are two rather sensitive issues which have appeared in the social media with regard to how *The Study Quran* treats certain issues. The first is what has been called a conscious effort to tone down Qurʾānic judgement on the Jews and Christians.

SHN: First off, of course, we have been aware of this type of criticism in our work. Throughout *The Study Quran*, however, we have tried to highlight the universality of the message of the Qurʾān and bring out the full meaning of those verses which in fact address all of humanity, mankind

as such. Through all our commentary, Islam for us is submission to God and Muslims are those who have submitted themselves to God; this is the most expansive sense of the word in the Qurʾān itself. Therefore, in the Qurʾān, *muslim* includes both Jesus and Abraham, upon both of them peace, but they would not be called Muslim in the English language today, because people think that Islam begins in the seventh Christian century. But Muslim is not used in the Qurʾān only in this sense. So we are very much aware of this type of criticism. In fact, one of the most important points of this whole commentary on the Qurʾān is the highlighting of the universal character of the Qurʾān, how universal the Qurʾān is among all the sacred scriptures in the world.

But, to distort the truth and not to talk about verses that talk about battles and religious opposition is also not right. In fact, there are more verses like that in the Bible than there are in the Qurʾān! We cannot destroy the integrity of a sacred text because many today are opposed to reference to wars and violence in religion while our world is dominated by oppression and violence. Wars, battles and violence are part and parcel of human life. So every sacred scripture has to respond to these realities, has to mention and deal with them. Therefore, we of course were not being apologetic, but we sought to show the immense importance and the centrality of mercy, of love and of forgiveness that the Qurʾān brings forth, and the universality of its message, that in a sense addresses all human beings. Many verses deal with Islam in its universal sense and these do not refer only to the specific community of the Prophet Muḥammad, upon him blessings and peace. These verses concern religion as such and we have tried to bring this truth out while at the same time dealing fully with verses that concern Muslims as the *ummah* of the Prophet, whether these verses deal with peace or war.

In a sense, our book is the very opposite of all these tendencies that are going on right now, both literally and also unfortunately in battle fields, in newspapers and so on, tendencies that try to create an exclusivist form of Islam facing everyone else as the enemy.

JIS: The second important criticism of *The Study Quran* that has appeared so far is in reference to soteriological pluralism, where it departs from traditional understanding and, in the words of one reviewer, “such an understanding of soteriology is difficult to support within a full reading of the Qurʾān, and certainly impossible after taking into account the less accommodating *hadīth* tradition which contains unambiguous reports such as, ‘By the One in Whose hand is the soul of Muhammad, there is no one among this nation, Jew or Christian, who hears of me and dies

without believing in that with which I have been sent, but he will be one of the people of the Fire.’ Verses repudiating the *Kitābī* traditions are not scant—they compose a major constituent of the Qurʾān, including extensive passages in Surat al-Baqarah, Āl-ʿImrān, al-Nisāʾ, and Māʾidah. They include critiques of *Kitābī* theology, ecclesiastic authorities, alterations of sacred texts, and implores the People of the Book to submit to the message of the Qurʾān and the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace. Attempts to proffer an inclusivist soteriology requires, as has been shown, a reliance on the Qurʾān-alone absent the prophetic tradition, a subordination of the majority of verses addressing the *Kitābī* traditions beneath Q 2:62, dismissal of the scholarly tradition, and unsubstantiated historicizing. Such a conclusion can fairly be described as a departure from consensus and unfaithfulness to tradition.”¹

SHN: What you say has not been the view of all traditional commentators, but only of some. Our interpretations are still all within the traditional spectrum of the Qurʾānic commentary tradition. For example, there is the question of abrogation (*naskh*). If Christianity and Judaism have become *mansūkh*, why does Islamic Law force Muslims to protect the lives of Christians and Jews? This is just because of good will? This is a false interpretation. These people are not like the people of the *Jāhiliyyah* in Arabia before the coming of Islam, for whom the choice was either to accept Islam or go into battle. So, the fact is that according to Islamic teachings churches are to be protected, synagogues are to be protected. This means that God wants followers of these religions to be protected under Islam. There are so many verses of the Qurʾān referring to the Christians and Jews and Muslims together, and so on and so forth. So if you say that these religions have been abrogated, that is, they are no longer a way of salvation to God and in following them one can no longer go to Heaven, then half of the Qurʾān becomes distorted and we are left with the monstrous view that Muslims are to protect the *ahl al-kitāb* or the People of the Book so that they can go to Hell.

JIS: The way the classical scholars have put this question is somewhat different. They pose it at the level of personal choice. So, the discussion in classical *ʿaqīda* texts asks the following questions: When a human being has received the message of the Qurʾān in an authentic way—whether he or she is from the People of the Book or someone else—what is his or her personal obligation toward this message? This has been extensively dealt with by all *madhāhib*. In this sense, the question is of a legal nature; it is a *sharʿī* question that has been dealt with in all *madhāhib*.

1. See Book Reviews section of the present issue.

SHN: But the necessity of the rejection of their own religion by the *ahl al-kitāb* when they come to know about Islam has also been rejected by a number of jurists (*fuqahā'*), not to talk about Sufis and so forth, who were very much against this view, but even among a lot of the *fuqahā'*. In Egypt, for example, where 10% of the population is Coptic, there were and are many Shāfi'ī '*Ulamā'* who did not and do not say that these are people who know Islam, because Islam has been there, but did not or do not accept it; therefore they are for the Fire of Hell, or something like that, or that they have to be fought against and destroyed. No! Their churches have been protected. One of the arguments that is now being given by some fundamentalist Egyptians who have been attacking Copts in Egypt until very recently, was precisely this argument that you are presenting, which is a misunderstanding and is opposed by many Azharite scholars. So this is a very delicate matter. I understand this view, this triumphalist attitude that all religions had when they were dominating, claiming to be the only true religion. In days of old in most places like in Europe, people knew only their own religion, even if there were a few followers of other religions which were usually ignored theologically if not always socially. This was different from the situation that we have now; Islam has left the door open for accepting the authenticity of other religions, although many of the *fuqahā'* did not have to deal with this issue in days of old, although some did historically in such places as Andalusia and India.

First of all, with the continuous contact of followers of various religions this type of exclusivism is not possible to sustain in the modern world while still believing in Divine Mercy and Justice. Secondly, most of the *fuqahā'* of the past did not have to deal with what we have to face today. It is just like how they totally condemned music, although their intent was to prohibit *lahw* and *la'ib*. So they gave this carte blanche opinion on banning music. The same thing happened concerning this question of abrogation of previous Divinely revealed religions. But it was not always like that. For example, in the Ottoman Empire, where there were sizable number of Christians in Istanbul and also a sizable Jewish community; they were given their rights, even the right to collect taxes from their own community, to preach their religion to their own people, have their own schools, have their own synagogues and churches. We have had examples of this situation until Atatürk came to power and even later with the rise of secularism in Turkey.

JIS: The question is not of protection of individuals or places of worship, of course, they are both protected. The issue is of the legal status of previously revealed religions after Islam and consequently, of their salvific efficacy for the one to whom the message of Islam has reached.

SHN: This is a long argument into which I cannot go here. Anyway, my position is well-known; I stand with those who believe that *islām* in *inna dīna ‘inda-llāhi-l-islām* (Q 3:19) means “surrender to God,” and whoever surrenders to God and follows a Divinely revealed religion, God will accept it. There are so many other verses of the Qur’ān that confirm this view.

JIS: Two last questions: What do you think is going to be the impact of *The Study Quran* on the academic approaches to Islam in general and the Qur’ān in particular, and are there plans to translate *The Study Quran* into other languages.

SHN: I think that the impact of *The Study Quran* on Qur’ānic studies will be great. Many scholars are already talking about it. Of course, the Orientalist establishment in the West in general is probably not very happy, that there is now *The Study Quran* done by Muslims at the highest scholarly standards, so that they cannot criticize it from just a scholarly point of view and so they lose their monopoly. In fact, they have already lost their monopoly. So, there will be a long-term impact. *The Study Quran* has already been assigned in many university courses. I know of a dozen universities in the United States where the professors called me up and said that they had ordered this work for their classes. I am sure that it will have a major impact; no doubt about it.

As for its translation, already both the Turks and the Iranians, who are usually the first two Muslim peoples to translate such books, have shown interest and they have already approached the publisher. So, these translations will come out and the publisher is also talking about French and other European language translations. I am anxious to have it out in French, more than any other European language, because of the Francophone region of Africa that is Muslim. I am thinking of Senegal, Ivory Coast, and places like that in West Africa, as well as Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco, a very large area. So to have a French translation will be very good. But I am sure that sooner or later it will come out also in German and Spanish, which are major European languages as well as perhaps other European and Islamic languages such as Bhasa Indonesian. There are even some Chinese Muslim scholars who are thinking of bringing it out in Chinese.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Editor-in-Chief), Caner K. Dagli, Maria Massi Dakake, Joseph E.B. Lumbard (General Editors), Mohammed Rustom (Assistant Editor), *The Study Quran*
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The Study Quran (SQ) can perhaps best be understood as an analog to its forerunner, the Harper Collins *Study Bible* (SB).¹ Originally published in 1993, the SB is an ecumenical project. Though various denominational actors and figures are cited, the SB bears no preference for one over another. Aside from its denominational accommodations, the SB is also significant as an academic project—entry level courses in academic institutions teaching the Bible or Christianity routinely mandate the SB as required reading. As a result of its widespread use in academia, the SB has sold quite well, having exceeded 150,000 copies since initial publication. Therefore, although the SB may not hold much currency within devotional contexts, it retains a majority market share in academic environments.

Like the SB, the SQ is also an ecumenical work. The authors account for both Shiite and Sunni perspectives when offering exegetical commentary and translating verses (see, for example, SQ commentary on Q 33:33), and have maintained translations of creed that can mutually support the various theological orientations that predominate in Islamic thought (Atharī, Ash‘arī, Māturidī, and Mu‘tazilī). In addition to its ecumenicism, the SQ will likely become a bona fide standard for Islamic Studies courses in academic institutions throughout the world. Unlike the SB, the SQ enters an arena in which alternatives are sparse. Instructors have long struggled to provide accessible translations of the Qur’ān, let alone commentaries that provide

1. Wayne A Meeks, *Study Bible* (New York: HarperOne, 1993); HarperCollins also has published *Commentary on the Torah* by Richard Elliott Friedman (New York: HarperOne, 2001).

meaningful insight corresponding to seemingly ambiguous and otherwise difficult passages found in the Qurʾān.

Qurʾān Translations²: The Current Landscape

The challenge to provide accessible translations of the Qurʾān has not been unique to the academic world. Originally published in 1934, Abdullah Yusuf Ali's (1872-1953) *The Holy Qurʾān: Translation and Commentary* became a de facto standard in English-speaking communities well into the 1990s. Though useful as an early translation, Yusuf Ali's work was fraught with problems. The language of Yusuf Ali's translation mimicked Victorian prose, employing terms that were not comprehensible to the majority of his Muslim readers. In addition to the linguistic shortcomings, the footnotes contained serious errors, particularly in earlier versions (later revisions eliminated much, though not all, of the truly egregious content). The best available alternative was perhaps Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall's (1875-1936) *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*, published in 1930. Yet he too suffered what Khaleel Mohammed has described as "archaic prose and lack of annotation".³

Muhammad Asad's (1900-1992) *The Message of the Qurʾān* (1970) has experienced broader adoption as of late, especially within the context of Muslim outreach. Despite its readable prose and accessible language, Asad's translation and commentary is explicitly slanted toward rationalist or allegorical interpretations of many verses (in place of their evident meanings), a hermeneutics which draws upon a Muʿtazilite heritage. Take for example Q 13:27, which Asad translates as, *Now those who are bent on denying the truth [of the Prophet's message] say, 'Why has no miraculous sign ever been bestowed upon him from on high by his Sustainer?' Say: 'Behold, God lets go astray him who wills [to go astray], just as He guides unto Himself all who turn unto Him'.* Notice here that *al-ladhīna kafarū* is translated as *those who are bent on denying the truth*, instead of the more direct *those who disbelieve*—a terminological difference yielding a theological

2. Translations, by definition, are subject to the shortcomings inherent in attempting to convey meanings from one language to another. The case of the Qurʾān presents more complications than most—'clean' equivalents are not always available for certain terms, let alone the stylistic, rhetorical, and linguistic features native to Qurʾānic passages. Ultimately, this requires interstitial commentary and interpretive decisions, many of which are non-trivial. The term "translation" can, therefore, be somewhat misleading. A better term would be 'an interpretation of the Qurʾān's meaning.' For more details, see Abobaker Ali et al, "Some Linguistic Difficulties in Translating the Holy Qurʾān from Arabic into English", *International Journal of Social Science and Humanity*, Vol. 2 (2013) No. 6.

3. See Khaleel Muhammad, "Assessing English Translations of the Qurʾān", *The Middle East Quarterly*, Vol. 12 (2005) No. 2.

distinction; *yudhillu man yashā'* is rendered *God lets go astray him who wills [to go astray]* as opposed to more conventional translations which accord to God an active role in the individuals straying, a position the Mu'tazilite's rejected due to the primacy of God's justice within their theology. Similarly, Asad translates *fā-zāda-humu Llāhu maraḍā* in Q 2:10 as, *so God lets their disease increase* whereas Pickthall, Yusuf Ali, M.A.S. Abdel-Haleem, Hilali-Khan, and others translate the passage as God increasing the disease. Such interpretations are not isolated incidents: miracles, any issue related to divine decree (*qadr*), the manifestations of divine justice (*'adl*), nonhuman phenomena—the evident sense of such verses is frequently allegorized, interpreted away, or otherwise situated within a Mu'tazilite worldview, rendering it theologically problematic for the majority of Sunni readers, whatever the clarity of its language.

Another recent yet problematic translation of the Qur'an is Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din Al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan's *The Noble Qur'an* (circa 1985). Subsidized by the government of Saudi Arabia, copies of *The Noble Qur'an* can be commonly found in mosques both across the United States and overseas. Unfortunately, the Hilali-Khan translation suffers from egregious errors and interpolations of its own, advancing a dogmatic Salafist orientation of Islam directly within the translation itself. Wherein prior translators constrained their efforts to translating the texts and footnoting their interpretive efforts, Hilali-Khan chose to interpose these biases directly into the translated words, making the distinction between God's words and their own quite difficult to discern. Though a number of verses can be brought to bear to demonstrate this active interpolation, perhaps the most noteworthy is the final verse of "The Opening" (*fātiḥa*) Q 1:7 which is translated as, *The Way of those on whom You have bestowed Your Grace, not (the way) of those who earned Your Anger (such as the Jews), nor of those who went astray (such as the Christians)*. The translation includes parenthetical references to both Jews and Christians which a plain reading of the verse simply does not support.

Two less problematic recent translation attempts include M.A.S. Abdel-Haleem's *The Qur'an, A New Translation*, and Aminah Assami's *Saheeh International The Qur'an: English Meanings* (accessible at Quran.com). Both provide cogent, readable prose, and have largely refrained from incorporating denominational biases within the actual translation itself, though of course neither is perfect and there remains significant room for improvement. Some have alleged the Saheeh International translation is little more than a less doctrinaire recension of the Hilali-Khan translation, borne out by renderings such as, *And Our angels are nearer to him than you, but you do not see*, where the pronoun "We" is translated as "Our angels", in direct contrast to the literal meaning of the term. Though such interpretation does have precedent among certain premodern commentators, a direct translation would not deliver this

meaning on its own. Due to this and other instances of interpolation, those with sensitivities to denominational impositions will likely prefer Abdel-Haleem's translation.

All of this is to say nothing about the category of exegesis in English, which is far less developed than translation. Few exegetical works have been translated, and those which have been are often summarized with their own, often copious shortcomings. In this regard, there is a palpable dearth of available vehicles through which inquiring minds can learn about the Qurʾān and its meanings. For this reason, the SQ is a contribution likely to take hold not only within secular academia but among lay believers as well, and the early reception to the SQ has certainly reflected that vacuum.

Features and Overview of the SQ

The SQ approaches 2,000 pages in full. It is the product of a decade of work, and its academic rigor is apparent after even a cursory reading. The exegetical commentary of the SQ references forty-one commentaries, with medieval commentaries constituting the predominant points of reference. Of the commentators cited, Ibn ʿĀshūr (d. 1973) and Ṭabāṭabāʾī (d. 1981) are the most recent.

The Study Quran has many strengths. For one, the SQ incorporates prophetic traditions (*ḥadīth*) into the commentary, something that I suspect will not please structural reformists who anchor their efforts in a Qurʾān-only epistemology. In addition, the SQ is not a work colored by the ideologies and agendas of secular liberalism (in its many forms). That is, it does not strike an apologetic tone, even regarding pericopes that appear discordant with the metaphysical commitments of contemporary liberal society. Instead, the SQ contextualizes, elucidates the tradition, and offers an understanding of those verses within the terms that the Muslim community (or at least some portion of it) has understood them for over a thousand years. This, I suspect as well, will not gratify reformists who view the majority of premodern jurists and theologians as having been prejudiced by patriarchy, exclusivism, and militarism.

For example, the commentary of Q 4:11, a somewhat difficult verse given its prescription for inequitable distribution of inheritance between men and women, explicates traditional inheritance law without seeking to reinterpret or historicize it. The SQ explains that the inequitable apportioning of inheritance can be attributed to the male's provider-responsibility within a household, a reasoning cited from the exegetical work of Ibn Kathīr. The commentary does not belabor the point, nor engage in apologetics. The explanation of Q 4:11 alone makes reference to the exegetical works of al-Ṭabarī, al-Qurṭubī, Ibn Kathīr, al-Wāḥidī, al-Zamakhsharī, and al-Ṭabrisī.

A similar approach can be seen in the explanation of Q 4:34, the verse of marital discord (*nushūz*). The SQ translation reads, *Men are the upholders and maintainers of women by virtue of that in which God has favored some of them above others and by virtue of their spending from their wealth. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient, guarding in [their husbands'] absence what God has guarded. As for those from whom you fear discord and animosity, admonish them, then leave them in their beds, then strike them. Then if they obey you, seek not a way against them. Truly God is Exalted, Great.* In the accompanying commentary the authors cite premodern jurists, expound upon the occasion of revelation (*sabab nuzūl*), and provide stipulations that premodern jurists would articulate when commenting on the very controversial locution *ḍarb* (“striking”). Of note is that the authors do not adopt an alternative explanation or translation, electing instead for a hermeneutic of fideism to the tradition.

Ādam, the genealogical father of humanity, the first of creation, and a prophet of God, is created *ex nihilo*, miraculously from dust, and not reenvisioned in light of Darwinian macroevolution (see commentary on Q 2:30-37; 3:59, and others). The *ḥūr ʿīn*, or wide-eyed maidens of the Garden, are appropriately presented as otherworldly figures in the commentary of Q 56:22. Although these figures have, of late been imparted to the general public via a medium of radicalism/extremism, the SQ authors reconfigure this discourse from one that is predominantly sensual/erotic to one that is part of a realm that God described as that “which no eye has seen and no ear has heard and what has not occurred to the heart of any human being.”⁴

The exegetical commentary on Q 13:11 explains the axiom, “*Truly God alters not what is in a people until they alter what is in themselves,*” as an imperative to individually reform. Premodern exegetes took this verse as an indication of how God’s blessings in this life, such as health and wealth, are contingent on one’s obedience to God—a far cry from the social revolutionary or even insurrectionary connotations with which it is deployed today.

The story of Lot is as well consistent with the premodern narrative concerning the sins of Sodom. Commentary on Q 29:28-29 states that although “some maintain that Lot reproaches them [i.e. his people] for forcible rather than consensual sexual relations,” the “emphasis here and in Q 7:81; 26:165-166; and 27:54 is upon approaching men with desire and lust, whether consensual or not.” The former framing interprets the sins of Sodom

4. See note 22-24 in SQ, which states: “Regarding all such allusions to the blessings of Paradise, there is a famous *ḥadīth qudsī*: ‘God says, ‘I have prepared for My righteous servants what no eye has seen and no ear has heard and what has not occurred to the heart of any human being; so recite if you will, No soul knows what comfort is kept hidden for it.’”

to concern rape, pederasty, and in certain cases highway robbery, rather than homosexual acts per se. As the SQ authors rightly conclude, a Qur'ānic reading of Sodom provides no such indications.

In many instances, the SQ provides lucid, powerful commentary on verses related to the Hereafter, repentance, virtue, and self-discipline. There are few texts that so seamlessly integrate spirituality (*tazkiya* and *taṣawwuf*), eschatology, intricacies of juristic disagreement, and creed. Take, for example, commentary on *Sūrat Yūsuf* (Q 12), which brings together Biblical references alongside exhortations deriding envy, advocating persistence and patience, the palliative power of prayer, and familial solidarity. The SQ authors take no creative license in this exercise, but rather draw from the copious medieval and modern commentaries relevant insights that animate the content of the chapter in ways that other books simply do not. Whether one is able to appreciate the painstaking research that must have gone into producing this work or not, a non-Muslim accessing the SQ as an entry-point for learning about Islam may in fact maintain prior prejudices, but cannot conclude that Islam as a religion, and the Qur'ān in particular, is a simplistic, irrational, malevolent, or univocal tradition from its content. This, if nothing else, merits considerable praise.

Points of Caution

Given such praise, there are reasons too to be cautious. The SQ is an academic and educational work, and as such includes commentaries from sources that may not be considered orthodox depending on a Muslim's prior commitments or denominational orientation. This includes elaborating views on creed that do not comport with either the Atharī, Ash'arī, or Māturidī Sunni mainstream. Some of the Sufi commentaries can come off as uncomfortably esoteric. Khārijite positions are occasionally expounded upon, and not for the purpose of refutation. Some will also find discomfiting the inclusion of an essay by Ahmed el-Tayyib, the current Grand Imam of al-Azhar and Mubarak/Sisi loyalist who supported the overthrow of Mohamed Morsi (though it should be noted that the essay predates the 2011 Egyptian uprising).

The SQ's commentary is commensurate with the conventions of secular academia. How that manifests is not always clear to common Muslims, but there are significant implications for the employment of the language. For example, when one refers to the self-referential nature of the Qur'ān, or the way in which 'the Qur'ān teaches us' something, the Qur'ān is treated as an object, with its own voice. This taxonomy is deployed by academics to avoid making an ontological claim. By contrast, for believers, the Qur'ān doesn't say anything: God does. As is common in a devotional context, it is God who proscribes, permits, ordains, praises, and condemns. Although such language

is appropriate and necessary for those who do not affirm the divine ontology of the Qurʾān (a significant audience of the SQ) or work within contexts which do not permit overt faith commitments, one should be careful not to internalize that language within confessional contexts and communities.

Early critics have questioned legal rulings attributed to various legal schools (*madhāhib*) elucidated in the SQ as either not the dominant view within the school or the school or misattributions.⁵ Though the SQ catalogs *ḥadīth* citations and exegetical commentaries, no such citations are provided for legal positions. Referencing source works for legal attributions would help to abate these criticisms, or correct misrepresentations; one should, of course, consult a trained scholar for definitive positions within a particular legal school.

The SQ is a reference work, one that Muslims working in academic contexts will engage. Students and lay congregation members pursuing *ṭalab al-ʿilm* (pursuit of sacred knowledge) should consult a reliable teacher as to whether and how it is advisable to study SQ. Put plainly, Muslim readers should not expect the SQ to inform their beliefs about orthodox Islam.

Departure from Consensus: The Case of *rajm*

In addition to these general remarks, there are more serious concerns. Although numerous verses explicating corporal (*ḥadd*) punishments, such as Q 5:38, are not avoided or explained away and, instead, communitarian benefits are articulated, destabilizing effects of wrongs examined, and premodern exegetes referenced—but the more difficult case of adultery (*zinā*) in Q 24:2 is a notable departure from this general heuristic, with the SQ authors opting to entertain a murkier hermeneutic and call into question the juristic consensus related to the issue of lapidation (*rajm*). In this regard, the authors initially mention the four principal prophetic traditions concerning *rajm*, but later purport “inconsistencies” and “incongruities” between them based on details within the disparate reports. In addition, the authors attend to the question of abrogation (*naskh*), both with regard to the abrogated verse of *rajm* as well as the question of the Sunna abrogating the Qurʾān and whether

5. These include, but are not limited to, inaccuracies regarding the legal status of *ʿUmrāh* (*sub* Q 2:158); the status of the Basmalah (*sub* Q 1:1); SQ statement regarding *wuḍūʿ* (*sub* Q 5:6). It is regarding such inaccuracies that one critic has quipped, “If I can’t trust you with a simple legal matter, I surely cannot trust you on matters of doctrine.” Another remarked: “Explication (*tafsīr*) has conditions; many issues—like creed—are not open to personal reasoning.” Still others have questioned the qualifications of the editors of SQ: “If someone does not fulfil the prerequisites for transmitting knowledge, explicating the Qurʾān, doing fiqh, or the like; what are you doing, endorsing [a] work that you know is folly to follow?”

non-mass transmitted (*mutawātir*) reports are sufficient for overturning clear, unambiguous Qurʾānic prescriptions.

There are a number of issues with this hermeneutic that I will try to synthesize here. First and most simply, *rajm* for *zinā* has been part of the juristic consensus since the time of the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace; there is little doubt that it was carried out by the Prophet, the Companions, and Forebears thereafter. It continued to be enforced for centuries after the early generations, with no scholar seriously arguing it as having been misapplied prior to the 20th century. If one were to accept SQ verdict on it, one would, in effect, have to accept that thousands of scholars spanning centuries simply got it wrong, or somehow acted in bad faith.

Second, the prophetic traditions concerning *rajm* are not negligible. The principal reports cited in the SQ span dozens of traditions in Bukhārī and Muslim alone, with narrations pronounced by way of thirteen independent Companions of the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, across the two canonical texts. ‘Alī, ‘Umar, Abū Hurayrah, Jābir, Zayd ibn Khālid, Ibn ‘Abbās, Ibn Mas‘ūd, Ibn Abī ‘Awfa, ‘Ubāda, Buraydah, Jābir ibn Samura, ‘Imrān ibn Ḥusayn, and Abū Sa‘īd al-Khudrī—God be pleased with them—all provide *rajm* accounts. In other words, the two most authoritative works in the field of prophetic narrations contain a multitude of independent reports about the Prophet having carried out *rajm* and the Companions fervently defending its place within Islamic jurisprudence. Ibn Qudāma (*Mughnī*), al-Bayhaqī (*al-Kubrā*), Ibn Ḥazm (*Marātib al-Ijmā‘*), Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr (*Istidhkār*), Ibn al-Mundhir (*al-Awsal*) and Māwardī (*al-Ḥāwī*) cite a consensus on the issue of *rajm*, with Ibn Qudāma saying he “is unaware of any discordant [views on *rajm*] other than the Khārijites” (see *Mughnī* 3/209). To simply dichotomize the issue as one of singular (*aḥād*) reports and dispense with it is not enough.

Third: The “incongruities” referred to are forced upon the various traditions. For example, in comparing the opportunities to recant afforded to the male adulterer with the Jewish couple to whom the Prophet—upon him blessings and peace—extended no such opportunity, the Prophet may have felt reluctant to offer leniency out of consideration to the established rabbinic authority. As is mentioned in the tradition concerning the Jewish couple, the Prophet—upon him blessings and peace—requested a copy of the Torah and adjudicated based on the ruling of their tradition, not his, while the couple are reported to have approached the Prophet for the explicit purpose of escaping the Torah’s retribution for adultery. Al-Zamakhsharī, al-Ṭabrisī, al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr and al-Rāzī all either explicitly make mention of the Jewish couple tradition or invoke the ruling of lapidation as one of the reasons for the revelation of Q 5:42-43 (as is noted in the SQ commentary of Q 24:2), the latter of which states, *And how is it that they come to thee for judgment, when they have the*

Torah, wherein is God's Judgment? The “misquotations in the Torah” mentioned in the SQ may in fact belong to a recension of the Torah extant during the Prophetic period. As for the famous case of the employer’s wife, in which a father’s son commits adultery with his employer’s wife, it makes no mention of the specifics carried out by the delegation sent to obtain a confession. It is quite possible that she chose to confess like the pregnant adulteress. Banishment, combining stoning and lashing, and related considerations may be viewed as discretionary, beyond the explicit *ḥadd* ruling—perhaps based on the nature of the infidelity, and as supported by the prophetic traditions. For example, the case of the employer’s wife began with the adulterer’s father attempting to offer compensation for his son’s crime, and the Prophet’s inclusion of the banishment—upon him blessings and peace—may have been added as a future deterrent against attempted bribery. There are other possibilities, many of which are examined and detailed in works authored by eminent premodern jurists. In conventional jurisprudence, scholars would exhaust legal instruments of reconciliation prior to classifying prophetic traditions as conceptually irreconcilable (*muḍṭarib*).

Fourth: The issue of abrogation (*naskh al-tilāwah*), though important, is not the central legal issue in determining the applicability of *rajm*. Even in the absence of the abrogated verse, the multitude of prophetic traditions, practice and statements of the Companions, and juristic consensus forms a sufficient corpus to evidentially support *rajm*. Furthermore, strictly speaking, the prophetic traditions concerning lapidation do not abrogate the verses stipulating flogging (*jaldah*), but rather delimit them to unmarried fornicators. Finally, although the SQ mentions lapidation as “a more grievous punishment than all others mentioned in the Qurʾān,” that distinction almost certainly belongs to the punishment for brigandry (*ḥirābah*) in Q 5:33.

The foregoing is an expounding of the premodern consensus, a defense of the place of *rajm* in the premodern tradition, and stands apart from how Muslim communities should wrestle with these traditions today. The SQ says nothing as to how this can be done (nor is that its purpose or claim). Some modern jurists have called for a moratorium on the *ḥudūd* corporal punishments altogether, and others have specifically called for a revisitation of the *ḥadd* related to *zīmā* due to unfortunate abuses, honor killings, and other misapplications that have resulted in the deaths of many innocent lives. This is not a trivial matter, and any earnest effort to address current abuses will have to take the tradition and its evidences into account on its own terms.

Soteriological Pluralism⁶ in the SQ

6. Though much of the social media fervor has employed the term perennialism, pluralism is, in fact, a more accurate term to denote

The legal case examined above aside, an even more problematic concern is with the SQ's pluralistic commitments. Upon release, Muslim critical reception of the SQ fixated almost exclusively upon the pluralist advances of the SQ, responding most pointedly to an essay in the SQ authored by Joseph Lumbard entitled "The Qur'ānic View of Sacred History and Other Religions". After reading social media vituperation over the inclusion of pluralist soteriological commitments, my initial suspicion was that such a reading was overstating the pluralist overtones, preoccupied with an essay in the back of the book and perhaps curious interpretations of verses Q 3:84-85. But such critics were not altogether wrong in begrudging the multiple areas in which pluralistic interpretations are forced into passages that do not ostensibly support them and have never been maintained as such within the tradition. What follows will again be an attempt to synthesize the primary arguments averred by the SQ authors within the exegetical commentary itself while also paying heed to a few arguments in Lumbard's essay. The primary arguments in the SQ concerning this topic are as follows:

- Q 5:73 rebuts Monophysite Christology and not Chalcedonian Christology. Non-Chalcedonian Christological orientations are presented on multiple occasions as the focus of the Qur'ān.
- Q 2:79 and elsewhere are not speaking about the Abrahamic (Kitābi) traditions. The scriptures of the Kitābi traditions have not been excessively altered.
- Q 2:62 is the primary verse serving as a rule for the salvific efficacy of other traditions. More critical verses addressing other traditions should be subsumed beneath Q 2:62.
- Q 3:84-85 and elsewhere speak to a general, universal submission to God ("islam"), and not to the specific "Islam" characterized by the prophethood of Muḥammad, peace and blessings upon him.

With respect to the Trinity, the SQ maintains in multiple places that orthodox Chalcedonian Christology is not the subject of God's reprimand in the Qur'ān, but rather exaggerated forms of the Trinity (namely, Monophysite Christology). The claim of 'exaggeration' is an argument extended from Q 4:171, which reproaches the People of the Book (*ahl al-kitāb*) for exaggerating (*taghlī*) in their religion. Although the SQ does in fact state that the tradition largely considers a unicity of God with three hypostases as incommensurable with the theology of Islam, a grievous error, and a major sin, in other places it delimits criticism to non-Chalcedonian Christology and largely creates a

the extending of salvific efficacy to diverse faith traditions. Though particular perennialist orientations may accord a pluralist soteriology, one does not necessitate the other.

distinction between a Trinity with three hypostases and polytheism (*shirk*) proper, alleging the former to not necessarily constitute the latter. In the commentary of Q 4:171 and Q 5:73 it is stated that “the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity as three ‘persons,’ or hypostases, ‘within’ the One God is not explicitly referenced, and the criticism seems directed at those who assert the existence of three distinct ‘gods,’ an idea that Christians themselves reject.” Later, the commentary states that “Islamic Law never considered Christians to be ‘idolaters’ (*mushrikūn*) and accepted Christians’ own assertion of monotheistic belief.” In certain instances, the SQ portrays Chalcedonian Christology as a minority, or at the least, largely misunderstood/unknown during the formative period of Islam.

Although medieval Eastern Christianity was more complex than the post-Niceno-Constantinopolitan theology which dominates today, Chalcedonian Christianity was not altogether uncommon and there is little reason to assume the early Muslim community to have been unaware of its presence and beliefs. The direct Qur’ānic criticisms of Christians include their attributing divinity to Christ, a child to God, and belief in a Trinity. There is no scholar in Islamic history that I am aware of who provided a concession for one Christological orientation over another, and exposure to Melkite Churches and its concomitant beliefs existed from the earliest days of Islam.

The earliest Christian apologetic text in Arabic to address Islam was a manuscript entitled *On the Triune Nature of God (Fī tathlīth Allāh al-Wāḥid)* by an unknown author (loosely dated to the early/mid-8th century). In it, the author goes to great pains to emphasize that Christian theological commitments are not of three separate “gods”, but of a single God with multiple states. One can assume that this means that in the formative period, Chalcedonian Christology was not being treated any differently than other forms of Christology, and the earliest Muslims regarded it as constituting the very Trinity which the Qur’ān rebukes. Another early Christian writing, a famous polemic against Islam, is John of Damascus’ (656-749) *Fount of Knowledge*. A Chalcedonian Christian, John characterizes Muslim belief as follows:

He says that there is one God, creator of all things, who has neither been begotten nor has begotten. He says that the Christ is the Word of God and His Spirit, but a creature and a servant, and that He was begotten, without seed, of Mary the sister of Moses and Aaron. For, he says, the Word and God and the Spirit entered into Mary and she brought forth Jesus, who was a prophet and servant of God. And he says that the Jews wanted to crucify Him in violation of the law, and that they seized His shadow and crucified this. But the Christ Himself was not crucified, he says, nor did He die, for God out of His love for Him took Him to Himself into heaven. And he says this, that

when the Christ had ascended into heaven God asked Him: ‘O Jesus, didst thou say: “I am the Son of God and God?”’ And Jesus, he says, answered: ‘Be merciful to me, Lord. Thou knowest that I did not say this and that I did not scorn to be thy servant. But sinful men have written that I made this statement, and they have lied about me and have fallen into error.’ And God answered and said to Him: ‘I know that thou didst not say this word.’⁷

Of note above is John’s characterizing of Islam’s conception of God against the Trinity (note that elsewhere in *Fount* John argues time and again for Jesus being consubstantial with God, in contrast to his Muslim interlocutors). John’s location in the first century of Islam is critical, as his understanding is largely being informed by information imparted by the Companions unto early converts. In this regard, John describes Prophet Muḥammad, upon him blessings and peace—as advocating for “one God, creator of all things, who has neither been begotten nor has begotten.” This same dynamic can be observed in the treatises (*mayāmīr*) of Theodore Abū Qurrah (750-823), as translated by John Lamoreaux. These treatises often simultaneously respond to both Islam and Monophysite Christology, directing vituperative criticism toward both.

One must conclude that if God were addressing only certain Christological orientations and not others, or that it only explicitly called out three separate “gods” but not “states” or hypostases, then that nuance was either missed by the early Muslim community, or that the early Muslim community succumbed to religious chauvinism and disregarded its otherwise ecumenical nature. The distinction between the legal categories of the People of the Book (*ahl al-kitāb*) from polytheists (*mushrikūn*) does not mean that one cannot simultaneously be another. Indeed, anything that derogates from the unicity of God constitutes a type of shirk, let alone belief in a godhead with three concurrent states, one of which is believed to be the son of God.

In the commentary of Q 2:62, attention is paid to the case of one who hears about Islam, but encounters obstacles that prevent Islam from taking hold. The SQ cites al-Ghazālī’s *Fayṣal al-tafrīqa*, which speaks of the ‘unreached’, an excuse that was more plausible in premodern societies. Theologians have long incorporated such individuals into the category of those ‘excused’ from being subject to chastisement, in keeping with Q 17:15, *We do not punish until We have sent a messenger*. How the notion of ‘unreached’ translates to those whose only

7. See *Fount of Knowledge*, part two entitled *Heresies in Epitome: How They Began and Whence They Drew Their Origin from Writings*, by St John of Damascus, *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 37 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1958), pp. 153-160, accessed from http://orthodoxinfo.com/general/stjohn_islam.aspx on February 2, 2016.

exposure to Islam is via the medium of hostility and antagonism, has also been dealt thoroughly.⁸

Though one may argue that soteriological pluralism is ancillary to the overall project of the SQ, or relevant only to a fraction of the two-thousand page oeuvre, the pluralist references do abound: many verses that repudiate Christian or Jewish doctrine are reinterpreted or historicized; salvific efficacy is extended to *all* religions and paths, so long as they are subsumed under the general postulate of “submission to God” (“islam”), instead of the particularized Muhammadan “Islam”. In this regard, belief in the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, is then inessential; belief in the Qurʾān itself and compliance with its injunctions are likewise non-compulsory for individuals living in a post-Muhammadan world. Its implication is that one could renounce the particularized Muhammadan Islam altogether in favor of a more broadly understood “islam” and still find themselves entitled to God’s salvation.

Such an understanding of soteriology is difficult to support within a full reading of the Qurʾān, and certainly impossible after taking into account the less accommodating *ḥadīth* tradition which contains unambiguous reports such as, “By the One in Whose hand is the soul of Muhammad, there is no one among this nation, Jew or Christian, who hears of me and dies without believing in that with which I have been sent, but he will be one of the people of the Fire.” Verses repudiating the *Kitābī* traditions are not scant—they compose a major constituent of the Qurʾān, including extensive passages in Surat al-Baqarah, Āl-ʿImrān, al-Nisāʾ, and Māʾidah. They include critiques of *Kitābī* theology, ecclesiastic authorities, alterations of sacred texts, and implores the People of the Book to submit to the message of the Qurʾān and the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace. Attempts to proffer an inclusivist soteriology requires, as has been shown, a reliance on the Qurʾān-alone absent the prophetic tradition, a subordination of the majority of verses addressing the *Kitābī* traditions beneath Q 2:62, dismissal of the scholarly tradition, and unsubstantiated historicizing. Such a conclusion can fairly be described as a departure from consensus and unfaithfulness to tradition.

Conclusion

The current landscape of Qurʾān exegesis in English to date has not offered much to non-Muslims and Muslims born in western lands seeking to learn about

8. Al-Ghazālī, for instance, adds to the category of those to whom the message of Islam has not reached, those who have only been reached with a distorted picture of Islam. In al-Ghazālī’s view, such people are excused until after they have had an opportunity to learn the truth (*Fayṣal al-tafrīqa*, *Majmūʿa rasāʾil al-Imām al-Ghazālī*, 3:96).

the Qurʾān. As a result, inquiring minds have been relegated to unreliable, often simplistic, web sites responding to “hot button” issues, frequently within a particular theological/denominational persuasion. Consequently, the intellectual legacy of Islam has largely gone unappreciated outside of specialist circles. For many lay Muslims, scholastic discordance has been perceived as an exceptional circumstance, disagreement portrayed as derogating from an unrealistic ideal of unity, and theological polarizations the norm. Lost in the myriad challenges associated with inaccessible literature about the Qurʾān has been the increasingly perverse portrayal of Islam and the Qurʾān in the minds of the general public.

The presence in recent years of more intelligible Qurʾān translations has surely helped, but accompanying commentaries remain nonexistent. Within this context, the SQ is a monumental contribution to the field of Qurʾān studies, offering perhaps the first proper exegetical work on the Qurʾān in the English language. Anchored in a traditionalist narrative accumulated over a thousand years, the SQ has coalesced the views of luminaries and theologians from disparate theological orientations and denominations. Although it is not the “final word on a whole tradition”, and nor does it seek to be, as Caner Dagli remarked in response to early critics, it certainly provides appreciable insight into a sophisticated, multi-dimensional tradition which has come to formulate how Islam is conceptualized today.

The SQ has regrettable instances in which it has departed from consensus, namely, with respect to lapidation and soteriological pluralism. In both cases, traditional theological methodologies have been jettisoned in favor of extenuating considerations and questionable heuristics that contradict normative orthodox religious teachings. Despite these legitimate and important concerns, non-Muslims interested in Islam, Muslims distant from their faith, policy makers, and universities making use of the SQ is far preferable to the overwhelming majority of content related to the Qurʾān today. In that vein, we are certainly indebted to its authors.

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The author wishes to gratefully acknowledge the feedback from the SQ authors in support of this piece. Their insights and feedback have animated this review in important ways. Though some of the critiques in this article are not favorable in reviewing certain topics in the SQ, I have found the authors themselves to be nothing other than genuine, open to dialogue, and very interested in furthering conversations that have been generated since the SQ's release. An earlier version of this review appeared on Muslimmatters.org.

‘Ā’ishah al-Bā‘ūniyyah • *The Principles of Sufism* • Translated by Th. Emil Homerin • New York University Press • 2016 • ISBN: 978-0-8147-4528-1 (HB) • 978-0-8147-4516-8 (e-book)

This bi-lingual edition of *al-Muntakhab fī uṣūl al-rutub fī ‘ilm al-taṣawwuf* by the Damascene Sufi master ‘Ā’ishah al-Bā‘ūniyyah (d. 923/1517) brings to English readership a rare feast: a short treatise on four fundamentals of the Sufi path—Repentance, Sincerity, Remembrance, and Love—strung together with copious quotations from the works of great masters such as al-Kalābādhi (d. 380/995), al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021), al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1074), Ibn al-‘Arīf (d. 536/1141), ‘Umar al-Suhrawardī (d. 632/1234), and Ibn ‘Aṭā’ al-Iskandarī (d. 709/1309). The somewhat simplified version of the original Arabic title notwithstanding, the translation reads well and additional notes, which trace the original quotations in ‘Ā’ishah’s work back to their authors and sometimes other Sufi works, enhance the value of the translation.

The original title, “A Selection of the Principles of the Stations in the Science of Ṭaṣawwuf,” indicates the author’s desire to present a selection of the wisdom of Sufi masters, which she does by using the traditional structure of such works, which had been fully explicated by her time: each of the four sections begins with relevant Qur’ānic verses and their commentary by Sufi masters, followed by selected Ḥadīth, almost always sourced to the collections where they appear; this is followed by the sayings of the pious forbears (salaf); and finally the sayings, aphorisms, and stories of the later Sufi masters are woven into a narrative that inspires and instructs.

Born in Damascus to a noble family of religious scholars and poets, hailing from the small village of Bā‘ūn in southern Syria, ‘Ā’ishah spent her childhood in the loving care of her father, Yūsuf b. Aḥmad b. Nāṣir al-Bā‘ūniyyah (d. 880/1475), a Shāfi‘ī jurist, who became the chief judge of Damascus. By the time she was eight, she had memorized the Qur’ān and her fine intellect and poetic abilities were already evident. She and her five brothers received traditional education. Her life was to take a major turn when as a teenager or young woman, she went on Hajj with her family.

While in Makka, one Friday night she felt restless and went to the Ḥaram. There, as she reclined on a couch on an enclosed veranda, overlooking the Ka’ba and the sanctuary courtyard, she heard a man recite a poem on the life of the Prophet, and other voices rose, sending blessings upon the Prophet. “Then, I could not believe my eyes—it was as if I was standing among a group of women. Someone said, ‘Kiss the Prophet!’ and a dread came over me that made me swoon until the Prophet passed before me. So I sought his intercession and, with a stammering tongue, I said to God’s Messenger, ‘O my master, I ask

you for intercession.’ Then I heard him say calmly and deliberately, ‘I am the intercessor on the Judgment Day’” (p. xiv, quoted from ‘Āishah’s *al-Mawrid al-ahnā fī-l-mawlid al-asnā*).

This early experience was to shape her life. She joined the Qādiriyyah Sufi Order, to which her family belonged. The translator’s brief note on her life quotes her own words, stating how her education took shape: “My education and development, my spiritual effacement and purification, occurred by the helping hand of the sultan of the saints of his time, the crown of the pure friends of his age, the beauty of truth and religion, the venerable master, father of the spiritual axes, the axis of existence, Ismā‘īl al-Ḥawwārī, may God sanctify his heart and be pleased with him, and then by the helping hand of his successor in spiritual states and stations, and in spiritual proximity and union, Muḥyī al-Dīn Yaḥyā al-‘Urmawī, may God continue to spread his ever-growing spiritual blessings throughout his lifetime, and join us every moment to his blessings and succor” (p. xiv).

Married to Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad Ibn Naqīb al-Ashrāf (d. 909/1503), another devotee of Shaykh Ismā‘īl al-Ḥawwārī, ‘Āishah had two sons and a daughter. After the death of her husband, she went to Cairo, where she was employed at the Mamlūk chancellery, studied jurisprudence with a number of scholars, and eventually returned to Damascus, where she died.

The well-structured short treatise is full of insights of an accomplished Sufi master, who lived a life devoted to worship and Sufi practices. As she brings to life four chosen aspects of Sufi path, ‘Āishah weaves into her narrative wonderful sayings of the previous Sufis. She quotes Yaḥyā ibn Mu‘ādh al-Rāzī, who said, “One slip for a penitent after his repentance is more odious than seventy before it” (p. 13). Dhū l-Nūn al-Miṣrī said, “The repentance of the common people is for sin. The repentance of the people of spiritual distinction is for heedlessness, and the repentance of the prophets is for regarding the weakness of others who fail to attain what they did.”

‘Āishah’s treatise is full of wisdom, culled from centuries of reflection on this well-trodden path. In her chapter on “Sincerity”, she quotes from al-Damīrī’s *Ḥayāt al-ḥayawān* (*The Lives of Animals*):

When God sent Adam, peace be upon him, down to Earth, a herd of gazelles came to him. So he prayed for them and stroked their backs. As a result, musk bags appeared on them. Then another herd asked them the cause of this musk, and they replied, “We visited Adam, peace be upon him, and he prayed for us, and stroked our backs.” So the other herd went to him, and he prayed for them and stroked their backs, but they found no musk. Later, they said to the first herd: “We did as you did, but received no musk in return,” and they replied: “We

visited him for God's sake, but you did that for the sake of musk!" (p. 59)

ʿĀishah ends her chapters with her own couplets. Concluding the third chapter, "Remembrance", she states: "Regarding the proper conduct for remembrance, God inspired the following couplet:

All of recollection's rules, I will tell you,
 So listen, remember, and choose success:
 Repentance, humility, ecstasy, friendship, and fear,
 Truth, presence, purity, fidelity, and flowing tears.

Her greatest personal contribution to the treatise is in the "Epilogue on Love", about which she says: "At the conclusion of this book, God the Exalted inspired us with mystical truths, in both poetry and prose, regarding this very special love. They are appropriately placed here as an epilogue to this work. We ask God's help, and He Suffices us and is the best trustee" (p. 143). The twenty-page epilogue consists of wonderful insights of a mature and accomplished Sufi master. She calls love, "God's most wondrous secret, the result of being chosen, the effect of designation, the means to proximity, and the ascension to union (*mi' rāj al-waṣl*)" (p. 143).

The translation reads well, but for certain usual breaks in the flow of the text, which reduce the force of the original—perhaps arising from a concern for ease of reading in English. A case in point is the just-quoted translation (paragraph 2, p. 142). Whereas the original paragraph has no pauses and advances into ever-increasing depth, filled with the force of Divine love and self-effacement, recording station after station, until it outpours into the loving recall of a Qur'ānic verse, the translation is broken up into five sentences, requiring addition of extra particles, thus reducing the impact of the original. Likewise, certain technical terms such as *jafā'*, *ṣafā'*, *jalāl*, and *jamāl*—rendered respectively as "mystical state of estrangement", "state of purity", "glory", and "beauty"—could be more eloquently translated. Yet these are minor points compared to the enormous benefit of having this wonderful book in an Arabic-English edition. Notes and bibliography, a specially designed and clear typeface for the Arabic text (DecoType Naskh by Thomas Milo and Mirjam Somers) and a delicate font for the English text—both uniformly used for all books in the Library of Arabic Literature Series of NYU Press—enhance the aesthetic quality of production.

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Yasminah Hashim and Muhammad A. J. Beg • *A Journey Through Islamic History: A Timeline of Key Events* • Kube • 2015 (reprint) • HB
 • ISBN 978-1-84774-028-1

This colorful book chronicles fourteen hundred years of Muslim history and civilization in linear timelines, supported by maps, charts, photographs, and lavish illustration. Initiated by a personal desire to see the big picture in a nutshell and graphically encompass the incessant flow of time—that is history—in a manner that attaches individual lives to the greater collective, the book took shape through a collaborative effort of the Saudi lawyer Yasminah Hashim, who started to make out these timelines at the age of seventeen, and UK based historian Muhammad A. J. Beg, who passed away in 2014 in Cambridge. *A Journey through Islamic History: a timeline of Key Events* begins with the birth of the Prophet and ends with the mention of certain events of 2015. Within this sweeping timeframe, there are varying degrees of depth; coverage is scanty in certain cases, more elaborate in others, but since the narrative is kept to a bare minimum, the value of the book is in its timelines and charts. The book overviews, in chronological order, the time of the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, the Rightly-Guided Caliphs, the Umayyads, ‘Abbasids, Mamluks, Ottomans, Safavids, Mughals, the rise of European power, and modern Muslim nation-States.

Color maps provide graphic depictions of their time period. “Conquests of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs and the Umayyads” (p. 23) shows Arab advance from 11AH till 40AH; subsequent maps similarly portray the changing Muslim environs, for example: Crusader States of the Middle East 1096-1291 (p. 77), European Empires in the Muslim World, c. 1920 (p. 147), Muslims around the World, 2009 (p. 161) and Palestinian and Jewish Land 1945–1999 (p. 169).

The first chapter about the Qur’ān and the life of the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, presents certain information that is conjectural, or even inaccurate. The last verse of the Qur’ān to have been revealed is said to be Q 5:3, revealed at ‘Arafāt, whereas even though there is no scholarly consensus on the exact verse that was the last, there is consensus that the Prophet continued to receive revelation after the Farewell Pilgrimage (see al-Suyūṭī, *Itqān*, Type 8, “What part of the Qur’ān was revealed last”). The floor plan of the house where the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, lived in Makkah, is totally conjectural; it identifies a very large room marked “Khadijah’s Office”, another room is labeled “Reception”—even the birthplace of Fatima and “The Prophet’s prayer room” are shown (p. 15)! All of this is imagination, as no such information is available anywhere in the sources. The timeline given for the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, so scanty; missing from it are the well-known journey to Syria with his uncle; it inaccurately states that “six months after the first revelation, Gabriel reveals to Muhammad that he is

the Messenger of God” (p. 18)! The timeline includes little information about the richly documented events of the twelve years in Madina. Fabled Central Asian cities like Samarqand and Bukhara are not considered worthy of much attention; scholars like al-Ghazālī are mentioned in passing Mali, Mauritania, and Timbuktu do not seem to have caught author’s attention.

First published in 2012 with 164 pages, this revised edition has 184 pages. With over 175 photographs and illustrations, approximately 500 entries in its timeline, and textboxes highlighting personalities, events, and ideas, *A Journey Through Islamic History: A Timeline of Key Events* is for lay readers interested in a picture book on Muslim history. It should, however, not be taken as a primary or even secondary source of reliable information, for this is not a scholarly text rooted in sources. The picture credits on the last page acknowledge copyright of some of the photographs along with an offer from the publishers “to rectify any omissions in future editions following notification from the copyright holders”(p. 184), but it is somewhat disturbing to discover inaccurate or absent credits and that none of the 16 maps in the book cite their source.

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THE ISLAMIC GIFT ECONOMY:
A BRIEF STATEMENT

Adi Setia

What is the Islamic Gift Economy?

The Islamic Gift Economy (IGE) is an integrative economic system that is autonomous and prosperous on its own ethical and structural principles while in constructive engagement with the currently dominant neoliberal capitalist system. IGE is based on the operative principles of cooperation, mutual consent, and partnership, and these are in turn founded on the principal ethics of compassion, gratitude, generosity, moderation, accountability and responsibility. While Islamic, these ethical principles also resonate very well with the ethical systems of other major world religions such as Buddhism and Christianity.

Metaphysically, IGE is grounded in the foundational psycho-cosmological outlook expressed in the belief that the natural and cultural resources of the world are abundant, while the material needs and wants of human beings are limited by sufficiency and should be thus limited. The outward quantitative growth in material prosperity is bounded by parameters of sufficiency (*kifāyah*) beyond which growth becomes qualitative and is directed inwards towards the cultivation of immaterial prosperity expressed in terms of happiness, balance and peace with respect to personal fulfillment, family cohesion, social relation, cultural enrichment and communal solidarity. In short, IGE is directed towards the cultivation of Right Livelihood for the Common Good.

The Islamic Gift Economy can thus be defined as *the provisioning and*

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sharing—by mutual giving and receiving through fair social and commercial exchange—of natural and cultural abundance for realizing material and spiritual wellbeing. This definition takes into consideration that the world and humankind are not only material or physical in nature but, more fundamentally, they are also spiritual and have a higher, metaphysical significance. They serve a cognitive and moral purpose that transcends their immediate physicality or sensuality; namely, a purpose which is indicative of a higher, more encompassing Reality from which they originated, on which they are dependent, in which they are embedded, and to which they are responsive and ultimately accountable.

What is a Gift?

The elements constituting a gift are basically six, namely (i) benefit, (ii) value, (iii) relevance, (iv) goodness (v) licitness and (vi) ownability. An economic exchange of goods and services that are constituted by these six basic elements will be a fair, just and equitable exchange serving both personal good and the common good. Here, the foundational notion of the ‘gift,’ or rather, gifting, giving and provisioning, is significant, for a deep reflection will show that economic exchange has less to do with taking than with gifting, and hence, ultimately more about serving wider, communal/public rather than narrow, individual/private interests. As a matter of fact, even the so-called individual ‘private interest’ that is served in formal commercial exchange is inseparably embedded into the larger fabric of communal ‘public interest’, hence *the commercial is never in spite of the communal*. The Gift Economy is the *Economy of Togetherness*.

The culture of the Gift is the capacity to express compassion, justice, reciprocity, dignity, harmony and humanity in the interests of building, maintaining and strengthening the community. The Gift Economy speaks of our inter-connectedness, togetherness, our common humanity and the responsibility to each and yet to all that flows from our mutual connections. The Gift Economy realizes that people are people through other people; it sees a person, an individual as being-with-others and not being-alone or being-isolated. It prescribes how we should relate to others, in that “being-with-others” is all about *personal good in the service of the common good*. Thus the Gift Economy is also the traditional African *ubuntu* economy.

The Gift Economy in the West

It is also pertinent here to say that this manner of systemic rethinking of what constitutes a true economy has been taking place for quite some time amongst the more conscientious economic and social thinkers and intellectuals of the West, such as Karl Polanyi, E. F. Schumacher, Kenneth Boulding, Bill McKibben, Herman Daly, Howard Zinn, Noam Chomsky, Hazel Henderson, Mark

Anielski, Molly Scott Cato, Tim Jackson, Juliet Schorr and Charles Eisenstein, among many other like-minded thinkers, economists and philosophers.

Also, the many interfaith dialogues over the past few years between Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and Christians on engaging the modern economy and its monetary system have all converged on the imperative of *re*-integrating economic life into the ethical framework of compassion, giving, gifting, sharing, temperance, moderation, justice, mutuality and gratitude, as it was realized in the long history of the traditional, community-centered socio-economic institutions and practices amongst the world's peoples.

The Gift Economy as the Circulative Economy

The Gift Economy as the Circulative Economy can be expressed in brief in the following three main points:

1. When every one gives, every one also receives, and none is left out, and none is marginalized.
2. The Gift Economy is an economy of mutual giving and receiving; of earning and provisioning; of a healthy interdependence between rich and poor whereby the surplus value of the rich is reinvested in the poor.
3. This Gift Economy is an economy of virtuous circulative exchange between rich and poor, *not* a vicious exchange between rich and rich; hence wealth is always in circulation among people and not hoarded nor monopolized by a select few.

The Gift Economy as the Economy of Embeddedness

This can be expressed in the following set of principles:

- The material is embedded in the spiritual.
- The physical is embedded in the moral.
- The technical is embedded in the ethical.
- The market is embedded in the cultural.
- Economy is embedded in ecology.
- Commercial exchange is embedded in social exchange.
- The individual is embedded in the communal.
- Self interest is embedded in public interest.
- The short-term is embedded in the long-term.
- The temporal is embedded in the eternal.
- The sectoral is embedded in the total.
- Financial returns are embedded in social returns.
- The ideal is embedded in the real.
- The financial sector is embedded in the real sector.

Some Salient Ethical Elements of Gifting

- *rahmah* = mercy, compassion
- *'adl* = justice, equity, fairness
- *shukr* = gratitude, appreciation
- *ihsān* = generosity, magnanimity
- *tawāzun*; *ta'affuf* = moderation, temperance, balance
- *amānah* = responsibility, accountability
- *khilāfah* = trusteeship; stewardship
- *zuhd* = abstinence, detachment
- *qanā'ah* = contentment
- *kifāyah* = sufficiency
- *ta'āwun* = cooperation, solidarity
- *nush* = good counsel, transparency

Operationalising the Islamic Gift Economy

The Islamic Gift Economy is operationalised through educational and training programs; through creating the appropriate enabling social, commercial and legal structures; and through initiating pilot projects on the ground for re-empowering local economic resilience and to provide proofs of concepts; and all these are facilitated through strategic collaboration with like-minded policy makers, professionals, non-governmental organizations, state agencies, community leaders, intellectuals, scholars, activists, business people and researchers, including 'ulama, fuqaha', shuyukh, imams and muftis, and religious leaders in general.

Conclusion

Since the 2007-2008 (and still ongoing) credit crunch, which has caused a lot of hardship to many communities across the globe, many thinking and conscientious intellectuals and scholars in the East and West are working very hard to work out in theory and in practice long-term systemic solutions for redirecting the economy to serve concrete, flesh and blood people and communities rather than faceless, impersonal, abstract profit-maximizing banks and corporations. The Islamic Gift Economy can be read as a real, positive Muslim contribution towards realizing those long term solutions for the common good of all humanity and all life.