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The virtue found within abstinence can be of great benefit to the social nurturing and sustenance of any society. The great religions of the world have long taught that sometimes less is of greater benefit to man than more. Abstinence is not simply to shun away from excess, rather it is to forego that which is lawful to man in order to facilitate a higher spiritual or social ambition.

It is becoming increasingly difficult for those of us living in the wealthiest nations of the world to put into context and consider our lavish lives with the reality of our fellow human beings living in less financially fortunate areas of the world. Therefore, abstinence is a path by which man voluntarily lowers his status so that he can more properly appreciate his own corporeality and existence. He is then able to counter-balance the excesses of his life and move towards moderation.

In the prophets Moses(as), Jesus(as) and Muhammad(saw) we find the model examples of those who partook in abstinence and maximised the benefits found therein. They were able to establish the greatest religions of history, through the grace of Almighty God, by ensuring that they never proceeded beyond the boundaries of moderation. This allowed them to identify and cater for the needs and sensitivities of both the rich and the poor equally.

They were the leaders of millions of people, yet it cannot be said that any of their followers served them more than they served their followers. They lived by the universal and timeless teaching of Muhammad(saw) – “The Leader of a nation is a servant to them”. In short, abstinence ensured that they were continuously in touch with the realities and sensitivities of the people around them. It is regrettable that many hundreds of years later countless political and religious leaders indulge in flagrant excess and thus cannot relate to the
very people they are charged with the responsibility of serving. If they embrace the humility of abstinence then perhaps they will remove the cloud of distrust society has placed over them.

Another benefit of abstinence is that it is the nemesis of greed. If man is to eliminate the cancers of war and economic anarchy then each individual must administer a portion of abstinence in their life. It not only inculcates a sense of moderation within mankind but also empowers us to apply moderation towards others; even our enemies.

Abstinence subdues sin and allows man to overcome the temptations of this world. More importantly, it facilitates the journey each servant of God must take in order to conquer their lower self. This is indeed the true purpose of man’s principle striving, the greater jihad of subduing one’s self, or as in the words of Dickens in Nicholas Nickleby, ‘Subdue your appetites, my dears, and you’ve conquered human nature’.

NOTE FOR THE REVIEW OF RELIGIONS
Verse references to the Holy Qur’an item count ‘Bismillah...’ (In the Name of Allah...) as the first verse of each Chapter. In some non-standard texts, this is not counted. Should the reader refer to such texts, the verse quoted in The Review of Religions will be found a verse earlier, i.e. at one verse less than the number quoted in this journal.

For the ease of non-Muslim readers, ‘(saw)’ or ‘saw’ after the words, ‘Holy Prophet’, or the name ‘Muhammad’, are used normally in small letters. They stand for ‘Sallallahu ‘alaihi wa sallam’ meaning ‘peace and blessings of Allah be upon him’. Likewise, the letters ‘(as)’ or ‘as’ after the name of all other prophets is an abbreviation meaning ‘peace be upon him’ derived from ‘Alaihis salatu wassalam’ which are words that a Muslim utters out of respect whenever he or she comes across that name. The abbreviation ‘ra’ or (ra) stands for ‘Radhiyallahu Ta’ala anhu and is used for Companions of a Prophet, meaning Allah be pleased with him or her (when followed by the relevant Arabic pronoun). Finally, ‘ru’ or (ru) for Rahemahullahu Ta’ala means the Mercy of Allah the Exalted be upon him.

In keeping with current universal practice, local transliterations of names of places are preferred to their anglicised versions, e.g. Makkah instead of Mecca, etc.
Every blessing is from Muhammad on whom be the blessings and peace of Allah. Blessed is He who taught and he who was taught.

Hadhrat Muhammad Mustafa, may the blessings and peace of Allah be upon him.

You have in the Messenger of Allah an excellent exemplar, for him who hopes to meet with Allah and the Last Day, and who remembers Allah much. (Ch.33:V.22)

After God I am inebriated with the love of Muhammad. If this is infidelity, then by God I am a great infidel.

That light of high degree that was bestowed on perfect man was not in angels, was not in stars, was not in the moon, was not in the sun, was not in the oceans and the rivers, was not in rubies or emeralds, or sapphires, or pearls; in short, it was not in any earthly or heavenly object. It was only in perfect man whose highest and loftiest and most perfect example was our lord and master, the Chief of the Prophets, the Chief of all living ones, Muhammad, the chosen one, peace be on him. That light was bestowed on this man and, according to their ranks, upon all those who bore the same colour to some degree.... This dignity was found in its highest and most perfect form in our lord and master and our guide, the immaculate...
Prophet, the righteous one, testified to by the righteous, Muhammad, the chosen one, peace be on him [Ayene Kamalat-e-Islam, (Qadian, Riyadh Hind Press 1893)], Now printed in Ruhani Khazain (London, 1984), Vol.5, pp. 160-162.

I always wonder how high was the status of this Arab Prophet, whose name was Muhammad, thousands of blessings and peace be upon him. One cannot reach the limit of his high status and it is not given to man to estimate correctly his spiritual effectiveness. It is a pity that his rank has not been recognised as it should have been.

He was the champion who restored to the world the Unity of God which had disappeared from the world; he loved God in the extreme and his soul melted out of sympathy for mankind. Therefore God, Who knew the secret of his heart, exalted him above all the Prophets and all the first ones and the last ones and bestowed upon him in his lifetime all that he desired. He is the fountainhead of every grace and a person who claims any superiority without acknowledging his grace is not a man but is the progeny of Satan. He has been bestowed the key to every exaltation and he has been given the treasury of every understanding. He who does not
receive through him is deprived forever. I am nothing and possess nothing. I would be most ungrateful if I were not to confess that I have learnt of the true Unity of God through this Prophet. The recognition of the Living God we have achieved through this Perfect Prophet and through his light. The honour of converse with God, through which we behold His countenance, has been bestowed upon me through this great Prophet. The ray of this sun of guidance falls like sunshine upon me and I continue illumined only so long as I am adjusted towards it [Haqiqatul Wahyi, (Qadian, Magazine Press 1907); Now published in Ruhani Khazain (London, 1984), Vol. 22, pp.115-116].

O all ye who dwell upon the earth, and O all human souls that are in the East or in the West, I announce to you emphatically that the true reality in the earth is Islam alone, and the true God is the God Who is described in the Qur’an, and the Prophet who has everlasting spiritual life and who is seated on the throne of glory and holiness, is Muhammad, the chosen one, peace be on him. The proof of his spiritual life and holy majesty is that by following him and loving him we become recipients of the holy spirit and are favoured with the bounty of converse with God and witness heavenly signs [Tiryaqul Quloob, Now printed in Ruhani Khazain (London, 1984), Vol. 15, p.7].

The man who in his being and his attributes and his actions and through his spiritual and holy faculties set an example of perfection, in knowledge and action and in sincerity and steadfastness, and was called the perfect man was Muhammad, peace be on him... The man who was most perfect as man and as Prophet, and came with full blessings, and who through a spiritual revival and resurrection manifested the first judgment in the world and revived the dead world, that blessed Prophet, the Seal of the Prophets, the leader of the righteous ones, the pride of the Prophets, was Muhammad, the chosen one, peace be on him. Our Lord, send down on that beloved
Prophet that mercy and blessing that Thou hast not sent down on anyone since the beginning of the world. Had that grand Prophet not appeared in the world then we would have no proof of the truth of lesser Prophets like Jonah(as), Job(as), Jesus(as) son of Mary, Malachi(as), John(as), Zakaria(as), etc. Though they were favourites and honoured and were beloved ones of Almighty God, they are under obligation to this Prophet that they were accepted in the world as true Prophets. O Allah, send down Thy blessings on him and on his people and on his companions, all of them. Our last word is that all praise belongs to Allah, Lord of the worlds [Itmamul Hujjah, (Lahore, Gulzar Muhammadi Press, 1311 A.H); Now printed in Ruhani Khazain (London, 1984), Vol. 8, p. 36].

When we estimate justly, then out of the whole series of Prophets, we find one of high courage and alive and greatly dear to God, the Chief of the Prophets, the pride and the crown of the Messengers, whose name is Muhammad Mustafa and Ahmad Mujtaba. By walking under his shadow for ten days one obtains that light which before him could not be obtained in a thousand years... We have found every light by following the immaculate Prophet and whoever follows him will also find it and he will become so accepted of God that nothing will be impossible for him. The Living God Who is hidden from people, will be his God and all false gods will be trodden under his feet. He will be blessed everywhere and Divine Power will be with him. Peace be on him who follows the guidance [Siraj Muneer, (Qadian, Ziaul Islam Press 1897); Now printed in Ruhani Khazain (London, 1984), Vol. 12, p. 80-81].

Now under heaven there is only one Prophet and only one Book. The Prophet is Muhammad, the chosen one, peace be on him, who is higher and more exalted than all Prophets and is the most perfect of Messengers and is the Khatamul Anbiya, and the best of men by following whom we find God Almighty and all the veils of darkness are lifted and the signs of true salvation are witnessed in this
very life. The Book is the Holy Qur’an, which comprises true and perfect guidance and effectiveness, through which knowledge and understanding of the Divine are obtained and the heart is purified of human weaknesses, and being delivered from ignorance and heedlessness and doubts, a person arrives at the stage of complete certainty (Baraheen-e-Ahmadiyyah, p. 467-468, sub-footnote 3).

There have been millions of pure-natured people in the world and there will be more in future, but we have found the best of all of them and the highest man of God, whose name is Muhammad, peace be on him. Allah and His angels call down blessings on the Prophet and do you who believe call down blessings on him and greet him with the greeting of peace. We shall leave aside any mention of the holy ones from among those people whose circumstances have not been described in detail in the Holy Qur’an. We shall express our view only with regard to the Prophets who are mentioned in the Qur’an like Moses, David, Jesus and other Prophets, peace be on them. We affirm it on oath, calling God to witness, that if the Holy Prophet, peace be on him, had not come into the world, and the Holy Qur’an had not been revealed, and we had not seen with our own eyes the blessings that we have witnessed, the truth of all past Prophets would have remained doubtful in our eyes. No reality can be gathered from mere stories, for it is quite possible that they may not be true and it is also possible that the miracles that are attributed to these Prophets might be exaggerations, for no sign of them is visible today. We cannot even ascertain for certain from the Books revealed in the past that God truly exists, because we are not assured that God speaks to man. But through the advent of the Holy Prophet(saw), all these stories became real. We now realise not merely as a statement, but as a matter of experience, what converse with the Divine means and how God’s signs are manifested and how prayers are answered. All this we have discovered by following the Holy Prophet(saw) and what other people relate as stories we have witnessed it all. We have attached ourselves
to a Prophet who manifests God to us.

How shall we express our gratitude to God who bestowed upon us the good fortune to follow the Prophet(saw) who is a sun for the souls of the righteous as there is a sun for the bodies? He appeared in a time of darkness and illumined the world with his light. He was neither tired nor fatigued till he purified all parts of Arabia from associating partners with God. He is the proof of his own truth for his light is present in every age and true obedience to him purifies a person as the clear and transparent water of a river cleanses dirty linen. Who has come to us with a sincere heart and has not witnessed that light, and who has knocked honestly on that door for whom it has not been opened? But the pity is that most people prefer the lower life and do not desire that higher light should enter into them [Chashma Ma’rifat, (Qadian, Anwar Ahmadiyyah Press, 1908); Now published in Ruhani Khazain (London, 1984), Vol. 23., p. 288-289].

The Holy Prophet(saw) was directed in the Holy Qur’an to supplicate:

> Exalted then is Allah, the True King. And make no haste to recite the Qur’an ere its revelation is completed unto thee, but only say, ‘Lord, bestow on me increase of knowledge.
> (Ch.20:V.115)

This means that the Holy Prophet(saw) was directed to supplicate for perfect knowledge of God’s greatness and understanding and attributes. At another place it is said:

> Thus have I been commanded and I am the foremost of those who submit.
> (Ch.6:V.164)

Reading these two verses together we find that the Holy Prophet(saw) became the foremost of the Muslims because he was the most learned in the knowledge of Divine understanding. For this reason, his Islam is the highest of all and he is the foremost of the Muslims. Another verse also indicates the vastness of his knowledge as is said:
He has taught thee that which thou knewest not, and great is Allah's grace on thee
(Ch.4:V.114)

This means that God Almighty taught the Holy Prophet(saw) that which he could not have learnt by himself and that by Divine grace he was blessed more than anyone else. That is to say, the Holy Prophet(saw) exceeded everyone in his knowledge and understanding of the Divine and God Almighty perfumed him with the fragrance of Divine understanding more than anyone else. Thus God has appointed knowledge and understanding as the principal means of obtaining a true concept of Islam. Though there are other means for obtaining such knowledge, like fasting and Prayer and supplication and carrying out all the Divine commandments, the number of which exceeds six hundred, yet the knowledge of the Greatness of God and of His Unity and of His attributes of Glory and Beauty is basic for everything. He who has a heedless heart and has no understanding of the Divine, cannot obtain the strength to observe the fast or perform Prayer or make supplication or occupy himself with doing good. All righteous action is incited by understanding of the Divine and all the other means proceed from it and are its issue. The beginning of this understanding is the reflection of God’s Rahmaniyyat and is not the result of any action or any prayer, but is a gift of pure grace. He guides whom He wills and He lets go astray whom He wills. Then this understanding is fostered by righteous action and good faith, till it assumes the form of revelation and descending in the word of God, illumines the whole expanse of the bosom with the light which is called Islam. At the stage of perfect understanding, Islam does not remain a mere phrase, but all its reality that we have described is achieved and the human soul prostrates itself humbly before Divine Unity. Thereupon, from both sides it is announced: Whatever is mine is Thine. That is to say, the human soul cries out and confesses: Lord whatever is mine is Thine; and God also speaks and conveys the good news: O My servant, the heaven and earth etc. that are with Me are with thee also. This stage is
indicated in the verse:

O my servants who have committed excesses against your own selves despair not of the mercy of Allah, surely Allah forgives all sins
(Ch.39:V.54)

In this verse instead of: Say: O servants of Allah; the Holy Prophet(saw) was commanded to say: O my servants. This verse was revealed in this form so that God Almighty might convey the good news of limitless mercies and might comfort those who are broken-hearted in consequence of their sins. Thus Allah the Glorious desired to exhibit a sample of His mercies and to make it manifest to what extent He honours His faithful servant with special favours. By adopting the form: Say: O my servants; God in effect said: Look at My beloved Messenger and see at what high rank he has arrived through his perfect obedience to Me that now all that is Mine is his. He who desires salvation should become his servant. That is to say, he should obey him so perfectly as if he was his slave. Then whatever sins he might have committed will be forgiven him. The word ‘abd in Arabic idiom also means slave as it is said:

A believing slave is better than an idol worshipper
(Ch.2:V.222)

In the verse to which we have drawn attention, it is indicated that he who desires salvation should establish the relationship of a slave with this Prophet. That is to say, he should not step outside his commandment and should consider himself bound to his obedience as a slave is bound and he would then obtain salvation. One pities those dark-souled ones who bear such rancour towards the Holy Prophet(saw) that they consider that names like Ghulam Nabi, Ghulam Rasul, Ghulam Mustafa, Ghulam Ahmad, Ghulam Muhammad, saviour of associating the Holy Prophet(saw) with God, whereas, the verse indicates that these names are a means of salvation. As ‘abd implies that a person so named should refrain from every kind of freedom and self direction and should be completely obedient to his master,
therefore, the seekers after truth have been urged that if they wish to attain salvation they should adapt themselves to this condition. This verse has the same connotation as the verse: Announce:

\[
\text{you love Allah, then follow me, Allah will then love you and forgive you your sins} \\
\text{(Ch.3:V.32)}
\]

Perfect following demands that devotion and full obedience which is conveyed in the expression ‘abd. The verse: Say: O my servants; means in effect: Say: O my followers, who are involved in sins, despair not of the mercy of Allah for Allah, through the blessing of your following me, will forgive all your sins. If the word servants in this verse is construed as meaning the servants of Allah, the purport of the verse is perverted for it cannot be true that God Almighty would forgive all idol worshippers and disbelievers without their believing in and following the Holy Prophet(saw). Such construction would be contrary to the express directions of the Holy Qur’an. It should be remembered that the purport of the verse is that those who become the sincere servants of the Holy Prophet(saw) will be bestowed the light and the faith and the love and the passion which will deliver them from all that is beside Allah, and they will be freed from sins and will be bestowed a pure life in this world and they will be delivered from the narrow and dark graves of human passions. This is indicated by the Hadith: I am the resurrector on whose footsteps people will be raised up. The Holy Qur’an is full of the idiom that the world had died and that God Almighty revived it through sending the Holy Prophet(saw) as is said:

\[
\text{Know that Allah revives the earth after its death} \\
\text{(Ch.57:V.18)}
\]

In the same way, it is said with reference to the companions of the Holy Prophet(saw):

\[
\text{God helped them with the holy spirit.} \\
\text{(Ch.58:V.23)}
\]
The help of the holy spirit is that it revives the hearts and delivers from spiritual death and bestows pure faculties and pure senses and pure knowledge and carries a person to the station of nearness to God through certain knowledge and conclusive arguments... This knowledge on which salvation depends cannot be obtained without that life which is bestowed through the holy spirit. The Holy Qur’an affirms it emphatically that that spiritual life is obtained only through following the Holy Prophet(saw) and that all those who repudiate obedience to him are dead and do not possess that life. Spiritual life means the intellectual and active faculties which are brought to life by the holy spirit. The Holy Qur’an shows that the commandments of God to which He desires man to conform are six hundred. In consonance with this the wings of Gabriel are also six hundred. Until the egg of humanness lies under the wings of Gabriel bearing these six hundred commandments, it cannot hatch the baby of being completely lost in Allah. The reality of man has the capacity of six hundred eggs. A person whose six hundred eggs are covered by the six hundred wings of the capacity of Gabriel is the perfect man whose spiritual birth is perfect and whose life is perfect. If one looks with care one finds that the spiritual issue of the egg of humanness which by the blessing of the following of the Holy Prophet(saw) were born to the holy spirit, are more perfect and complete than the spiritual children of all the other Prophets. This is indicated by the verse:

*You are the best of people who have been raised up for the reform of mankind* (Ch.3:V.111)


The Holy Prophet(saw) came into the world so that he might bestow hearing on the deaf, who had continued in that condition for hundreds of years. Who is blind and who is deaf? The same one who does not accept the Unity of
God and who does not accept this Prophet who revived the Unity of God on the earth; the same Prophet who converted the wild ones into men and then converted them into men possessing true moral qualities, then dyed them in the Divine colour of those who establish their relationship with God; the same Prophet, the sun of righteousness, at whose feet thousands of those who had died of paganism and atheism and evil living were revived and came to life and a sample of the Judgment Day was exhibited. It was not mere talk like that of Jesus(as). The Prophet who appeared in Makkah and dispelled the darkness of association with God and the worship of man, was the true light of the world, who found the world in darkness and bestowed such light upon it that he converted a dark night into day. What was the world before his advent and what did it become after it? This is not a question that is difficult to answer. If we are faithful our conscience will tug at us to persuade us to believe that before that great personage the greatness of God had been forgotten by the people of every country and it had been assigned to avatars and stones and stars and trees and animals and mortal men, and despised creation was seated in the place of that Lord of Glory and Holiness. It is true that if these men and animals and trees and stars were in fact God, Jesus(as) being one of them, then this Prophet was not needed, but if they were not God, the claim that our lord Muhammad(saw), made on the hill of Makkah has a grand light attending upon it. What was that claim? It was that God, having found the world in the deep darkness of associating partners with God had sent him to dispel that darkness. It was not only a claim, but that Messenger, accepted of God, fully established that claim. If the superiority of any Prophet can be established by such works as proclaim true sympathy with mankind exceeding that of all other Prophets, then, O ye people, arise and bear witness that in this respect Muhammad, peace be on him, has no equal in the world.... Blind worshippers of creatures have not recognised that great Prophet who set forth thousands of examples of true sympathy with
mankind. I perceive, however, that the time has arrived when this Holy Messenger would be recognised. If you wish you might record my statement that henceforth the worship of the dead will decline daily till it disappears altogether. Will man set himself up against God? Will a despised drop frustrate the designs of God? Will the projects of mortal man disgrace Divine commandments? O ye who can hear, listen, and O ye who can reflect, consider and remember that truth will be proclaimed and he who is the true light will shine forth (Tableegh-e-Risalat, Vol. VI, p. 9).

It is my personal experience that to obey the Holy Prophet(saw) with a sincere heart and to love him, ultimately makes a person beloved of God. God creates in his heart a burning for His Own love and such a one, withdrawing his heart from everything else, leans towards God and his affection and desire remain only for God Almighty. Thereupon a special manifestation of Divine love falls upon him and bestowing upon him the full colour of love and devotion pulls him towards itself with great force. He then overcomes his passions and from every direction extraordinary works of God Almighty appear as signs in his support and to help him [Haqiqatul Wahyi, (Qadian, Magazine Press 1907); Now published in Ruhani Khazain (London, 1984), Vol. 22, p. 65].

I have observed that by calling down blessings upon the Holy Prophet, Divine grace in the shape of wonderful light proceeds in the direction of the Holy Prophet(saw) and is absorbed into his breast and then issuing therefrom numberless streams of it reach everyone deserving them according to his capacity. Certainly no grace can reach anyone without the agency of the Holy Prophet(saw). Calling down blessings on the Holy Prophet(saw) brings into movement His Throne from which these streams of light issue. He who desires to obtain the grace of God Almighty should call down Divine blessings on him very diligently so that that grace might be moved (Al-Hakam, 28 Feb. 1903, p. 7)
One night this humble one called down blessings on the Holy Prophet(saw) to such a degree that my heart and soul were filled with its fragrance. That night I saw in my dream that angels were carrying water-skins full of light into my house and one of them said to me: These are the blessings that you called down on Muhammad, peace be on him (Baraheen-e-Ahmadiyyah, p.503, sub-footnote 3).

We should not let a doubt enter our minds how a mere follower can partake of the names and attributes and praises of that accepted Messenger. It is true that in reality even a Prophet cannot share equally in the holy excellences of the Holy Prophet(saw). Indeed even the angels cannot claim equality in that respect, let alone that anyone else should share in his excellences. But O seeker after truth, may God guide you aright, listen carefully to this. With the object that the blessings of that accepted Prophet should be displayed forever and that the perfect rays of his light should confound and refute his opponents, God Almighty has made the following arrangement by His wisdom and mercy. Some individuals out of the followers of Muhammad, peace be upon him, who obey him with thorough humility and falling prostrate on the threshold of humbleness are completely lost to their ego, being found by God like a clear mirror, exhibit the blessings of the accepted Messenger in their humble selves. Whatever praise is bestowed upon them by God and whatever signs and blessings are manifested by them, the true source of all their praise and the perfect fountainhead of all those blessings is the Holy Prophet(saw).

In reality and in their perfection those praises are worthy only of him and he is their perfect exemplar, but as the follower of the way of the Holy Prophet(saw) becomes through his perfect obedience like a reflection of the Holy Prophet and the Divine lights which are manifested in the latter are also manifested in his reflection, the appearance in the shadow of the whole form and manner of the reality is a matter
that is not hidden from anyone. This shadow is not established in itself and no superiority is in reality present in it. All that appears in it is a picture of the real one which is manifested in the reflection. Do not, therefore, consider it a loss that the inner lights of the Holy Prophet(saw), reach those who are perfectly obedient to him out of his followers. Two great matters result from this reflection of lights, which, like permanent grace, manifests itself in some members of the following of Muhammad(saw). One is that the extreme perfection of the Holy Prophet(saw), is thereby displayed; for a torch from which other torches can be lit and are ever lit, is better than a torch from which no other torch can be lit. Secondly, the perfection of the Muslims and their superiority over the followers of other religions is established by this permanent grace and the proof of the reality of the religion of Islam is furnished afresh and reliance is not had only upon the past. This is the manner in which the lights of the truth of the Holy Qur’an shine forth like the sun, and the proof of Islam is established conclusively as against its opponents, and the disgrace and humiliation and frustration of the enemies of Islam are made manifest. They observe in Islam those blessings and light the like of which they cannot find in the ministers and pundits of their own religion. Consider this well, O true seeker, May Allah help thee in thy search.... How great is the station of the Khatamul Anbiya, peace be on him, and how excellent is the bright effectiveness of this sun of righteousness that obedience to him makes someone a perfect believer and someone else a recogniser of God and bestows upon a third one the rank of a Sign of Allah and a Proof of Allah and bestows upon him Divine praise. (Baraheen-e-Ahmadiyyah, pp. 243-245, sub-footnote 1).
Continuation of an extract from ‘Our Teaching’ in ‘Kishti-e-Nuh’ (Noah’s Ark) by the Promised Messiah(as), an important book of the Holy Founder of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community. Hadhrat Mirza Bashir Ahmad(as), son of the Promised Messiah(as), wrote in the foreword to ‘Our Teaching’: ‘This is a time when the darkness of materialism has overspread the entire face of the earth and obscured people’s vision. Many there are who profess faith but are deprived of its true sweetness and strength. They are unaware of the One Living, Omnipresent God… This book is a torch of guidance through which every Muslim, nay every man with a craving for truth and spirituality, can rekindle his inner lamp and illuminate his heart.’

The Door of Revelation is Open Even Now
Do not think that Revelation from God is not possible in the future; that it was possible only in the past: do not think that the Holy Spirit cannot come down. I tell you truly that every door can be closed but the door for the coming down of the Holy Spirit. Open all the doors of your heart to receive it. With your own hands you remove yourself to a distance from that sun, where you yourself close the window through which light can enter. Therefore, get up at once and throw this window open, so that the light of the sun should, of its own accord, enter your heart with the simplicity and inevitability of a natural process. When God has not closed the doors of His blessings upon the world, when in fact He has multiplied them even more than before, do you venture to presume that he has closed upon you the doors of His spiritual blessings, even at a time when they were needed most? No, no, not at all; rather that door has been opened beyond any possible shadow of doubt. Now, in accordance with His teaching as given in Surah Fatihah [opening chapter of Holy Qur’an], when the door of all earlier blessings has been opened for you, why do you decline to receive them? Create a thirst for this spring,
and then, of itself, the water will begin to gush out. For this milk cry like a child, so that it should well up in the breast. Begin to deserve mercy, so that you should be shown mercy. Show anxiety and deep concern, so that your minds should be set at rest. Cry out with pain, again and again, so that a hand should stretch itself and take hold of you. Indeed, how terribly difficult is the way which is the way of the Lord! But, verily, it is made easy for those who jump into the abyss, resolutely determined to face destruction and death.

Blessed are they who for the sake of the Lord wage a war against their own selves; while truly ill-starred are they who for the sake of their baser selves wage a war against the Lord, and refuse to mould themselves in obedience to His will. Whoesoever, for the sake of his own self, evades a commandment of God, will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Strive therefore to the utmost that not a jot or syllable of the Holy Qur’an should bear witness against you, and cause you to be apprehended on that account. For indeed even a single grain of evil is punishable.

The time is very short, the mission of your life not yet fulfilled. Walk with speed, for the evening draws nigh. Whatever you have to put before the Lord, examine it well, and as often as you can, lest some defect remain to cause irreparable loss: or lest you take something with you which in fact should amount to no more than filthy and spurious goods, not worthy to be presented at a royal court.

**Elevated Position of the Holy Qur’an**

I have been given to understand that there are some among you who reject the *Hadith* [(Traditions)]. If this is so, then these people are in manifest error. I have never taught that they should hold such views. Quite to the contrary, I hold very firmly that for your guidance God has provided three things. The foremost among these is the Holy Qur’an, which sets forth the unity of God, His grandeur and greatness, and decides all points in dispute between the Jews and the Christians. Further, the Qur’an forbids that you worship anything other than God – neither man, nor beast, the sun nor the moon, nor any other heavenly body, nor
material means, nor your own selves. Therefore beware. Do not take a single step in contravention of anything contained in the Holy Book.

Verily, I tell you truly that whosoever evades even the least of the seven hundred commandments embodied in the Holy Qur’an he slams the door of salvation upon himself. The real and perfect paths of salvation have been opened only by the Holy Qur’an; all others were only its shadows. Therefore you should study this Holy Scripture with the utmost attention and deepest thought; and you should love it as you have never loved anything else. For, indeed, as God has conveyed to me, ‘Al Khairu Kullahu Fil Qur’an’ i.e., all good lies in the Qur’an. All kinds of good are to be found in it – and this is the truth. Unfortunate, indeed, are the people who give preference to other things over it. The Holy Qur’an is the fountainhead for your salvation, for all betterment and success. There is not even a single spiritual need which has not been met for you in this Holy Book. The supporter or falsifier of your Faith on the Day of Judgement would be the Holy Qur’an; and apart from this Book there is no other under the heavens which can provide you with direct guidance. It is indeed a great blessing of God upon you that He has bestowed on you a book like it.

Verily, I tell you truly that the book which has been read upon you, had it been read upon the Christians, they would not have perished; and the blessing and guidance which has been vouchsafed to you, had it been extended to the Jews, in place of the Torah, many of their sects would not have ended by denying the Day of Judgment. Realise, therefore, the value of the blessing bestowed on you. It is a precious blessing, and a great treasure. Without the Holy Qur’an, the whole world would have been no better than a dirty clot of half formed flesh. Indeed it is a book as compared to which all other scripture and sources of guidance amount to nothing at all. The Holy Qur’an can purify a man within a week, provided there is no attempt to get away from it in form or spirit. The Qur’an can make you like the Prophets, provided you do not try yourself to run away from it.
Apart from the Holy Qur’an what book is there at the very outset which has taught its readers a prayer like:

Guide us in the right path,
The path of those on whom
Thou hast bestowed Thy blessings…
(Ch.1:Vs.6-7)

And has thus held out to them a great hope, namely, the hope of the way being shown to them which would lead them to the attainment of those blessings which were bestowed on those who were of the Prophets, the *Siddeeqs* [truthful], the *Shuhada* [martyrs], and the *Saliheen* [pure]. Therefore elevate your resolve, and do not reject this invitation of the Qur’an when it calls you to work for attainment of the blessings given to the earlier peoples. God in fact is inclined to bestow on you even more. God has made you inherit all their spiritual and material substance, but until the Day of *Qiyamah* [Judgment] these will not pass away from you to anyone else. God will not keep you deprived of the blessing of Revelation, and of the tangible forms of communion generally spoken of as (*mukalamaat*) and (*mukhatabaat*). He will consummate all those blessings on you which He ever bestowed on others. But whosoever by way of insolence shall lie and shall claim to have received Revelation from Him, when in fact he had received no such Revelation, or claim that he had the honour of communion with God of the kind called *mukalamaah* and *mukhatabah*, when in fact no such honour had been bestowed upon him, then, with God and all His angels as my witness I declare, that such a one shall perish and be destroyed for having lied about his Creator and for having perpetrated a fraud.

**The Explanatory Position of the Sunnah**

The second instrument for guidance vouchsafed to the Muslims is the Sunnah, i.e., the measures adopted by the Holy Prophet(saw) with a view to the exposition of the Holy Qur’an and its being put into actual tangible practice. For instance, looking at the surface only, there appears to be no specification in the Qur’an of *rak’aats* [postures] in the case of the five daily obligatory prayers,
how many for what prayers, but the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet(saw) has made all these things very clear.

No one should fall into the error that the Hadith and the Sunnah are one and the same thing, for what is called the Hadith came to be collected a hundred and fifty years afterwards, while the Sunnah existed from the very outset side by side with the Holy Qur’an. After the Holy Qur’an, the greatest debt of gratitude the Muslims owe to anything is to the Sunnah. The obligation on God and His Apostle in regard to the guidance of mankind was only twofold, namely that by sending down the Holy Book, God by means of His word indicated His will and pleasure, in fulfillment of the demand inherent in the Divine Law; while the duty which developed upon the Holy Prophet(saw) was this that by putting it into actual practice he should clearly demonstrate it in all its aspects in actual operation. Therefore he transformed into action what had been said in the form of words, and by his actual practice solved a number of difficulties. It is not proper to say that this duty devolved upon the Hadith, since Islam had established itself upon the earth long before the Hadith came to be collected. Did not the people offer their prayers at the time when the Hadith had not yet been collected? Did they not pay the Zakat or perform the Hajj? Or, were they ignorant as to what was permissible for them and what was not?

Supportive Position of Hadith
Of course, the third means of guidance is the Hadith, because many points in regard to history, ethics and jurisprudence are to be found explained fully in it; and the great utility of the Hadith lies in the fact that it is a servant of the Qur’an and the Sunnah. Some people who are ignorant as to the real position of the Holy Qur’an, here assign to Hadith the position of a judge on the Qur’an, as did the Jews in regard to some of their traditions. We on the other hand look upon the Hadith as a servant of the Qur’an and the Sunnah, the existence of servants being in no way derogatory to the master, being in fact a sign of his importance and grandeur. The Holy Book is the Word of God, while the Sunnah is the act of the Holy Prophet(saw), the
Hadith being a supporting witness for the Sunnah. It is wrong to say (God forbid) that the Hadith is a judge on the Holy Qur’an. If there is any judge on the Holy Qur’an, it is the Holy Book itself. The Hadith, which in any case has an element of speculation in it, cannot be given a superior position, being no more than a supporting argument. The Qur’an and the Sunnah have done all the real work, the Hadith doing no more than supplying some additional verification. How can the Hadith be in the position of a judge for the Holy Qur’an?

The Holy Book and the Sunnah were extending guidance to mankind at a time when as yet there was no sign of the so-called judge. Therefore, never say that the Hadith is a judge on the Holy Qur’an; say rather that the Hadith supplies further supportive evidence for the Qur’an and the Sunnah. Of course the Sunnah, undoubtedly, is a thing which indicates the will of the Qur’an, and it signifies the path on which the Holy Prophet(saw) put his companions. The Sunnah is not a name for the things which came to be written and collected a hundred or a hundred and fifty years afterwards. These are called the Hadith. The Sunnah, on the other hand, is the practical example that has, from the very earliest beginning, existed, all along, in the practical actions of the Muslims, their number extending to thousands at the most conservative estimate. But even though in a great part of it the Hadith occupies the position of speculation, still, where it does not run counter to the Holy Qur’an, it deserves to be accepted, serving as a supporter for the Holy Qur’an and the Sunnah, with a large store-house of material, bearing on many Islamic questions.

Failure to appreciate the Hadith, therefore, is tantamount to cutting away a large part of the body of Islam. But of course, if a Hadith falls counter to the Holy Qur’an and the Sunnah, and counter to other Ahadith which are in accord with Holy Book, or it stands in opposition to the Sahih Bukhari, it should not be accepted, for acceptance thereof would imply rejection of the Holy Qur’an, and of all those Ahadith which stand in accord with the Holy Book. I am satisfied that no righteous person
would want to subscribe to such a belief. In any case give due recognition to Hadith and derive benefit from it to the fullest possible extent, for they come from the Holy Prophet(saw) and unless they are rejected by the Qur’an and the Sunnah, you should not reject them. You should adhere to the Hadith to such an extent that no action of yours, no pause, no performance, and no failure to perform any work, should be without basis in Hadith. But if there is a Hadith which stands in contradiction of what has been stated in the Qur’an, you should exercise your mind to reconcile it in interpretation; but where no such reconciliation is possible, the Hadith should be rejected and thrown aside, since it cannot be taken to have come from the Holy Prophet(saw). But if there is a weak Hadith, which stands, nevertheless, in accord with the Holy Qur’an, it is to be accepted, for the Qur’an has confirmed it.

Criterion for Judging Ahadith Embracing Prophecies
But if there is a Hadith embracing a prophecy which the Muhadditheen have adjudged as weak, while in your own time, or at some time earlier than yours, the prophecy contained in that Hadith has been fulfilled, then that Hadith has to be accepted as authentic, and all those who adjudged it weak and failed to accept it, thinking that it was a fabrication, will be held to have been in error. The number of Ahadith containing prophecies runs into hundreds, and most of these by the Muhaditheen have been held to be fabricated or defective. Therefore when one of these is fulfilled and you try to avoid the point, saying that you could not accept it since it was weak, or since this or that narrator in the link through which it had come was not a righteous man, then such a rejection on your part would be due to your faithlessness, for you would be rejecting a Hadith of which the reliability had been established by God, even to the extent of fulfilment of the prophecy contained in it.

Now suppose there are one thousand Ahadith of this kind, held to be weak and unacceptable by the Muhadditheen, but suppose the prophecies contained in them come
to be fulfilled, would you reject them, and also reject all the one thousand arguments in support of the veracity of Islam which the fulfilment of the prophecies in question stood for? If you do anything of the kind, you would become, thereby, enemies of Islam. Allah says: He does not reveal His ghaib (future) except when He chooses to do so to an Apostle. Therefore, to whom is a true prophecy to be attributed if not to a true Prophet? Is it not more in an accord with one’s righteousness of mind to say on such occasions that the Muhaddith in question had erred in so far as he had rejected as weak a Hadith which in fact was quite reliable? Or would it be more proper for us to say that in supporting a weak Hadith with the testimony of actual events God Himself had been guilty of an error? For you the guiding principle in any case should be that you follow even a weak Hadith, provided it is not counter to the Holy Qur’an and the Sunnah, or counter to other Ahadith in accord with the Holy Book.

However, great care is needed on this point, for it is a fact that there exist a large number of fabricated Ahadith which have caused a great deal of disruption in Islam. All the conflicting sects take their stand on this or that Hadith, as suits their needs, so that even such a clear and well-established question as of the prescribed obligatory prayers has given rise to extreme differences of views. Some cry amen in a loud voice, audible to others, while some hold this should be done in one’s own mind. Some follow the recitation of the Fatiha by the Imam with similar simultaneous recitation of the same on the part of the congregation, each in his own mind, while others believe that such recitation spoils one’s prayer and is, therefore, forbidden. Some hold their hands folded on the breast, while others hold them at the navel. The real cause of all these differences lie in the Ahadith [as the Qur’an states in Ch.23:V.54]

علَى حَزْبٍ يَبْلَغُ الْأَدْنَمَ
قَلْوُونَ

i.e. each group being pleased with what it has in its hand.
The great fast of Judaism is called **Yom Kippur** (Day of Atonement) and is probably the most important and awesome day of the Jewish year. It is observed on the first day of the seventh month of the Hebrew calendar. It is a day set aside to “afflict the soul,” to atone for the iniquities of the past year and to “Return to our Creator”. Many Jews who do not observe any other Jewish custom will refrain from work, fast and/or attend synagogue services on this day.

There are several minor fasts in Judaism, but Yom Kippur is the only fast day decreed in the Bible.

The Torah (The first 5 books of the Hebrew Bible revealed by God to Prophet Moses) calls the day **Yom HaKippurim** in the Book of Leviticus and decrees:

> ‘And the Lord spoke to Moses saying: On the tenth day of the seventh month, there shall be a day of atonement [for the children of Israel], it shall be a holy convocation unto you, and you shall afflict your soul. And you shall do no work in that same day for it is a day of...’

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**YOM KIPPUR, the Jewish Fast**

*By Mehri Niknam MBE*

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atonement to make atonement for you before your God.’
(Leviticus 23:23-28)

The rites for Yom Kippur are set forth in the sixteenth chapter of Leviticus (cf. Exodus 30:10; Leviticus 23:27–31, 25:9 and Numbers 29:7–11). It is described as a solemn fast, on which no food or drink can be consumed, and on which all work is forbidden.

Abstaining from the pleasure of food is meant to improve one’s ability to focus on repentance. The Yom Kippur fast is a 25-hour fast that begins before sunset on the evening before Yom Kippur and ends after nightfall on the day of Yom Kippur.

Yom Kippur is a complete Sabbath; no manner of work (such as driving, lighting of fire, carrying of items in public, cooking, shopping, buying or selling, etc.) can be performed on that day. It is well known that you are supposed to refrain from eating and drinking, even water. However, spiritual elevation is a pre-requisite for true repentance. One way to achieve spiritual elevation is to abstain from the physical luxuries. Therefore, the Talmud (the Book of Jewish Oral Law written by great Sages and Rabbis) also specifies additional restrictions based on interpretations of the Hebrew Bible. Bathing, anointing one’s body (with cosmetics, etc.), wearing leather shoes (one should not wear something which is made as the result of the death of a living animal) and engaging in sexual relations are all prohibited on Yom Kippur.

The fast of Yom Kippur is incumbent upon men and women. Boys and girls from the time they reach the age of majority, 13, are obligated to fast. However, there are exemptions. As always in Jewish law, the preservation of life overrules all other laws.

Therefore, any of the Yom Kippur restrictions can be lifted where a threat to life or health is involved. In fact, children under the age of nine and women in childbirth (from the time labour begins until three days after birth) are not permitted to fast, even if they want to. Older children and women from the third to the seventh day after childbirth
Yom Kippur, the Jewish Fast

may fast, but are permitted to break the fast if they feel the need to do so. These rules are Talmudic, based on and interpreted from verses in the Torah.

Yom Kippur has a highly spiritual aspect called Teshuvah (Returning to the Creator in repentance) which is its highest aim and achievement. It is an opportunity granted by God in His Mercy, so that we may become aware of our iniquities and by admitting them before God, correcting our wrongs and asking forgiveness with a contrite heart, we may return once more to “Our Father, Our King, the Creator”.

Traditionally the spiritual preparation for Yom Kippur starts 40 days before, when the custom of waking up in the early morning hours to recite Selihot (prayers of asking for forgiveness) starts. Although this traditions may not be strictly observed nowadays in the West, it is nevertheless, observed on a special evening called Selihot, when Jews attend a special all night service at the synagogue in preparation for Yom Kippur.

Forgiveness in Judaism, however, cannot be taken for granted. There are two kinds of forgiveness: from the wrongs we have committed against God and the wrongs we have committed against our fellow human beings. Therefore, Yom Kippur atones only for iniquities between us and God, not for the wrongs committed against another person. These rules are based on the Torah as explained by the Talmudic rabbis. To atone for the wrongs against another person, we must first seek reconciliation with that person, righting the wrongs we had committed against them if possible. That must all be done before Yom Kippur.

Yom Kippur occurs on the tenth day after the Jewish New Year called Rosh Hashanah. The ten days in between the New Year and Yom Kippur are known as the Days of Awe. Traditionally, we believe that on Rosh Hashanah God makes judgement for each one of us, putting before us the possibility of whether we live or die –and the manor of the death – in the year to come. “On Rosh Hashanah judgement is made, on Yom Kippur judgement is sealed” (Talmudic). Those, whose time has come to die, will die, but for
the rest of us, we are granted ten
days – Days of Awe – to recognise
our iniquities, correct those
committed against our fellow
human beings and, ask God to
forgive us for iniquities committed
against God. At the end of Yom
Kippur God’s judgement is
“sealed”.

This year Rosh Hashanah is on
Saturday 19th of September
starting at sunset on Friday 18th.
Yom Kippur starts on Sunday 27th
September at sunset and ends
Monday 29th, one hour after
sunset.

After 25 hours of afflicting our
soul, of fasting and standing most
of the time during the all-day
synagogue service, after long
hours of praying and leaving one’s
soul bare before

“Sovereign of existence”, after
shamefully admitting one’s short-
comings, mistakes, wrongdoings
and iniquities before “The
Merciful One who is Slow to
anger and Forgives”, as the
shadows lengthen and the day
draws to an end we read:

‘When you call Me and come
to pray to Me, I will hear you
When you seek Me, you will
find Me
When you search for Me in
your heart
I shall let you find Me.’
Jeremiah 29:12-14

And the service ends with the blast
of the Shfar (Ram’s horn) blown in
remembrance of the ram which was
provided by the Merciful God to
replace the sacrifice of Isaac by
Abraham, and all the Jewish people
in the world declare the chief
Jewish prayer and belief, “with all
our heart and all our soul and all
our might” Deuteronomy 6:5:

“Hear O Israel [Bani Esra’il], the
Lord is our God, the Lord is
ONE” Deuteronomy 6:4

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reproduced with prior permission of
the author or the Joseph Interfaith
Foundation.)
The Muslims believe Laylatul-Qadr to be a night of great blessing when Almighty God showers His Mercy upon those of His believers who sincerely and faithfully love and obey His Will. It is a night which is commonly associated with the revelation of the Holy Qur'an but also has other meanings which are all deeply rooted in Almighty God’s attribute of Rahmaniyyat (Grace). The above verses of the Holy Qur’an (Ch.97:Vs.1-6) indicate that Layla-tul-Qadr literally means the ‘Night of Decree/Power’ and that it is a night of greater value than a thousand months (1000 being a metaphor for the highest numerical figure in Arabic). During this blessed night the angels are said to descend upon earth and help to breathe a new life into mankind. We also know from another place in the Holy Qur’an (Ch.44:V.4) that it is a ‘Blessed Night’ (Laylatin Mubarakatin).

Hadhrat Mirza Bashir-ud-Din Mahmud Ahmad, the second Khalifa of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community, writes in his book of Qur’anic commentary (Al-Tafsir al-Kabir) that the words ‘Therein descend angels and the Spirit’ (tanazzal al-mala’ikah wa al-ruhu feeha) mean:

**In the name of Allah, the Gracious, the Merciful.**
*Surely, We sent it down during the Night of Decree.*
*And what shall make thee know what the Night of Decree is?*
*The Night of Decree is better than a thousand months.*
*Therein descend angels and the Spirit by the command of their Lord with Divine decree concerning every matter:*
*It is all peace till the rising of the dawn.*
*(Ch.97:Vs.1-6)*
‘...the Angels of God descend to meet and satisfy every religious need and to remove all obstacles and impediments from the way of the expansion and spread of the new Message.’

(Al-Tafsir al-Kabir, p.2859)

Another traditional view of the chapter of al-Qadr is that it refers to the night in which the Holy Qur’an was revealed to the Holy Prophet(saw), when he recited the blessed verses which will forever live in the hearts of all Muslims:

Convey thou in the name of thy Lord Who created,
Created man from a clot of blood.
Convey! And thy Lord is Most Generous,
Who taught man by the pen,
Taught man what he knew not.
(Ch.96:Vs.2-6)

Furthermore, this chapter represents the entire ministry of the Holy Prophet(saw) as the Holy Qur’an was revealed to him throughout the latter part of his life. Further elucidating on this subject, Hadhrat Khalifatul Masih II(ra) has explained that the words ‘one thousand months’ (alfi shahr) have several meanings two of which include:

• As Layla-tul-Qadr is better than a countless number of nights this signifies that the period of the Holy Prophet(saw) is greater than all other periods combined; and

• The rich content and value of the Holy Qur’an is greater in worth than the combined research and efforts of all learned men. This definition is derived from the word “shahr” (month/s) which can also mean learned man/men.

Layla-tul-Qadr also has a wider understanding and can signify that when mankind reaches a point of darkness, and is in need of reform, Almighty God answers its need by sending a new reformer. In relation to this a period of 1000 months roughly amounts to a century and can thus be linked to the saying of the Holy Prophet(saw):
‘Verily God will continue forever to raise for this Ummah (community) in the beginning of every century one who Will restore for it its faith.’

(Abu Dawud, Kitabul Fitan)

Almighty God is described in the Holy Qur’an as the Ever Merciful (al-Rahim) and such a verse personifies the magnificence of Allah’s infinite Mercy which is safeguarded for the remainder of mankind’s existence. Further expanding on this point Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the Promised Messiah and Imam Mahdi(α) writes:

“Inna anzalnahu fee Laylatul Qadr’, This Night, according to its common interpretation, is a Blessed Night, but some of the verses of the Holy Qur’an indicate that the condition of the darkness of the world is also a Night of Decree on account of its hidden qualities. In that condition of darkness, sincerity and steadfastness, and piety and worship, have great value in the estimation of God. It was because of that condition of darkness which at the time of the advent of the Holy Prophet(س) had arrived at its climax and demanded the descent of a Grand Light, that observing this dark condition and having mercy on the creatures afflicted with darkness, there was an upsurge in the attribute of Rahmaniyyat and heavenly blessings addressed themselves to the earth. That dark condition became blessed for the world and the world thereby received a grand mercy so that the Perfect Man and the Chief of the Prophets, like whom there had been no one, nor ever will be, came for the guidance of the world and brought that bright Book for the world whose match no eye has beheld. It was a great manifestation of spiritual perfection of God that, at a time of gloom and darkness, He sent down a Grand Light which is named the Furqan
and which distinguishes between truth and falsehood and which demonstrated the coming of truth and the disappearance of falsehood. It descended upon the earth when the earth had become spiritually dead and land and sea had been greatly corrupted. By its descent it accomplished that to which God Almighty has pointed in the verse: *A‘lamu ann-Allaha yuhyi al-Arda ba‘da mawtiha*.

That is to say: The earth had died and God revived it afresh. It should be remembered that the descent of the Holy Qur’an which took place for the purpose of reviving the earth came about through the upsurge of the attribute of *Rahmaniyyat*. This is the attribute which sometimes manifests itself in a material way and causes the rain of mercy to descend upon dry land and thus makes provision for those who are afflicted with famine. The same attribute sometimes surges up spiritually and has mercy on the condition of those who are hungry and thirsty and near unto death on account of misguidance and error, and lack the nourishment of truth and righteousness which is the source of spiritual life. Thus the Gracious One, as He bestows nourishment upon the body at the time of need, so of His Perfect Mercy He provides spiritual nourishment also at the time of need.’

(Barahin-e-Ahmadiyya, Ruhani Khaza’in, Vol. 1, pp414-435, footnote 11)

The ultimate effect of a reformer being sent to the earth is that the world enters a period of peace, as is alluded to in the concluding verse of Surah al-Qadr. Hadhrat Khalifatul Masih II(ra) explains:

‘The word ‘salam’ (peace) stands for a complete sentence meaning, “it is all peace.” In the time of a Prophet or Divine reformer a
peculiar kind of mental peace of equanimity descends upon the believers amidst hardships and privations. The heavenly happiness which inspires believers at that time transcends all material and sensuous joys.

The expression “hiya hatta matla’ al-fajr” (It is all peace till the rising of the dawn) means, the passing of the night of hardships and the rising of the dawn of predominance and ascendancy of the cause of truth.’

(Layla-tul-Qadr, p.2860)

In another Hadith the Holy Prophet(saw) advises as to when one should seek Layla-tul-Qadr saying:

‘Search for the Night of Qadr in the odd nights of the last ten days of Ramadan’

(Sahih al-Bukhari, Vol.3, Bk.32, No. 234)

The Promised Messiah(as) is known to have said that should the 27th night of Ramadan fall upon a Friday then this will often be Layla-tul-Qadr.

In light of the above blessed narrations it is incumbent on each Muslim to increase his or her worship during the last ten days of Ramadan and pray sincerely that he or she may benefit from the fruits of Layla-tul-Qadr. In his weekly Friday Sermon on the subject of Layla-tul-Qadr (14 Nov, 2003), Hadhrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad, the Fifth Khalifa of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community, stressed the

Layla-tul-Qadr – ‘Night of Decree’

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need for every believer to pay special attention to not only the last ten nights of Ramadan but indeed to every night. Hadhrat Khalifatul Masih V (may Allah strengthen his hand) indicated that one reason behind the ambiguity of which night Laylatul-Qadr falls upon is to ensure that believers spend all of the last ten nights in worship and do not simply ritualise one appointed night.

Hadhrat Khalifatul Masih V added that the Holy Prophet(saw) said that whoever offers all his or her prayers during the month of Ramadan in congregation gleans a large portion of Laylatul-Qadr. Therefore, in order to properly experience this night one must maintain the highest standard of righteousness throughout the month, discharging the dues of almighty God and the dues of mankind. Hadhrat Khalifatul Masih V explained that although certain Hadith signify the appearance of signs (like flashes of light) to verify that one has experienced Laylatul-Qadr, these signs are not obligatory to Laylatul-Qadr. Indeed the Holy Prophet(saw) would gather immense resolve and determination at the start of the last ten days of Ramadan, spending these days in the worship of God. He enjoined us to engage profusely in the remembrance of Allah during these days, to glorify Him and to exalt His greatness.

To support a Muslim in this effort the following prayer (dua) to be recited on Laylatul-Qadr was conveyed to Hadhrat ‘A’ishah(rna) by the Holy Prophet(saw):

Allahumma innaka ‘afuwwun tuhibbul ‘afwa fa’fu ‘anni

‘O Allah! You are the Great Pardoner; You love to pardon. So please pardon me.’

(Ibn Majah, Kitabul Du’aa)

May we each engage in sincere worship during this blessed month and incur the Mercy of Almighty God, God willing.
‘Eid-ul-Fitr  By Hadhrat A. R. Dard(ra)

(Adapted from The Review of Religions, May 1926, Vol. XXV, No.5)

‘Eid is a day when all the Muslims of the world, in India, Africa, Arabia, Egypt, Syria, China, and in every other country, are very, very happy and glad. They get up early in the morning at 3 or 4 o’clock, prepare the choicest dishes, and by the time the sun rises, young children can be seen going briskly hither and thither, carrying some sweet gifts to their neighbours, friends and relations. After their bath on this morning everyone puts on the best clothes they can afford, scented with perfumes, and the streets are variegated with beautiful fancy-coloured dresses. Even serious-minded people yield at this time of the year to some of the innocent beckonings of gaiety. Drinking, music, and dancing are not allowed in Islam, but people entertain one another in the most sumptuous manner. It is usual on this day to embrace one another and say, “‘Eid Mubarak, ‘Eid Mubarak,” i.e., “Happy ‘Eid congratulations, happy ‘Eid congratulations!” Special fairs are held in many places and these various expressions of happiness are continued late into the night, till at last their gaiety is spent, and the festival comes to a close.

It may be asked why a Muslim is happy at ‘Eid. Most Muslims are happy on that day perhaps, because they look upon it as a festival which has been celebrated annually from the very time of their birth, and has some sweet associations attached to it. Some might be happy merely because the world looks happy. Some indifferent ones would perhaps say they are happy because now that the month of fasting is over they can eat and drink whenever they like, and live comfortably as they could before the month of Ramadan. But it is not really so, for Ramadan is not a burden upon the Muslims. If it were so, the early Muslims would not have asked the Holy Prophet(saw) after it about the blessings of the other months. They would not have been eager for its arrival. The Holy Qur’an records:
They ask you about the new moons (after the month of Ramadan), say, they are times appointed for the benefit of the people.
(Ch.2:V.190)

The Holy Qur’an was revealed, as is well-known, in the month of Ramadan, and the followers of the Holy Prophet(saw) had had such spiritual exaltation that in order to make further progress they inquired if such was the case with the other months as well. This surely shows clearly that fasting was not regarded as a burden by the Muslims.

The ‘Eid may be understood to commemorate, in a sense, the beginning of the spiritual ministry of the Holy Prophet(saw), for the Holy Qur’an having been revealed in the month of Ramadan, the Holy Prophet(saw) began to preach the truth to the world from this day. The Ramadan marks an epoch in the history of mankind because in it was revealed the best of guidance for all ages and all climes, and to the individual Muslim it is a valuable opportunity for great spiritual progress. So the ‘Eid which

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terminates it is a joy to all, but it entails a responsibility also for the preaching of Islam to the four corners of the world.

The Arabic language has a peculiarity of its own. Every word has in itself some reason for the meaning it conveys. The word “‘Eid” implies a great event, which naturally causes anxiety; and this is another meaning of the same word. The beginning of the prophetic career of Muhammad(saw) is a very great event, and its celebration would entail anxious responsibility upon all the Muslims for the giving of the glad tidings to the world.

As the ‘Eid comes after the month of fasting, it can offer little pleasure for a person who has not observed the fast properly. So for such a person the ‘Eid is a sorrow; and this also is a meaning of the same word. It is an opportunity lost, and therefore a sorrow. But it cannot be a sorrow to those who observe the fasts regularly, make the best of this precious opportunity and make a special progress spiritually, for they have a reason to be happy; therefore, the word ‘Eid generally means in the Arabic literature a happiness that is renewed every year because Muslims collectively are expected to observe the fasts.

But ‘Eid has another meaning as well, for it means a day on which people remember and worship their God. This shows that there is nothing in the day itself that causes sorrow, happiness or anxiety. It is only an occasion and an opportunity, and not a sort of superstition attached to the day. This meaning has the same two aspects, for it is a joy to those who worship and glorify their Creator on this day, and it is a sorrow for those who waste it away in the satisfaction of their lower desires. And it is this aspect of ‘Eid upon which the Holy Prophet(saw) has laid great stress.

Ordinarily a Muslim has to pray five times a day but on the day of ‘Eid he is required to offer a special prayer in the morning to show that it is a pleasure only for those who find their happiness in the remembrance of God. In the prayer itself special stress is laid on the glorification of God. We begin our daily prayers by saying, “Allahu Akbar” (God is Great) once, but in
‘Eid prayers we say, “God is Great” seven times in the first part, and five times in the second. While going to the place of ‘Eid prayers, a Muslim is recommended to say, “Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar La Ilaha Illallah”, meaning that God is great, God is great, and that there is nothing beside Him worth loving, obeying and worshipping. This aspect is emphasised by another commandment of the Holy Prophet(saw), Islam really means the complete surrender of man to God. It is a religion of submission rather than of compulsion, and the smallest details of its teachings are based upon this one principle. Fasting does a man good only when he keeps fasts with a view to seeking the pleasure of God in obedience to His commandment. Otherwise it is lost labour, because Islam does not allow asceticism. It is this spirit of obedience to God which consecrates the month of Ramadan and places it above ‘Eid day and it is, therefore, a sin to fast at that time, just as it is sinful to pray when the sun is rising or setting. All this moreover tends to show that a Muslim is one who completely submits all his desires to God, and finds his pleasure in the love and will of God alone. He does not live to eat, drink, and make merry, but he eats and drinks to live, love and worship his Lord.

In the Holy Qur’an the word ‘Eid occurs only once: “Jesus(as) the son of Mary(as) said, ‘O God our Lord, send down to us food from heaven which should be to us an ‘Eid to the first of us and to the last of us. (Ch.5:V.115)” This seems to refer to the well-known petition for daily bread in the Lord’s prayer. The prayer is granted, and the followers of Jesus(as) are favoured with the riches of this world so that it is almost an ‘Eid for them every day. They possess everything in this world, wealth, riches and power; they dress, eat, drink, and enjoy every day as a Muslim would do on the day of ‘Eid. But the Holy Qur’an sounds a note of warning for the Christians, which is in fact a warning for all those who enjoy themselves a little too much: “Surely I will send it down to you,” it says, “but whosoever shall disbelieve afterwards from among you, surely I will chastise him with a chastisement with which I will not chastise any one among the nations”. (Ch.5:V.116)
Finally, the word ‘Eid means a day in which people gather together, and it is this which gives the Muslim celebration of ‘Eid a much deeper significance. Islam is a religion of unity as it is preeminently of peace and love, unity of God as well as of man. God being One and only One wants to make all men at one with Him, and Islam aims at uniting mankind as a string unites pearls. Every teaching of Islam has at its root this spirit of love, peace and unity. The five daily prayers offered in congregation symbolise unity. There are hundreds and thousands of associations and unions in the world established for the realisation of some common object, but there is not a single institution which holds its meetings five times daily in a manner which expresses the best of love, peace and unity of purpose. Look at the way Muslims stand in prayer: they make lines, the rich and the poor, the high and the low, the master and the servant, the father and the son, the mother and the daughter, all standing in the same way facing the same thing and doing the various movements involved all together and at the same time. By coming in such close contact so often in the day, with the same purpose and object in view, they not only come in contact physically, but are also united mentally and spiritually. Facing towards the Ka’aba also signifies the unity of purpose. To create love, sympathy and affection among men it is necessary that people should see one another, and it is to afford suitable opportunities for this purpose that Muslims are enjoined to pray five times daily by gathering together in their local mosques.

But as it is not easy and practicable for all the Muslims living in a city to assemble five times daily in one place. Therefore, it is taught that they should attend the Friday prayers every week and thus come together and pray together. It was not possible for the neighbouring country people to come every week to the city. Islam appointed two occasions in the year for bringing the inhabitants of a city and its neighbouring country people together, and the ‘Eid-ul-Fitr forms one of them, ‘Eid-ul-Adha being the second. But Islam, being a universal religion, is not confined to a particular locality or city. It is a
religion for all mankind. Therefore, in order to unite all men, God has commanded that the Muslims of all the world living in any part of the globe should hold their meeting at the time of Hajj (the pilgrimage) once a year in Makkah, the birthplace of their religion, so that thus worshipping their Lord together they may be afforded the opportunity of discussing and deciding every year matters of international importance with a view to spreading and maintaining peace, amity and goodwill among all men, whatever their colour, race or country. And all this is done in loving obedience to God so that His name alone may be glorified and exalted here below.

It may also be added that if peace were ever required in the world now is the time. The progress of science is uniting men of all countries. The barriers of time and space, once considered absolutely impassable, are broken, conquered and shortened day by day, and the establishment of world-peace is engrossing the attention of all civilised people, and the day is nigh, nay, it is already at hand, when all the world will become as one big city. A scientist prophesied the other day that within 100 years there would be only one language in the world and only one religion. “The old order changeth yielding place to new,” According to the prophecies of the Holy Qur’an we believe that, Islam will prevail in the end because it surpasses all other religions in its universality. God wants to unite mankind, and for this purpose He has sent a special Messenger at whose blessed hands His wish is to be fulfilled, and to Whom He has given the name of “Prince of Peace.” Let us, therefore, cease from our quarrels and strifes, for it is no time for them. Let us obey God and join the fold of Ahmad who is a servant of the Holy Prophet Muhammad(saw), so that we may hasten the coming of the real ‘Eid of world peace and unity for which all the various institutions of Islam are but signposts and symbols.
The burqa or hijab, an all-enveloping garment worn by Muslim women that leaves only the eyes exposed, has hit the headlines again! In an historical address to parliament on Monday, 22nd June, French President Nicolas Sarkozy strongly criticised the wearing of the burqa by Muslim women in France:

“The problem of the burqa is not a religious problem. It is an issue of freedom and dignity of women. This is not a religious symbol, it is a sign of subservience, it is a sign of lowering. I want to say solemnly, the burqa is not welcome in France. We cannot accept in our country women trapped behind a fence, cut off from social life, deprived of any identity. This is not the idea that we have of the dignity of women.”

The debate over Muslim women’s apparel is not new. In 2004, France passed a law banning students from conspicuous religious items, including Muslim headscarves, in schools. In December 2008, the European Court of Human Rights unani-
mously ruled that there was no human rights violation when a French school expelled two students for refusing to remove their headscarves. Last July, a Muslim woman’s citizenship application was denied because she had reportedly failed to assimilate to French culture and she practised a type of Islam found incompatible with French values.

So what does Islam say about the wearing of the veil. According to the Holy Qur’an, women:

...should pull down upon them their outer cloaks from their heads over their faces. That is more likely that they may thus be recognised and not molested. And Allah is Most Forgiving, Merciful.

(Ch.33:V.60)

And say to the believing women that they restrain their looks and guard their private parts and that they display not their beauty or their embellishment except that which is apparent thereof, and that they draw their head coverings over their bosoms, and that they display not their beauty or their embellishment save to their husbands...

(Ch.24:V.32)

Other religious texts also speak of veiling:

‘When Rebekah raised her eyes, she caught sight of Isaac and she swung herself down from off the camel. Then she said to the servant, ’Who is that walking in the field to meet us?’ and the servant said ’It is my master’. And she proceeded to take a head cloth and to cover herself.’

(Genesis: 24:64-65)

‘But every woman that prays or prophesies with her head uncovered shames her head for it is one and the same as if she were a (woman) with a shaved head. For if a woman does not cover herself let her also be shorn; but if it is disgraceful for woman to be shorn or shaved, let her be covered.’

(1 Corinthians: 11:5-6)

The Bible then treats the wearing of a veil as an inherently righteous undertaking. Perhaps President
Sarkozy should look more closely at pictures of the Virgin Mary in the famous French gallery, the Louvre. He will note that she is often depicted in works of art with her head covered. Likewise it used to be obligatory upon Catholic women to don a headscarf while attending the church service. Today Christian nuns and Amish women continue to cover their heads.

The extent to which a Muslim woman covers her face may vary according to her situation and practical needs. However, the act of veiling is not considered a disgrace or a hindrance for a woman. Instead it is seen as honouring her and freeing her from the bondage of society and the obstacles that prevent her intellectual, moral, and spiritual advancement.

Veiling only becomes a sign of subservience when it is used by men to prevent women from fully participating in daily life. Sadly, some Muslim countries have allowed the perpetration of this belief through their cruel treatment of women. However, it must be noted that there is no law in Islam that punishes a woman for not veiling. It is her choice, not a sanction of her sexuality to be imposed by a man.

France’s problems with Europe’s largest group of Muslims are not because of the veil but rather social issues. The unemployment rate for immigrants and their French-born children is higher than the national average. Many children of immigrants complain of discrimination, saying they get passed over for jobs because they have “foreign-sounding” names. This frustration of many North African and black immigrants was evident in France’s three-week wave of riots in 2005.

France needs to engage in dialogue with its Muslim communities. But banning the burqa is not the way to do this. Indeed by deciding for these Muslims women that the burqa is a mark of subservience, he, like the Muslim men who force them to wear it, will be guilty of exerting his rights over theirs, hardly an expression of respecting the dignity of women.

Ban the Burqa?
Intimate Human Relationships
Healthy living is very closely related to intimate human relationships. Human beings are social animals and live in clusters and communities. There are close family members, followed by tribes and clans, communities and villages, towns and cities, nations and countries and finally the whole human race that form a link. If this concept of one closely linked human race is recognised universally, and properly utilised, then peace, prosperity, health and happiness will prevail over the whole world. The human relationship within the immediate family of a person is, however, where it all starts.

The Role of the Mother
The mother has a pivotal role in all human relationships as she:

- conceives the baby
- keeps it in the womb for 9 months
- gives birth after enduring great pains and considerable danger to her own life
- nurses on her breast milk or otherwise feeds the newborn
- helps it to grow and become strong and independent

What health risks are incumbent at each stage? What do we know about this from modern science and the guidance found in the Holy Qur’an?

The Conception
This is a precarious time and although, in the majority of cases, everything turns out fine, much can go wrong at this stage.
Modern science has shown that the human embryo is made up of a female egg being fertilised by a male sperm, and each bit contributes to half of the characters of the individual. The embryo then grows and gets implanted into the womb of the mother, where it continues to grow further. It passes through several stages during which various cells of the dividing embryo specialise and start forming different tissues of the body such as the skin, muscles, bones, internal organs, brain and the limbs. This process continues throughout pregnancy. The Qur'an states:

*We have created man from a mingled sperm-drop*
(Ch.76:V.3)

*Then we placed him as a drop of sperm in a safe depository; then We fashioned the sperm into a clot; then We fashioned the clot into a shapeless lump; then We fashioned bones out of this shapeless lump; then We clothed the bones with flesh; then We developed it into another creation. So blessed be Allah, the Best of creators.*
(Ch.23:Vs.14-15)

*He creates you in the wombs of your mothers, creation after creation, in threefold darkness.*
(Ch.39:V.7)

So what can go wrong at this stage? And what can a mother do to give birth to a healthy baby? These are vital questions and from our present knowledge of embryology we understand them much better now than at any other time in human history.

**Genetic Diseases**
Genetic diseases often occur if the genes forming the embryo are defective. The genes exist in pairs; if one gene is defective, but the other is healthy and the two combine, the individual inheriting the defective gene may not display symptoms of the disease at all and appears entirely healthy. On the other hand if both the genes are defective the
individual suffers from full manifestations of the disease and becomes seriously ill. Very often such embryos do not even survive and abort spontaneously. So the correct selection of the sperm to fertilise an ovum is an important matter and must be considered at the time of the marriage. This is now a well-developed science and genetic counselling is often advised before marriage to couples with a family history of certain diseases. The genetic make up of close relatives like parents and siblings is often very similar and the offspring of such mating have a much greater chance of inheriting a pair of defective genes and thus being borne with a serious genetic illness. This is referred to as incest and can cause a lot of ill health and diseases. However, in most societies and countries of the world this sort of practice is unacceptable and considered to be illegal. The Holy Qur’an gives the following guidance in this matter:

Forbidden to you are your mothers, and your daughters, and your sisters, and your father’s sisters, and your mothers’ sisters, and brother’s daughters, and sister’s daughters, and your foster-mothers that have given you suck, and your foster-sisters, and the mothers of your wives, and your step-daughters, who are your wards by your wives unto whom you have gone in – but if you have not gone in unto them, there shall be no sin upon you – and the wives of your sons that are from your loins; and it is forbidden to you to have two sisters together in marriage, except what has already passed; surely, Allah is Most Forgiving, Merciful. (Ch.4:V.24)

It is also important to know the exact make up of the human embryo. Short of chromosomal studies it is very simple to discern if both the partners of mating are clearly identified. Hence, the following teachings in the Qur’an:
And forbidden to you are married women...
(Ch.4:V.25)

And come not near unto adultery; surely, it is a foul thing and an evil way.
(Ch.17:V.33)

This aspect of health is so important that women who are widowed or divorced are not allowed to get married again until enough time has elapsed to reveal any pregnancy that may have resulted from the previous husband, as the following verses indicate:

And the divorced women shall wait concerning themselves for three courses; and it is not lawful for them that they conceal what Allah has created in their wombs, if they believe in Allah and the Last Day...
(Ch.2:V.229)

And those of you who die and leave wives behind, these (wives) shall wait concerning themselves four months and ten days. And when they have reached the end of their period, no sin shall lie on you in anything that they do with regard to themselves according to what is fair. And Allah is aware of what you do.
(Ch.2:V.235)

This point becomes even clearer when we consider another verse that describes the separation of a couple bonded in marriage ‘before’ they have touched each other. In such a case there is no waiting period for the woman to remarry:

O ye who believe! when you marry believing women and then divorce them before you have touched them, then you have no right against them with regard to the period of waiting that you reckon. So make some provision for them and send them away in a handsome manner.
(Ch.33:V.50)

Infections
Infections are closely related to
uninhibited intimate sexual relationship. They harm both participants in the act as well as their offspring. In the modern ‘civilised’ society we live in, unlimited sex is rampant in the adolescent as well as the mature age groups. The institution of marriage is laughed upon; men and women like to live as partners rather than as husband and wife. Same sex marriages are being recognised as the basic human right of the individual. Pornography is widely accessible in print, internet and all other media. Anal, vaginal and oral sex is considered by many to be the basic human right of the individuals to seek pleasure in their personal lives as they please. The following quote from www.en.wikipedia.org may give us some idea of the grave dangers of anal sex:

‘Among the diseases with which anal sex is associated are HIV, human papilloma virus (HPV) (which can increase risk for anal cancer), typhoid fever and various diseases associated with the infectious nature of fecal matter or sexual intercourse in general. Among these are: amoebiasis; chlamydia; cryptosporidiosis; E. coli infections; giardiasis; gonorrhea; hepatitis A; hepatitis B; hepatitis C; herpes simplex; human papilloma virus; Kaposi’s sarcoma-associated herpesvirus (HHV-8); lymphogranuloma venereum; public lice; salmonellosis; shigella; syphilis and tuberculosis.’

What is the modern medical advice to prevent these terrible diseases? The advice is the use of condoms and more condoms and more condoms and to have safer sex. The use of vaccines is also advocated where such vaccines are available. Vaccination of schoolgirls against human papilloma virus is an example as is hepatitis B vaccination in male homosexuals. Early consultation with the specialists if there is suspicion of contracting a sexually transmitted disease.
Gonorrhea, syphilis and HIV/AIDS played havoc with public health and caused untold misery before the treatment of these diseases was discovered. Multidrug resistant and completely resistant tuberculosis (MDR/XDR TB) is a particular problem in those suffering from immune deficiency related to HIV/AIDS infection equally in the third world countries like India or the developed countries like the United States.

The guidance in the Holy Qur’an to prevent all these problems is comprehensive and foolproof. Intimate relationship between individuals is governed by regulations of marriage and is outlined below.

**The Sanctity of the Institution of Marriage**

The Holy Qur’an bases the human relationship on righteousness or ‘Taqwa’ as the following verses indicate:

_O ye people! fear your Lord, Who created you from a single soul and created therefrom its mate, and from them twain spread many men and women; and fear Allah, in Whose name you appeal to one another, and fear Him particularly respecting ties of relationship. Verily, Allah watches over you._

(Ch.4:V.2)

_O Ye who believe! fear Allah, and say the right word. He will bless your works for you and forgive you your sins. And whoso obeys Allah and His Messenger, shall surely attain a mighty success._

(Ch.33:Vs.71-72)

_O ye who believe! fear Allah; and let every soul look to what it sends forth for the morrow. And fear Allah; verily Allah is Well-Aware of what you do._

(Ch.59:V.19)

According to Islamic tradition, the above verses of the Qur’an are recited at the time of the announcement of a wedding of a
couple. They emphasise the righteousness and fear of God, or Taqwa, five times as the basis of sexual relationship. They make it clear that Allah watches over all our deeds and knows all our intentions. They tell us to look after each other’s feelings, convey the absolute unadulterated truth in our statements and care for our coming generations because that is the ultimate purpose of sexual relationship.

About extra marital relationship and other immoral sexual acts the following verses, some of which have already been quoted, give full and comprehensive advice:

*And come not near unto adultery; surely, it is a foul thing and an evil way.*

(Ch.17:V.33)

*And who guard their chastity. Except from their wives or what their right hands possess, for then they are not to be blamed; but those who seek anything beyond that are the transgressors.*

(Ch.23:Vs.6-8)

The believers in Qur’an in the above verses are strongly advised to refrain from adultery, fornication, rape and any other extramarital sexual activity. They are also commanded to guard the usage of their private parts for sexual gratification as well as to be guided about the means to achieve such an object in the following verse:

*Say to the believing men that they restrain their eyes and guard their private parts. That is purer for them. Surely, Allah is well aware of what they do.*

(Ch.24:V.31)

The Arabic word translated as private parts in relation to the men in the above verse is ‘furuj’ and literally means a ‘hole’ or an ‘opening’. The same word is used in the following verse in relation to women. The best method of safeguarding the private parts is to restrain the eyes from viewing such things
that may excite their feelings. The ‘hijab’ for women is prescribed for this very reason and is mentioned in the following verse, thus pinpointing the relatives who are permitted to mingle with women freely.

And say to the believing women that they restrain their eyes and guard their private parts, and that they disclose not their natural and artificial beauty except that which is apparent thereof, and that they draw their head-coverings over their bosoms, and that they disclose not their beauty save to their husbands, or to their fathers, or the fathers of their husbands or their sons or the sons of their husbands or their brothers, or the sons of their brothers, or the sons of their sisters, or their women...
(Ch.24:V.32)

This teaching of the Qur’an is precise. It is based on the belief in the One, All-Knowing and Powerful God who watches over our actions at all times. He has given us the guidance for our own benefit and by following these instructions we reap immediate benefits. This is the Qur’anic way to prevent all those terrible diseases that are prevalent in the promiscuous society due to aberrant sexual behavior.

Risk of Cancer
Infection with Human papilloma virus has shown a close association with genital cancers. This is an infection that occurs in individuals engaged in uninhibited sexual activities with multiple partners. This infection can be prevented by vaccination and recently a drive to get all the sexually active schoolgirls vaccinated against this infection was carried out in some parts of America to reduce the risk in this most vulnerable population.

Righteous living as advocated by the Qur’an and quoted above will obviously eliminate this risk completely.
Another carcinogen sometimes mentioned is the smegma, the material that accumulates underneath the foreskin of uncircumcised men. This may cause cancer both in the males as well as their female partners. The practice of male circumcision traditional amongst the Muslims to remove the foreskin surgically probably reduces the risk of these cancers.

Pregnancy
Many things can go wrong during pregnancy as well. Many of the infections referred to above can affect the developing foetus during pregnancy. This leads to its infection resulting in either an abortion or a congenital illness in the newborn. It is, however, worth mentioning two important factors that are in the limelight these days. One is the consumption of alcohol by the pregnant mother and the other is the effect of active and passive smoking, on the health of the developing baby. Both these substances are commonly consumed or used by pregnant women in western societies and are extremely harmful to the foetus.

Alcohol consumption during pregnancy is particularly harmful and can cause a variety of defects ranging from low birth weight to full-blown foetal alcohol syndrome and brain damage. Similarly, smoking is also very harmful and also causes low birth weight and is associated with sudden infant death syndrome. Medical advice is to refrain from both alcohol and cigarettes during pregnancy.

The Qur’an gives precise guidance that has been discussed earlier, but to recap, the following verse at this stage may be useful:

\[\text{O ye who believe! wine and the game of hazard and idols and divining arrows are only an abomination of Satan’s handiwork. So shun each one of them that you may prosper.}\]

\[\text{(Ch.5:V.91)}\]
The consumption of intoxicants mentioned in the Qur’an include alcohol in all its different strengths and formulations, opium and its derivatives, marijuana and its derivatives and tobacco that produces a substance called ‘nicotine’ which is an addictive substance. The Qur’an recognises that alcohol has some benefits as well, and alcohol is permitted in Islam for medical purposes. However, because the disadvantages exceed its advantages, alcohol is prohibited. All these are forbidden to the believers and if the pregnant woman sticks to this guidance she and her baby will be safe from their harmful effects.

Is there any guidance about labour in the Holy Qur’an? There certainly is. This guidance is contained in the verses in relation to the delivery of Jesus(as) to Mary(as), his blessed mother. The instructions given to her in the following amazing verses contain all the guidance one requires:

And the pains of childbirth drove her unto the trunk of a palm-tree. She said, ‘O! would that I had died before this and had become a thing quite forgotten!’ Then he called her from beneath her, saying, “Grieve not. Thy Lord has placed a rivulet below thee; “And shake towards thyself the trunk of the palm-

Labour
Labour is a very distressing and painful experience for the mother. She can suffer physical damage, infections, psychological trauma and many other harmful effects during this stressful time. The newborn can also come to similar harm and suffer from infections and even death during or soon after delivery. A lot has been learnt about how to prevent all these problems in the modern times. Some of the important factors are good and proper hygiene and cleanliness, physical and moral support of the mother and the nutrition of the mother and the baby.
These verses mention the pains of childbirth and the support that is needed for women at that time. It mentions good hygiene as the driving principle of care during labour, and finally, the nutrition of the mother and the care of the baby which bring immediate solace and joy to both of them. These are the principles of care during and immediately after labour that are associated with enormous health benefits.

Caring for the Offspring
An important step that has a lasting effect on the health of an individual, and hence the society as a whole, is the proper care and nutrition of a newborn. There again is the very important role of the mother in maintaining the good health of the society. No one can perform this job as well as the mother; she alone is provided with the means to breastfeed the newborn. There was a time when artificial feeding was fashionable. No woman wanted to breastfeed her baby. They thought breastfeeding would cause them to lose their figure and make them look ugly. Moreover medical advice of the time was that formula feeding was healthier for the babies as it contained all the modern ingredients of diet necessary for the proper growth of the babies. However, with new research it transpired that the mother’s milk is the best source of nutrition for the newborn baby, and not only it supplied all the essential ingredients of the diet such as protein of the right type, calcium and vitamins, but also gave special protection against many diseases because of such immunoglobulin that the mother supplied in her milk. Moreover, breastfeeding the baby removed all the unnecessary fat that the mother had accumulated on the body during pregnancy. There are also many other health benefits of breastfeeding for the mother. Research has also shown that breastfeeding gives
more satisfaction to the babies, forming an intimate attachment to their mothers and that this helps them develop into more sensible, intelligent and satisfied individuals. The following quote from the American Academy of Pediatrics is self-explanatory:

‘Extensive research, especially in recent years, documents diverse and compelling advantages to infants, mothers, families, and society from breastfeeding and the use of human milk for infant feeding. These include health, nutritional, immunologic, developmental, psychological, social, economic, and environmental benefits.’

The practice of breastfeeding the newborn baby slowly came back for these reasons, though only reluctantly. The mother of the newborn, however, has to return to her day job and start earning the livelihood again for economic reasons. So, despite its advantages, the practice of nursing the baby is only short-lived and transient. The formula feeds and the nannies finally take over again.

So what is the guidance in the Qur’an about all these matters? The following quotation from the Qur’an outlines this:

And mothers shall give suck to their children for two whole years; this is for those who desire to complete the suckling. And the man to whom the child belongs shall be responsible for their (the mothers’) food and clothing according to usage. No soul is burdened beyond its capacity. The mother shall not make the father suffer on account of her child, nor shall he to whom the child belongs make the mother suffer on account of his child, and the same is incumbent on the heir. If they both decide upon weaning the child by mutual consent and consultation, there is no blame on them. And if you
desire to engage a wet nurse for your children, there shall be no blame on you, provided you pay what you have agreed to pay, in a fair manner. And fear Allah and know that Allah sees what you do.

(Ch.2:V.234)

This is very clear guidance. The nursing period is two years, but may be reduced by mutual parental consent. It is the father’s responsibility to provide food, daily needs and livelihood, and he is commanded to look after the mother and baby and provide for them. The following verse also points to the fact that men must take full responsibility of the economic needs of the family:

Men are guardians over women because Allah has made some of them excel others, and because they (men) spend of their wealth.

(Ch.4:V.35)

Bringing up children properly is given foremost priority and both parents are made responsible for this, with love, kindness and compassion. The following verse forbids believers to cause any harm to their children.

Kill not your children for fear of poverty. It is We Who provide for them and for you. Surely, the killing of them is a great sin.

(Ch.17:V.32)

Parental Respect
The Holy Qur’an commands the believers to recognise the role of their parents in their upbringing and be grateful and respectful to them. The following verses point out this fact quite clearly:

And We have enjoined on man concerning his parents — his mother bears him in weakness upon weakness, and his weaning takes two years — ‘Give thanks to Me and to thy parents. Unto Me is the final return.

(Ch.31:V.15)

And We have enjoined on man to be good to his...
parents. His mother bears him with pain, and brings him forth with pain. And the bearing of him and his weaning takes thirty months, till, when he attains his full maturity and reaches the age of forty years, he says, ‘My Lord, grant me the power that I may be grateful for Thy favour which Thou hast bestowed upon me and upon my parents, and that I may do such good works as may please Thee. And make my seed righteous for me. I do turn to Thee; and, truly, I am of those who submit to Thee.’ (Ch.46:V.16)

Thy Lord has commanded, “Worship none but Him, and show kindness to parents. If one of them or both of them attain old age with thee, never say unto them any word expressive of disgust nor reproach them, but address them with excellent speech. “And lower to them the wing of humility out of tenderness. And say, ‘My Lord, have mercy on them even as they nourished me in my childhood.’” (Ch.17:Vs.24-25)

So the teaching of the Qur’an in this respect is that not only is it necessary to look after one’s parents when they are old, but it is also essential to constantly pray for them that God has mercy on them.

The Spouse
The most intimate relationship one has is with one’s spouse. The health benefits to the individuals and the society at large of a long-term stable sexual relationship is well-documented. The institution of marriage is a guarantee to this. It gives individuals rights and benefits that are unparalleled by any other means. The principles of marriage are laid down by the Holy Qur’an and are mentioned in many places, but the following verses give the gist of the purpose or marriage according to Islam:

And lawful for you are chaste believing women and
chaste women from among those who were given the Book before you, when you give them their dowries, contracting valid marriage and not committing fornication nor taking secret paramours. (Ch.5:V.6)

So marriage is an undertaking in which men and women are bound together in an honest and just commitment in which there is no deceit or fornication. The following Arabic words, quoted from the above verse, ‘Muhsineena ghayra Musafiheena wa la Muttakhidhi Ahdan’ (meaning that marriage is a noble deed and is not meant for achieving carnal pleasure or making hidden paramours), make this point absolutely clear.

Further guidance is given about the way to treat one’s spouses where it is stated in the Holy Qur’an, ‘and consort with them in kindness’ (Ch.4:V.20).

The main purpose of intimate personal relations is to propagate the human race as is evident from the following verse:

O ye people! fear your Lord, Who created you from a single soul and created therefrom its mate, and from them twain spread many men and women. (Ch.4:V.2)

The following verse is also indicative of the same purpose:

Your wives are a tilth for you; so approach your tilth when and how you like and send ahead some good for yourselves... (Ch.2:V.224)

The feelings of pleasure, enjoyment, love and tenderness in the intimate personal relationship with one’s spouse is fully recognised as the following verse comprehensively indicates:

He has created wives for you from among yourselves that you may find peace of mind in them, and He has put love and tenderness between you. (Ch.30:V.22)
Despite this fact, however, seeking only pleasure is not the main object of having intimate personal relationship with one’s spouse. The following verse drives this message home:

**And they ask thee concerning menstruation. Say: 'It is a harmful thing, so keep away from women during menstruation, and go not in unto them until they are clean.'**

(Ch.2:V.223)

This is an amazing verse. It not only forbids sexual relationship with a woman during the seven to ten days of her menstrual cycle, but is also a tremendous lesson in personal hygiene, cleanliness and health. The woman is shedding her lining of the womb during this time and the inner surface of the womb is raw and vulnerable to infections and other harm. She is also not fertile at this time. So if females are merely a source of carnal pleasure and desires of the powerful male sex, then this lucid and unmistakable inhibition on their activities with their lawfully-wedded wives would not be present. This point also supports the argument that the Qur’an was revealed by an All-Knowing, Powerful God who cares for all His creatures whether they are males or females.

On the other hand, however, the importance of intimate relationships is acknowledged fully, and even during the sacred month of Ramadan, a time when Muslims devote their attention towards seeking the pleasure of Allah by fasting during the days and praying during the nights, permission for such a relationship is granted as the following verse shows:

**It is made lawful for you to go in unto your wives on the night of the fast. They are a garment for you, and you are a garment for them.**

(Ch.2:V.188)

Another amazing concept introduced in this verse is that of the spouses having the functions
of being a dress or garments for one another. This concept is most unique and novel. This verse has been discussed elsewhere in greater detail, but is worth mentioning here insomuch that it means that men are a source of protection, comfort, grace and joy for their wives; these are all the functions of the clothing. Likewise, the wives fulfil the same objects for their men and each one has to care for their dress to be tidy, clean, beautiful, and comfortable and at the same time hide all the defects of the body underneath that wears it.

**Divorce**

All human beings are different and sometimes two persons may not be compatible and, thus, unable to live together. This point is also recognised and separation of the couple in the form of divorce is made permissible in the Qur’an, but again justice, equity and human rights are safeguarded in this action. The following verse of the Qur’an point to these circumstances:

> Such divorce may be pronounced twice; then, either retain them in a becoming manner or send them away with kindness. And it is not lawful for you that you take anything of what you have given them (your wives) unless both fear that they cannot observe the limits prescribed by Allah. (Ch.2:V.230)

Divorce, though allowed, is considered to be distasteful, but all the regulations and conditions pertaining to and following such an action are described in detail in the Qur’an in several more verses. These include efforts of bringing an amicable solution to the problem, but if that cannot be found then separation should proceed in a cordial and just manner without usurping the rights of either party. The divorced women are allowed to marry again after the waiting period is over. The rights of the children and ownership of the property are all considered in detail. This teaching is
important for maintaining sanity and the psychological health of individuals.

**Objections to the Teachings of the Qur’an**

There are many objections to Qur’anic teachings on women’s rights, and the permission granted to men to be able to marry four women at any one time. But if you consider these teachings with a balanced view, it becomes clear that all the instructions given in the Qur’an regarding marriage are to keep the society free of corruption, disease and disharmony.

Equity, justice, human rights and human feelings are safeguarded at every step of these teachings. Observe the following verses that were revealed at a time when the Muslims were engaged in a struggle of life and death with their enemies who were trying to wipe out this new faith and its followers - physically attacking them right, left and centre. The believers were at the time engaged in continuous and never-ending battles with their opponents. Numerous men were killed in these battles, leaving behind their wives, children and property. In many battles the Muslims were also victorious and brought with them the prisoners of war, some of them women, of different faiths and cultures. So this very new religion right at the start of its life faced this tremendous danger of being wiped out by other cultures due to the mixture or conversion of large number of these men and women who knew nothing about the new enlightened teachings of Islam. With this in mind, the purpose of this guidance becomes crystal-clear to us and the relevant verses are as follows:

> And if you fear that you will not be fair in dealing with the orphans, then marry of women as may be agreeable to you, two, or three, or four; and if you fear you will not deal justly, then marry only one or what your right hands possess. That is the nearest
way for you to avoid injustice. (Ch.4:V.4)

And you cannot keep perfect balance between wives, however much you may desire it. But incline not wholly to one so that you leave the other like a thing suspended. (Ch.4:V.130)

These two verses read together make it quite clear that marriage is for providing protection to women – those who have been left behind as orphans or widows as well as to those who have entered society from warring factions as prisoners of war and have also lost their husbands or carers. Equity, justice and care for their physical, economical, moral, psychological, and mental needs are the important conditions imposed on anyone deciding to marry more than one wives. This is also made quite clear that such a justice and balance between wives may be a very difficult object to achieve; hence it is better just to stick to one wife.

In short all the above teachings of Qur’an keep individuals in society both physically and mentally healthy and provide them with proper support and help. These measures are also the means to replenish the human resources that are so valuable for the growth and progress of a society and may at such times of crisis and wars become depleted.

References:

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