

SURKHEEL SHARIF

Footprints

ON THE SANDS OF TIME

365 aphorisms for daily
contemplation and
meditation

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Footprints on the Sands of Time

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In the Name of Allah, All-Merciful, Bestower of Mercy

INTRODUCTION

Here is a collection of musings and aphorisms that are religious in nature and that I penned over the last two decade. They cover a spectrum of reflections and life-lessons, with no particular structure or arrangement. I have, nonetheless, grouped them into chapters, so as to avoid monotony and facilitate meditation. Many of these musings have found their way into one online posts of mine, or another; but maybe not most. They mix a little politics with spirituality, relationship issues with social activism, mental health concerns with the art of simple living, and issues of Muslimness with the challenges of modernity.

As for the title of this anthology, it was culled from a line written by the American poet, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (d.1882), widely regarded as the best-loved American poet of his age, entitled, *A Psalm of Life*:

*Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time.*

Many of these *Footprints* are intended to serve, not as end statements in or of themselves, but as meditations

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or conversation starters on Islam, Muslims, modernity and spiritual growth. For this is an age of unparalleled spiritual pollution, and widely rooted ignorance about the human purpose. It is an age where practitioners of all faiths are feeling more and more claustrophobic, as society accords them less and less breathing space and loses interest in their concerns. The pressure that now bears down on Religion for it to concede ever more to the profane are immense. These *Footprints*, then, are offered as part of the ongoing conversation about how we Muslims can best engage such interesting, exciting, yet turbulent times.

Surkheel Abu Aaliyah
August, 2025
London

1. CHANGES

- 1.** Nobility involves: living wisely with oneself, living patiently with others, and living devoutly to Allah.
- 2.** It is said that the worship of the eye is weeping, the worship of the ear is listening, worship of the tongue is voicing thanks and praise, worship of the hand is in giving, worship of the body is striving, worship of the heart is love, fear and hope, and worship of the spirit is surrender and satisfaction in Allah.
- 3.** The majestic beauty of the night sky and the starry heavens are signs to fulfil the soul's deepest longing. If we mistake the signpost for what is signposted, we will end up pinning our hopes on lesser things that will not quench our thirst for true meaning.
- 4.** Political heads are tripping over themselves in their bid to be champions of 'moderate' Islam. But do they seek moderate Islam, or to moderate Islam?
- 5.** Beneficial knowledge is that which increases us in knowledge of Allah, acquaints us with the divine dos

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and don'ts, helps us be less clingy to the world while more desirous of the Hereafter, and brings home to us the flaws and defects in our own selves.

6. Isn't knowing not to give walnuts to the toothless, or earrings to the earless, part of wisdom?

7. The archer intends, not just to hit the target, but to hit the actual bullseye. So in all things, let's heed the prophetic words: *saddidu wa qaribu* – i.e. 'aim as best as you can.' Since once the arrow leaves the bow, the outcome is not in our hands.

8. Islam teaches to measure progress, not in terms of material prosperity or political freedoms, but in terms of an increasing awareness of Allah's presence and the moulding of our lives around such an awareness. So if change via political activism ushers in the first two goals, but harms the latter goal, how can the believer truly rejoice?

9. It was once said to the sage-scholar of early Islam, Sahl al-Tustari, that intoxications are of four types. So he asked: 'Tell me them.' The man said: 'Intoxication of drink, intoxication of youth, intoxication of wealth and intoxication of authority.' Sahl replied: 'There are two more kinds: intoxication of the scholar who loves

1. CHANGES

this world, and intoxication of the devotee who loves to be noticed.'

10. 'Her vulnerabilities invite you to stand up for her, not to stand up to her.' – Abdal Hakim Murad

11. The counsels of Revelation or the warnings of the scholars are often, in and of themselves, insufficient for any whose heart has been seized by worldliness or sins. So Allah makes them taste the turmoils of such worldliness, or the anguish of sins, so that they might be disillusioned by them. Leaving them then becomes easier.

12. Ordinary, mosque-going Muslims know that they know not. Trained scholars know that they know. Self-taught preachers know not that they know not.

13. The world is in a right state; Islam calls you to be in a right state: *Allah will not change the condition of a people, till they change what is in themselves.* [Q.13:11]



2. OPTIMISM

14. Be well-mannered without ceremony, easy-going without negligence, valiant without conceit, serious-minded without pretension and cheerful without fuss.

15. Isn't an affliction that turns us to Allah better than a blessing that distracts us from Him? Isn't an enemy that brings us to Allah better than a friend who cuts us off from Him? Isn't a believer's cup always half-full, never half-empty?

16. 'Modernity is simply our context. We must never allow it to become our excuse.' – Dr. Sherman Jackson

17. Because today's modernity offers Man everything but the essential, it leaves him feeling, bored, empty, distracted and lost. Man, amidst all the extraordinary achievements of science and technology, still fails to find the happiness or contentment he so desperately seeks. Those gifted with some degree of reflectiveness grow ever more cognisant that human fulfilment will not be found on the material plane alone; that man's angst or ennui cannot be healed by anything worldly.

2. OPTIMISM

The Spirit needs to be nourished. It must be made to recall and reconnect with the Source of all goodness and life: Allah. Only then might meaninglessness and despair be truly driven away.

18. Social media is the opium of the narcissists.

19. Intelligent husbands never withhold one person's rights at the expense of another. This is especially the case vis-a-vis his wife and his mother: *O people! Give just measure and weight, nor diminish anything that is due to people.* [Q.11:85]

20. Allah *does* create things He dislikes or hates, but only for the sake of a wise purpose that He loves and is pleased with.

21. Real learning roots four traits in the seeker: piety towards Allah, humility towards others, detachment from worldliness, and striving against one's ego.

22. Whoever claims we can be beholden to the Divine Beauty, before even being clipped and pruned by the Divine Rigour, is an imposter – all but the *majdhub!*

23. The Qur'an forewarns the believers that they will be subjected to much vilification, taunt and mockery from those who do not share their faith: *You will hear*

much that is offensive from those who were granted the Book before you, and from the idolaters. But if you are patient and fear Allah – these are weighty factors in all affairs. [Q.3:186] So when faith takes root in the soil of heedlessness and unbelief, there will always be stern resistance; particularly in the form of verbal abuse or false propaganda. The key is to bear these hurts with resilience, restraint and a deeper duty to Allah, along with the unwavering belief that all unfolds according to His wise plan.

24. ‘There have been men before now who became so interested in proving God’s existence that they came to care nothing for God Himself.’ – C.S. Lewis

25. Isn’t recoiling from the Qur’an’s advice to the soul much like a dung beetle agitated by the fragrance of a sweet smelling rose?

26. Despite the current state of the collective Muslim *ummah*; despite the plethora of forces which confront it today; nor withstanding how Muslim ignorance or slack religiousness can be our own worst enemy, the religion of Islam shall continue to grow, and it shall, as foretold in a hadith, reach wherever day and night reaches. But much of this will be dependent upon the truthful courage of the scholars, the tireless efforts of the callers, and the sacrificial blood of the martyrs.

2. OPTIMISM

27. It is in the nature of science to take things apart to see how they work: it is in the nature of religion to put things together to see what they mean.

28. In today's world, behaviour inconsistent with the ethical teachings of Islam, by those who are meant to be following Islam, is a significant cause for Islam to be devalued and mocked. Discuss!



3. INHALE

29. Be kind, courageous, seek the good in all people, show courtesy, be enchanted with the natural world, be responsible, and be learned in Allah's ways – or at least try. It is all about making the soul luminous.

30. The first chords of the monoculture's swan song began some time back. We are likely now on the final encore.

31. The *murshid* or spiritual 'guide' instructs, advises, trains, awakens sleepy souls, revives decaying hearts and, above all, leads by example.

32. Whereas the Quraysh failed to heed the suffering of the many at the hands of an elite few, the Prophet ﷺ saw it, understood it and gave voice to it.

33. Religiosity, piety and good character must be the touchstone for spouse selection. Much goodness may come from a God-fearing heart, while a pious nature is important for attracting divine grace. But being on good terms with Allah in respect of prayer, fasting or

3. INHALE

other acts of worship, does not always translate into good character or companionship with others. Hence the prophetic advice to select someone whose ‘religion *and* character pleases you.’ – Al-Tirmidhi

34. Only fools wander, only the wise travel, and only the ship that knows where it is heading benefits from favourable winds.

35. Are the conspiracy theories that have etched their way into modern popular culture true? Maybe. Have powerful elites in each age sought to band together to control, manipulate and subdue the masses? Possibly. Is Allah in full control of history and human destiny? Absolutely! Yet many Muslims forget this and instead waste their time, obsessed with chasing shadows.

36. A sign of maturing in Islamic learning is the calm confidence to hold no cast iron stance on many of the *ijtihadi* issues of contention that rage in our times.

37. Beware of egos in marriage: for marital becomes martial when the ‘i’ is pushed forward.

38. To negate the role Western foreign policy plays in fuelling *takfiri* extremism is as naive or as coloured by self interest as denying the role of a twisted theology in nurturing it. Till both gremlins are acknowledged,

and addressed, we fail public security and give kudos to a false political narrative.

39. It has been persuasively argued, and reality points amply to it, that the more we are unschooled in *ih-san*, the more ugliness we will bring into the world.

40. Firmness without knowledge leads to extremism. Frankness without knowledge leads to insolence. And boldness without knowledge leads to argumentation.

41. Muslims are called to witness that each day of our life brings a host of difficulties, trials and travails: *We have indeed created man in toil and hardship.* [Q.90:4] A believer must bear witness too that whilst the liberal monoculture teaches us to drown out these troubles or trials with drink, drugs or distractions, Abrahamic monotheism insists our happiness is best served when we face life's trials patiently, stoically and responsibly: *Those who patiently endure shall be rewarded without measure.* [Q.39:10]



4. CALM

42. It is in a state of solitude that the heart's gaze can best be diverted from the hustle and bustle of creation and be focused solely on the Creator.

43. Over the past three decades or so, it has become clear that many of the Muslims involved in extremist acts have tended to lack even basic religious literacy. The level of religious knowledge is often infantile. It seems, Religion plays its role, less as a driver of their behaviour, and more as a vehicle for their own dark pathologies or political outrage. Here is a limerick to help make the point:

*A bro who once lived with his mummy;
Sought street cred more than he did money.
‘Shall I be a mufti,
Or takfiri-jihadi?’
So he went and brought ‘Islam for a Dummy’.*

44. In Islam, happiness entails: being Allah-centred; not self-centred, being quick to give others their right, civility in speech, thanks for what one has; not greed for what one does not, doing works of faith, and not making a habit of eating to one's full.

45. It's hard to find any greater expressions of *tawhid* than in the *du'as* of the Prophets of Allah; upon whom be peace.

46. The affair is not just that we love, but that we also be loved: 'My servant does not draw closer to Me with anything more loved by Me than the obligatory duties I have enjoined on him; and My servant continues to draw closer to Me through the optional deeds, until I love him.' – Al-Bukhari

47. The Muslim scholarly way is built upon conserving whatever is best in any given political order, collective or society; and seeks to address or rectify imbalances and injustices, instead of toppling or tearing down the whole house in the forlorn hope that something better will arise out of the ashes. And Muslim activism – be it here, or in Muslim majority places – would do well to reflect this.

48. Partake of the earth's fruits for our needs we must; partake of them for our wants we may; but partake of them excessively, irresponsibly or recklessly we must not: *Eat and drink, but not excessively. Allah loves not the excessive.* [Q.7:31]

49. Being rooted in the old, while deducing the new, makes the Muslim jurist fit for purpose.

4. CALM

50. Freedom to want dominates liberalism's discourse. Freedom from excessive or needless wants dominates Islam's.

51. Faithful Jewish hearts might seek, as they wish to live out the Law of Moses, spiritual solace in [Mount] Zion. But the Zionist enterprise, notwithstanding the right of the Jewish people never to again be subjected to a 'final solution', has shown itself to be fanatically fascist, shamefully racist and also zealously genocidal. Anti-semitic we cannot be; anti-Zionist we shall have to be. As for the rather deceitful cry that it all started on October 7th, then for too long it has been the case of, to cite these germane words from Orwell: 'The past was erased, the erasure was forgotten, the lie became truth.' ... But no longer!

52. 'The half-baked jurist asks: What did he say? The seasoned jurist asks: What did he intend?' – Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah

53. If our thoughts stay entrenched in the let-downs of the past, won't it blind us to Allah's blessings on us in the present?

54. Along with the typical types of possible husbands to avoid – the irreligious, immoral, arrogant, miserly, ill-tempered, immature or highly impatient – there is

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another type to beware of too: i.e. those in the grip of serious addictions. Alcohol, drugs or pornography are obvious ones. But two subtler addictions should also be avoided: Firstly, a man's addiction to his mother: a 'mummy's boy'. This must not be confused with our love, honour, duty or kindness to our mothers. There is, though, a big difference between that and sheepish subservience to them. A husband who lets his mother rule the roost, permitting her to marginalise the role and rights of his wife, is failing to offer his wife the protective care she has a God-given right to. The other addiction is to video games. An increasing number of marriages now fail because of it. In short, addictions wreck marriages.

55. In the midst of this burdened world we make our supplications, knowing that when all else fails us, He is always with us; listening and ready to respond: *And your Lord has declared: 'Call on Me, and I will respond to you.'* [Q. 40:60]



5. IMAGINE

56. In calling post-monotheistic Britain to Islam, we must first help people to reawaken their *fitrah*, so that they can leave their comfort zones, begin questioning the assumptions of their age, and be authentic Truth-seekers.

57. Is it better to lose a worldly thing for Allah's sake than to lose Allah for a worldly thing's sake?

58. Purification of the soul is unlikely to come as long as we are seeking it. It will come when we are seeking Him.

59. When one firmly intends to make Allah their goal, or when one wishes to turn away from a former life of heedlessness and dereliction of duty, then one begins with true, heartfelt repentance (*tawbah*): *Truly, Allah loves those who turn to Him in repentance and loves those who strive to purify themselves.* [Q.2:222]

60. Over the past four of five decades much has been said and debated about the dumbing down of society.

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This dumbing down refers to the oversimplification of critical thought, and the diminishment of intellectual content in education, art, culture and politics. Even if we now have more information at our disposal, we are seen to be far less capable of critical thinking than the generations of people before us. The argument is that media, entertainment, the over reliance on tech, and surrendering to turbo-consumerism has all led to this numbing or dumbing down. A more sinister narrative says the dumbing down has been socially engineered so the powers that be can continue to keep the masses in check – less in an Orwellian way, and more in the Huxleyan sense.

61. Committing sin is no doubt wrong. But when sins no longer strike any discordant note in our soul, isn't that when we really need to worry?

62. Why are we forever telling non-Muslims about the great Muslim achievements of the past? But what of great Muslim achievements in the present?

63. It is precisely because life is never without its ups and downs, its joys and sorrows, that a Muslim knows a good life must be lived with a tinge of melancholy. Melancholy is not the same as desolation or despair. Nor is it the same as being miserable and depressed. Instead, melancholy could be described as a cheerful

5. IMAGINE

sadness. It is where we acknowledge the goodness of life and Allah's blessings upon us, but also accept that life is filled with much injustice, tragedy and suffering. And it is because of such darkneses that the believer tempers their joy and gratitude to Allah, with patience and pensive sorrow for the tragic woes of the world.

64. The believer is to bear the injustices and political outrages of the time, not with indifference or apathy, but guarded perseverance, dignified response, and a sense of righteous anger which does not burst at the seams or explode into uncontrolled rage.

65. True sincerity (*ikhlas*) isn't just to single-out Allah for worship or do acts for His sake. It's to do so while not being moved by the delight of a compliment, nor the pain of criticism.

66. Should our Islam not help us to imagine a better, fairer, more compassionate world? Should it not help us consider how to build a society which does not just deliver economic prosperity and political security, but also a far better relationship with money, with nature, with others, and with ourselves?



6. ILLUMINATE

67. ‘That which is a means to Religion must have the lights of Religion reflected in it.’ – Al-Ghazali

68. Islam’s masters of the inner life instruct: Let your journey’s provision be mindfulness of Allah, your talk be *dhikr*, and your contemplation be to draw a lesson from the events and people around you. Cling to this until you pass on from this earthly realm.

69. Even the Devil will tempt to virtue, if it leads to a greater vice.

70. The nefarious side of our Information Revolution: misinformation, disinformation and weaponisation of information. Welcome to the Post-Truth era!

71. Rightly-guiding *‘ulema* have long been concerned about pseudo-scholars and charlatans turning Islam into as many things as modernity wants Religion to be. Islamic texts are twisted or tortured so as to make them compliant with whatever ‘ism’ that happens to be modernity’s zeitgeist: be it humanism, secularism,

6. ILLUMINATE

or nationalism,; or more recently liberalism, feminism, or transgenderism. If not these, then Islam no longer means *istislam* – ‘surrender’ to God’s will; a letting go, but a fluffy sort of *salam* – ‘peace’. Their concerns, as it turns out, were wholly justified! A limerick:

*A hippy who was ever so calm;
Thought that peace was the whole of Islam.
His faith got derailed;
God’s Oneness, he veiled;
For a penny, he’ll now read your palm!*

72. Higher than giving our children our unconditional love which, of course, we must do, is to pray we can love them for the sake of Allah: for the faith, piety and beauty they hopefully live by.

73. Let the scholars or callers examine themselves on two accounts: [i] Am I fulfilling the trust of teaching, or betraying it; and [ii] Do I practice what I preach? *O you who believe! Why do you say what you do not do? Odious it is in the sight of Allah that you say what you do not do.* [Q.61:2-3]

74. It’s been argued that whatever political spectrum Muslims advocate for, most Muslim movements and activism that sought change throughout the twentieth century, till now, are locked in the logic of modernity, and so can only operate within its limiting, hegemonic

parameters; its spider's web? Islam, though, premised upon the Adamic *fitrah* and the prophetic *Sunnah* lies outside the monoculture's plethora of philosophies. So it cannot be made subordinate to it. It is why Islam is, and continues to be, the great global dissent from the totalising ideology of liberal modernity.

75. 'Time is the progenitor (lit. father) of marvels and the well-spring of wonders.' – Al-Hasan al-Yusu

76. Small minds always see concrete certainties in *fiqh* issues. But the learned know that *fiqh* issues are never as ironclad as the narrow minded imagine.

77. In order to properly 'represent' Allah to the world, we must know Him. To do that, we must first learn. To learn, we must have curiosity. Only then will we have the impulse to search for truth about His nature, His character and His works; beyond the childhood ideas we learnt about Him. Beyond the innate curiosity we call *fitrah*, we must nurture a conscious curiosity. For with it, will can explore both His Word and His world. Without it, we stagnate, cease to grow, and loose the capacity to truly see: *It is not the eyes that grow blind, but the hearts in the chests that become blind.* [Q.22:46] But if we start to grow in this divine curiosity, we will then be inspired to explore and positively impact this weird and wonderful, messy world.

6. ILLUMINATE

78. Muslim marriage: Let believing spouses seek to be loving companions on a sacred journey.

79. The Qur'an offers every human an opportunity to discover their wings and their worth.

80. Can relationships of marriage, family and friends stand up to the Divine Consequences of unrepentant sins? Do sins not harm the blessings that keep hearts intimate or close in the first place? One hadith tells us this: 'No two people love each other for Allah's sake, or for the sake of Islam, then fall out with each other, save due to a sin one of them does.' – Al-Bukhari, *al-Adab al-Mufrad*.

81. Those whose business is faith must not turn their faith into a business.



7. BALANCE

82. Entertainment is now the new religion, so religion must now be entertaining.

83. Loss and suffering are as inseparable from life as are shadows from the light of day.

84. In principle, we are proud to be Muslims – pride born, not of the ego’s arrogance, but from gratitude for Allah’s guidance: *We would not have been guided had Allah not guided us.* [Q.7:43] We can rightfully be proud if it’s without ego; if it’s of the Spirit (*ruh*). In practice, it is rare for such pride to be without ego, even when it relates to religiousness.

85. *‘Insan with the e-culture becomes insane.’* – Abdal Hakim Murad

86. The journey from a one time Islamic extremist to a darling liberal stalwart is by now a well-known one. Launching themselves with a high profile tell-all book, or TV interview, or public YouTube apology (but not to the Muslims or to the scholars whose guidance was so

7. BALANCE

brashly denied), such anxious-to-please actors bring to the counter-terrorism industry all sorts of pathologies. There are attention seekers, shameless sell-outs, choirs of frightened eulogists, the opportunists and, of course, those in the following limerick:

*An unemployed man called Nabeel;
Said, 'counter-terrorism's a lucrative deal.'
He kicked up a storm;
Called for Islamic reform;
He's now so rich, it's unreal.*

87. For all our modern airs and graces, in the absence of a shared moral code, society as a whole will start to fray at the seams.

88. If we're not spiritually anchored, won't we be cast adrift in the socio-political storms of our age?

89. Given the gravity and importance of marriage, or *nikah* in Islam, it must not be entered into hastily or unadvisedly; for it is *a solemn covenant* [Q.4:21] Rather, it must be entered into honourably, soberly and with trust in Allah. The reasons for marriage must be well pondered before embarking on this quest of intimacy. In Islam's legal tradition the reasons why marriage is ordained are said to be: that the natural instincts of love and intimacy implanted by Allah might be given blessed expression; for mankind's continuation and of

children to be raised in Allah's reverence and thanks; and for society's benefit, given family is the bedrock of a just and caring society, and the context where love, duty, support and sacrifice are first learnt. Or to state it in the language of anthropologists, the function of marriage is to ensure: social reproduction, socialising of children, and the passing on of social capital.

90. The meaning of the daily prayers is attachment to Allah: the meaning of the annual fasting is detachment from *dunya*.

91. In the teachings of mainstream, Sunni Islam — as per a volley of prophetic hadiths) — we do not expect our *'ulama* to lend support to armed rebellion against legitimate Muslim governments, even if such regimes be headed by despots or tyrants. Yet nor do we expect them to be sheepish mouthpieces for *taghut* regimes, siding with them in mowing down unarmed protestors and shedding the blood of the masses. Rather, what we hope from our *'ulama* is that they be mediating voices of reason: recognising the injustices inflicted upon the masses and advising them when they stray from right guidance and sound reason; while also restraining the state's use of force and urging it to redress the public's grievances as best as it can. We could even painfully tolerate silence from the *'ulama*, where they don't side with one camp or another. But *'ulama* who champion

7. BALANCE

the massacre of unarmed civilians does beggar belief. What we ask of our *'ulama* is that they be courageous, without compromising their integrity. What we further ask of them is that they be sincere mediators, without pandering to the public or to the palace.

92. 'While the intellect still seeks a saddle for the *hajj*, love has already encircled the Ka'bah.' – Rumi

93. Shouldn't we want acceptance from others in light of our religious principles, not in spite of them?



8. OPPORTUNITY

94. If learning *'aqidah* does not help stoke the fire of longing for Allah, we're likely learning it in the wrong way, or from the wrong people.

95. Sacred knowledge helps free us from confusion. Worldly detachment (*zuhd*) helps free us from angst. And sober meditation on death and the afterlife helps put life and its struggles into perspective.

96. Be not like those so caught up in the ordeals of the *ummah*, yet hardly pray to the Lord of the *ummah*.

97. If, at day's end, we Muslims forgave all who have wronged us, it would be purer for our souls and more loving to the Lord: *But those who pardon, and seek to reconcile, their reward is with Allah.* [Q.42:20]

98. Maybe a book on Islamic *du'as* might do more for a skeptical mind than a book on *sirah*. The former can make clear abundant sincerity; the latter can be full of confusing genealogies or unpronounceable names. So let's think before we give.

8. OPPORTUNITY

99. Only when egos are hung-up on their coat pegs, and the *shari'ah* respectfully observed, might husband and wife find *sakinah*; sacred peace: *And of His signs is that He created for you wives from yourselves that you might find peace in them.* [Q.30:21]

100. To discuss: 'Practical politics consists in ignoring facts.' – Henry Brooks Adams

101. The deeper we internalise Allah's acts, the more we are led to Allah's love.

102. Why do we find excuses for our own misdeeds, but never an excuse for others? And why do we look at ourselves through rose-tinted glasses, yet scrutinise others with a magnifying glass? *What is with you; how then do you judge?* [Q.10:35]

103. The Qur'an wants us to open our ears to hear the sage voices of the past, so as to help guide us aright in the present, and best prepare us for the future.

104. Religion frowns on us getting too wrapped-up in ourselves. So while self-reflection is a good thing, to work out how to better oneself, being self-absorbed is not. Being our own narcissistic focus of attention must be guarded against. For a believer, it is simply a case of *Allahu akbar* – 'God is greater!' Allah should be our

main focus. One of the great religious insights is that the more we obsess over our own wants and desires, the less likely we are to find what it is we are looking for. Lifting the gaze of the heart from our own-selves, to Allah, is what religion may be said to be all about.

105. Those unhinged from the chain (*sanad*) tradition in terms of authorisation, and permission to transmit or teach, yet still insist on joining the scholarly debate on revival, will wittingly or unwittingly be enemies to the Islamic story.

106. Be not like those who are so involved in proving the correctness of Islam, but care little for practicing Islam.

107. Algorithms do not incentivise *ikhlas*.

108. Monotheism, no doubt, urges compassion. But it demands courage too. It isn't for the faint-hearted. As its vision of the world inspires us to each partake in the healing of society's many wounds, it insists we be critical iconoclasts too: questioning secular wisdoms, challenging conventional orthodoxies, speaking truth to power, asking if universal human rights are really universal, and interrogating liberalism to find out if it is just an elaborate veneer for a new totalitarianism; one that cannot accept any meaningful diversity, and

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is unwilling to accommodate any significant voices of dissent?

109. A scholarly rule says: ‘What counts are realities and meanings, not mere terms or labels (*al-‘ibrah bi’l-haqā’iq wa’l-ma‘ani la bi’l-alfaz wa’l-mabani*). So when it comes to claims of inner purification (*tazkiyah*), this rule cannot be ignored. A limerick:

*There once was a Sufi with beads;
Who was terribly impressed with his deeds.
The Salafi, he scorned;
‘You’ve no purity,’ he warned;
With his self he was all too pleased.*

110. The Prophet Noah, peace be upon him, called out to the animals once, and they boarded the Ark. Yet he called his people for nine-hundred and fifty years, but they chose to drown!



9. RUMINATE

111. Generally, while Muslims are keen to die upon *la ilaha illa'Llah*, far fewer Muslims seem keen to live by *la ilaha illa'Llah*.

112. Where there is a perception, in majority Muslim polities, of bad governance, of disenfranchisement, of religious persecution, of young men feeling alienated, there will be opportunities for Kharijite-like extremists to recruit to their murderous creed and cult.

113. Sacred learning is about life's three great areas: knowledge of God, of Self, and of Sin.

114. The post-religious person is beset by existential angst and despair, born from falsely thinking that life is bereft of meaning: that we're all here by some huge cosmic fluke; that despite our freedom to desire and choose, death is our ultimate end, and so life is utterly pointless. Knowing the psychologies and philosophies that have shaped such a profane age, and so damaged the human perception, is of paramount importance if we are to be therapists: "The greatness of a prophet,

9. RUMINATE

as opposed to a mere logician, is that he understands the inner life of his adversaries, and constructs arguments that help them to recognise the nature of their own subjectivity.’ – Abdal Hakim Murad

115. If the soul lets go of the reigns of *adab*, all things run wild!

116. It is the nature of *Homo religiosus* that if public life is emptied of religious references, society’s souls grow steadily heedless and a downward spiral of faith gathers collective pace.

117. The Holy Qur’an wants marriage life to be a life of mutual kindness and companionship. It says, while addressing men: *Live with them in kindness.* [Q.4:19] It insists: *Give them their dowry in kindness.* [Q.4:25] And if it be the case: *Keep them honourably, or release them in kindness.* [Q.2:229] It also warns men: *House them in your own homes, according to your means. Nor harass them, so as to make life intolerable for them.* [Q.65:6] So, to use that oft-quoted phrase ... be a man!

118. To turn Facebook into Disgracebook or Instagram into Fitnahgram may help get us a larger following or more likes. But such activity will corrupt hearts and damage whatever little relationship we have with the All-Seeing, All-Knowing Lord.

119. The just husband, if ever he comes to know his mother is being unjust or offensive to his wife (i.e. her own daughter-in-law), and such is not a one-off thing, will advise that she stops this mistreatment. For such a mother-in-law might then be on the verge of being a monster-in-law.

120. The juristic rule that states: 'Fatwas change with the changing of time' is not a free for all.

121. Extremism is not excessive piety, it's a lack of it.

122. People should be seen as rich only in as much as the number of things they don't need. The Prophet ﷺ said: 'Richness is not in having many possessions. But richness is in contentment of the soul.' – Al-Tirmidhi

123. Scholars must be on guard against the *fitnah* of governments trying to domesticate them.

124. 'People's affairs in the world are maintained with justice and a certain measure of sin, more than with infringing people's rights, even when no other sin is involved. This is why it has been said: "Allah upholds a just state, even if disbelieving, but doesn't uphold an unjust one, even if Muslim." And that: "The world can endure with justice and disbelief, but it cannot endure with injustice and Islam."' – Ibn Taymiyyah

9. RUMINATE

125. Part of our instinct is to want to avert death and flee from this inevitable intruder; or at least not try to think about it. But there's no dodging this proverbial silver bullet: *That which you are promised will surely come, and you cannot escape it.* [Q.6:134]



10. LOVE

126. Are our children likely to be inspired by Islam if all we parents make it out to be is just a list of do's or don'ts, which often can serve our interests more than it does theirs?

127. Contentment comes by altering our outlook, not necessarily our circumstance.

128. *Taqwa* is about closing the gap between who we have the God-given potential to be, and who we are.

129. Notions of public welfare (*maslahah*) aren't just rooted in ease, nor confined just to this world. Rather, public welfare concerns both this world and the next, and is rooted more in mercy and reigning in the ego, than in ease for its own sake.

130. Discuss: 'Nothing can penetrate the loneliness of the human heart except the highest intensity of the sort of love the religious teachers have preached.' – Bertrand Russel

131. Let our aspiration be driven by divine yearning.

10. LOVE

132. A common error among some practicing Muslims is to conflate outward *adab* with inward *tazkiyah*, and to think the former suffices for the latter.

133. Where we live, the job we do and the places we go can cloud the heart. A hadith says: ‘Whoever lives in the desert becomes coarse, whoever hunts game becomes negligent, and whoever goes to the gates of the ruler is put to trial.’ – Al-Tirmidhi

134. An Islamic maxim states: ‘Whoever’s knowledge increases, his censuring diminishes (Ar. *man kathura ‘ilmuhu qalla inkaruhu*).’ Discuss.

135. Islam’s spiritual path is rooted in: the admission of one’s impotence (*‘ajz*); acknowledgement of one’s existential poverty (*faqr*); realisation that compassion (*rahmah*) is the key principle upon which the cosmos is founded; and attainment of constant reflection and self-awareness (*tafakkur*).

136. The Four Imams have been described by some as grammarians of the divine Word, and the four streams of law and legal culture which flowed from them lent themselves to the stability in Muslim polities for close to a millennium. But by the 20th century – ‘the Age of Extreme’, as it’s been called – reaction to these Four law schools, or *madhhabs*, was being made felt, even

to the masses. Here, as is so often the case, extremes meet. On one hand, modernists dismissed the classical legal formulations as being out of date or irrelevant to the time. On the other, a puritanical outlook sought to 'return to the Qur'an and *Sunnah* in its pristine purity' and sift the wheat from the chaff in the *madhhabs*. Of them, some chose to reject the scholarly *ijma'* that was so central to orthodoxy. Others tried to stitch together a meta-*madhhab*; a *madhhab* to end other *madhhabs*. What they had in common was a reluctance to accept that the men whose works and insights they so lightly treated were far learned and wiser than they were.

137. Led by a prophetic love for the Adamic potential in even the most diehard soul; and knowing that even the most unyielding heart, if confronted with Muslim mildness, forgiveness and moral beauty, might soften, the caller is optimistic; ever hopeful.



11. BEAUTY

138. Challenges of modern marriage: How to be more interesting than your spouse's smartphone.

139. Religiosity needs skill, not just enthusiasm.

140. Look inwardly to see the best version of yourself, then aim for that. This best version of you is the one that most conforms to the life of the Prophet ﷺ.

141. When a clown moves into a palace, he does not become a king. Instead, the palace becomes a circus. When the ego co-opts the *Sunnah*, it does not become beautiful. Instead, the *Sunnah* is made to look ugly.

142. The principle of modesty has long been written out of our social norms or mores. This was bound to impact Muslim attitudes sooner than later. One hadith says: 'Modesty and faith are two close companions, if one of them is removed, the other follows.' – Al-Bukhari, *al-Adab al-Mufrad*. As Muslims themselves begin to relax these principles, or compromise them in the hope of being invited to the table of liberal sensibilities, can

we perhaps see in where it has led others, where we too could be heading? And whilst modesty (*haya'*) is also about dress code, it is not just the hijab or niqab we are talking about. It runs far deeper than that. It's about much more than just the externals. It is about how we behave, how we carry ourselves, and how we as Muslim men and women dispose our souls towards the opposite gender. Ultimately, it is about the heart's purity and acceptability to Allah.

143. Discuss: Is Muslim political participation here in the West a Faustian bargain, such that any who 'make it' have to compromise their faith or dilute their sense of justice in exchange for acceptance?

144. Being regularly occupied in trivial amusement is the infantile happiness of those who cannot think.

145. People's hearts are seldom as bad as their deeds, and usually not as bad as their words.

146. A man bore witness to someone's uprightness in front of *sayyiduna* 'Umar, so 'Umar said to him: 'I do not know you, and it does not harm you that I do not know you. But bring someone who does know you.' A man said: 'I know him, O Leader of the Believers.' 'Umar said: 'With what do you know him?' The man said: 'His uprightness.' So 'Umar asked: 'Is he a close

11. BEAUTY

neighbour such that you know of his nights and days, his comings and goings?’ The man said: ‘No!’ ‘Umar asked: ‘Have you had money dealings with him which points to his piety?’ Th man replied: ‘No.’ ‘Umar then said: ‘Has he been your companion on a journey that may point to his good character?’ The man said: ‘No.’ ‘Umar said: ‘Then you don’t know him.’ – Al-Bayhaqi

147. We either read the ‘book of creation’ in the name of things themselves, or we read them in the name of Allah.

148. No one should be outside our circle of empathy and understanding: as many people as possible ought to be inside our circle of sympathy and forgiveness.

149. The word *‘awrah*, often translated into English as ‘nakedness’, can also mean weakness, vulnerability or something that is unseemly or indecent. Women are considered to be *‘awrah* because of their desirability. In Islam, the feminine form – desirable, alluring and sensuous in the privacy of the marital home – should not be made to appear so in the public sphere. As one hadith says: ‘A woman is *‘awrah*, when she goes out, Satan beautifies her.’ – Al-Tirmidhi. It is not merely the objectifying male gaze that demeans or threatens her. Sometimes some women need saving from their own intemperate selves.

150. The Holy Qur'an, even after fifteen centuries, is still relevant and liveable in terms of its guidance. It meets you wherever you are and guides you to where you ought to be going.

151. Absolute truth about the Divine Nature and the Divine Acts are unknowable. At best, we are required to make do with theological approximations.

152. If we moderns imagine we are kings of our own castles, then let's recall that castles built on sand will never endure: *All that is upon the earth will perish. But the face of your Lord will abide forever, full of majesty and generosity.* [Q.55:26-27]



12. COURAGE

153. Laugh or cry, the world is a very *faani* place.

154. ‘How odd it is that you seek to rectify your heart, while your limbs partake as they want in that which is forbidden.’ – Ibn Ata’illah

155. If, as revealed texts say, the principle of Muslim women is one of *satr* or ‘concealment’, then aren’t the *muslimat* expected to be *masturat*?

156. Our worldview starts with Quranic truths, which then give meaning to historical truths, which in turn give relevant meaning to personal and public truths in the present age.

157. In the attempt to restrain the tyranny of those in power, scholars shoulder a huge responsibility. For as guardians of the sacred law and the prophetic legacy, they are expected to be courageous and independent enough to clarify truth from falsehood – without ego or desire getting in the way; and to gently, yet firmly speak truth to power – if the occasion demands. Fear

that they might likely lose their life in the process, or be tortured, or bring harm upon their family or loved ones, may excuse them from this duty. But what they can't be is a sheepish mouthpiece for shabby tyrants. While speaking about how the venerable scholar and exemplar from the *salaf*, Imam al-Awza'i, spoke to the tyrant of the age, we read that he: '... proclaimed the bitter truth, as you've just seen. Unlike those corrupt scholars who justify for the rulers the persecution and tyranny they plunge into; or turn falsehood into truth for them – may Allah fight them; or who keep silent, despite having the ability to proclaim the truth.' – Cited by al-Dhahabi, *Siyar A'lam al-Nubala*

158. Can we have control over our own lives without having control over our own selves?

159. One well-worn Arab proverb has it that: *nisf al-'ilm akhtar min al-jahl* – 'Half-baked knowledge is far more dangerous than ignorance.' In Islam's scholastic tradition there is the concept of *ta'alum*, of 'feigning knowledge': claiming to be versed in religion, usually by just a little online surfing or reading a few books, rather than formal learning, studying and dialoguing with seasoned *'ulama*. This half-baked knowledge can be more corrupting and dangerous – personally and socially – than plain and innocent ignorance. Time for another limerick:

12. COURAGE

*A lad who was very ambitious;
Gave fatwas on all things religious.
With headscarf so slick;
But no ounce of fiqh;
His nafs found it oh so delicious.*

160. Here's a truism acknowledged by every civilised society: Without law to endorse or enforce contracts in a timely manner, businesses and the economy will collapse. Isn't that the same with marriages: In that if there are no courts to deal with marital grievances, or effective mechanism to settle disputes, the institution of marriage will rapidly weaken.

161. Let a believer's share from you be three: If you cannot benefit him, do not harm him. If you cannot gladden him, do not sadden him. If you cannot speak well of him, do not speak ill of him.' – Yahya b. Mu'adh al-Razi

162. Although blows which are long foreseen fall less violently, they still hurt.

163. Muslim engagement with modernity: We may lick the lolly, but we won't bite the stick.

164. Discuss: In a world where politics is now angry, irrational or chaotic, can we still change people's minds through words or arguments alone?

165. Be not like those who are so busy protesting the political rights of others, yet have little time for Allah's Rights:

*A Muslim proclaimed one day;
'Political Islam is the way.'
Demonstrating;
Is his full-time thing;
He can't even find time to pray!*

166. Since in Islam the goal is to be virtuous, it is not enough to do what is right or choose to act in a godly manner. Virtue must also include feeling the right way about certain acts, ideas and people. This entails not hating or loathing what Allah has revealed in respect to morals, rules or beliefs: *'That is because they hate what Allah has revealed; therefore He makes their deeds fruitless.'* [Q.47:9]



13. LOVABILITY

167. For a Muslim, should good deeds done need any fanfare or trumpets ... or posting selfies?

168. For a seeker, there is no educator like adversity.

169. Alienation, anxiety, depression, existential angst or crisis of identity – while some of these respond to physical treatments, all of them need to be addressed metaphysically, not necessarily chemically.

170. The loving, loveable mother-in-law is a piece of paradise in this world. This is the kind of lady whose hope and prayer is for her son and his wife – i.e. her daughter-in-law – to have a happy, loving and blessed marital life, Her attitudes and actions are a testimony to her righteous hopes and intentions. It is a mother-in-law who, although there may be occasional lapses of beautiful conduct from her, exemplifies what a good and godly Muslim mother-in-law should be. They want their sons and daughters-in-law to have good, blessed marriages. So she doesn't meddle in their affairs, nor dictate how they ought to live their lives, nor put the

daughter-in-law under constant scrutiny, nor into stress or anxious, defensive mess; and nor believes that she is the ultimate authority on parenting.

171. Today's atheism is often less a hatred for God or a well-argued denial of Him, than a technology-driven indifference to Him.

172. Islam the religion births Islam the culture; Islam the culture births great civilisations.

173. The Arabic word *fitnah* can mean: trial, discord, affliction, temptation, civil war, or any other strife that ruptures a community's unity or pits Muslim against fellow Muslim. There is the ageless *fitnah* of women, wealth or worldliness. There is also *fitnahs* of callers to misguidance. And, of course, there is the *fitnah* of sectarian violence and wanton *takfir*. Our Prophet ﷺ delivered this stark warning: 'Before the coming of the Hour there will be *fitnahs* like patches of dark night. A person will awaken in the morning a believer but by evening become a disbeliever, or in the evening be a believer but by morning be a disbeliever; and people shall sell their religion so as to acquire some portion of the world.' – Al-Tirmidhi

174. 'I wish it need not have happened in my time,' said Frodo. 'So do I,' said Gandalf, 'and so do all who

13. LOVABILITY

live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us.' – J.R.R. Tolkien

175. Is it possible for a woman to be in hijab, draped from head to toe in black, yet still lack modesty? And is modesty, at root, about externals, or about how the soul inwardly carries itself? And is body language not part of the hijab? Discuss.

176. The more a person broadens in knowledge, the more his tolerance broadens towards valid differing. If his learning is limited, he will intolerantly or narrow-mindedly censure opinions he has no Islamic right to whatsoever.

177. We needn't argue with the claim that people are happier if they are better fed, housed, or clothed. But argue we must with the claim that happiness on this level is all that matters.

178. Poetry, it is said, is 'the spontaneous overflow of powerful meanings.' The poem below is no exception. For it speaks of a love beyond earthly love; of a deep yearning for what might soothe our sorrows. Though not religious, the believer may uncover in it powerful symbols of religious sentiment: seeking, yearning, love sublimer than any earthly love: the heart's hunger for

FOOTPRINTS ON THE SANDS OF TIME

God. So in his poem, *One Word is Too Often Profaned*, the English Romantic poet, Percy Shelley wrote:

*I can give not what men call love;
But wilt thou accept not
The worship the heart lifts above
And the Heaven's reject not:
The desire of the moth for the star,
Of the night for the morrow,
The devotion of something afar
From the sphere of our sorrow?*

179. Politics must never veil Islam's call to *tawhid* or its core life assumptions.

180. What we do in this world is important. But it is important, ultimately, for the discipline it offers us in order to grow in knowledge of self, knowledge of sin, and knowledge of Allah: *'Then He shall inform you of all that you used to do.'* [Q.62:8]



14. INVITE

181. Let there be a correspondence between what we outwardly represent and the inward state of our souls.

182. ‘By Allah! It is unlawful for you to hurt a dog or a pig without just cause. How then can you ever harm another Muslim?’ – Fudayl b. ‘Iyyad

183. A core part of our responsibility as Muslims here in the West is to mine our heritage, and explore ways in which we might heal the current civilisational crisis of the monoculture. Grounded in the healing energy of Abrahamic monotheism, is it still possible? Only time will tell.

184. Be just, to friend or foe, without fear or favour:
Let not the hatred of a people swerve you from justice.
Be just! That is closer to piety. [Q.5:8]

185. To call to Allah in a language people understand should go without saying. But being understood isn’t just about speaking the indigenous language. We can speak the right language, yet still be unrelatable, due

to adopting foreign dress codes and cultural outlooks that Islam does not insist upon, thereby alienating us from the wider public. Ignorance of a people's norms or conventions isn't expected of one who claims to be steered by the *Sunnah*: *We did not send any Messenger, but with the language of his people, that he may make [the message] clear to them.* [Q.14:4]

186. In a world filled with grotesque levels of human inequality, and soaked in the unholiness of starvation and poverty, we must all commit to eradicating these global injustices.

187. All that brings about discord (*fitnah*) or division (*furqah*) cannot be part of the religion.' – Ibn Taymiyyah

188. A real person of virtue acts before speaking, then afterwards speaks according to their action.

189. Before we discuss the best form of a state, must we not first determine what is the best kind of life for people?

190. *Adab* – beautiful conduct or cultivated manners, compared to the crass, vulgar or ugly, is highly praised in Islam. The Arabs say: *adaba ila ta'amih* – 'He invited others to his banquet.' From it comes the idea of *adab* being an invitation to partake of what is virtuous and

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praiseworthy. In its religious sense, *adab* is an invite to acquire virtuous traits. *Adab* carries with it the sense of civility, courtesy, refined manners, high culture, or excellent breeding or upbringing. Throughout the ages of Islam, *adab* was that type of learning acquired for the sake of living beautifully. For *adab* is about what a person should know, should be and should do, so as to perfect the art of beautiful living. One hadith says: ‘The most perfect of believers in faith are those with the best characters.’ – Abu Dawud

191. Should the traits which disgust and offend us in others, not disgust and offend us if they are found in ourselves? Yet seldom is this so!

192. Islam’s *da‘wah*, in any age, is to bring the world into line with sacred principles, keeping those aspects of governance, custom or industry that do not violate this. Progressive Muslims do the exact opposite. They desire to bring Islam into line with the world.

193. Modernity is interested in useful learning, but in the pre-modern world, those who were educated at a school or college were taught two things specifically: a holy text, and learning of high culture. In the West it meant the Bible and the classics. In the Muslim East or West this meant the Qur’an and refined comportment (*adab*) Pre-modern education was about pursuing truth

and wisdom, not money. Meaning and the sacred were the heart of pre-modern learning. By contrast, modern education has no lofty educational philosophy which drives it any more. Meaning is wholly absent.

194. Leadership traits: see it as a trust (*amanah*) from Allah, respect the office, be worthy of people's trust, use resources wisely, do what is timely, and love good for the people. Those given leadership, without them seeking it, will be blessed. Those who crave it ... then God forbid! A limerick:

*An uncle who migrated from Durban;
Thought himself very suburban.
Said the mosque committee;
Was his destiny;
Now his head is too big for his turban.*

195. To have little isn't poverty. Poverty is to lack any inner peace. So ensure you are seeking the right kind of richness.

196. *Da'wah* is currently being infested with *shari'ah* amateurs whose understanding of Britain's landscape is juvenile, who have their roots in weakly-educated cultures, whose familiarity with the higher discourse of Islamic scholarship is poor, and who lack the skills or insight to properly weigh up the complex nuances of the good and bad on offer. As a result of this, many

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a door of opportunity has been shut, but many others have been unnecessarily opened for the community's ardent enemies. Our watchword must be: *Repel [evil] with that which is better.* [Q.41:34]

197. Where there is ugliness or imbalance, there will always be conflict and disorder. Where there is beauty and balance, people are more attracted and feel freer to turn to God as plants turn to the sun.

198. When all is said and done, when the warnings have been given, when all excuses are offered, when the calling comes to a close, then the Qur'an arrives at the moment: *When the sun is darkened, when the stars fall, and when the mountains are moved ... and when the seas are set boiling, and when the souls are reunited ... and when the record of people's deeds are laid open, and when the sky is torn asunder, and when Hell is set ablaze, and when the Garden is brought near; then every soul will come to know what it has prepared for itself.* [Q.81:1-14]



15. INTROSPECTION

199. Non-Muslims are less interested in what Muslim achievements gave to the world in the past, and more concerned about what Muslims are offering society in the present. So let's wake up and smell the coffee!

200. Time passes all too soon: those with only memories to reminisce over know this all too well.

201. While some Muslim husbands are the culprits of stormy marriages, are husbands always the criminals and Muslim wives always victims? Is that the untruth we are now propagating?

202. 'Respect the young, for they are likely to be closer to the *fitrah* than you.' – Abdal Hakim Murad

203. If Muslim leaders cannot muster even the will to stand up to the continued assault against Islam or its people via economic pressure, political soft power, or jihad, should they not drag themselves off disgraced? For while we don't expect Muslim rulers to be saints, are they not expected to at least be men?

15. INTROSPECTION

204. When we Muslims realise that *da'wah* is to invite damaged souls to be healed, not to wag our finger at them in contempt, only then might our *da'wah* claim to be prophetic, not pathetic.

205. Are scholars even allowed to flatter rulers?

206. Isn't the greatest gift the gift of seeing gifts?

207. The seeds of faith start with wonderment at the sheer mystery of existence, of why there is something rather than nothing?

208. 'The wayfaring (*suluk*) of one seeking Allah and the Afterlife will not be sound except with restraints: Restraining one's heart to seek and want only Him, training it to turn away from all but Him. Restraining the tongue from whatever will not be of benefit to it, training it to constantly remember Allah and all that increases it in faith or knowledge of Him. Restraining the limbs from sins or dubious acts, training them to fulfil the mandatory and encouraged. He cannot part with such restraints till He meets his Lord.' – Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah

209. Here from the '80s, Muslim women seem to have been better at being Muslim women than Muslim men have at being Muslim men. Today, is that still true?

210. Even in the classical period, provided it entailed no disobedience to the Creator, people were required to submit to the decree of the Muslim ruler in terms of their action, not in terms of their mind, judgement or reasoning.

211. The only pill Muslim men need to swallow is the green pill of Islam. Any other pill, red or not, is a sign of the ego's frustration or mental confusion.



16. DIGNITY

212. Islam's sacred knowledge is serious and weighty, nothing about it is light or frivolous: *We will soon cast upon you a weighty word.* [Q.73:5]

213. In terms of gender interaction, Islam insists it be built upon decency: on the virtues of modesty (*haya'*), dignity (*waqar*) and respectability (*haybah*).

214. 'The concern of scholars is to cultivate, while the concern of fools is [just] to relate.' – Al-Hasan al-Basri

215. As our numbers swiftly grow, and as the spotlight is on us like never before, is there now not a need for more *da'wah* to Muslims than to non-Muslims?

216. Islam is neither racist nor colour blind. It wants us to know that skin colour has no real worth, only piety does: *Truly, the noblest of you in Allah's sight is he who is the most pious.* [Q.49:13]

217. If sacred knowledge doesn't help lift our gaze to Allah, or make us serious people with loftier concerns,

then we are receiving it with wrong hearts or from the wrong people!

218. A sign of Allah's pleasure (*rida*) is that when one grows in knowledge, one grows in humility too.

219. While there needs to be better guidance on how Muslim men ought to be, in a growing demasculinised world, the irony here is that the Muslim Red Pill posse comes from exactly the same toxic place as do Muslim feminists. They both share gender-biased worldviews and seek solutions to their grievances from outside the healing light of Islam's revealed guidance.

220. A sign of Allah's *rida* is that when one grows in wealth, one also grown in generosity.

221. The selfish, spiteful daughter-in-law is one who is ever trying to create schisms between her husband and his mother. Like the mean mother-in-law, she too must fear Allah and reign in her egotistical conduct. This is the daughter-in-law who – despite her in-laws accepting she neither has to obey them, cook or clean for them, seek their permission to visit her parents; or that she has a right to live separately without their interference – is still the cause of intentional friction and *fitnah*. Be it from paranoid suspicion, unjustified insecurity, obsessive, neurotic jealousy, or a cruel and

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cunning nature, this is someone who divides mother from son, withholds grandchildren, sabotages family get-togethers, emotionally manipulates her husband, and rains down misery on others; especially upon her mother-in-law. Perhaps divorce is a solution, if there are no children in the equation. Or it might be a case of the husband along with his family making this their personal jihad, by patiently persevering and heaping as much kindness upon her as possible in the hope of softening her heart.

222. Another sign of Allah's *rida* is that as one grows in status, one grows in drawing closer to others so as to serve them and help fulfil their needs.

223. 'The people are of four types: He who knows and knows he knows; he is learned, so follow him. He who knows and knows not that he knows; he is asleep, so wake him. He who knows not and knows he knows not; he seeks to learn, so teach him. And he who knows not and knows not that he knows not; he is a fool, so shun him.'⁷ – Al-Khalil b. Ahmad



224. The Holy Qur'an teaches that the mystery of our existence is not just to survive: to eat, drink and seek to be merry. Rather, it's about the human Spirit (*ruh*) being allowed to grow loveable and luminous through knowing its Maker and drawing closer to Him: *When I have fashioned him and breathed into him of My Spirit, then bow down to him prostrate.* [Q.15:29]

225. If death is the one thing in life that's guaranteed, then what have we prepared for it?

226. Confidently smug atheists are probably not very honest ones: concerned or troubled atheists probably are.

227. If the prophetic concern is regarded as primarily being about social welfare and political justice, rather than about sin, salvation and preparation for eternity, aren't feet already on a slippery slope?

228. Chasing *dunya* may give you more, but it makes you less.

229. If the test of a man is to lower his gaze: *And tell the believing men to lower their gaze* [Q.24:30], isn't the test of a woman to resist being seen in all her beauty and charms: *Do not flaunt your charms in the manner of the former times of Ignorance* [Q.33:33]?

230. 'If we are only matter, we don't matter.' – Abdal Hakim Murad

231. If pragmatism is now stressed over principle, or politics over metaphysics, isn't that to reduce Islam to a political ideology on par with Marxism, Socialism or Liberalism?

232. If, as the Qur'an states, *Men are maintainers and protectors of women* [Q.4:34], what does that say about a husband who allows his wife to be bad mouthed by his family, yet does nothing to defend her honour?:

*A bro who thought himself tougher;
Spoke jihad all day, and none other.
The thing is, you see;
It's hypocrisy;
Can't defend his wife from his own mother.*

233. If we want to know how Allah regards us, let us look at how we regard the Prayer.

234. If, as Muslims, we should be stepping out of the shadows, why are we still playing with the shadows?

235. In Islam, although humans are seen as slaves of God, their life is not meant to be *slavish*. Rather, they are held to be self-determining free agents, endowed with reason, gifted with Revelation, enabling them to pursue ends that are beneficial for themselves and for their self-fulfilment.

236. If, as a hadith says: ‘The wife who is the greatest blessing is the one easiest to maintain’ – Ahmad, what does that say about a wife who drains her husband’s money on one extravagant demand after another?

237. If it is Allah we truly seek, many paths are open to becoming beloved to Him, beyond being a scholar. The way for most of the *ummah* is to be a good, godly Muslim who knows at least the basic Islamic beliefs, practices, ethics and spiritual virtues; doesn’t tread on the toes of the scholars or complex knowledge; strives to earn a *halal* living, be a loving and loveable spouse, raise kids in the reverent thanks and worship of Allah, serve the neighbourhood and society in regular ways, and be an example of beauty – more in deeds than in words.



18. WISDOM

238. Muslims don't believe Allah is the alternative to a scientific explanation. Allah is the very ground of all explanation.

239. Wisdom is to speak of first things first, and last things last.

240. The good life requires effort. But it is impossible without self-restraint.

241. Allah gathered together in Adam all that He had scattered or diffused in all the various other kinds of creation in the cosmos: from angelic lights, to devilish impulses; from earth's clay, to stardust. Hence man is a microcosm, but he contains the macrocosm!

242. 'Knowledge, even if you give it your all, you still gain [just] a part.' – Al-Ghazali

243. The goal of Islamic governance is not to rule or restrain by fear, nor to exact obedience. Rather, it is to facilitate the project of godliness and free the people

from fear, so they might live in *iman* and *amn* – faith and security. If you cannot offer this, please step aside and let someone else do the job.

244. To be full of oneself is to be truly empty.

245. It has been said that fools wander aimlessly, but the wise travel purposefully.

246. ‘Some people who are overcome with ignorance, whose intellects are weak, and natures corrupt, think they are from the learned, when they are not. There is no worse harm to knowledge and to the learned than from the likes of such people. For they took a meagre part of some of the sciences, but miss a much larger portion than what they had grasped. Moreover, their seeking knowledge was not a search for knowledge of Allah, exalted is He, nor was their aim to escape the darkness of ignorance. Rather, it was to be one-up on people through showing-off or self-importance, or to attract attention by being cantankerous and inciting controversy, or shamelessly boasting about being from the scholars when in reality they are not.’ – Ibn Hazm

247. Death is a loss, but isn't it sometimes a gift?

248. Education should be to the mind what sculpture is to marble

18. WISDOM

249. The *Sunnah's* wisdom teaches us to say little, do much, face the world with cheerful countenance, and to say of things one doesn't know: 'I do not know.'

250. When Wisdom governs the law, should not such a law then govern men?

251. Wisdom is studying to practice, not just to teach.

252. Rather than the mother-in-law, daughter-in-law or husband blaming each other, may the problem not be due to one's own sinfulness: like missing *salat*, not paying *zakat*, not caring about a *halal* living, making false insurance or benefit claims, watching *haram* on our smart screens; or backbiting, slandering and lying; or other major acts of disobedience to Allah? *Whatever good befalls you is from Allah, and whatever calamity befalls you is from yourself.* [Q.4:79] Also: *We destroyed them because of their sins.* [Q.6:6] So let's repent and get real!

253. The wise do not rush into speech, reply, or speak in front of one who is wiser. Nor does one come to be wise without revising cherished opinions.



19. INFLUENCERS

254. Sometimes it is easier to work for the welfare of Muslims, than with Muslims. Discuss.

255. True worldly power is not anymore military, nor economic. Power is monopolising data, meaning and epistemology. That is to say, true power is controlling how people understand the world: not just what they think, but how they come to know, define or interpret things.

256. A sign of a good book: it gets us asking, ‘How did the author know that about me?’

257. A sign of good parenting: our child has no wish to become a cowboy mufti on TikTok.

258. During the early twentieth century, many books were written that warned about the dangers of giving the state control over new, powerful technologies. The nightmare visions of society these books conjured up have left an indelible mark upon our collective, social consciousness. Orwell’s *1984* and Huxley’s *Brave New*

19. INFLUENCERS

World are held to be the two most influential in the genre. The two books depict a dystopia where an all-powerful state controls and manipulates the masses in order to preserve its own power and stability, and to keep the masses servile. But these two dystopias, the Orwellian and Huxleyan, are quite distinct, and their warnings very different. Orwell's dystopia warned of a repressive surveillance society where every thought and conversation was monitored and any dissent was brutally punished. Huxley's warned of a society held captive to gross consumption and seduced by sensual gratification, political theatre and trivial amusement. Passionate discussions still abound as to whether we are closer to being an Orwellian society or a Huxleyan one?

259. Aren't people today more deserving of our pity than our rebuke?

260. Orwell warned we would be controlled through inflicting pain. Huxley warned we would be controlled by inflicting pleasure.

261. Be a God-pleaser, not a praise-chaser. It state in a hadith: 'Whoever seeks Allah's good pleasure at the expense of people's displeasure, will win Allah's good pleasure and Allah will cause men to be pleased with him. But whoever pleases men by displeasing Allah,

will earn Allah's displeasure, and Allah will cause the people to become displeased with him.' – Ibn Hibban

262. The best incentive to change our bad character is to see it fully developed in someone else.

263. Orwell warned that we would be frightened into submission. Huxley warned that we would be seduced into submission.

264. Orwell warned we would all be watched by Big Brother. Huxley warned we would all be watching Big Brother!

265. A sign of good character: to treat well those who can do nothing for us.

266. Orwell warned of a society where even ideas are brutally policed and truths manipulated. While Huxley warned of a society where people occupied with trivial gossip or news no longer cared about truth!



20. HEALING

267. ‘Whatever our religion, we can no longer be sure of holding onto it out of habit or by an act of will. We have to be, if not theologians, then at the very least people who study their religion and who think about it.’ – Gai Eaton

268. Isn’t the union of simplicity, dignity and modest, unassuming piety the truly forgotten *Sunnah*?

269. Fascist *fiqh*: when *furu’* differing, rooted in valid *ijtihad*, are turned into divisive issues to judge whose Islam is ‘*sahih*’ or not. Limerick time:

*A Salafi who loved to bicker;
Refused to validly differ.
He ain’t got a clue;
What’s usul from furu’;
Stitched himself up like a kipper.*

270. If religion is internalised and becomes a matter of the heart (and not just externally observed), then we become possessed of those traits which are going to make a successful marriage and will turn someone into a loving and loveable spouse.

271. When we see that we deserve nothing, only then will the doors of true happiness be opened to us.

272. If you wish to meet with divine approval in your *da'wah*, overcome your ego's theatrics.

273. Can 'Broken Britain' – which isn't just a bold turn of phrase, but a present reality that now haunts us as a society – be fixed with the insights of faith?

274. 'Time is like a sword, if you do not cut it, it will cut you.' – Al-Shafi'i

275. Whoever calls to matters against the established scholarly consensus (*ijma'*) might well be misguided, but is undoubtedly misleading; whatever group name they ascribe to.

276. If you are only a good *da'i*, you are not really a good *da'i*.

277. The desire to fit in and find acceptance is a very powerful urge. As calls for Islam to reform intensify, so do the temptations to water it down and gloss over its less palatable teachings, in order to appease liberal sentiments. The Qur'an says: *Perhaps you may [feel to] leave out some of what is revealed to you and your heart feels strained because they say: 'Why hasn't any treasure*

20. HEALING

been sent down to him, or an angel not come with him? You are nothing but a warner, and Allah is Guardian over all things. [Q.11:12] Which is to say, the weakened spirit or anxious-to-please Muslim might think: ‘What if I fudge this religious ruling, or omit that duty, so as to bolster my liberal credentials: will the truth not be more agreeable?’ But we’re told the truth should be delivered as it was revealed – wisely, thoughtfully and convivially – and that to skip parts of what is obligated is to sink into the crime of gratifying egos.

278. If all Islam is to us is a list of do’s and don’ts, the best we will do is attain to a Kharijite-type of warped religiosity.

279. ‘A man’s reputation is what other people think of him; his character is what he really is.’ – John Milton

280. True religion is about healing. It is about seeing the best in all things, and the Adamic potential in all people; while seeking to heal the world one day at a time, one act at a time.



21. GROW

281. Not all that is good should be said, and not all that is said should be spread.

282. All who stand at the station of patience, should really be standing at the station of gratitude.

283. ‘If Allah gives you knowledge, give Him worship, and do not let your concern be to just narrate to the people.’ – Abu Qilabah

284. Many atheists feel smug when they counter the alleged theistic assertion for proof of God’s existence that: ‘Everything must have a cause for its existence’, with: ‘What caused God?!’ But no Muslim theologian has ever asserted this. Instead, they hold: ‘Everything which comes into existence, *from non-existence*, must have a cause for its existence.’ But God did not ‘come into existence’. He always existed and will continue to exist eternally. That is to say, He is beginningless and endless. Allah’s eternal attribute of Life is inseparable from, and intrinsic to, His holy Essence and He is the Uncaused Causer of everything.

21. GROW

285. It speaks to an acute bout of amnesia to think we have never done anyone, anywhere, any wrong.

286. Even if a devil whispers, man's ego is the reason for his destruction.

287. The *Sunnah* dislikes haste, thus the *awliya* don't rush. They are inwardly stilled by Allah's *dhikr*, much like the slumber at Badr: *Remember when He made the slumber overcome you as a reassurance from Him.* [Q.8:11] So is political agitation, shouting till one froths at the mouth, or running around like headless chickens the type of activism Islam encourages?

288. For a believer, the natural world is as a mirror: beautiful in itself, reflecting the even greater beauty of Allah.

289. The *shari'ah* is a code of living that nurtures the profoundest, overall sense of human satisfaction.

290. For a believer, shouldn't happiness be less about thrill or experience, and more an activity; a practical way of living virtuously? Discuss.

291. Pillars of the path: study, remembrance (*dhikr*), contemplation (*tafakkur*) and spiritual companionship (*suhbah*). Those who become engrossed with *qasa'id*

or spiritual ‘odes’, over study, tend often to fall away from the path. Those with no serious regime of *dhikr* and *tafakkur* tend not to have any real path.

292. If your shaykhs overfeed you on *fiqh* and fatwa, with little to no *suluk* to feed the Spirit, then don’t be surprised if the soul shrivels and the heart dries.

293. Internalise: ‘Let not acts of obedience make you joyous because they come from you. Rather, be joyous because they come from Allah to you. Say: “*In Allah’s grace and His mercy, in that let them be joyous. This is better than what they hoard.*” [Q.10:58]’ – Ibn Ata’illah

294. Allah has created the earth in a state of balance and an equilibrium, that is composed of innumerable mini equilibriums. So we can utilise the earth for our food, clothing and instruments of trade and, indeed, for actualising our potentials within us. But all of this is conditional on not disturbing the equilibrium, nor transgressing the balance: *He has raised the heavens and has set in it a balance, so that you may not upset the balance, but observe the balance and not fall short therein.* [Q.55:7-9]



22. JUSTICE

295. ‘Knowledge and justice are the root of all good, injustice and ignorance are the root of every evil.’ – Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah

296. Beware of acquiring too much law, but too little justice.

297. If we wish to find Allah’s *rida* in our lives, then we must wish to live without sin. We will, though, fail to live without sin. But failing is totally different from not even trying.

298. If Islam’s meaning of justice is ‘To put a thing in its rightful place,’ does that not require having knowledge about the value and measure of things as Islam assigns to them? Otherwise how will justice be done? For to put a thing in other than its rightful place, isn’t that the very definition of injustice?

299. To feel honoured by a tyrant is disgraceful.

300. Being concerned with the minutiae of *fiqh* does not make you petty minded. But *only* being concerned

with such minutiae does – particularly if it makes you overlook clear socio-political injustices. Ibn ‘Umar was once asked about a very minute issue: a pilgrim killing a mosquito. So he said to the questioner: ‘Where are you from?’ He said: ‘I am from the people of Iraq.’ Ibn ‘Umar said: ‘Look at him. He asks me about the blood of a mosquito, while they murdered the [grand]son of the Prophet ﷺ!’ – Al-Bukhari

301. In classical Islam, warfare is regulated by an all-important rule that says about jihad: *wujubuhu wujub al-wasa’il la al-maqasid* – ‘Its necessity is a necessity of means, not of ends.’

302. Muslims of the West should be part of the West’s culture, but not of all its values.

303. ‘There’s a reason you separate military and the police. One fights the enemies of the state, the other serves and protects the people. When the military becomes both, then the enemies of the state tend to become the people.’ – Commander Adama, *Battlestar Galactica*

304. Delaying justice is itself an injustice.

305. An effective boycott is one that’s widely observed. For this to be so, its justness must be widely accepted; or else it will be ineffective, or even unjust.

22. JUSTICE

306. A parent displaying outward favouritism to one child over another is considered an injustice in Islam, due to the psychological harms, resentment, or hurtful feelings it usually breeds. Once, when the Prophet ﷺ came to hear that a parent had favoured one child by giving him a gift, but not the others, he ﷺ said: ‘Fear Allah and be just between your children. I do not bear witness to injustice.’ – Al-Bukhari & Muslim

307. Sacred knowledge: never jump in the deep end if it’s not on Allah we truly depend.

308. Is Riyadh still the garden of *takfir*?

309. Blessings are Allah’s unmitigated favour upon us, while misfortunes are due to our sins. The first is from Allah’s grace (*fadl*); the second from His justice (*‘adl*): *Whatever good befalls you is from Allah, and whatever calamity befalls you is from yourself.* [Q.4:79] So let’s not get in a muddle about Allah’s *fadl* and *‘adl*.

310. Sacred architecture: we shape our buildings, but so too do our buildings shape us.

311. ‘The *shari‘ah* is rooted in, and built on, wisdom and [achieving] public welfare, in this life and in the next. It is justice in its entirety, mercy in its entirety, welfare in its entirety, and wisdom in its entirety. Any

issue that departs from justice to injustice, mercy to its opposite, public welfare to corruption, or wisdom to folly cannot be of the *shari'ah*, even if it is claimed to be so because of some interpretation.' – Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah

312. Ladies, without a chaperone, 'let's talk more' can easily morph into let's stalk more!

313. 'In this world, people's affairs are kept in order with justice and a certain measure of sin, more than with violating the rights of people, even if it entails no other sin. That is why it is said: "Allah upholds a just state even if it is disbelieving, but does not uphold an unjust one even if it is Muslim." It was also said: "The world may endure with justice and disbelief, but not with injustice and Islam." The reason is that justice is the universal order of things. So when earthly administration is based on justice, it works, even when the person in charge has no share in the Hereafter. But if it is not based on justice, it does not work, even if the person in charge is a believer who shall be rewarded in the Hereafter.' – Ibn Taymiyyah



23. LIFE

314. Do not reject an argument that is sound for one that is only sound.

315. In life's hustle and bustle, we don't see our sins. But as things quieten, we can then see the real state of affairs.

316. We're all in need of mercy and the consideration of others. So let's give unto others what we wish them to give unto us.

317. Islam's overall take on war is best seen in these words of the Prophet ﷺ: 'Do not desire to meet your enemy, rather ask Allah for safety. But if you do meet them, be firm and know that Paradise lies beneath the shades of swords.' – Al-Bukhari. In other words, pursue a path of peace, in the presence of justice. If such a path be denied by belligerence, or by hostile intent, then be prepared to act differently.

318. Those comfortably settled in life tend not to ask what it all means. For them, things are how they are

meant to be. The status quo goes unquestioned; it just is. But those whose place is unsettled, uncertain, who are uneasy in their existence, are the ones who tend to ask why, and who usually come up with radically new answers. So a believer never gets too clingy.

319. ‘People will come to adore the technologies that undo their capacities to think.’ – Neil Postman

320. Even if: ‘All the world’s a stage, And all the men and women merely players,’ we must never play to a crowd in our worship and *da’wah*. If we do, we might find our deeds being nullified quicker than the cocky boxer is knocked out in the following limerick:

*There was a big show-off from Goa;
Who thought himself Rocky Balboa.
All flash in the ring,
Went down at ding-ding,
It still cracks them up in Iowa!*

321. In activism, not all silence is capitulation and not all political advocacy is Kharijite-agitation.

322. While freedom from tyranny is undeniably good and necessary, we Muslims must never lose sight of an even sublimer freedom; namely, freedom from the dictates of one’s ego (*nafs*). Received wisdom tells us: ‘No one achieves true freedom, as long as he remains

under even the slightest influence of his own ego (*ma wasala ila sarih al-huriyyah man baqiyah 'alayhi min nafsihi baqiyah*)'. – Abu Madyan

323. Isn't the antidote to our growing xenophobia and violence, conversation?

324. Profane people's Life questions: What do I want? Why do I want it? How do I get it? Profound people's Life questions: Who am I? Why am I here? How then shall I live?

325. As Europe faces declining population growth and an increase of euthanasia, there's an increase of youth in Asia.

326. *Ijma'*-orthodoxy: not getting fixated on a name; but getting fixated on an aim.

327. If we do not make enough space in our lives for things that ultimately matter — for family and friends, for love, for generosity and service to others, for acts of virtue, for knowing the value of things; not just the price of things — aren't we likely to burn out mid way, numb our souls, or just wonder where life went?

328. From Religion's great insights: happiness is best found when we're in service to others, not the Self.

329. In Islam, society should participate in the glory of God; if not, it cannot be the reason for its erosion. But getting the correct mix between society's political stability, economic welfare and its spiritual wellbeing is easier said than done. But as long as the State is the legislator of religious rulings and religiousness, can it ever be an Islamic State? Won't it swiftly morph into a fascist state, with mass apostasy being the long term consequences? Discuss.

330. The Prophet ﷺ stated: 'Live as you wish, for you shall soon die. Do as you wish, for you shall soon be recompensed. Love who you wish, for you shall soon be separated.' – Al-Tabarani, *al-Mu'jam al-Awsat*

331. When we find an attention-seeking spouse with a roaming gaze, an attention-denying spouse is likely not far behind.

332. Whoever seeks knowledge so as to act by it, his knowledge humbles him, making him weep at himself. But one who learns just to teach, give fatwas, brag or show-off, becomes foolish, boastful, quarrelsome and perishes in his vanity and is hated by others: *He surely is successful who purifies it [his soul], and a failure who corrupts it.* [Q.91:9-10]. – Al-Dhahabi



24. TOMORROW

333. Any future where there's no justice or rule of law is a nightmare! It's far worse if there's no forgiveness or mercy.

334. Imagine no Religion, it's easy if you try. Nothing to live or die for; only TikTok and Wifi. – For John

335. The *'ulama* are entrusted not to pervert Islamic acts of worship and rulings that are underscored by a time-honoured *ijma'*.

336. The world we hope to build tomorrow is birthed in the ideas we pass on to our children today. So for believers, education is the game-changer.

337. By 2050, it is predicted Muslims will be as high as 18% of Britain's population, rather than the 4.5% they currently are. This alone places on us the urgent task of evolving a socially and politically relevant, and theologically-sound set of leadership challenges that are only now beginning to be thought of and fleshed out by us. Given liquid modernity's many boundless

hurdles, given also the growing tide of Islamophobia, and given the uphill nature of reconnecting an angst-filled humanity to the All-Merciful Source of Peace, such a Muslim leadership role — for the love of God, and the love of what each person has the potential to become — has a mammoth task ahead of it.

338. Can we use the Kafkaesque notion to say that the West is a cage in search of a bird, whereas the Muslim world a bird in search of a cage? Discuss.

339. ‘Modernity is a deal. The entire contract can be summarised in a single phrase: humans agree to give up meaning in exchange for power.’ – Yuval Noah Harari

340. As intellectual attacks on Islam grow, as universal literacy gets closer to the target, and as professional lay Muslims aren’t as uninformed as lay people of pre-modern times, there is an urgent need for intelligent, articulate, textually-grounded teachings — especially in terms of rational coherence, scientific literacy, and liveable relevancy. When our scholars are seen as not meeting such a need, this continues to be one of the primary causes for the crisis in confidence in Muslim scholars. *‘Ulama* who are seen as being domesticated by tyrant regimes is another driver of this crisis, as is regime-written and state-sanctioned Friday *khutbahs* that scholars read out.

24. TOMORROW

341. Mob mentality can be extremely infectious. Stand too close to the whirlpool of a reckless herd, and one is likely to get sucked right in.

342. So much emphasis has been put on the Muslim woman's hijab as mainly a piece of cloth draped over the head (i.e. a *khimar* or a 'headscarf'), rather than an overall way of modest *satr* or 'concealment' of their natural charms, that many a young Muslimah has also brought into it. So when meaning is lost, heads might be covered, yet body language and behaviour signal indecorum: *Be not soft of speech, lest he in whose heart is a disease aspires to you, but speak honourable words.* [Q.33:32] Sometimes it's the case of what is reluctantly expressed in this limerick:

*A hijabi was asked one day;
'Why cover your hair this way?'
'It's modesty, see;'
Which did confuse me;
Coz the rest of her was on display.*

343. Changes in society seldom begin with physical acts. They start with an act of imagination. By asking ourselves what a better society might be, even if we're unable to actualise it now, may seem like a pie in the sky exercise. Yet it's by imagining what could be that we best begin to see what might be wrong with what we have, and set the wheels of change in motion.

344. *So tell believing men to lower their gaze.* [Q.24:30] Al-Fadl, a handsome young lad was seated behind the Prophet ﷺ on a camel: ‘The Prophet ﷺ stopped to give people fatwas. An attractive lady from the Khath‘am tribe came seeking a ruling from Allah’s Messenger ﷺ. Al-Fadl began staring at her, being enamoured of her beauty. The Prophet glanced behind while al-Fadl was still gazing at her. The Prophet ﷺ then extended his hand backward and turned al-Fadl’s cheek, so he would stop staring at her.’ – Al-Bukhari. When he was asked why he turned his cheek away, he answered: ‘I saw a young man and woman who weren’t safe from [the influence of] Satan upon them.’ – Al-Tirmidhi. Here there was no big fuss, no hoo-ha about the situation. The Prophet ﷺ politely did what needed to be done by putting the onus on al-Fadl to avert his gaze, rather than send the young lady away.

345. We either raise our children upon a clear vision, or else the world will blind them.

346. The best preparation for tomorrow is to do our best today: *O you who believe! Fear Allah, and let each soul look at what it has sent on for tomorrow.* [Q.59:18]



25. ADIEU

347. Believers don't just begin with the end in mind, they take the end to heart.

348. Practicing brothers watching women's tennis on TV ... and pigs will fly!

349. Discuss: Isn't Islamophobia a nuanced matter: at times rightly used, at others misused or abused?

350. While folks are focused on making good money, growing their start-ups, buying shares or investing in crypto, don't follow fashion. Invest in the Spirit!

351. Many are the emotions that assail the heart, but grief, without doubt, is the hardest of them. The pain felt at a loved one's loss awakens grief, yet seldom is much gained by yielding too far to grief's cruelty. Yes, tears must flow, pain must be endured and souls must sorrow and be scarred. That you grieve not, none has the right to insist. Weep then, but wail not; and let not sorrow's suffering tarry too long. For your loved one would never have you sorrow and suffer more than is

fitting. For what would she say to you, she whose loss you lament? That she welcomes the love you show to her; yet she doesn't want your grief to be prolonged. She'd ask that you gently put your sorrows to slumber and remember her in the splendour of her days. And that although time eventually heals the pangs of grief, she would want that we move on from such grief by choice. So remember and recollect the most cherished things about the one who is loved but is lost; of how she enriched our lives and the lives of others too. For this honours our departed loved ones and consoles us, and keeps them with us in our heart. And while such memories are not without bitterness, yet still, let's put our sorrows to slow slumber and let's remember her in the glory of her days. – Adapted from A.C Grayling

352. A *faqih* isn't the one who knows good from bad, but the one who knows better from worse.

353. Can the Kafkaesque idea be co-opted to say that *fiqh* is a cage in search of a bird, and *tasawwuf* a bird in search of a cage? Discuss.

354. We have no idea where our world's heading. All we know is that it's heading there fast!

355. Life needs its pauses for divine remembrance if the soul is not to be spiritually choked.

356. Can healing sometimes hurt even more than the wound? Those who feel it know it to be so.

357. To be something, or not to be something, that is the question: Whether to grow our Adamic potential, and be lifted to a spiritual station loftier than that of even the angels, Or to live in pursuits of cravings and the ego's tantrums, and so sink to the lowest of lows. To choose, to live wisely, ere we shuffle off this mortal coil. To sleep, to die. And in that sleep of death what dreams may then come — ay, there's the rub.

358. Science speaks of what is, not what ought to be. It explains how, but not why. It's descriptive, not prescriptive. It might tell us about cause, but cannot tell us about purpose.

359. Down the nightingale's lane, a nightingale I first heard sing. Echoes of that joyous sound, in my soul it still does ring.

360. Soothing grief: close your eyes, take a few deep breaths, and whisper twice or thrice: *inna li'Llahi wa inna ilayhi raji'un* – 'Surely, to Allah we belong and to Him is the return.'

361. In Appendix A of *The Lord of the Rings* comes *The Tale of Aragorn and Arwen*. It tells the enchanting, yet

FOOTPRINTS ON THE SANDS OF TIME

bittersweet story of how Aragorn first met Arwen in Rivendell; of how, after a long parting, they met each other again under the trees of Calas Galadhon in the forests of Lothlorien; how they betrothed themselves to each other on the fair hill of Cerin Amroth; of how at Midsummer, in the year of Sauron's fall, they were wedded in Gondor; how, after 'six-score years in great glory and bliss', Aragorn fell into death's deep sleep; and finally how, a while later, a grief-stricken Arwen, finding death – 'the gift of the One to Men' – hard to bear, bade farewell to all whom she loved and left at winter's end for a now deserted Lothlorien, and laid herself to rest upon Cerin Amroth: 'and there is her green grave, until the world is changed, and all the days of her life are utterly forgotten by men who come after.' – J.R.R. Tolkien

362. We humans are meaning-seeking creatures. We seek to understand our place or purpose in this oh so enchanted world and this breathtaking cosmos.

363. When the time comes for King Aragorn to 'move beyond the circles of this world', Arwen is beset with grief and begs that he stay a while longer. 'But let us not be overthrown at the final test,' Aragorn counsels her. Before Aragorn gives up his life, his final words to Arwen speak of hope, happiness and anticipation of an even better life to come in a world remade anew:

25. ADIEU

‘In sorrow we must go, but not in grief. Behold, we are not bound forever to the circles of the world, and beyond them is more than memory. Farewell!’ – J.R.R. Tolkien

364. Presents we so wanted in childhood: good toys. Presents we so want as adults: empathy, forgiveness, and a little reassurance.

365. The Prophet ﷺ said; Allah, exalted is He, said: ‘I have prepared for my righteous servants what no eye has yet seen, what no ear has yet heard and what no human heart has ever yet imagined.’ – Al-Bukhari. Recite if you wish: *For no soul knows what is kept hidden for them of the eye’s delights, as reward for what they used to do.* [Q.32:17]



CONCLUSION

In winding-up this serving of aphorisms, musings and melancholic reflections – these *Footprints on the Sands of Time* – indulge me in two final meditations. Both, in their own way, might be thought as being universal to the human story. The first speaks to a need: the other, to a reality (as far as Islam sees life).

It seems, in the end, what most of us want is to know that we've left some footprints behind so that we can be remembered in some meaningful way. Whether it's through children, loved ones, work or influence, this urge can be deeply psychological, and is often tied to just how fleeting our lives are in the grand scheme of things. Of course, not all people feel this need. Some are content with quiet, transient lives; and it troubles them not if they leave no footprints. For them, life is lived from moment to moment, and that's enough.

But the reality, as Islam tells us, is that we each leave footprints; whether we wish to or not, or whether we realise it or not. Moreover, the footprints we all leave are duly witnessed. For the Qur'an teaches us that we

CONCLUSION

are surrounded by a host of witnesses – ranging from God Himself and His angels, to our very own tongue, hands and feet, through to the earth itself: *When the earth shakes with its earthquakes, and the earth yields up its burdens, and man says: ‘What is wrong with it?’ On that day it shall relate all its news, for its Lord will have inspired it.* [Q.99:1-5] The Prophet ﷺ said: ‘Do you know what its news is? Its news is that it shall testify about each male and female servant what they did on its surface. It will say: On such a day, he did such and such. That is its news.’ – Al-Tirmidhi

Using the word, fingerprints instead of footprints, the author of *Remembering God* wrote that: ‘[W]hen the Last Day dawns, the earth herself will bear witness to everything that man has done. It might be said that we leave our fingerprints upon all that we touch, and they remain in place long after we have gone on our way. We forget so much of the past, but the past is still there and cannot be wiped out, unless God – under His Name “the Effacer” (*al-Afu*) – chooses to erase it from our record.’ – Gai Eaton

So were it not for the divine Mercy, scattered as rain throughout the entire creation, and Allah’s readiness to forgive our sins – our wayward footprints – if they are followed by sincere repentance, we would be in a real fix. But for the truly repentant, the best of all our

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footprints are acknowledged and accepted, while the ones so unwisely chosen are wiped away; cleansed as if they weren't there. So as the world wants us all to watch our carbon footprints; and rightly so, Islam asks that we mind our spiritual footprints too.

These aphorisms and musings, while some have been a play on words or playful with words, have a serious aim; namely, that the footprints we leave in life must surely be left on Allah's 'Straight Path'; nowhere else! For each word spoken, each act done, and each social media posting posted is a well-witnessed footprint we leave behind on the sands of time.

