

DRAWING CLOSER TO ALLAH AND HIS PROPHET: A PRACTICAL GUIDE



ABDUL QADER ISMAIL

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For my precious parents and beloved wife.

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A`udhu billahi min ash-shaitani r-rajim
(I seek refuge in Allah from Shaitan, the accursed one)

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(In the Name of Allah, The Kind, The Caring)

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Foreword

The religion of Islam is about submission to the Lord of the Universe, seeking His pleasure and serving His creation. Submission to Allah and serving others are the activities of a practicing Muslim. Dr Ismail has very thoughtfully put together a set of Islamic practices that will help the reader achieve these goals. This is not your typical religious text which you can read and forget about, but a practical guide which provides detailed checklists, engagement with which can help change a person's life.

The author has confined himself to the major practices that really bring about a change in a person's thinking, devotional habits and experience of Islam, therefore he has chosen the reading of the Qur'an, the daily prayers, following the beautiful example and sending peace and blessings upon the blessed Prophet (peace be upon him), fasting, charity and finally accepting the Divine Decree to achieve peace and happiness. The checklists challenge, and make the reader reflect on their own daily habits and practices to help bring about change, to help you draw closer to Allah and His Prophet (peace be upon him). I commend Dr Ismail for this innovative and effective approach.

Dr Musharraf Hussain Al-Azhari (OBE, DL)
CEO & Chief Imam Karimia Institute

Introduction

In modern times, especially for those of us born into Muslim families, religion becomes a ritualistic hobby. We follow customs, perform acts and recite prayers without understanding the significance of what we are doing. We attend religious gatherings but what we hear does not translate into strengthening our faith or changing our behaviour. Practicing this kind of 'superficial' Islam means we fail to receive the full blessings of Islam and are more likely to neglect our faith and move further away from Allah in times of difficulty or when we are busy with worldly matters. Furthermore, if we do not practice the faith with understanding, what example are we setting others, especially non-Muslims? What will we be able to teach our children?

The purpose of this book is to provide you the means of changing your thoughts and behaviour regarding some of the most fundamental aspects of our religion. Each chapter introduces a topic using the Qur'an and Hadith followed by practical advice on how to act upon this; recording your daily/weekly/monthly progress in the space provided. Sincere engagement with this process will help you develop lifelong habits of practicing your faith understanding why you are doing what you are doing.

Each chapter is independent of the others therefore the book does not need to be read in any specific order. However, I would advise you to focus on one chapter at a time, and try not to do too much too soon since you are likely to overburden yourself and disengage with the process. Remember the words of the Prophet (peace be upon him):

“Take up good deeds only as much as you are able, for the best deeds are those done regularly even if they are few.” (Ibn Majah)

Use this book with the firm intention to better yourself in the hope of pleasing and drawing closer to Allah and His Prophet (peace be upon him). Certainly, Allah will help you:

“He who draws close to Me a hand's span, I will draw close to him an arm's length. And whoever draws near Me an arm's length, I will

draw near him a fathom's length. And whoever comes to Me walking, I will go to him running..” (Bukhari)

The Qur'an: Reading, Understanding, And Internalising It

Islam ('submission to the will of Allah') is the true religion of all Prophets, from Hazret Adam to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon them all). As human society developed over time so did their relationship with Allah, until the 'Seal of the Prophets' (peace be upon him) was sent with the perfected religion:

"...Today, I have completed your religion, for you; I gave My favour in full, and I am happy that Submission to My will is your religion..."
(Qur'an 5:3)

The purpose of Prophets was to guide mankind upon 'Sirat-ul-Mustaqeem' (the straight path) and many of them were sent with Revelation, e.g. Gospel (Injeel) of Jesus, Torah (Taurat) of Moses, Psalms (Zabur) of David (peace be upon them all), and many more which have been lost.

History and immutability (inability to be altered) of the Qur'an

The final Prophet, Muhammad (peace be upon him) was given the final Revelation, the Qur'an over a period of 23 years:

"This Quran could not have been invented independently of Allah; rather it confirms what preceded it and is an explanation of that Book in which there is no doubt, which is from the Lord of all the realms." (Qur'an 10:37)

When verses of the Qur'an were revealed, the Prophet (peace be upon him) recited them to his Sahabah (disciples – may Allah be pleased with them all) and instructed them where the verses fit in relation to others. Many Sahabah had memorised either parts or all of the Qur'an. The literate ones would also write it down on cleaned pieces of bone, leather, or leaves, which were carefully stored.

During the reign of Hazret Abu-Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him) many Huffaz (memorisers of the Qur'an) were martyred during the battle of Yamama and so the written Qur'an (Mushaf) was collected and compiled. By the time of Hazret Usman's caliphate (may Allah be pleased with him) Islam had spread through many Arab lands where the dialect and pronunciation varied. This led to accusations that the Qur'an was being changed. So the Caliph made a committee to create duplicates of the original Mushaf in the Quraishi dialect which would eliminate the problem of different pronunciations. This was recited in the presence of the Muslims of Madinah before copies were sent to the rest of the Islamic world. Any copies of the Mushaf which were not identical to this one were burnt (a respectful way of disposing of them).

The previous revelations were changed by misguided people:

“Do you expect them to believe you when a group of them hears the words of Allah and, after understanding them, deliberately changes them?” (Qur'an 2:75)

“Some of them twist their tongues when reciting from the Book to make you think it is from the Book, even though it forms no part of the Book, and they say, “This is from Allah,” even though it is not from Allah, and they knowingly tell lies against Allah.” (Qur'an 3:78)

However, Allah has taken it upon Himself to safeguard the Qur'an:

“We revealed the Reminder, and We are its Protectors.” (Qur'an 15:9)

The Qur'an we have today, more than 1400 years after the time of the Prophet (peace be upon him), is identical to the very oldest copies of the Mushaf that have been found from the time of the first and second-generation Muslims (may Allah be pleased with them all).

The significance of the Holy Qur'an

What does Allah, Himself, say about His Qur'an?

"This is the Majestic book, there is no doubt in it, a guidance for the pious." (Qur'an 2:2)

"People, your Lord's teachings have come to you; they're a healing balm for the diseases of the heart, and guidance and goodwill for the believers." (Qur'an 10:57)

"This is a Book that We sent down to you, a blessed Book, so people may contemplate its verses, and the intelligent might heed." (Qur'an 38:29)

"He reveals clear teachings to His servant, to take you out of darkness into light, and treats you kindly." (Qur'an 57:9)

These verses show that Allah revealed the Qur'an for us to reflect upon and understand, to achieve guidance and salvation.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, "Indeed this Qur'an is a rope – one end of it is in the hand of Allah and the other end is in your hands. So, hold firmly to it [the result would be] that you would never go astray and never be destroyed [no matter what the circumstance]." (Ibn Hibban)

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, "The Qur'an is an intercessor and its intercession is accepted and its plea is believed. Whoever makes it lead him – it leads him to Paradise and whomsoever places it behind him [the result will be] he is dragged to the Fire." (Ibn Hibban)

Indeed, the Qur'an is the greatest miracle that Allah gave to His final Prophet (peace be upon him):

"Every Prophet was given a miracle, the type of which brings mankind to faith. What I was given is a revelation that Allah sent down to me..." (Muslim)

To truly understand the nature of this miracle we need to realise what it is. The Qur'an is literally the speech of Allah, spoken in the form of

Revelation to His Prophet (peace be upon him), and through him to the rest of mankind, during his lifetime and until the Day of Judgement. Therefore, as His speech the Qur'an is not something that can be separated from the essence of Allah (similar to the other 'Siffaat' or attributes of Allah), and as such is infinite and uncreated.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, "The superiority of the Speech of Allah compared to all other speech is like the superiority of Allah over His creation." (Tirmidhi)

Consider the tremendousness of this fact, it is truly profound. Allah has given us something which can be considered to be a part of Him (Divine).

"Say, 'If all humanity and jinn got together to bring a book like this Quran, they wouldn't be able to bring it, no matter how much they helped each other.'" (Qur'an 17:88)

"Had We revealed this Quran on a mountain, you would have seen it humble and turn to dust out of Allah's fear..." (Qur'an 59:21)

When we understand this then it is easy to see why study of the Qur'an is the greatest form of Dhikr'Allah (His remembrance) that we have.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, "You will not come back to Allah with anything better than that which came from Him (i.e. the Qur'an)." (Al Hakim)

In the same way that Allah has no beginning and no end, i.e. He is infinite, so too is his word. Since the time of the Prophet (peace be upon him) scholars have spent their lives studying the Qur'an, countless books of Tafsir (commentary and explanation of the Qur'an) have been written and yet there is no-one who can claim they have discovered all its secrets. Even though it was revealed over 1400 years ago it is not an ancient text, with each generation scholars continue to derive guidance from it relevant to the changing world around us.

"In this Quran We explained every kind of example for people's benefit, but most refuse to acknowledge the truth." (Qur'an 17:89)

"... We revealed to you a glorious Book that explains the truth about all things; it is guidance, a kindness and good news for the Muslims."
(Qur'an 16:89)

Therefore, the Qur'an should be the most important thing in our lives. However, this does not just mean for you to keep the Mushaf on a high shelf in your house and never open it, although indeed even that is a source of blessing. If Allah has given us such a miracle, that holds the secrets to this life and the next, that holds the key to purifying our outward and inward character and attaining His nearness, then we must not only read the Arabic but study its translation and tafsir with our learned teachers, and furthermore internalise and act upon what we learn.

Hazret Abdullah ibn Masud (may Allah be pleased with him) said, "When a man amongst us learned ten verses [of the Qur'an], he would not move on [to the next verses] until he had understood their meanings and how to act by them." (Tabari)

Indeed, when the Prophet (peace be upon him) used to recite the Qur'an it was as if he was having a conversation with Allah:

"And when he (peace be upon him) recited the verses which referred to the glory of Allah, he glorified Him, the great, and when he recited the verses that mention supplication, he supplicated, and when he recited the verses that mention seeking refuge of the Rabb [Lord], he sought (His) refuge." (Muslim)

The famous saint, Mohiuddin Ibn Arabi of Andalusia, Spain (may Allah be pleased with him) attributed everything he knew to reading the Qur'an, he used to spend hours each day alone with Allah in this way; 'he read it as a lover would read a letter from an absent beloved.' He would read the Qur'an in the way of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and left advice for us: 'Read the Qur'an slowly. When a verse asks a question, reply to it, when a verse reminds, heed its reminder, when a verse gives an instruction, follow it. When told to seek God's protection, recite 'I seek Allah's protection' where it asks you to seek forgiveness, seek forgiveness. When you find the qualities of God-fearing people, ask yourself which of these do I possess and which I need to develop? Be thankful to Allah for

those you have and strive to achieve those you lack. Similarly, when you come across verses describing the disbelievers, examine yourself, do you have any of these traits? If you do, then rid yourself of them. This is the best way to recite the Qur'an.'

Blessings attained by reading, understanding, and acting upon the Qur'an

Apart from the ultimate benefit of guidance that we derive from the Qur'an, Allah has also hidden countless other blessings within recitation of his word, and within specific verses of which only a few examples are given below.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "Whoever recites one letter from the Book of Allah then he will receive a good reward, and every good deed is rewarded with ten times its like. I do not say that 'Alif Laam Meem' is one word but 'Alif' is one word, 'Laam' is one word and 'Meem' is one word." (Tirmidhi)

With regards to Surah al-Fatiha (Qur'an 1), and the last two verses of Surah al-Baqarah (Qur'an 2:285-286):

Hazret Ibn Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him) narrated, "While Jibra'il was with the Prophet (peace be upon him), he heard a noise from above. Jibra'il lifted his sight to the sky and said: "This is a door in the Heavens being opened, and it has never been opened before now." An Angel descended from that door and came to the Prophet (peace be upon him) and said: "Receive the glad tidings of two lights that you have been given, which no other Prophet before you was given: the Opening of the Book (al-Fatiha), and the last verses of 'al-Baqarah.' You will not read a letter of them except that you will gain its benefit." (Muslim)

Regarding Ayat al-Kursi (Qur'an 2:255):

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said "Whoever recites Ayat al-Kursi after every obligatory prayer, then there is nothing between him and his entrance into Paradise except his death." (Al-Nasai)

Regarding Surah al-Yaseen (Qur'an 36):

Hazret Ibn Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him) narrated, "Whoever recites Yaseen in the morning, his work for that entire day will be made easy and whoever recites in at the end of the day, his tasks until the next morning will be made easy." (al-Darimi)

Regarding Surah al-Ikhlās (Qur'an 112):

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, 'By Him in Whose hand my soul is, it is equal to one third of the Quran.'" (Bukhari)

Regarding Surah al-Falaq and al-Naas (Qur'an 113-114):

"The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) used to seek refuge with Allah from the jinn and from the evil eye until the Mu'wadaitain (Surah al-Falaq and al-Naas) were revealed, and when they were revealed He started to recite them and not anything else." (Tirmidhi)

I would encourage you to also do your own research on the blessings hidden within different verses of the Qur'an.

Developing a habit of reading, understanding, and acting upon the Qur'an

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a practical means of developing a relationship with the word of Allah. The aim is to read some Qur'an every day, with translation so you can understand what you have read, and from this to find a message or instruction to act upon. All of this should be recorded on the following pages to help develop this habit. Do not fall into Shaitan's (the devil's) trap by trying to read too much in one go since you will not be able to do this daily, and are more likely to abandon the habit before it becomes established. Instead, start small and gradually increase, remembering the hadith:

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "Take up good deeds only as much as you are able, for the best deeds are those done regularly even if they are few." (Ibn Majah)

In this way, reading, understanding, and acting upon the Qur'an will become easy for you and part of your daily routine. Have this noble intention from the very beginning and make Dua (supplication) to Allah

to help you in this struggle. As we are told in the Hadith Kudsi (*Bukhari, Muslim*):

“He who draws close to Me a hand’s span, I will draw close to him an arm’s length. And whoever draws near Me an arm’s length, I will draw near him a fathom’s length. And whoever comes to Me walking, I will go to him running...”

Date:	/ /
Did you read the Qur'an today?	Yes / No
How much did you read (pages/chapters)?	
Did you read it with translation/Tafsir?	Yes / No
What message did you take/learn from what you read?	

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Drawing Closer To Allah And His Prophet: a Practical Guide

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The Salaat: Praying With Concentration

The five daily Prayers (Salaat / Namaaz) are one of the five pillars of Islam. As such they are obligatory (compulsory) for all Muslims. This has been made very clear to us in the Qur'an and Hadith (sayings of the Prophet - peace be upon him):

“I am Allah. There is no god but Me, so worship Me. Perform the prayer to remember Me.” (Qur'an 20:14)

“Perform prayer, pay Zakat, and bow down with those who bow in prayer.” (Qur'an 2:43)

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, “The first action for which a servant of Allah will be held accountable on the Day of Resurrection will be his Prayers. If they are in order, then he will have prospered and succeeded. If they are lacking, then he will have failed and lost...” (Tirmidhi)

The Prophet (peace be upon him) was asked: “Which deed is the dearest to Allah?” He replied: “To perform the daily prayers on time.” (Bukhari)

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: “The difference between us and them (the disbelievers) is that of Salaat; so whoever abandons Salaat certainly commits Kufr (disbelief).” (Tirmidhi)

These instructions from Allah and His Prophet (peace be upon him) make it very clear that praying Salaat is a fundamental part of Imaan (faith). But for us to develop a true desire in our hearts to stand before our Creator in prayer requires an understanding of the history of Salaat.

History of Salaat

It is a common misconception that Islam began with the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). In actual fact Islam (translated as ‘submission to the will of Allah’) is the true religion of all Prophets, from Hazret Adam to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon them all). As human society developed over time so did their relationship with Allah, until revelation of the perfected religion to the ‘Seal of the Prophets’ (peace be upon him):

“...Today, I have completed your religion, for you; I gave My favour in full, and I am happy that Submission to My will is your religion...”
(Qur’an 5:3)

From the beginning every Prophet was given forms of worship which involved ‘Sajda’ (prostration – putting your head on the ground); examples of which can still be found in the Torah and Gospel. But what about the Salaat that we pray? Near the end of his time in Makkah, the Prophet (peace be upon him) faced two tragedies. His first wife, Hazret Khadija (may Allah be pleased with her), the first person to accept Islam, the mother of his children, and an immense source of strength for him passed away. Furthermore, his uncle Abu Talib who helped raise him, and through whom the Prophet had protection from non-Muslim Arabs also passed away.

Having limited success in calling the Arabs of Makkah to Islam, the Prophet travelled to the neighbouring city of Taif. However, the elders rudely refused to talk to him and did not let him stay. Instead they told their slaves and children to shout insults at and pelt him with stones as he left. The assault was so brutal that by the time the Prophet (peace be upon him) found refuge in a nearby orchard his shoes were filled with blood.

On the backdrop of these events this was a year of great sorrow and difficulty for the Prophet (peace be upon him). One night he was asleep when the Archangel, Hazret Jibra’il (may Allah be pleased with him) arrived to wake him. He was seated on the Buraq, a steed from heaven which travels so fast as to plant its next step at the farthest point the eye can see. From Makkah they travelled to Masjid-Al-Aqsa

in Jerusalem (the night journey – ‘Isra’), and from here they ascended to the heavens (the ‘Miraj’ – literally translated as ‘ladder’).

“Glory to Him Who took His noble servant on a night journey from the sacred Masjid to the farthest Masjid...” (Qur’an 17:1)

As they went from the first to the seventh Heaven they saw many wondrous sights including the Kaaba of the Angels (Al-Bait Al-Ma’mur – ‘the oft visited house’). Hazret Jibra’il (may Allah be pleased with him) took him to Sidra-tul-Muntaha – a huge lote tree, which is his station from where he awaits Allah’s command. From here the Prophet (peace be upon him) continued on into the presence of Allah alone.

Consider this meeting between Allah and His beloved; not a dream but the Prophet (peace be upon him) has travelled in mind, body and soul, to a station that is unique for him alone. Perhaps it is no coincidence that the Isra w’al-Miraj occurred at the time of such sadness and difficulty; a reminder from Allah that this is your true station. And look at the mercy and compassion of the Prophet (peace be upon him), during such a meeting he is still remembering his Ummah (community, or followers, until the Day of Judgment), begging for our forgiveness. During this most exalted of meetings Allah gave His beloved a gift for us: the Salaat.

Virtue of Salaat

The immense blessings of Salaat are mentioned in the Qur’an and Hadith:

“...and regularly perform their prayers. Such people are the true heirs, they will inherit Paradise, remaining in it forever.” (Qur’an 23:9-11)

“...and perform the prayer. Without doubt, prayer protects from indecency and evil...” (Qur’an 29:45)

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, “If there was a river at your door and you took a bath in it five times a day, would you notice any dirt?” They replied, “Not a trace of dirt would be left.” He said, “That is the example of the five daily prayers by which Allah removes sins.” (Bukhari)

The Salaat is a unique form of physical and spiritual worship in which specific prayers are linked to actions or postures. For example, the prostration (Sajda) is a particularly favourite worship (Ibadah) in the eyes of Allah. You pray *Subhaana rabbiyal a'ala* (How perfect is Allah, my Lord, The Most High) while lowering the highest part of your body (your forehead) to the ground; an action which is Haraam (impermissible) to carry out in front of anyone or anything else. The Prophet (peace be upon him) told us:

“The nearest a servant comes to his Lord is when he is prostrating himself, so make supplication (dua) in this state.” (Muslim)

In each unit (Rakaat) of Salaat we pray Surah Fatihah (Qur'an 1). Regarding these 7 'oft repeated' verses (the 'Mother of the Qur'an'), Allah says:

“I have divided Al-Fatihah into two halves between Myself and My servant:

- *When My servant says, ‘Alhumdolillah he Rabil Alamin (All praise and thanks be to Allah, the Lord of existence),’ Allah says, ‘My servant has praised Me.’*
- *When My servant says, ‘Ar Rahman hir Rahim (The Kind, The Most Merciful),’ Allah says, ‘My servant has glorified Me.’*
- *When he says, ‘Malik e Yawmid Din (The King of the Day of Judgment),’ Allah says, ‘My servant has related all matters to Me.’*
- *When he says, ‘Iya ka na’budu wa iya ka nasta’in (You alone we worship, and You alone we ask for help),’ Allah says, ‘This is between Me and My servant, and My servant shall acquire what he seeks.’*
- *When he says, ‘Ihdinasira Tal Mustakeem (Guide us to the straight path), Siratalazeena an umpta alayhim, ghayril maghdube alayhim waladaalin (The way of those on whom You have granted Your grace, not the way of those who earned Your anger, nor of those who went astray),’ Allah says, ‘This is for My servant, and My servant shall have what he asked for.’” (Muslim)*

These examples show us that during Salaat Allah's attention is towards us and the prayers we recite are part of a real conversation between Allah and His slave. He is listening to our every word and indeed replying to our supplications. The Prophet (peace be upon him) told us, "*the Salaat is the Miraj of the Mo'min,*" (devout believer) but this is not applicable to just any Salaat. This is a Salaat where your attention is towards Allah alone and you have left the world behind. This is a Salaat where, as the Prophet told us, "*you are praying as if you are seeing Allah, and if you cannot do that, then with the surety that Allah is seeing you.*" Then you will be in the presence of Allah, on your own Miraj.

How will you know when you have achieved this? Because you will feel overwhelmed, your heart will tremble with awe of Allah, tears will stream from your eyes, and you will wish the Salaat would never end. When you have finished your heart will feel at peace but you will long for the next Salaat, so you can once again stand in front of your Creator and go on your Miraj, into His presence.

How to increase Khushoo (concentration) during Salaat

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a practical guide to achieve this level of 'Khushoo' (focus/concentration/humility). However, we must remember the immeasurable blessing of Allah that He has given us Hidayat (faith) to pray Salaat even if we lack concentration. Being aware our Salaat is deficient and having the desire to improve it is a further blessing from Him. Pray to Allah to help with this struggle and remember the Hadith:

"He who draws close to Me a hand's span, I will draw close to him an arm's length. And whoever draws near Me an arm's length, I will draw near him a fathom's length. And whoever comes to Me walking, I will go to him running..." (Bukhari)

1) Pray in the Mosque with Jamaat (congregation)

Go to the Mosque to pray. This means leaving your normal environment in which you are surrounded by people engrossed in worldly affairs and your worldly possessions. So not only is there the physical act of distancing yourself from the world but also the psychological act when

you make the intention, prepare for, and then leave your house to go to the house of Allah, to pray before Him. Being surrounded by others who are there for the same purpose protects from distraction and helps with concentration.

If you are praying at home, or if you are a woman (according to Hanafi Fiqh), then have an allocated prayer room where there is no noise or distractions and within it you just have the things needed to pray Salaat and Quran and do Dhikr'Allah. It is also most beneficial if the entire family can pray at the same time.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "Prayer in congregation is superior to prayer alone by twenty-seven degrees." (Bukhari).

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "Whoever prays Isha in congregation, it is as if he spent half the night in prayer, and whoever prays Isha and Fajr in congregation, it is as if he spent the whole night in prayer." (Abu Dawood)

2) Perform the Wudhu with intention

When we do our Wudhu (ablution/washing), it should be with the intention that we are purifying ourselves with the purpose of standing before Allah. In this way our concentration for Salaat begins from the Wudhu and ideally we should do a fresh Wudhu for each prayer. This also means we should avoid doing anything else in between the Wudhu and standing for Salaat.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "...the key to Salaat is Wudhu." (Tirmidhi)

3) Clarify your intention for Salaat

Take a few minutes to sit before starting Salaat. Therefore, if going to the Mosque to pray with Jaamat arrive a few minutes early so you do not have to rush to join the prayer. If praying at home do not leave the prayer until its time is about to run out. The purpose is to contemplate what you are about to do.

What are we doing when we pray Salaat? We stand in front of Allah, we talk to Him, He listens to us and sees us, and He responds to our

words. This is why the Prophet (peace be upon him) described the Salaat as a Miraj because like he stood before, and spoke with Allah on the night of ascension, so in truth when we are praying Salaat we are doing the same. By taking a few minutes before we start to think about this, it will help improve our concentration during the prayer. Before you start read a few Quranic verses to protect you from the whisperings of Shaitan (the devil):

A`udhu billaahi min ash-shaitaani r-rajim
(I seek refuge in Allah from Shaitan, the accursed one)

Bismi-llahi r-rahmani r-rahim
(In the Name of Allah, the most Beneficent, the most Merciful)

Qul a`udhu bi-Rabb-in-naas, Malik-in-naas, Ilah-in-naas, min sharri'l waswaasi'l khannaas, alladhi yuwaswisu fisudur-in-nas, min al-jinnati wan-naas

(Say, "I seek refuge in the Lord of the people, the King of the people, the God of the people, from the evil of the sneaking whisperer, who whispers into people's hearts and minds, from among the jinn and people.") (Qur'an 114)

4) Control your thoughts during the Salaat

Consider what you are thinking about during the Salaat itself. Our thoughts are often related to work, family or money. We perform the actions and recite the prayers of Salaat on autopilot while our concentration on these worldly matters becomes magnified; they are all we think about. This results in forgetting how many Rakaat we have prayed and sometimes we complete the prayer and it feels as if we have not even prayed.

How shameful is this situation? If we pray like this, if all we are thinking about is worldly matters then what are we achieving by praying? We are merely fulfilling a ritual with very little benefit to ourselves. But also consider, when we pray Salaat we are standing before the King of kings, The Creator and Sustainer of the universe. These problems and worries we have, these worldly matters which preoccupy us, it is Allah

who is ultimately responsible for them. Because Allah is the One who has absolute control over all things.

“The Creator of the Heavens and the Earth. When He decides on any matter, He only says: ‘Be!’ and there it is.” (Qur’an 2:117)

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, “When you ask, ask Allah. When you seek aid and succour, seek it from Allah. And know, that if the entire nation got together to benefit you in some way, they could never benefit you at all except for that which Allah had already decreed for you. And, if they all got together to harm you in some way, they could do you no harm except for that which Allah had already decreed for you.” (Tirmidhi)

So if Allah wills everything will work itself out for the best even if we have no expectation that it is possible, and if He wills, everything can become disastrous for us even if we are currently happy and stress-free. So when we are standing before Allah, praying to Him, speaking with Him, asking Him for His help, what need do we have to worry about anything?

Therefore, while standing in Salaat itself remember who you are standing before, who you are talking with, who is listening to your prayer, and in doing so you should feel a sense of peace and calm, and be able to free yourself from the worries of this world.

“...those who believe and their hearts find peace in Allah’s remembrance. The fact is, hearts find peace in the remembrance of Allah!” (Qur’an 13:28)

5) Consider the words and actions of the Salaat

As you are praying actively think about what you are reading and doing. Recite the Arabic slowly and calmly perform the movements. If you were standing before someone important you would speak carefully, you would not be in a rush, mixing your words so they do not make sense, nor would you be in a hurry to leave. If someone came to ask you for help, in such a rush that you could not understand what they were saying, would you help them?

Do not pray in silence. The Prophet (peace be upon him) taught us that your words should be just loud enough for you to hear them. When you hear yourselves say the words it will focus your concentration. Learn the meaning of the Arabic verses you recite to understand how different verses relate to different movements and how we really are having a conversation with Allah.

So in summary, while performing the Salaat remember you are standing before the King of kings, the Lord of the universe; perform your actions in a calm manner, speak the verses slowly, loud enough so you can hear them, and with understanding of their meaning.

6) Perform the full Salaat

Many of us just read the Fardh (obligatory part of the prayer) missing out the Sunnah and Nawafil Rakaat (supererogatory parts). Consider why you are praying. If it is because it is just a ritual you have to do then it may make sense to perform the minimum and leave the rest. But if you pray Salaat because you wish to talk with your Lord 5 times a day, to stand before Him and His attention turned towards you, to obtain the feeling of calm and peace only found within the remembrance of Allah, then you would want the prayer to last as long as possible and it makes no sense to perform the Fardh and leave the Sunnah and Nawafil Rakaat. As Allah says in the Hadith Kudsi:

“My slave does not draw closer to Me by anything more beloved to Me than that which I have made obligatory upon him, and My slave continues to draw closer to Me by doing Nawafil (supererogatory) deeds until I love him, and if I love him I will be his hearing with which he hears, his vision with which he sees, his hand with which he strikes and his foot with which he walks. If he were to ask of Me, I would surely give to him; if he were to seek refuge with Me, I would surely grant him refuge.” (Bukhari)

Sunnah and Nawafil can also make up for deficiencies in the Fardh:

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, “...if there is something defective in his obligatory prayers, then the Almighty Lord will say: “See if my servant has any voluntary prayers that can complete what is insufficient in his obligatory prayers.”” (Tirmidhi)

7) Make time for Dua (supplication) and Dhikr (meditation) after the Salaat

Perform Dua (supplication) and Dhikr'Allah (meditation in the remembrance of Allah) after you have completed the Salaat. Many of us do not perform Dua following our Salaat, let alone sitting for even a few minutes, in silence, eyes closed, attention turned inwards towards our heart, remembering Allah. In the same way that concentrating during Salaat is difficult, so too is concentrating during Dhikr'Allah. The two work in harmony; Dhikr'Allah helps with gaining concentration during Salaat, and Salaat helps with gaining concentrating during Dhikr'Allah.

“If My servants ask you about Me, tell them that I am near, I answer the prayer of the prayerful whenever he prays to Me.” (Qur’an 2:186)

“There is no Muslim who calls upon his Lord with a Dua in which there is no sin, or severing of family ties, but Allah will give him one of three things:

- *Either He will answer his prayer quickly, or*
- *He will store (the reward for) it in the Hereafter, or*
- *He will divert an equivalent evil away from him.’ [Tirmidhi]*

“So, remember Me, and I shall remember you...” (Qur’an 2:152)

“...who remember Allah standing, sitting and lying down...” (Qur’an 3:191)

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, “Whenever people sit to remember Allah, angels cover them (spreading their wings over them) and divine mercy envelops them; inner peace descends on them and Allah mentions them to those who are with Him.” (Muslim)

Summary

We have outlined 7 points to improve concentration during Salaat:

1. Going to the Mosque to pray with Jamaat, or if at home, in a separate prayer room free from worldly distractions and noise. In this way you physically enact the spiritual action of leaving the world to enter the presence of Allah.

2. Perform the Wudhu (ablution) before every prayer with the intention of purifying yourself for standing before Allah, and do not get distracted between doing Wudhu and praying.
3. Before starting the prayer take a few minutes to sit and prepare yourself for the prayer considering what you are about to do, who you are about to stand in front of, and recite 'Bismillah', 'Auzbillah', and Surah Naas.
4. During the prayer leave all worldly thoughts and worries behind. Truly be in the presence of The Almighty, The Creator, the One who has control over all things, and so be at peace.
5. This manifests itself as calmly performing the movements and reciting the Arabic verses, just loud enough so you can hear yourself and with understanding.
6. If you have achieved this then you will complete the Salaat including the Sunnah and Nawafil Rakaat, you will not be in a rush to finish.
7. Once you have finished, raise your hands and after doing Shukr (being thankful), ask Allah for whatever your heart desires, and then sit for a few minutes, close your eyes, focus on your heart, and perform some Dhikr'Allah.

On the following pages I have included tables for you to record the number of prayers you perform each day, whether you performed them with Jamaat (or at home for women), and what degree of Khushoo you had during the Salaat. In this way, it will become apparent to you if you are consistently missing a certain prayer (e.g. Fajr or Isha), it will encourage you to pray in the Mosque (for men), or a quiet room at home (for women), and it will force you to assess if over time you are increasing your level of Khushoo.

When we practice anything in life (e.g. work, cooking, sport, a musical instrument) our aim is to improve, to get better at it each time we do it. The Salaat should be no different. Make an intention and effort that each time you pray, it should be a little bit better than the last time. If you could do this imagine how beautiful your Salaat would become within a day, a week, a month, a year, a lifetime?

Salaat	Prayed?	With Jamaat / in quiet room at home	Level of Khushoo (concentration) (%)
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Date: ___ / ___ / ___

Fajr	Yes / No	Yes / No	0 / 25 / 50 / 75 / 100
Dhuhr	Yes / No	Yes / No	0 / 25 / 50 / 75 / 100
Asr	Yes / No	Yes / No	0 / 25 / 50 / 75 / 100
Maghrib	Yes / No	Yes / No	0 / 25 / 50 / 75 / 100
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Date: ___ / ___ / ___

Fajr	Yes / No	Yes / No	0 / 25 / 50 / 75 / 100
Dhuhr	Yes / No	Yes / No	0 / 25 / 50 / 75 / 100
Asr	Yes / No	Yes / No	0 / 25 / 50 / 75 / 100
Maghrib	Yes / No	Yes / No	0 / 25 / 50 / 75 / 100
Isha	Yes / No	Yes / No	0 / 25 / 50 / 75 / 100

Date: ___ / ___ / ___

Fajr	Yes / No	Yes / No	0 / 25 / 50 / 75 / 100
Dhuhr	Yes / No	Yes / No	0 / 25 / 50 / 75 / 100
Asr	Yes / No	Yes / No	0 / 25 / 50 / 75 / 100
Maghrib	Yes / No	Yes / No	0 / 25 / 50 / 75 / 100
Isha	Yes / No	Yes / No	0 / 25 / 50 / 75 / 100

The Sunnah: Celebrating Your Prophet By Following His Example

Love for our Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), the last and final messenger of Allah, is an essential part of our faith:

“Say, ‘If your fathers, children, brothers, spouses, relatives and the wealth you have gathered, the business whose downturn you fear and the houses that delight you, if these things are dearer to you than Allah, His Messenger and struggling in His path, then you should wait until Allah’s Judgment comes to pass. Allah doesn’t guide the disobedient.”
(Qur’an 9:24)

“Say, ‘If you love Allah then follow me, and Allah will love you and forgive your sins...” (Qur’an 3:31)

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, “None of you will have faith until he loves me more than his father, his children and all mankind.”
(Bukhari)

A man asked the Prophet (peace be upon him) about the Hour (i.e. Day of Judgment) saying, “When will the Hour be?” The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, “What have you prepared for it?” The man said, “Nothing, except that I love Allah and His Prophet (peace be upon him).” The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, “You will be with those whom you love.” (Bukhari)

To increase our love for the Prophet (peace be upon him) we must learn about him and follow his example (his Sunnah). This is why Allah says about His beloved in the Qur’an:

“You have an excellent role model in the Messenger of Allah...”
(Qur’an 33:21)

Rewards for acting upon the Sunnah

Fortunately for us, the family of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and his Sahabah (companions – may Allah be pleased with them all) have given us every detail about his life. There is nothing hidden about him and there is no person in history about whom more is known. The rewards for acting upon the Sunnah of the Prophet (peace be upon him) are immense, both in this life and the next:

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: “Whoever revives my Sunnah, loves me. Whoever loves me will be with me in Jannah.” (Tirmidhi)

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: “Whoever revives an aspect of my Sunnah that is forgotten after my death, he will have a reward equivalent to that of the people who follow him, without it detracting in the least from their reward.” (Tirmidhi)

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: “Whoever adheres to my Sunnah when my Ummah is corrupt will have the reward of a hundred martyrs.” (Al-Targheeb, Kitabuz Zuhd of Baihaqi, Al-Kamil of Ibn ‘Adiy, Ibn Batta’s Al-Ibanatul Kubra)

Character of the Prophet

Given the excellent character of the Prophet (peace be upon him), when we follow his example our character and behaviour will also improve. For example, Hazret Zaid ibn Haritha (may Allah be pleased with him), who grew up in the house of the Prophet (peace be upon him), says that in the 10 years he spent there as a child never once did the Prophet (peace be upon him) show any displeasure at his misbehaviours. The Prophet’s wife, Hazret Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) describes how the Prophet (peace be upon him) would help with the housework and play games and joke with her. The Sahabah of the Prophet (may Allah be pleased with them all) describe how when he would talk to someone he would turn to face them completely and not turn away while the conversation was on-going. They would feel as if they were the most important person in the world for the Prophet (peace be upon him) due to the attention and love he directed towards them. He would enquire about and go out of his way to help not just his family and friends or those in need, but

also those who tried to hurt him, those who would throw rubbish on him, spread thorns in his path, put the entrails of animals on him and stone him until his shoes were filled with blood (as happened in Taif). He would forgive them even when he was in a position of power and able to take revenge (such as after conquering Makkah). His enemies would call him 'Amin' and even after he revealed his Prophethood and the Quraysh became staunch enemies, they would entrust their property and goods in his care because they knew he had never lied, stolen or cheated.

Dawah through action

This is the best form of Dawah (to invite others to Islam). The Prophet (peace be upon him) and his Sahabah (may Allah be pleased with them all) had such excellent character that people would see their behaviour and when they realized that this was due to their adherence to the teachings of Islam, they would want to become Muslims. That is true today as it was then; if you wish to convey the message of Islam to the people you know the best way to do it is through your actions rather than your words. Unfortunately for Muslims today the opposite is the case; non-Muslims see our behaviour and want nothing to do with Islam. We need to change this and the best way is to follow the practices and develop the character of the Prophet (peace be upon him) within ourselves. Our religion places a very high value on having a good character as shown in the following hadith from Sahih-al Bukhari:

“The most beloved of Allah’s servants to Allah are those with the best manners.”

“Nothing is weightier on the Scale of Deeds than one’s good manners.”

Practical benefits

Following the way of the Prophet (peace be upon him) will not only help us in our spiritual life and enable us to draw closer to Allah and the Prophet (peace be upon him), but will also help us in our everyday lives with real-world problems we all face. This is beautifully exemplified in the following story.

Hazret Abdullah bin Mubarak (may Allah be pleased with him) was born about 100 years after the Hijri (migration from Makkah to Madinah) of the Prophet (peace be upon him), and was involved in a battle where the Muslims had laid siege to a fort of the non-Muslims. Despite their efforts they could not break the siege. So they had a meeting where they came to the conclusion that there must be a Sunnah of the Prophet (peace be upon him) they were not doing which is why Allah was not giving them victory. However, they could not think of a single Sunnah they were not fulfilling. So they sent a messenger to Madinah and they were sent back a message to make sure they were doing Miswaak (brushing their teeth with a toothbrush made from a tree). Upon hearing this message they immediately set to work cutting branches from the local trees to make their Miswaak and using them. A look-out on the fort of the disbelievers was watching the Muslims and upon seeing what they were doing was horrified and fled to his commander. He told him that their only chance now was to surrender because the Muslims had started sharpening their teeth and were getting ready to eat them.

While the connection between following a nearly 1,500-year-old Sunnah and unrelated problems within our modern lives might seem very distant, we must remember that Allah is the ‘Musabib’al-Asbab’ – The Originator of Causes. Consider, how could anyone have predicted that the Muslim army doing Miswaak would help them conquer the fort but when Allah wants to create an opening for you then He does as He pleases, and He is Al-Qahhar (The Irresistible).

A word of warning

I must also mention a word of warning for those who consider the Sunnah of the Prophet (peace be upon him) to be unimportant or an unnecessary part of our religion. Allah told us quite clearly through his Prophet (peace be upon him) that:

“Whoever turns away from my Sunnah, then they are not of me.”
(Bukhari)

“The loss of religion begins with abandonment of Sunnah. Just as a rope breaks fiber by fiber, so does faith vanish with abandoning the principles of Sunnah, one by one.” (Darimi)

Making a habit of following the Sunnah

This chapter contains a list of Sunnah of the Prophet (peace be upon him) split into two groups; simple or small (often relating to actions), and larger or more complex (often relating to our emotions and character). The purpose is to choose Sunnah to act upon and incorporate into our lives.

I would advise you to choose only one to begin with and then make a firm intention to try and incorporate it into your daily life, while praying to Allah for His help. Record the date you make this intention. Once following that Sunnah has become like second nature to you record that date also and move onto a second Sunnah. Avoid the trap that Shaitan (the devil) will set for you; to pick many Sunnah at the same time or to move too quickly from one Sunnah to the next, because you will be more likely to fail and give up altogether. As the Hadith says:

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "Take up good deeds only as much as you are able, for the best deeds are those done regularly even if they are few." (Ibn Majah)

While doing this always remember why you are doing it (your intention). You are following the Sunnah of the Prophet (peace be upon him) to increase your love for him and draw closer to him as well as obeying the command of Allah and earning His pleasure. Having such a noble intention means that Allah will help you as we are told in the Hadith Kudsi (Bukhari, Muslim):

"He who draws close to Me a hand's span, I will draw close to him an arm's length. And whoever draws near Me an arm's length, I will draw near him a fathom's length. And whoever comes to Me walking, I will go to him running..."

It was not my intention to include a complete list of Sunnah but merely to serve as an introduction for the reader to develop this habit. Once you have exhausted the Sunnah listed here Insh'Allah you will have the desire and motivation to search for further Sunnah to incorporate into your daily life. For this reason I have included several blank pages.

	Simple Sunnah that are easy to follow	Date started	Date habit formed
1	Greet all Muslims you meet by saying, “Assalaamu alaykum wa rahmatullahl wa barakaatuhu” (may the peace, mercy, and blessings of Allah be with you)		
2	When you meet another Muslim shake their hand with a smile		
3	When you sneeze say, “Al-hamdu-lillaah” (all praise be to Allah)		
4	When you hear a person sneeze say “al-hamdu-lillaah” reply, “Yarhamukallaah” (may Allah have mercy upon you)		
5	When entering your house mention the name of Allah (saying Bismillah or giving Salaam, even if no-one is at home)		
6	Walk to the Mosque on foot, even if not the whole way, park further away than normal in a place that does not inconvenience the local community and walk the rest of the way		
7	Remove anything from the road which may cause others harm or difficulty		
8	Enter the Mosque with the right foot, leave with the left foot		
9	Stand in the first row in the Mosque, if there is space		
10	When joining any gathering sit wherever a place is found rather than causing others to have to move on your account		
11	When you hear the Adhan (call to prayer), answer it by repeating the phrases after the Muezzin		

	Simple Sunnah that are easy to follow	Date started	Date habit formed
12	Read ‘Ayat-ul Kursi’ (the throne verse: Qur’an 2:255) after the obligatory prayers		
13	Read ‘Fatima’s Tasbi’ after the obligatory prayers: 1) Al’hamdu-lillaah (all praise and thanks be to Allah) x 33 2) Subhan’Allah (how perfect is Allah) x 33 3) Allahu Akbar (Allah is the greatest) x 34		
14	Send peace and blessings (Dhurood) upon the Prophet (peace be upon him) before and after making Dua (supplication)		
15	Do not waste water while doing Wudhu (ablution), e.g. do not leave the tap running		
16	Use Miswaak to brush your teeth when doing Wudhu (ablution), i.e. before praying (Namaaz/Salaah)		
17	Perform Ghusl (bath) on Fridays		
18	Dress in a beautiful manner according to your means without being wasteful or having pride in your heart		
19	Wear clean white clothes every Friday		
20	In general, but specifically on Fridays, send peace (Salaam) and blessings (Dhurood) upon the Prophet (peace be upon him) in abundance		
21	Keep a beard and trim it (minimum 1 fist length) and your moustache		
22	Keep your fingernails short (at a minimum cutting them every 40 days)		

	Simple Sunnah that are easy to follow	Date started	Date habit formed
23	Regularly shave underarm and pubic hair (at a minimum every 40 days)		
24	Attend the funeral prayer (Namaaz Janaazah) of fellow Muslims, even if you do not know them		
25	Eat with the right hand		
26	Do not eat very hot food and do not blow on food		
27	Read 'Bismillah' (in the name of Allah) before eating		
28	Eat from the side of your plate that is in front of you		
29	Eat without leaving any leftovers (but do not overfill your plate to begin with)		
30	Finish all your food in a way that your plate and cutlery are left clean		
31	After eating (with your hands) lick your fingers		
32	Wash both hands before and after eating (up to the wrists) and gargle		
33	Drink while sitting down, not standing		
34	Drink in 3 breaths (sips), removing the cup from the mouth after each sip		
35	Do not drink directly from a jug or bottle, pour the contents into a glass first		
36	After eating or drinking, say 'Al'hamdu-lillah' (all praise and thanks be to Allah)		

	Simple Sunnah that are easy to follow	Date started	Date habit formed
37	Eat with others, rather than alone, and do not leave the table until everyone has finished		
38	Take a walk after dinner		
39	Enter the toilet with the left foot and leave with the right foot		
40	Urinate while sitting (not standing)		
41	When wearing clothes or shoes begin with the right side; when taking off clothes or shoes begin with the left side		
42	Sit while dressing or undressing		
43	Avoid yawning, if you cannot stop yourself cover your mouth with your hand and try to avoid making a sound		
44	Change into some other clothes (e.g. pyjamas) before going to sleep		
45	Brush your teeth before going to sleep		
46	Go to sleep in a state of Wudhu (ablution)		
47	Sleep on your right-hand side, do not sleep on your stomach		
48	On awakening rub your face and eyes with the palms of your hands		
49	Make your bed in the morning		
50	When struck by any calamity or misfortune, recite “inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji’un” (surely, to Allah we belong, and to Him we shall return)		

	More complex Sunnah that will take more effort	Date started	Date habit formed
1	Pray 5 times a day		
2	Recite Surah Mulk (Qur'an 67) before sleeping		
3	Sleep immediately after the Isha Salaat		
4	Wake up for Tahajud prayer (pre-Fajr prayer)		
5	Do not sleep straight after Fajr		
6	After praying Fajr sit in the mosque until the sun rises and then pray a further two Raqaat (Ishraaq)		
7	Recite a portion of Qur'an every day, no matter how little		
8	Read Qur'an with the translation/tafsir to gain understanding		
9	Spend some time every day in quiet seclusion, meditating and remembering Allah (Dhikr)		
10	Fast on Mondays and/or Thursdays		
11	Respect your elders, especially your parents, never get angry or annoyed with them		
12	Keep good relations with all your relatives, even the ones you do not get on with		
13	Show mercy and kindness to those who are younger than you		
14	Inquire about the welfare of your neighbours and treat them with kindness		
15	Be hospitable towards guests, regardless of how important or unimportant you consider them		

	More complex Sunnah that will take more effort	Date started	Date habit formed
16	Visit Muslims when they are sick, even if you do not know them personally		
17	When eating fill a third of your stomach with food, a third with drink, leaving a third empty		
18	Do not find fault with food		
19	Keep your gaze on the ground when walking		
20	Always keep a smile on your face		
21	Speak softly and politely at all times		
22	Turn to face whoever is talking to you and give them your full attention until the conversation is over		
23	Have a sense of humour that does not include hurting the feeling of others or lying		
24	Abstain from idle talk and if you have nothing good to say about someone or something, do not saying anything at all		
25	Control your anger by doing the following:- - Saying “A’udhu billahi minash Shayta’nir Rajim” (I seek refuge with Allah from Shaitan, the outcast) - Performing Wudhu (ablution) - If standing, sit down; if sitting, lie down		

The Sunnah: Celebrating Your Prophet By Following His Example

	Other Sunnah that you will try to follow	Date started	Date habit formed
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Drawing Closer To Allah And His Prophet: a Practical Guide

	Other Sunnah that you will try to follow	Date started	Date habit formed
26			
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Sending Peace And Blessings Upon The Prophet

“Allah and His Angels continually bless the Messenger; so believers, you too bless and greet him with peace.” (Qur’an 33:56)

In this verse Allah is instructing the believers to carry out two actions: to send blessings (Dhurood) and salutations/peace (Salaam) upon the Prophet (peace be upon him). When this verse was revealed the Sahabah (companions – may Allah be pleased with them all) asked the Prophet (peace be upon him), “O Messenger of Allah, we know how to convey Salaam (*i.e. what is read in the atahiyyat – As-salamu alayka ayyuha’n-nabiyyu wa rahmatu’llahi wa barakatuhu...*), teach us how to convey blessings.” The Prophet (peace be upon him) taught them, “Allahumma salli ala Muhammadinw wa ala ali Muhammad...” (*i.e. Dhurood Ibrahimi that is read after atahiyyat*) (Bukhari, Muslim).

The unique nature of sending peace and blessings upon the Prophet

As the hadith above shows, not only does Allah command His believers to send peace and blessings upon the Prophet (peace be upon him) within the Qur’an, but He has also chosen to include this within the Salaat (5 daily prayers). By doing this Allah is elevating its status and showing us its importance. We are also being told that sending peace and blessings upon the Prophet (peace be upon him) is in reality a form of Ibadah (worshipping Allah), since we are following His command.

This act is also unique because it is the only deed Allah has prescribed for us which He and His Angels are also participants in. Allah does not pray Salaat, give charity, fast, or perform Haj, but he does send His peace and blessings upon the Prophet (peace be upon him) and He commands His Angels and His believers to do the same.

It is important to clarify that even though Allah is asking us to send blessings upon the Prophet (peace be upon him) that is not what we are doing. If you read the translation of any Dhurood (including Dhurood

Ibrahimi) it is a supplication (Dua) to Allah for Him to send blessings upon the Prophet (peace be upon him). But how are we fulfilling Allah's command in which He tells us to do this when in reply we are asking Allah to send blessings upon His Prophet (peace be upon him)? The explanation given for this is that for us to send blessings upon the Prophet (peace be upon him) we would have to be higher in rank than him, and given the Prophet's status as the pinnacle of all creation and the most beloved of Allah there is nothing within creation that is worthy of blessing him, and so all of creation asks Allah to send His blessings upon His Prophet (peace be upon him).

Love for the Prophet

Love for the Prophet (peace be upon him) is part of our faith:

"Say, 'If your fathers, children, brothers, spouses, relatives and the wealth you have gathered, the business whose downturn you fear and the houses that delight you, if these things are dearer to you than Allah, His Messenger and struggling in His path, then you should wait until Allah's Judgement comes to pass. Allah doesn't guide the disobedient.'"
(Qur'an 9:24)

"Say, 'If you love Allah then follow me, and Allah will love you and forgive your sins...'" (Qur'an 3:31)

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said "None of you will have faith until they love me more than their father, their children and all mankind." (Bukhari)

A man asked the Prophet (peace be upon him) about the Hour (i.e. Day of Judgment) saying, "When will the Hour be?" The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "What have you prepared for it?" The man said, "Nothing, except that I love Allah and His Prophet (peace be upon him)." The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "You will be with those whom you love." (Bukhari)

Our Prophet (peace be upon him) is the one through whom Allah blessed us with Imaan (faith). It is through his intercession that we will be saved from punishment in Hell and enter Paradise. He was constantly

remembering us and praying for our forgiveness when he was born, when he travelled into the presence of Allah on the miraculous night journey (Isra w'al-Miraj), on his deathbed, and from his grave in Madinah.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "My life is blissful for you because you hear traditions from people and relate them to others and my death is also blissful for you because your deeds will be presented to me. If I see the virtues prevail, I will be grateful to Allah, and if I see the vices prevail, I will pray for your forgiveness from Allah." (Bazzar)

His love for us is obvious but if we truly love him as we claim to do, should we not also constantly remember him?

One of the most powerful ways to express this love and to increase it further is to send peace and blessings upon him in abundance. The Prophet (peace be upon him) told us:

"Indeed, the person closest to me on the day of Judgement is he who invokes blessings upon me most abundantly." (Tirmidhi)

Rewards of sending peace and blessings upon the Prophet

The Prophet (peace be upon him) told us that:

"The person in whose presence I am mentioned should invoke blessings upon me. Whoever invokes blessings upon me, Allah confers ten blessings upon him, forgives ten of his sins and elevates his status tenfold thereby." (Ahmad, Nasai)

It is impossible to put a value on even one of Allah's blessings, let alone ten. Indeed, one of His blessings is sufficient for His entire creation, let alone one of His slaves. Furthermore we have our sins forgiven and status raised, all in return for asking Allah to fulfil His own command of sending blessings upon His Prophet (peace be upon him). These immeasurable rewards Allah bestows upon those who send peace and blessings is evidence of the depth of love Allah has for His Prophet (peace be upon him).

Unfortunately there are some Muslims who believe that since this is not a compulsory act (Fardh), it is of little importance. Leaving aside the

fact that the Salaat cannot be prayed without reciting peace and blessings upon the Prophet (peace be upon him), we are told that;

“Dua (supplication) is suspended between heaven and earth and none of it is taken up until you send blessings upon your Prophet (peace be upon him).” (Tirmidhi)

There are also clear Hadith related to those who do not fulfil this command, especially upon hearing his name. One day, while the Prophet (peace be upon him) was ascending the three steps of the Mimbar (pulpit) the Sahabah (may Allah be pleased with them all) heard him say: *“Ameen, Ameen, Ameen.”* They asked why he had done this. He replied: *“Jibra’il came to me and said: ‘May that person be destroyed who witnesses the month of Ramadan but is not forgiven.’ I said ‘Ameen.’ Jibra’il then said: ‘May that person be destroyed in whose presence you are mentioned but does not invoke blessings upon you.’ I said ‘Ameen.’ Jibra’il then said: ‘May that person be destroyed who finds both or one of his parents in old age, but they do not enter paradise.’ I said ‘Ameen.’” (ibn Hibbaan)*

When, where, and how much?

This question was asked of the Prophet himself (peace be upon him) by one of his companions (may Allah be pleased with them all), *“O Messenger of Allah, I wish to invoke blessings upon you abundantly, how much of my time set aside for supplication (Dua) should I devote to this purpose?”* The Prophet (peace be upon him) replied, *“As much as you like.”* He asked, *“One quarter?”* The Prophet (peace be upon him) replied, *“If you like, but if you do more it shall be better for you.”* He asked, *“One half?”* The Prophet (peace be upon him) replied, *“If you like, but if you do more it shall be better for you.”* He asked, *“Two thirds?”* The Prophet (peace be upon him) replied, *“If you like, but if you do more it shall be better for you.”* So he said, *“I shall devote all my time to invoke blessings upon you!”* The Prophet (peace be upon him) replied, *“In that case, all your worries will be taken care of and your sins will be forgiven.” (Tirmidhi)*

We need not worry about where we are or what we are doing when we invoke peace and blessings upon the Prophet (peace be upon him); they are indeed being listened to and reach him:

“Allah has certain angels who roam the earth and convey the greetings of my followers to me.” (Nasai, Al-Albani)

“No person sends peace upon me except that Allah returns my soul to me, so that I may reply to him.” (Abu Dawood)

The numerous forms sending blessings upon the Prophet take

The simplest and shortest form of sending peace and blessings upon the Prophet (peace be upon him) is what is read upon hearing his name:- ‘sallallahu alayhi wasallam’ (peace be upon him). The only Dhurood mentioned within the Hadith literature is Dhurood Ibrahim, which is what we read within the Salaat. However, there are hundreds of other Dhurood which we find within the Islamic literature. To give a few examples:

Dhurood-e-Shafi

Allahuma salli ala muhammadin kullama zakarahuz zaakiruna wa kullama ghafala un zikrihil ghafilun

O Allah! Shower Blessings on Muhammad and his children whenever he is remembered by those who remember him, and Shower Blessings on Muhammad and his family whenever he is not remembered by the negligent.

Durood-e-Tanjeena

Allahumma salli ala sayyidina wa maulana muhammadin wa ala aali sayyidina wa maulana muhammadin salaatan tunajjina biha min jami’il ahwaali wal’afaati wa taqdilana biha min jami’il haajaati watu tahiruna biha min jami’is sayyi aati watar fa’una bi haa a’lad darajaati watu bal lighuna biha aqsal ghaayaati min jami’il khairaati fil hayaati waba’dal mamaati innaka ala kulli shay in qadeer

O Allah! Shower Blessings on Muhammad, our Master, and his family such Blessings by means of which You May Relieve us of all anxieties and calamities; You May Satisfy all our needs, You May Clean us of all evils, and thanks for which You May Grant us high

position and high rank and status in Your Presence, and You May Lead us to the utmost limit of our aspirations and capacity in whatever is best in this world as well as in the Hereafter, as You Have Full Power over everything.

Dhurood-e-Nariya

Allahumma salli ala salawatan kamilataw wa sallim salaaman taaaman ala sayyidina muhammadinil lazi tanhallu bihil uqadu watan fariju bihil kurabu wa tuqda bihil hawa iju wa tunaalu bihir raghaaa'ibu wahusnul khawatimi wa ustasqaayal ghamamu biwajhihil kareemi wa alaaa a'lihi wasahbihi fi kulli lamhatiw wa nafsni bi adada kulli ma'lumil laka yaaa allahu yaaa allahu yaaa allahu

O Allah! Every moment and in every breath, Bestow Complete and the Best Blessings and Perfect Peace which is Endless on Muhammad, our master, and on his descendants and his companions, and may, for his sake, all our troubles and tortures be over, calamities ended, and all our needs fulfilled, all our cherished desires attained, and good-ends vouch-saved; and clouds are laden with water through the glorious countenance of the Prophet. The perfect blessings and peace on the Prophet's House, his family and his companions every instance in number equal to the count of all things in Your Knowledge.

Dhurood-e-Qur'ani

Allahumma salli wasallim ala sayyidina muhammadiw wa ala aali wa ashabi bi adada ma fi jami'il quraani harfan harfan wabi adadi kulli harfin alfan alfan

O Allah! Send Your Blessings and Peace on Muhammad, our Master, and on his progeny and his companions according to the number of every letter in the Qur'an and let each letter carry thousands of blessings and salutations in it.

So a question naturally arises as to where these other Dhurood came from? The answer is that they are gifts which the pious, the Awliyah-Allah, the true lovers of the Prophet (peace be upon him) have been given. They are often received within dreams and then shared with

the rest of us, or composed as acts of love and then afterwards accepted by the Prophet (peace be upon him) within dreams. Four very famous examples are given below.

Tanam Farsuda Jaan Para

Mawlana Abdur Rahman Jami (may Allah be pleased with him) had composed a poem – ‘*Tanam Farsuda Jaan Para*’, when he decided to go on pilgrimage to Makkah with the intention to stand at the grave of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and recite the verses he had composed. When he set out for Madinah the governor of Makkah saw the Prophet (peace be upon him) within a dream and he was told to stop Mawlana Jami (may Allah be pleased with him) from entering Madinah. The governor at once set his agents to work at doing this and when Mawlana Jami (may Allah be pleased with him) tried to enter Madinah he was turned away. But given his strong yearning to visit the Prophet (peace be upon him) he tried a different route. Once again the governor of Makkah had a dream in which the Prophet (peace be upon him) told him that the man was still trying to enter Madinah and must be stopped. Again, the governor set his agents to find Mawlana Jami (may Allah be pleased with him) and this time when they found him he was arrested. Yet again that night the governor had a dream in which the Prophet (peace be upon him) came to him, this time telling him that the man they arrested was not a criminal but one of his lovers who had composed poetry, and if he was to enter Madinah and recite it at his grave, the Prophet (peace be upon him) would extend his hand out of his grave to shake Mawlana Jami’s hand and this would cause great confusion.

Dala’il al-Khayrat

The ‘*Dala’il al-Khayrat*’ is another great work of love for the Prophet (peace be upon him) written by Imam Jazuli (may Allah be pleased with him). One day while in Khalwa (solitary retreat), Imam Jazuli (may Allah be pleased with him) went to perform Wudhu from a nearby well but could not find any means to draw the water up. While searching nearby he was seen by a young girl who called out from high, “*You’re the one people praise so much and you cannot even figure out how to get water out of a well?*” She came down and spat into the water, which welled up

until it overflowed. Imam Jazuli made his Wudhu and then turned to her and said, “I ask you to tell me how you reached this rank.” She said, “By saying blessings upon him whom the beasts lovingly followed as he walked through the jungles.” Imam Jazuli thereupon vowed to compose the book of blessings on the Prophet that came to be known as his ‘Dala’il al-Khayrat’.

Balaghal-ula be-Kamal-e-hi

When Sheikh Saadi Shirazi (may Allah be pleased with him) was composing ‘*Balaghal-ula be-Kamal-e-hi*’ he couldn’t think of what to write for the final verse. While he was working on it, one night as he slept he found himself in the blessed presence of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and his companions (may Allah be pleased with them all). The Prophet (peace be upon him) asked him what was disturbing him, why he looked troubled. Sheikh Saadi (may Allah be pleased with him) replied that he had composed a ‘Rubai’ (a four lined Persian poem) for the Prophet (peace be upon him) but could not finish it. The Prophet (peace be upon him) asked him to recite it and upon hearing the first three lines, himself added the final line, ‘*Sallu alae-hi wa Aal-e-hi.*’

Qaseeda Burda Sharif

The ‘Qaseeda Burda Sharif’ (the mantle ode) was written by Imam Busiri (may Allah be pleased with him), who was known for the poems he would write in praise of the Prophet (peace be upon him). During his life he suffered a stroke which paralysed half of his body. He was seen by the physicians of the time but no cure was found and as time passed he began to lose hope. In desperation Imam Busiri (may Allah be pleased with him) composed one more poem in love of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and also requested the Prophet to intercede for him and supplicate for Allah to cure him. He repeatedly sang the poem, wept, prayed, and asked for intercession. When he slept, in his dream he saw the Prophet (peace be upon him) who wiped Imam Busiri’s face with his blessed hands and covered him in his mantle/cloak (Burdah). When Imam Busiri (may Allah be pleased with him) woke up he found that he was able to walk, so he got up and left his house. He had told no one about what had happened but on the way encountered one of the

Awliyah-Allah who said to him: *“I want you to give me the poem in which you praise the Prophet (peace be upon him).”* Imam Busiri (may Allah be pleased with him) replied, *“Which one?”* given that he was known as a writer of poetry in love of the Prophet (peace be upon him). But the saint replied, *“The one that you composed during your sickness.”* Before Imam Busiri (may Allah be pleased with him) could answer, the saint recited the first verse and said: *“I swear by Allah that I heard it in a dream last night being sung in the presence of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). I saw the Prophet was pleased with it and covered the person who sang it with his cloak.”* So Imam Busiri (may Allah be pleased with him) realised it was Allah’s will for his poem to be made public.

Making a habit of sending peace and blessings upon the Prophet

In summary, we should strive to make sending peace and blessings upon the Prophet (peace be upon him) as second nature for us; in doing so love for the Prophet (peace be upon him) will blossom in our hearts, we will draw closer to him, and we may even be so blessed as to receive our very own Dhurood as a gift.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a practical means of developing this habit. I recommend setting yourself a weekly goal of how many peace and blessings you want to send upon the Prophet (peace be upon him) and then try and accomplish this by daily recitation. Record this in the tables provided on the following pages. Do not fall into Shaitan’s (the devil’s) trap by setting the goal too high and making it difficult for yourself. You will be more likely to fail and abandon the habit before it becomes established. Instead, start small and gradually increase the number you read each day/week, remembering the hadith:

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, “Take up good deeds only as much as you are able, for the best deeds are those done regularly even if they are few.” (Ibn Majah)

In this way sending peace and blessings upon the Prophet (peace be upon him) will become easy for you and part of your daily routine. Have this noble intention from the very beginning and make Dua (supplication)

to Allah for help in this struggle. As we are told in the Hadith Kudsi (*Bukhari, Muslim*):

“He who draws close to Me a hand’s span, I will draw close to him an arm’s length. And whoever draws near Me an arm’s length, I will draw near him a fathom’s length. And whoever comes to Me walking, I will go to him running...”

Weekly goal (number of peace and blessings to send upon the Prophet - peace be upon him)			
Day	Number	Day	Number
Friday		Tuesday	
Saturday		Wednesday	
Sunday		Thursday	
Monday		Weekly total	

Weekly goal (number of peace and blessings to send upon the Prophet - peace be upon him)			
Day	Number	Day	Number
Friday		Tuesday	
Saturday		Wednesday	
Sunday		Thursday	
Monday		Weekly total	

Weekly goal (number of peace and blessings to send upon the Prophet - peace be upon him)			
Day	Number	Day	Number
Friday		Tuesday	
Saturday		Wednesday	
Sunday		Thursday	
Monday		Weekly total	

Weekly goal (number of peace and blessings to send upon the Prophet - peace be upon him)			
Day	Number	Day	Number
Friday		Tuesday	
Saturday		Wednesday	
Sunday		Thursday	
Monday		Weekly total	

Weekly goal (number of peace and blessings to send upon the Prophet - peace be upon him)			
Day	Number	Day	Number
Friday		Tuesday	
Saturday		Wednesday	
Sunday		Thursday	
Monday		Weekly total	

Weekly goal (number of peace and blessings to send upon the Prophet - peace be upon him)			
Day	Number	Day	Number
Friday		Tuesday	
Saturday		Wednesday	
Sunday		Thursday	
Monday		Weekly total	

Weekly goal (number of peace and blessings to send upon the Prophet - peace be upon him)			
Day	Number	Day	Number
Friday		Tuesday	
Saturday		Wednesday	
Sunday		Thursday	
Monday		Weekly total	

Weekly goal (number of peace and blessings to send upon the Prophet - peace be upon him)			
Day	Number	Day	Number
Friday		Tuesday	
Saturday		Wednesday	
Sunday		Thursday	
Monday		Weekly total	

Weekly goal (number of peace and blessings to send upon the Prophet - peace be upon him)			
Day	Number	Day	Number
Friday		Tuesday	
Saturday		Wednesday	
Sunday		Thursday	
Monday		Weekly total	

Weekly goal (number of peace and blessings to send upon the Prophet - peace be upon him)			
Day	Number	Day	Number
Friday		Tuesday	
Saturday		Wednesday	
Sunday		Thursday	
Monday		Weekly total	

Weekly goal (number of peace and blessings to send upon the Prophet - peace be upon him)			
Day	Number	Day	Number
Friday		Tuesday	
Saturday		Wednesday	
Sunday		Thursday	
Monday		Weekly total	

Weekly goal (number of peace and blessings to send upon the Prophet - peace be upon him)			
Day	Number	Day	Number
Friday		Tuesday	
Saturday		Wednesday	
Sunday		Thursday	
Monday		Weekly total	

Fasting: Training Our Selves And Increasing Our Mindfulness Of Allah

It is a common misconception that Islam began with the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). In actual fact Islam (translated as 'submission to the will of Allah') is the true religion of all Prophets, from Hazret Adam to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon them all). As human society developed over time so did their relationship with Allah until revelation of the perfected religion to the 'Seal of the Prophets' (peace be upon him):

*"Today, I have completed your religion, for you; I gave My favour in full, and I am happy that submission to My will is your religion."
(Qur'an 5:3)*

Every Prophet was given forms of worship that involved fasting (Siyam):

*"Believers, fasting has been prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you so that you become mindful of Allah."
(Qur'an 2:183)*

Even now if we look at the Jews and the Christians we find forms of fasting prescribed within their books and practiced by the pious amongst them.

What does fasting involve?

Fasting involves not eating and drinking from sunrise to sunset. This makes us experience what it is like to be hungry or thirsty, it allows us to empathise with those who go hungry because they have nothing to eat or drink, sometimes for days at a time. This should have two results: to increase our gratitude (Shukr) to Allah for all that He has blessed us with, and increase the charity we give to the poor. We have failed to benefit from this aspect of fasting if we overcompensate for the thirst and hunger we feel during the day by overeating during the night.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "If a person does not refrain from lying and indecent activities, Allah does not want that he should abstain from eating and drinking." (Bukhari)

So our fast is not just a prohibition on eating and drinking but also all other major and minor sins including bad habits which have become like second nature to so many of us (lying, backbiting, arguing, cheating, stealing, fighting – especially with family, friends, neighbours, other Muslims, or the wider community at large).

Taqwa – God consciousness

In the above Qur'anic verse, we are told that fasting is a means of becoming mindful of Allah (developing 'Taqwa'). A more complete translation would be to change our behavior due to consciousness and fear of the consequences of displeasing Allah. This is developed through a realisation that Allah is always watching us and knows all that we do.

When someone is watching us, even if it is someone we do not know, we are very careful about what we do and say. If it is a friend or relative we are even more careful; we do not want them to see us engaged in bad behaviour that is shameful. Imagine then, if your mosque's Imam was with you, or your Pir/Sheikh (religious and spiritual teacher); you would be on your best behaviour. So then consider, that it is none other than Allah, the Lord of the universe, the King of kings, and your Creator, who is always watching you, who knows your every deed. If we truly believed this, would we be able to partake in any sinful act?

Sheikh Sayed Abdul Qadir Jilani (may Allah be pleased with him) said, "Consider not the insignificance of sin you are about to commit, instead consider the greatness of the One you are about to disobey."

The blessed month of Ramadan

One of the most blessed months in the Islamic calendar is Ramadan, a month in which fasting is obligatory (Fardh) and ends with Eid-ul-Fitr:

"The Quran was revealed in the month of Ramadan; the Quran is a guidance for people, it contains clear teachings and distinguishes

right from wrong; whoever is present in the month must fast in it...”
(Qur'an 2:185)

The blessings of this month are linked to the final Revelation and word of Allah, the Qur'an, revealed to His final Prophet, Muhammad (peace be upon him):

“We sent down the Quran on the Night of Power, and what can explain the Night of Power to you? The Night of Power is better than one thousand months; the angels and the Spirit, Jibra'il, come down by the order of their Lord, bringing with them each person's destiny. Peace descends everywhere until the break of the dawn.” (Qur'an 97)

This blessed night is worth more than a thousand months, equivalent to over 83 years of worship. This was the night when the entirety of the Qur'an was sent down from Al-Lauh-al-Mahfuz (the preserved tablet – in which is recorded everything that has ever happened and will ever happen), to the lowest Heaven, from where it was revealed to the Prophet (peace be upon him) over 23 years via the Archangel Jibra'il (may Allah be pleased with him). Consider then, the significance of the Qur'an, the uncreated word of Allah, that on the night of its descent Allah bestows rewards equivalent to a lifetime of worship on those of His servants who search for it within the last ten nights of Ramadan.

Training your Nafs

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, “When the month of Ramadan starts, the doors of Heaven are opened and the gates of Hell are closed and the Shayatin (devils) are chained.” (Bukhari)

If the devil and his helpers are unable to whisper in our ears why do we commit sins within Ramadan? This is because we follow our 'Nafs (sometimes translated as 'ego'). This is the part of our soul which produces 'animal' desires within us; to eat, drink, sleep, find comfort, be lazy, lust and procreate; whether by Halaal (permissible) or Haraam (impermissible) means. This is the 'Nafs al-Ammara' (the commanding soul):

“...human ego continually incites one to do evil...” (Qur'an 12:53)

It is within all of us, and it is through encouraging the Nafs that Shai'tan discourages us from performing good deeds and encourages us to sin. If we let the Nafs take over and follow its every desire then we are no better than animals, in fact we are worse because they can do no different whereas we have a choice.

Therefore training our Nafs is essential to decrease the influence it has on us and to lessen the chance of following the whispers of Shai'tan. By doing this the 'Nafs al-Ammara' develops into the 'Nafs-al-Lawwamah' (the blaming/self-critical soul), which feels guilty whenever it disobeys Allah and commits sins, and encourages you to seek forgiveness (Tauba/Istighfaar):

"...and I swear by the self-critical soul!" (Qur'an 75:2)

This is not easy; in fact it is a most difficult struggle that will not stop your entire life. In a Hadith the Prophet (peace be upon him) was returning from the battlefield with his Sahabah (companions – may Allah be pleased with them all) when he told them they were going from the lesser Jihad ('al-Jihad al-Asghar') to the greater Jihad ('al-Jihad al-Akbar'). The Sahabah (may Allah be pleased with them all) were puzzled, what could be a greater Jihad than the battlefield? The Prophet (peace be upon him) told them that Jihad (struggle) against your own Nafs is even more difficult than being willing to sacrifice your life on the battlefield.

Training of the Nafs was practiced by all the Awliyah-Allah (saints). Whenever their Nafs desires anything they purposefully deny it; be that food, drink, sleep, good clothes, or any other comfort of this world. These are not things which are Haraam (impermissible), but to gain proximity to Allah you have to continuously deny the pleasures of this world to become indifferent to them. Because you cannot have love for the creation and the Creator in your heart at the same time, not true love for Allah anyway. These saints would often leave civilisation at some point in their lives, wandering in the jungles and deserts. This is for the same purpose, to literally leave the world behind and learn to rely entirely on Allah. Following this, when they return to humanity they are a means for Allah to benefit His creation. They are able to live in the world but not to be of it, since their Nafs is firmly under their control. The 'Nafs-al-Lawwamah' becomes the 'Nafs al-Mutma'inna' (the peaceful soul):

*“Contented person! Return to Your Lord cheerfully and loved.”
(Qur’an 89:27-28)*

So in this blessed month of obligatory fasting we have an annual opportunity to develop our Taqwa, our realisation that Allah is always watching us; and to train our Nafs by distancing ourselves from the world and turning our attention to Allah. This is done by trying to pray for longer with greater concentration (Khushoo), because we are less distracted by our worldly thoughts and desires, by giving away our wealth in charity to those less fortunate than ourselves and by abstaining even from eating and drinking.

Rewards of fasting

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: “Whoever fasts during Ramadan out of sincere faith and hoping to attain Allah’s rewards, then all his past sins will be forgiven.” (Bukhari)

The Prophet (peace be upon him) was asked: ‘O Messenger of Allah, tell me of an action by which I may enter Paradise.’ He (peace be upon him) said: “Take to fasting, there is nothing like it.” (Nasai)

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, “On the Day of Judgment, fasting will say: “O My Lord, I prevented him from food and desires so accept my intercession for him.”” (Ahmad)

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, “Fasting is a shield with which a servant protects himself from the Fire.” (Ahmad)

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, “...Allah has made fasting during it (Ramadan) an obligation, and steadfastly observing its nights in worship a voluntary act. Whoever undertakes an act of obedience to Allah during this month with a voluntary good deed (Nawafil), it is as if he has performed an obligatory act (Fardh) at other times; and whoever performs an obligatory act during it is as one who performed seventy obligations at other times. It is the month of patience, and the reward for patience is Paradise. It is the month of goodwill, during which provisions are multiplied. Whoever feeds a fasting person will be compensated with forgiveness of sins and

salvation of his soul from Hell. He will also receive a reward equal to that of the person he feeds, without causing him any reduction (in his good deeds).” (Bayhaqi)

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, “Every action of the son of Adam is given manifold reward, each good deed receiving 10 times its like, up to seven hundred times. Allah the Most High said, ‘Except for fasting, for it is for Me and I will give recompense for it, he leaves off his desires and his food for Me.’ For the fasting person there are two times of joy; a time when he breaks his fast and a time of joy when he meets his Lord, and the smell coming from the mouth of the fasting person is better to Allah than the smell of musk.” (Bukhari)

So within this blessed month the Shayatin (devils) are chained and Allah has multiplied the already countless blessings He bestows upon us. We fast the entire month, the pleasures of which are twofold; once experienced upon opening the fast and the other upon the Day of Judgment, when Allah will reward the believer Himself. Within the last ten nights Allah has also included the hidden gem of Layla t'al-Qadr:

“The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, “Whoever establishes the prayers on the Night of Qadr out of sincere faith, and hoping to attain Allah’s rewards, then all his past sins will be forgiven.” (Bukhari)

Allah is so merciful that He is looking for any excuse to forgive His slaves, and so the Prophet (peace be upon him) told us specific acts of worship or times within the year when we have these opportunities (the most famous example of which is the Haj). Unfortunately we have gotten used to hearing this and do not reflect upon the enormity of this blessing.

Imagine, to have all our previous sins forgiven, to be as a newborn baby, so if we were to die we would be guaranteed Paradise. This opportunity comes every year, having spent Ramadan training our Nafs, increasing our Taqwa, our old sins washed away, ready to make a fresh start and lead the kind of pious lives we aspire to. However, Allah knows His creation is weak. We often start well but as time passes we fall back into our bad habits, and so He has given us this blessed month and this blessed night every year.

Fasting outside of Ramadan

Fasting as an act of worship is not confined to Ramadan, we can achieve its blessings at other times of the year, specifically those mentioned below.

Six fasts of Shawwal

In the month following Ramadan (Shawwal), it is a Sunnah (practice of the Prophet, peace be upon him) to fast for 6 days (during any time within the month and not necessarily kept). Regarding these six fasts the Prophet (peace be upon him) said:

“Whoever fasts Ramadan and follows it with six days from Shawwal it is as if they fasted the entire year.” (Muslim)

This is clarified by the following Hadith:

“Allah has made for each Hasanah (good deed) ten like it, so a month is like fasting ten months, and fasting six days completes the year.” (Nasai)

If we are able to do this every year then the following Hadith would apply to us:

The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said: “Whoever fasts Ramadan and follows it with six days of Shawwal, it will be as if he fasted for a lifetime.” (Ibn Majah)

Consider standing before Allah on the Day of Judgment with a lifetime of fasts within our scale, the reward for which Allah has said He Himself will give...

Ten days and nights of Dhul-Hijja

Regarding the first ten days and nights of Dhul-Hijjah, Allah says in the Qur'an:

“By the dawn, by the ten holy nights...” (Qur'an 89:1-2)

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said:

“There are no other days that are as great as these in the sight of Allah, the Most Sublime. nor are there any deeds more beloved to Allah than those that are done in these ten days...” (Tabarani)

In his Hadith commentary (Fath al-Bari), Ibn Hajar al-Ascalani (may Allah be pleased with him) says:

“The most apparent reason for the ten days of Dhul-Hijjah being distinguished in excellence is due to the assembly of the greatest acts of worship in this period, i.e. Salawat (prayers), Siyam (fasting), Sadaqa (charity) and the Haj (pilgrimage). In no other periods do these great deeds combine.”

Day of Arafat

This is on the 9th Day of Dhul Hijja. From sunrise until sunset all of the pilgrims stand in prayer before Allah. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, *“The best of supplications are those on the Day of Arafat,”* (Tirmidhi) and he also said that, *“Haj is Arafat.”* (Tirmidhi)

In another Hadith he said, *“There is no day on which Allah frees more of His slaves from Jahannam (fire of Hell) than the Day of Arafat...”* (Muslim) and, *“Verily Allah boasts of the people of Arafat before the people of Heaven (i.e. the Angels) saying: ‘Look to my servants who have come to Me disheveled and dusty.’”* (Ahmad)

But the mercy of Allah is such that His blessings are not reserved only for the Hajis. For the rest of us the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: *“Fasting on the day of Arafat is an expiation (forgiveness of sins) for two years, the year preceding it and the year following it.”* (Ibn Majah)

The month of Sha’ban

Sha’ban is the month preceding Ramadan, in which the Prophet (peace be upon him) prepared for the coming month by fasting frequently:

Hazret Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) said, “I did not see the Messenger of Allah fast any month in its entirety except Ramadan, and I did not see him fast as frequently in any other month as he did during Sha’ban.” (Bukhari)

The Prophet (peace be upon him) was asked, "I have never seen you offer fast in a month as you do in Shaban." To which, the Prophet (peace be upon him) replied, "It is a month people disregard that is between Rajab and Ramadan. In that month deeds are presented to the Lord of the Worlds, so I like my deeds to be presented while I am fasting." (Nasai)

Laylatul Bara'ah (the night of the 15th of Sha'ban)

As indicated in the following Hadith there are specific blessings associated with the night of the 15th of Sha'ban (Laylatul Bara'ah):

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "When the middle night of Sha'ban arrives, you should stand (praying) in the night and should fast in the day following it." (Ibn Majah)

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "Allah turns to his entire creation on the fifteenth night of Sha'ban and forgives all of them except one who ascribes partners to Him and one who harbours enmity in his heart." (Tabrani)

It is for this reason that this blessed night is called Laylatul Bara'ah – which means the night wherein judgment of salvation from Hell is passed.

The night of the Isra and Miraj

The Isra and Miraj is the name of the miraculous night journey the Prophet (peace be upon him) was taken on, from Makkah to Masjid al-Aqsa and from there into the presence of Allah. Given the unique nature and immeasurable blessings of Allah upon His Prophet (peace be upon him), and through him to his Ummah (community, or followers), this is an event that Muslims have celebrated through the ages. It is believed to have occurred on the night of the 27th of Rajab (Imam Nawawi stated this in Rawdah, and Imam Ghazali maintained this opinion in Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din – may Allah be pleased with them both). Celebrations involve attending religious talks, Dhikr'Allah gatherings at local Mosques, and fasting the next day. However, there are no Hadith on

support this act as a Sunnah, therefore it is done as means of expressing gratitude (Shukr) to, and worshipping Allah.

Fasting on Ashura – 10th of Muharram

When the Prophet (peace be upon him) arrived in Madinah, he found that the Jews there fasted on the 10th of Muharram and asked them the reason for their fasting on this day. They said, *“This is a blessed day. On this day Allah saved the Children of Israel from their enemy (in Egypt) and so Prophet Musa [Moses] fasted on this day giving thanks to Allah.”* The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, *“We are closer to Musa than you are.”* (Muslim)

With regards the blessings associated with this fast:

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, “Fasting the day of ‘Ashura’ (is of great merits), I hope that Allah will accept it as an expiation for (the sins committed in) the previous year.” (Muslim)

The Prophet (peace be upon him) advised to fast for two days rather than just on the 10th of Muharram. The scholars give two reasons for this; to differentiate ourselves from the Jews, and to make sure we do not miss the fast of the 10th due to uncertainty over moon-sighting and when the month of Muharram started.

Fasting on Mondays and Thursdays and three days every month

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: “Deeds are shown (to Allah) on Mondays and Thursdays, and I like my deeds to be shown when I am fasting.” (Tirmidhi)

The Prophet (peace be upon him) was asked about fasting on Mondays and he said: “On (that day) I was born and on it Revelation came down to me.” (Muslim)

The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said. “If you fast any part of the month then fast on the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth.” (Ahmad)

The fasting of the Prophet Dawood (David – peace be upon him)

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: “The best fasting is the fast of Dawood (the Prophet David – peace be upon him)...he used to fast one day and not the next.” (Bukhari)

This chapter

The purpose of this chapter is to help you develop a habit of fasting both inside and outside of Ramadan. Reading the above should have opened your eyes to the immense blessings associated with this special form of worship, which Allah prescribed for the Christians and Jews before us as well. However, to take advantage of this we have to remember that fasting is not solely to do with staying hungry and thirsty from sunrise to sunset, it must also involve abstinence from all sins and an effort to increase our good deeds, both regarding the creation and the Creator. Only with that intention will we start to gain control over our Nafs and increase our Taqwa, thereby emptying our heart from the love of this world and replacing it with the true love of Allah.

On the following pages fill in the tables to record your fasting throughout the year. Avoid the trap that Shaitan (the devil) will set for you, to try to do too much too quickly because you will be more likely to fail.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, “Take up good deeds only as much as you are able, for the best deeds are those done regularly even if they are few.” (Ibn Majah)

While doing this, always remember why you are doing it (your intention). Make Dua (supplication) to Allah for help in this struggle, remembering the Hadith Kudsi (*Bukhari, Muslim*):

“He who draws close to Me a hand’s span, I will draw close to him an arm’s length. And whoever draws near Me an arm’s length, I will draw near him a fathom’s length. And whoever comes to Me walking, I will go to him running...”

Ramadan Fast	Did you fast today?	Did you pray 5 times today?	Did you read Tirawi prayer?	Did you read Quran today?	Did you overeat at Iftar?	Did you abstain from other sins?
1	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No
2	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No
3	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No
4	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No
5	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No
6	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No
7	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No
8	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No
9	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No
10	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No
11	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No
12	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No
13	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No
14	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No
15	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No

Ramadan Fast	Did you fast today?	Did you pray 5 times today?	Did you read Tirawi prayer?	Did you read Quran today?	Did you overeat at Iftar?	Did you abstain from other sins?
16	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No
17	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No
18	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No
19	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No
20	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No
21	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No
22	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No
23	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No
24	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No
25	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No
26	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No
27	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No
28	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No
29	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No
30	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No

Six fasts of Shawwal	
What is the last day of this month (before which you need to keep the six fasts)?	
How many fasts did you keep?	1 / 2 / 3 / 4 / 5 / 6

Ten days/nights of Dhul Hijja	
What date did the first day of Dhul Hijja fall on?	
How many fasts did you keep?	
Did you fast on the day of Arafat (9 th Dhul Hijja)?	Yes / No

Ashura – 10th of Muharram	
Did you fast on the 9 th of Muharram?	Yes / No
Did you fast on the 10 th of Muharram?	Yes / No
Did you fast on the 11 th of Muharram?	Yes / No

Layta'tul Barraa - 15th Shaban	
What date does the 15 th of Sha'ban fall on?	
Did you fast on the 15 th of Sha'ban?	Yes / No

Month:	
Did you fast on Monday?	Yes / No
Did you fast on Thursday?	Yes / No
Did you fast on Monday?	Yes / No
Did you fast on Thursday?	Yes / No
Did you fast on Monday?	Yes / No
Did you fast on Thursday?	Yes / No
Did you fast on Monday?	Yes / No
Did you fast on Thursday?	Yes / No
Did you fast at least 3 days this month?	Yes / No

Month:	
Did you fast on Monday?	Yes / No
Did you fast on Thursday?	Yes / No
Did you fast on Monday?	Yes / No
Did you fast on Thursday?	Yes / No
Did you fast on Monday?	Yes / No
Did you fast on Thursday?	Yes / No
Did you fast on Monday?	Yes / No
Did you fast on Thursday?	Yes / No
Did you fast at least 3 days this month?	Yes / No

Month:	
Did you fast on Monday?	Yes / No
Did you fast on Thursday?	Yes / No
Did you fast on Monday?	Yes / No
Did you fast on Thursday?	Yes / No
Did you fast on Monday?	Yes / No
Did you fast on Thursday?	Yes / No
Did you fast on Monday?	Yes / No
Did you fast on Thursday?	Yes / No
Did you fast at least 3 days this month?	Yes / No

Month:	
Did you fast on Monday?	Yes / No
Did you fast on Thursday?	Yes / No
Did you fast on Monday?	Yes / No
Did you fast on Thursday?	Yes / No
Did you fast on Monday?	Yes / No
Did you fast on Thursday?	Yes / No
Did you fast on Monday?	Yes / No
Did you fast on Thursday?	Yes / No
Did you fast at least 3 days this month?	Yes / No

Charity: Investing In This Life And The Next

In Islam there is both obligatory and voluntary charity. Obligatory charity is known as ‘Zakaat’ and is one of the 5 pillars of Islam. It involves giving 2.5% of the wealth you own (as long as it is above a ‘Nisab’ – a threshold value, you are an adult of sane mind and free from debt) in charity every year. The importance of this is such that Allah mentions Zakaat together with Salaat (the obligatory 5 daily prayers) no less than 82 times in the Qur’an:

“...My kindness embraces everything. I shall decree what is good for those who are mindful of Me, pay zakat and believe in Our signs...”
(Qur’an 7:156)

“...establish the prayer regularly, pay the Zakat and loan to Allah a beautiful loan. Remember whatever good you stock up is for yourselves; in the Hereafter you will find it with Allah. It is better and a greater return...” (Qur’an 73:20)

The wisdom of Allah behind linking these two seemingly different pillars of Islam in this way is because they both involve us spending some of what Allah has given us in His way (‘time’ for Salaat, and ‘wealth’ for Zakaat). Apart from Zakaat (which is obligatory) giving voluntary charity (Sadaqa) is also a very important part of our faith.

The reality of giving charity

We must remember that Allah does not need our money. Indeed, the people or cause we are giving charity to also do not need our money. Allah is Ar-Razzaq (The Provider) and Ar-Raziq (The Sustainer) and He does not depend on our charity to fulfil His Divine attributes. As He says in the Qur’an:

“Control of the heavens, the Earth, and whatever lies within them belongs to Allah, and He has power over everything.” (Qur’an 5:120)

Therefore, when we give charity we should be clear that we are only helping ourselves. We must realise that Allah is the One who has given us everything we have and just because that money is in our possession, it does not mean we are its owner. Everything we have, including our health, our wealth, our families, is a 'trust' from Allah. It is given to us for a period of time, but it remains His and it is His to take back whenever He pleases and in whatever manner He pleases.

So is He not merciful then, that He gives us so much wealth and then asks for a small portion of it back so that we can become the means ('Sabab') by which He provides for His creation, and if we do this He is pleased with us?

Earning Allah's pleasure by spending your wealth in His way

"Those people who spend their wealth in Allah's way are like a grain that sprouts to produce seven ears, each ear containing a hundred seeds, and Allah can multiply it many times further for whomever He pleases." (Qur'an 2:261)

"Whatever good things you give in charity will benefit yourselves; that is, if you give, seeking only Allah's pleasure. Whatever good things you give in charity will be rewarded, and you will be not short-changed in the least." (Qur'an 2:272)

"People who give their wealth in charity by night or by day, secretly or openly, shall have their reward from their Lord: they shall neither fear nor grieve." (Qur'an 2:274)

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "Charity finishes sins as water extinguishes fire." (Tirmidhi)

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "Give charity without delay, for it stands in the way of calamity." (Tirmidhi)

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "Charity cools the wrath of Allah and prevents a bad death." (Tirmidhi)

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "The believer's shade on the Day of Resurrection will be his charity." (Tirmidhi)

Given the immeasurable rewards mentioned in the Qur'anic verses and Hadith of the Prophet (peace be upon him), could there be a better investment than to spend the wealth Allah has blessed us with in charity?

Fear of poverty

A sign of weak Imaan (faith) is to be miserly when giving charity because you believe you will become poor as a result. This is impossible:

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "Charity does not in any way decrease the wealth..." (Muslim)

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "Allah said: 'Spend, O son of Adam, and I shall spend on you.'" (Bukhari)

As a reward for giving charity Allah may give you more wealth in this life, maybe immediately or in the future. Indeed, Allah may have given you the very wealth you are giving from because He knew you would give charity from it. Furthermore, your remaining wealth will have 'Barakah' in it (it will be blessed so it will grow and increase). As such, even from a financial point of view the investment with the best guaranteed return is to give charity:

"Who is willing to offer his life to Allah as a beautiful loan, which He will multiply many times over?" (Qur'an 2:245)

Making sure your charity is not rejected

There are two important points to consider to ensure the charity we give is acceptable to Allah. The first is to make sure the money from which we are giving is not earned through 'Haraam' (impermissible) means.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "A slave (of Allah) who acquires Haraam wealth and gives charity from it, it is not accepted from him. If he spends from it, he does not have any Blessing (Barakah) in it. If he leaves it behind him (i.e. he dies) it will be a means of taking him to the fire (of Hell). Verily, Allah does not wipe out an evil deed with an evil deed..." (Ahmad)

For example, charity will not be accepted from money earned through sale of goods which are Haraam (e.g. alcohol, pig meat, selling of self

- prostitution), even if it is to non-Muslims. Similarly, the owner of a disco, nightclub or brothel, who is earning money from a business which encourages Haraam acts will not have their charity accepted. Business owners will not have their charity accepted if the money they make involves unfair or unjust practices with regards to how their workers are treated or paid. Similarly, people in a position of power e.g. police, military, political leaders, rulers of countries, will not be able to use money they have obtained through corruption, bribery or other unjust means. Obviously, any earning of money which involves lying, cheating or stealing is Haraam.

However, even for those Muslims who are careful in avoiding earning money through impermissible means there are still pitfalls which we may not be aware of. For example, if you consistently arrive to work late or leave early, even by five minutes, that results in part of your earnings becoming Haraam. If you waste time while at work (e.g. excessive talking to colleagues, taking frequent bathroom breaks which you do not need, coming back from break/lunch late, taking longer to do something that you could do much quicker), the same applies.

Not only will charity not be accepted from such earnings, but consider that you are then spending that money on buying food for yourself and your family about which the Prophet (peace be upon him) said:

“No meat (i.e. person) that was nourished with Haraam will enter Paradise. Every meat (i.e. person) that was nourished with Haraam is more deserving of the Fire.” (Ahmad)

A common complaint Muslims have is that their ‘Dua’ (supplications, or prayers) are not accepted, but is this not then to be expected?

The Prophet (peace be upon him) made mention of a man who is constantly in journeys and has disheveled hair and a dusty appearance (due to constant journeys for performing acts of righteousness such as Haj (Pilgrimage to Makkah), Umrah, seeking knowledge etc.) and he raises his hands towards the sky saying “O my Lord! O my Lord!” But his food is from Haraam. His drink is from Haraam. His clothes are from Haraam. He is nourished from Haraam. How can it (his supplication) be accepted? (Muslim)

The second condition is if your ‘Niyah’ (intention) is to show off, so people talk about you, praising you for your generosity. This raises the question of whether we should give charity openly or secretly. We should not assume that people who give charity openly are doing so to show off. If the intention is to inspire others to follow their example, this is a praiseworthy act. However, if you think that by giving charity openly, when others praise you, you may start to enjoy their praise and become proud then it is better to give charity in secret:

“If you give charity openly, that is wonderful, but giving it secretly to the needy is even better, in both cases it will pay for your sins. Allah is fully aware of what you do.” (Qur’an 2:271)

“There are seven whom Allah will shade in His Shade on the Day when there is no shade except His Shade... one who gives in charity and hides it, such that his left hand does not know what his right hand gives in charity...” (Bukhari)

Following on from this, once we have given charity we should forget about it and never remind those who we have given to. As Allah says in the Qur’an:

“Those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah and do not follow it up by reminding the recipients of the favour, or causing them offence shall have reward from their Lord: they shall neither fear nor grieve.” (Qur’an 2:262)

This is especially important when we give charity to those we know, be it family or friends. If people you know are in need they are more deserving of your money than people you do not know in a far-off country:

“The best charity is that which is practiced by a wealthy person. And start giving first to your dependents.” (Bukhari)

Indeed, even spending on your own family can be an act of charity:

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: “When a Muslim spends something on his family intending to receive Allah’s reward, it is regarded as charity for him.” (Bukhari)

Non-financial acts of charity

How can those who may not have much money, e.g. students, single parents, minimum wage (or lower) workers give charity? The Prophet (peace be upon him) was asked the very same question by his Sahabah (companions – may Allah be pleased with them all):

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: “Every Muslim has to give in charity.”

The people then asked: “(But what) if someone has nothing to give, what should he do?”

The Prophet (peace be upon him) replied: “He should work with his hands and benefit himself and also give in charity (from what he earns).”

The people further asked: “If he cannot find even that?”

He replied: “He should help the needy who appeal for help.”

Then the people asked: “If he cannot do (even) that?”

The Prophet said finally: “Then he should perform good deeds and keep away from evil deeds, and that will be regarded as charitable deeds.” (Bukhari)

Some people from amongst the companions (may Allah be pleased with them all) said to the Prophet (peace be upon him), “O Messenger of Allah, the rich people have made off with the rewards; they pray as we pray, they fast as we fast, and they give [much] in charity by virtue of their wealth.”

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, “Has not Allah made things for you to give in charity? Truly every Tasbeehah [saying: ‘Subhan’Allah’] is a charity, and every Takbeerah [saying: ‘Allah-u-Akbar’] is a charity, and every Tahmeedah [saying: ‘Al-Hamdu’lillah’] is a charity, and every Tahleelah [saying: ‘La-Ila-ha-ill’Allah’] is a charity. And commanding the good is a charity, and forbidding an evil is a charity, and in the sexual act of each one of you there is a charity.”

The Sahabah (may Allah be pleased with them all) said, “O Messenger of Allah, when one of us fulfils his carnal desire, will he have some reward for that?”

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "Do you not see that if he were to act upon his desire in an unlawful manner then he would be deserving of punishment? Likewise, if he were to act upon it in a lawful manner then he will be deserving of a reward." (Muslim)

The mercy of Allah is so overwhelming that any act of 'Ibadah' (worship), indeed any Halaal (permissible) act can be considered an act of charity and is rewarded accordingly:

"Every act of goodness is charity." (Muslim)

Gaining reward even after death

Charity is one of the few acts that can benefit us after our death, as the Prophet (peace be upon him) said:

"When a slave dies his actions come to an end except three things: a continuing charity ('Sadaqa Jaariya'), or knowledge which gives benefit, or a pious child who prays for him." (Muslim)

When we spend our money, time, or effort to do good or stop evil, as long as the effects of that continue, even after our death, we will continue to gain reward.

"Among the acts and good deeds that will reach a believer after his death are: knowledge which he learned and then spread; a righteous son whom he leaves behind; a copy of the Qur'an that he leaves as a legacy; a mosque that he built; a house that he built for wayfarers; a canal that he dug; or charity that he gave during his lifetime when he was in good health. These deeds will reach him after his death." (Ibn Majah)

Therefore, apart from making sure we live a righteous life by following the commands of Allah and the Sunnah of the Prophet (peace be upon him), what more valuable investment can we make then regularly giving charity? The returns will help us at a time when there will be no further opportunity to do good deeds, no other way to earn the pleasure of Allah (and enter Paradise) and be saved from His wrath (and avoid Hell).

Developing a habit of regular giving

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a practical means of developing a habit of giving charity. Think about whether there are any family members, relatives, close friends or neighbours who are in financial difficulty. They have the first right to your money. Consider your local mosque from which you gain such benefit and which runs entirely on the donations of its congregation. What about poor Muslims within the UK, a significant number of whom are homeless, there are charities which help support them in this difficult time. Other charities carry out projects in the poorest parts of the world (e.g. sponsoring orphans, building schools, digging wells) and in places where natural disasters or wars have caused immense suffering.

We might not be directly involved in spreading the religion of Islam ('Dawah'), but these initiatives (e.g. radio or TV channels, local/national organisations) require financial support. Consider whether you would prefer to make a single donation, or set up a monthly standing order; remembering the words of the Prophet (peace be upon him):

“Take up good deeds only as much as you are able, for the best deeds are those done regularly even if they are few.” (Ibn Majah)

Do not fall into Shaitan's (the devil's) trap by giving too much too quickly and causing yourself financial difficulty. You will be more likely to regret what you have done and abandon the habit before it becomes established. Instead start small and gradually increase the number and amount of your donations. Keep in mind that any act of kindness to others (even animals) and all forms of worship are counted as charity. I have provided blank tables on the following pages for you to record your progress.

By regularly reviewing your charitable acts and donations you will gradually develop a habit of giving and helping others, it will become part of your daily routine. Have this noble intention from the very beginning and make Dua (supplication) to Allah for help in this struggle. As we are told in the Hadith Kudsi (Bukhari, Muslim):

“He who draws close to Me a hand's span, I will draw close to him an arm's length. And whoever draws near Me an arm's length, I will draw near him a fathom's length. And whoever comes to Me walking, I will go to him running...”

Month/Year	
Are there any family members, relatives, friends or neighbours who are going through financial difficulty?	Yes / No
Are you supporting your local mosque?	Yes / No
Which Dawah projects are you supporting?	
Where in the world are you sending money to help those in need?	
What 'Sadaqa Jaariya' (on-going charity) projects are you involved in?	

Month/Year	
Are there any family members, relatives, friends or neighbours who are going through financial difficulty?	Yes / No
Are you supporting your local mosque?	Yes / No
Which Dawah projects are you supporting?	
Where in the world are you sending money to help those in need?	
What 'Sadaqa Jaariya' (on-going charity) projects are you involved in?	

Month/Year	
Are there any family members, relatives, friends or neighbours who are going through financial difficulty?	Yes / No
Are you supporting your local mosque?	Yes / No
Which Dawah projects are you supporting?	
Where in the world are you sending money to help those in need?	
What 'Sadaqa Jaariya' (on-going charity) projects are you involved in?	

Month/Year	
Are there any family members, relatives, friends or neighbours who are going through financial difficulty?	Yes / No
Are you supporting your local mosque?	Yes / No
Which Dawah projects are you supporting?	
Where in the world are you sending money to help those in need?	
What 'Sadaqa Jaariya' (on-going charity) projects are you involved in?	

Month/Year	
Are there any family members, relatives, friends or neighbours who are going through financial difficulty?	Yes / No
Are you supporting your local mosque?	Yes / No
Which Dawah projects are you supporting?	
Where in the world are you sending money to help those in need?	
What 'Sadaqa Jaariya' (on-going charity) projects are you involved in?	

Month/Year	
Are there any family members, relatives, friends or neighbours who are going through financial difficulty?	Yes / No
Are you supporting your local mosque?	Yes / No
Which Dawah projects are you supporting?	
Where in the world are you sending money to help those in need?	
What 'Sadaqa Jaariya' (on-going charity) projects are you involved in?	

The Divine Decree: Finding Peace Through Acceptance

We have a habit to look at others, sometimes people we know (friends or relatives) or people we know about (celebrities, sports stars, business people) and think how easy their life must be. We think about how they do not have the kind of troubles and stressful life that we have, and how happy we would be if we were them.

What we fail to realise is that everyone has their own problems no matter how happy they look, how strong their relationships seem, how wealthy they are, or what kind of job they do. If you were to spend some time talking to them, finding out what is going on in their life, you would realise that even though they appear to have a peaceful and comfortable life no-one is without worries and troubles they are either dealing with right now or have faced in the past. Often-times you will end up feeling glad you are not that person or in their situation, your troubles will seem less difficult in comparison.

This life is a test

What we must remember is that our life in this world is a test from Allah, and our purpose is not to live a life of ease and pleasure but to pass this test. The better we are doing, the stronger our 'Imaan' (faith), the more difficult this test becomes. As Allah says in the Qur'an:

"You will certainly be tested through your wealth and persons..."
(Qur'an 3:186)

"We will certainly test you: with fear, hunger, loss of wealth, health and harvests..." (Qur'an 2:155)

The Prophet was asked, "O Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him), which people are tested most severely?" The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "They are the prophets, then the next best, then the next

best. A man is tried according to his religion. If he is firm in his religion, then his trials will be more severe.” (Tirmidhi)

Therefore, we have to change the way we think. We cannot expect to live a life free of troubles, Allah has reserved that for Paradise, for those who pass the trials and tribulations of this life.

Once we do this we will stop expecting our life to be constantly full of joy and happiness and start to expect there to be times of hardship. In this way, when we next enter a period of our life when we face trouble, when something goes wrong, we will not overreact and complain. We will not become depressed and start questioning Allah – ‘Why me?’ because we will understand that this is a normal part of life. We will realise times of hardship and trouble will occur, and we will have to deal with them in the same way every other person has to.

The will of Allah

Following this we need to change the way we think about the hardships we face. We must remember that everything that happens is by the will of Allah. Let us imagine some extreme examples of difficult situations, e.g. getting divorced, going bankrupt, becoming homeless, or perhaps the most difficult, losing a parent or a child. When devastating things like this happen we often blame ourselves or others. What we must realise is that when something has happened, it has been revealed to us that this was the will of Allah. It is revealed to us that it was decided by Allah and written in ‘Al-Lauh Al-Mahfuz’ (The Preserved Tablet / The Book of Decrees) even before He created the universe. Therefore, whatever happens was always going to happen, there was no way it could have been avoided. As Allah says in the Quran:

“Any disaster on Earth or to yourselves is written down before it happens; this is easy for Allah.” (Qur’an 57:22)

This means we must not think that if we had done something different we would not have faced this difficulty. In a Hadith of the Prophet (peace be upon him) we are told:

“If a calamity befalls you, do not say, ‘If only I had done that, it would have been like that.’ Say instead, ‘It is the destiny of Allah

and He does whatever He wishes' for surely 'if' opens the door for Shai'tan." (Muslim)

Is there benefit in the harm?

Alongside changing our mindset so we expect hardships and troubles to come our way from time to time, and realising that the hardships we face are the will of Allah and predestined for us, we must also consider what purpose these trials and tribulations serve. The Prophet (peace be upon him) told us:

"How wonderful is the affair of the believer, for his affairs are all good, and this applies to no one but the believer. If something good happens to him, he is thankful for it and that is good for him. If something bad happens to him, he bears it with patience and that is good for him." (Muslim)

This leads us to another fundamental concept of our faith; Allah loves each and every one of us. To understand how much He loves us consider the following story:

"Some prisoners were brought to the Prophet (peace be upon him), and there was a woman among them who was searching for her child. When she found him, she embraced him and put him to her breast. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said to his disciples (may Allah be pleased with them all), 'Do you think that this woman would throw her child in the fire?' They said, 'No, by Allah, not if she is able not to.' The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, 'Allah is more merciful to His slaves than this woman is to her child.'" (Bukhari)

If we truly believe and understand this then how can anything that befalls us by the will of Allah be harmful for us? This is the true meaning of the above Hadith in which we are told that every affair of the believer is blessed for him.

Patience, thankfulness and seeking forgiveness

When we face a difficulty in our life, to understand how it is beneficial for us we must consider three things; Sabr (patience), Shukr (thankfulness), and Istighfar (seeking forgiveness).

With regards to Sabr, Allah mentions this quality 90 times in the Quran. In one verse He specifically singles it out to give it the highest honour:

“Believers, find strength through patience and prayer – Allah is with those who are patient.” (Qur’an 2:153)

But as the Prophet (peace be upon him) told us:

“The real patience is at the first stroke of a calamity.” (Bukhari)

This means your initial reaction, i.e. your first thoughts and what you say and do, is the true test of whether you are patient or not. Therefore, whenever we are in difficulty we have to remember that it is a test, and to pass this test we have to be patient, to bear with the difficulty and not complain.

Now let us consider something even higher than bearing a difficulty with patience, and that is to be thankful to Allah (Shukr). To be able to do this we have to realise that everything that happens to us, not just the things we like, but both the good and what we think of as bad, is in fact good for us and a blessing from Allah.

This is a difficult concept to understand so let us go back to the examples of life’s calamities we mentioned earlier. Consider losing a child, how could this be a blessing from Allah? One way is that when you have patience, when you realise this is Allah’s will and accept it, that it was Allah who gave you your child and your child was Allah’s to take away, then Allah is pleased with you, your sins are forgiven, and your rank is raised. As Allah says in the Qur’an:

“...Give good news to those who are patient and who, when they are struck by misfortune, softly say: ‘We belong to Allah and are returning to Him.’ These are the ones who shall be blessed and kindly treated by their Lord; they are the guided.” (Qur’an 2:155-157)

The Prophet (peace be upon him) told us:

“When a person’s child dies, Allah the Most High, asks His Angels, ‘Have you taken the life of My slave’s child?’ They reply that they have. He then asks, ‘Have you taken the fruit of his heart?’ They reply that they have. Then he asks, ‘What has My slave said?’ They

say: 'He has praised You and said: Inna lillahi wa inna ilaihi raji'un.'
Allah says: 'Build a house for My slave in Jannah (Paradise) and name it Bait-ul-Hamd (the House of Praise).'" (Tirmidhi)

Furthermore:

"There is no Muslim that is afflicted with a calamity, and he says what Allah has commanded him to say: "To Allah we belong and to him we will return! O Allah! Give me the rewards (of being patient over) this calamity, and grant me something better than it to replace it," except that Allah will give him something better to replace it."
(Muslim)

So this is one way a calamity can be a blessing, through your patience and reliance on Allah your rank is raised and He is pleased with you. In fact, through your patience he will replace what you have lost with something even better.

Another way is that Allah may have averted a larger calamity that was going to befall you by testing you with a smaller calamity. What if that child of yours had grown up and left Islam and died as a non-Muslim (Kafir)? They would have entered Hell for all eternity. By dying as a child they are guaranteed Paradise, where you will have the chance to meet with them again. We can see examples of this in the Qur'an in the stories of Hazret Khidr and Hazret Musa (peace be upon them both).

The problem is that we are short sighted and do not rely on Allah's infinite wisdom, we do not truly understand that He knows and does what is best for us because we do not know what kind of bigger trials and difficulties He may have exposed us to, which He has instead made easier for us. As He says in the Qur'an:

"...sometimes you may dislike something that is good for you, and sometimes you may like something that is bad for you. Only Allah knows the whole truth, not you." (Quran 2:216)

One of the Awliyah Allah (saint) used to make a Dua (supplication) in which he said:

"I make Dua to Allah for something I want, and if he gives it to me then I am happy once, and if he does not give it to me then I am

happy ten times because the first was my choice, but the second was Allah's choice."

As the Prophet (peace be upon him) told us:

"Whatever Allah has decreed for His believing slave is a blessing, even if that is in the form of withholding; it is a favour even if that is in the form of a trial; and the calamity decreed by Him is fair, even if it is painful." (Madaarij al-Saalikeen)

Indeed, by being grateful we call the blessings of Allah down upon ourselves, as He said in the Quran:

"If you are grateful, I will surely increase My favours to you, but if you are ungrateful, then My punishment is severe." (Qur'an 14:7)

Having discussed Sabr and Shukr, the third aspect is Istighfar (to seek forgiveness). This involves two things, the first is to realise that our sins can result in punishment in this life as well as in the grave and the hereafter. This does not mean that every difficulty we face is a punishment but a Muslim understands that it is only the Prophets who are free from sin. However pious others may believe you to be, the closer you get to Allah the more you realise how sinful you are. Therefore, when faced with a difficulty a Muslim should consider that it could be a punishment and seek Istighfar from Allah.

This is exemplified in the story of Taif, when the Prophet (peace be upon him) was rudely rejected by the people and physically assaulted by being pelted with stones until his shoes filled with blood. In his Dua to Allah, he said, *"So long as you are not angry with me, I do not care."* Therefore, even in the case of the Prophet his only concern after such a terrible ordeal is that the calamity befell him as a result of Allah's displeasure, which of course was not the case.

However, even if the difficulty is not a punishment, by exhibiting the qualities of Sabr and Shukr, some of your sins are forgiven. As the Prophet (peace be upon him) told us:

"No fatigue, nor disease, nor sorrow, nor sadness, nor hurt, nor distress befalls a Muslim, even if it were the prick he receives from a thorn, but that Allah expiates some of his sins for that." (Bukhari)

“Trials will continue to befall the believing man and woman, with regard to themselves, their children and their wealth, until they meet Allah with no sin on them.” (Tirmidhi)

Summary

To summarise, I have talked about changing our mindset so we expect hardships and troubles to come our way from time to time; and also to realise that the hardships we face are the will of Allah and predestined for us. I have discussed how Allah’s love for us is greater than even that of a mother for her child and that everything that happens to a believer is a blessing for him. This is by having Sabr (patience) and considering that Allah may have spared us from an even greater test, which we may not have been able to bear and may have even put our Imaan (faith) in jeopardy. It is also by realising that through these tests we can achieve higher ranks and get closer to Allah. Through this Sabr Allah will replace what we have lost with something even better. Therefore, not only do we have Sabr but we also do Shukr (express gratitude); in His infinite wisdom Allah knows what is best for us. When we do Shukr we gain even greater pleasure of Allah and He showers even more of His blessings upon us. Through these difficulties Allah also cleanses us of our sins so we can stand before him on the Day of Judgment in a purified state and Insh’Allah enter His Jannah (Paradise) where we will spend eternity in peace and comfort.

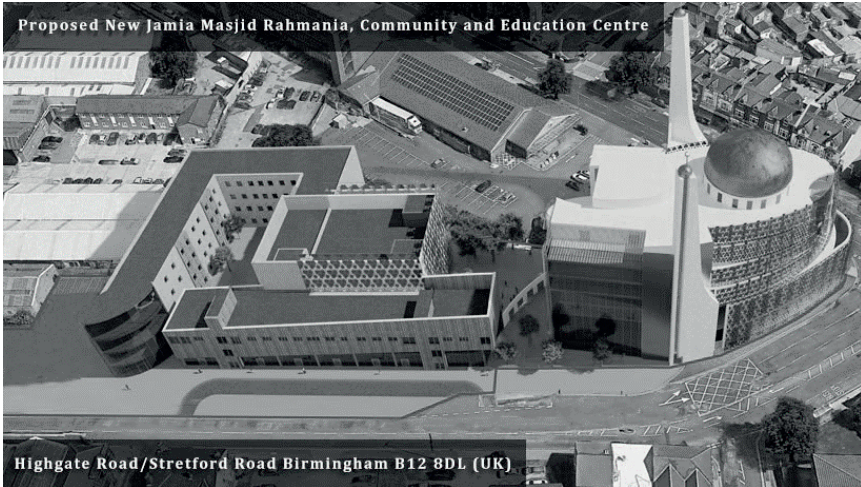
The purpose of this chapter is to provide a practical means of reflecting upon and appreciating the immeasurable blessings of Allah upon you even in times of difficulty and stress. Fill in the blank tables on the following pages with lists of things you are grateful for, what difficulties you are facing in your life and whether these outweigh all that Allah has given you. Furthermore, think deeply about these difficulties you face and consider what benefits and blessings are hidden within these tests Allah has bestowed upon you. Doing this exercise regularly, especially in times of difficulty and stress, will help develop a habit of patience and gratitude.

Drawing Closer To Allah And His Prophet: a Practical Guide

What difficulties are you facing?	Do these outweigh the blessings Allah has bestowed upon you?
	Yes / No
	Yes / No
	Yes / No
	Yes / No
	Yes / No
	Yes / No
	Yes / No
	Yes / No
	Yes / No
	Yes / No
	Yes / No
	Yes / No
	Yes / No
	Yes / No
	Yes / No
	Yes / No

What difficulties are you facing?	Do these outweigh the blessings Allah has bestowed upon you?
	Yes / No
	Yes / No
	Yes / No
	Yes / No
	Yes / No
	Yes / No
	Yes / No
	Yes / No
	Yes / No
	Yes / No
	Yes / No
	Yes / No
	Yes / No
	Yes / No
	Yes / No
	Yes / No

**Please donate generously to help build Jamia Masjid
Rahmania, Community and Education Centre**



Qadria Trust was established as a small Mosque for the local Sparkbrook community (Birmingham) in 2005 by Pir Mohammad Tayyab Ur-Rahman Qadri. Since then, as the size of the congregation grew the Mosque was expanded accordingly. Currently, Qadria Trust provides education to over 200 children employing over 20 staff, and during Jummah despite two Jamaats the Mosque is overflowing. Therefore work is currently underway to collect funds to build Masjid Rahmania, a new Mosque, community and education centre at the junction between Highgate and Stratford Road.

When the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) migrated from Makkah to Madinah, the first thing he did was build a Mosque. This Mosque was a place where not only the 5 daily prayers were performed in congregation, but it was a true community centre:

- It was a place of education, where the companions would learn at the feet of the Prophet (peace be upon him), and themselves teach after his passing.
- It was a place where the Prophet (peace be upon him) governed the new Muslim state, making decisions about treaties, meeting with foreign dignitaries.
- It was a court where people would come with their arguments and differences which would be resolved by the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him).
- It was a place of interfaith dialogue, Christian and Jewish leaders and their followers would visit the Prophet (peace be upon him) and his companions.
- It was the place where the poorest members of the community would stay, would eat, would receive charity.
- It was also a place where recreation and leisure activities took place. There is the famous story of Hazret Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) watching the Ethiopian warriors performing their war dance over the shoulder of the Prophet (peace be upon him), and there are hadith about the companions performing archery inside the Mosque.

So what we learn is that the Mosque in the time of the Prophet (peace be upon him) was in constant use, by the young and the old, the rich and the poor, for religious, education and community purposes.

Given this is the model established by the Prophet (peace be upon him) of the functions a Mosque should fulfil, how do the Mosques we have today compare? Unfortunately most fulfil only one purpose, the congregational prayer, and apart from for Jumma they are mostly empty even for that. It is also very clear there is a disconnect between the youth (our future generation) and the Mosque and therefore our religion, Islam.

There is no doubt this is a contributing reason why so many of our youth are involved in criminal and Haraam activities and why the population of Muslims in prison is disproportionately high. This is why it is so important to re-establish the Prophetic model of what a Mosque is meant to be; to create an organisation which serves as a hub for the community which helps to reconnect our next generation with the Mosque, with their religion, and with the wider community.

Masjid Rahmania is such a unique project, this will truly be not only a Mosque, but also an education and community centre. It will contain:

- Separate prayer halls for men and women
- Community centre, catering for:
 - Multi-functional conference rooms with state-of-the-art audio/visual capabilities, for weddings, funerals, special events, etc.
- Advice bureau, advising on:
 - Marriage counselling, divorce
- Education centre, providing:
 - Full time school and supplementary after-school classes for children
 - Library of Islamic literature
- Nursery
- Youth hub, including:
 - Sports and recreational activities
 - Mentoring services
- Women's centre
- Day centre for the elderly
- Food-bank and emergency shelter for the homeless
- Matrimonial and funeral facilities
- Retail outlets and apartments (to generate income for the centre)

This means the local Sparkbrook community and residents of Britain have a unique opportunity; to be part of the revival of the Prophetic model of what a Mosque is meant to be. As the Qur'anic verses and Hadith previously quoted tell us, by spending our God-given wealth on this most worthy project, Insh'Allah we will be investing in not only the future of Muslims in this country but also our own future, in this life and the next.

Methods to donate:

- Call donation hotline (Monday to Friday - 11am to 6pm):
 - 0844 344 4786
 - 07966 047284 / 07940 709106
- Post cheque:
 - Payable to 'Qadria Trust (UK)'
 - 26 Alfred Street, Sparkbrook, Birmingham, B12 8JL
- Direct bank transfer:
 - Qadria Trust (UK) HSBC
 - Sort Code: 40-11-20
 - Account number: 11627457

Email us for further information:

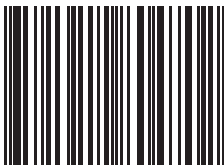
- qadriatrust@gmail.com / qadria.trust@ymail.com

In the busy lives of modern-day Muslims, many of us living in secular countries, how can we stop our religion becoming a ritualistic hobby? This book will provide you the means of changing your thoughts and behaviour regarding the most fundamental aspects of our religion:

- Reading the Qur'an
- Praying Salaat
- Following the Sunnah of the Prophet (peace be upon him)
- Sending peace and blessings upon the Prophet (peace be upon him)
- Fasting and Ramadan
- Giving charity
- Accepting the Divine Decree

Each chapter introduces the topic using the Qur'an and Hadith followed by practical advice on how to act upon this, with space to record your progress. Sincere engagement with this process will help you develop lifelong habits of practicing your faith understanding why you are doing what you are doing. The final goal? Drawing close to Allah and His Prophet (peace be upon him).

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