

The Quest of a Curious Muslim

*Responses to commonly asked questions on
contemporary topics*

By

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&

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To:

Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad,

Khalifatul Masih V (may Allah be his Helper)

طَلَبُ الْعِلْمِ فَرِيضَةٌ عَلَى كُلِّ مُسْلِمٍ

Seeking knowledge is the duty of every Muslim.

—The Prophet Muhammad
(Peace and blessings of God be upon him)

A Note on Transliteration

References to the Holy Quran in this book are in the format, chapter number: verse citation. For example, 13:29 means that the quoted verse is the 29th verse of the 13th chapter of the Quran. The numbering counts *Bismillahir-Rahmanir-Rahim* (In the name of Allah, the Gracious, the Merciful) as the first verse in every chapter it appears.

The name of Prophet Muhammad^{sa} is followed by the symbol ^{sa}, which is an abbreviation for the salutation *sallallahu alayhi wa sallam* (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him).

The name of the Promised Messiah^{as} is followed by the symbol ^{as}, an abbreviation for *alayhis-salam* (on whom be peace).

The companions of Prophet Muhammad^{sa} and the Promised Messiah^{as} are followed by the symbol ^{ra}, which is an abbreviation for the salutation *radiyallahu anhu/anha/anhum* (may Allah be pleased with him/her/them).

The names of deceased pious Muslims who are not companions of the Holy Prophet^{sa} or of the Promised Messiah^{as} are followed by the symbol ^{rh}, which is an abbreviation for *rahmatullahi alayhi/ alayha/alayhim* (may Allah have mercy upon him/ her/ them).

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Farhan Iqbal and Shahrukh Rizwan Abid
Ramazan 2019

Foreword

Knowledge and wisdom are both the lost property of a believer. In a world bursting with greater curiosity than ever before, sometimes it can feel like we don't have the answers. However, as members of Majlis Khuddamul Ahmadiyya Canada, we are very blessed to have access to books written by Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad^{as}, the Promised Messiah, and the guidance of Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad, Khalifatul Masih V (may Allah be his Helper). Huzoor Anwar continuously guides Khuddam and lovingly helps them navigate the intellectual waters and dangerous moral landscape of the 21st Century.

Religious learning requires us to ask the tough questions, but this is no reason to ever hesitate. What is required is an unbiased and fair-minded investigation for the sake of understanding the truth. The super-surge of information that exists today through technology has never existed before.

As such, while access to information is at its peak, the chances of being misinformed are also at an all-time high. Hence, a believer always investigates with fairness and vigilance.

Today's day-and-age is teetering on a high wire of extremes – on one side are those who simply follow their whims and whatever social media tells them, and on the other are people who feel the need to over-intellectualize everything. Islam invites its followers to draw a beautiful balance between the two. It proposes a brilliant symbiosis between faith and reason, where, rather than being enemies, reason and faith are allies which help catapult a believer toward true knowledge of both his Creator and the creation.

In the Majlis-e-Shura of 2017, a forum was proposed for Khuddam to get answers to frequently asked questions on everyday topics. This book is part of a humble effort made by Majlis Khuddamul Ahmadiyya Canada to achieve this goal. It provides concise and comprehensive answers to questions in light of the Holy Quran, Ahadith, writings of the Promised Messiah^{as} and Khulafa-e-Ahmadiyyat. With the guidance and approval of Syedna Hazrat

Khalifatul Masih V (may Allah be his Helper), this book is being published at the occasion of Majlis-e-Shura 2019.

We would like to thank both the authors, Maulana Farhan Iqbal sahib and Maulana Shahrukh Rizwan Abid sahib, for finding and compiling the answers to the important questions discussed in this book. In the end, we also thank Allah the Almighty for enabling Majlis Khuddamul Ahmadiyya Canada to complete this humble undertaking, and we express our sincerest and heartfelt gratitude to our Beloved Hazrat Khalifatul Masih V (may Allah be his Helper) for guiding us in all our endeavors. We pray that Allah makes this book a source of knowledge and guidance for our Khuddam. Amen!

Zubair Afzal

Sadr Majlis Khuddamul Ahmadiyya Canada

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Introduction

It all begins in infancy. Not long after birth, every human being is curious. To know. To learn. To explore. Some of our questions drive our parents nuts. Yet, we keep on asking, and thinking, and making our own conclusions, then rethinking and changing the conclusions already made. Human beings therefore are curious creatures. Whether it is the simple childish desire to know what snow tastes like, or the ultimate question, “Who am I and where do I come from?”, curiosity is an inherent part of what makes us human. The Holy Quran calls those curious people who ponder over the creation of the heavens and the earth, the *ulul al-baab* (people of understanding). It is a statement of praise. No doubt, from age immemorial, curiosity is what has driven us forward in the fields of science, economics, sociology, psychology, and so on. The religion of Islam is no different. Learning Islam and advancing in spirituality requires curiosity. Being

Imams, we have been asked a variety of questions from Muslims and non-Muslims alike over the past several years. In this book, we share our answers to thirty commonly asked questions related to contemporary topics. Let us take you on this journey—this *quest*—to learn how Islam responds to the challenges of modern society.

PRAYER AND REPENTANCE

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Why do we pray?

Prayer is the most basic form of communication between human beings and God. It is a unique type of communication where a human being presents himself or herself before God and seeks His Grace and Mercy with utter humility. And God responds either through the acceptance of the prayer and directly acting in the person's life to fulfill his desire, or by disclosing His acceptance through visions or dreams, or even by directly bestowing revelations to him or her. In the Holy Quran, Allah says:

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٢﴾ الَّذِينَ هُمْ فِي صَلَاتِهِمْ خَاشِعُونَ ﴿٣﴾

That is, "Success does come to the believers, who are humble in their prayers" (Holy Quran, 23:2-3). In other words, according to the Quran, prayer is a means to success. What is required is that we are patient and persevere. Ultimately, success *does* indeed follow and can come in a variety of ways.

One way is that it becomes a safeguard against vices, and restrains us against indecency and evil (Holy Quran, 29:46). Just the act of worship five times a day is enough of a distraction from evil works that it becomes a safeguard. The Holy Prophet Muhammad^{sa} once said that the five daily prayers are an expiation of sins, meaning that any sins committed in the time period between one prayer and the next are essentially purged when the person offers the next prayer.¹ Similarly, he likened the five daily prayers to taking a shower five times a day, and said, “Allah wipes out the sins with them”.²

Another way that prayer helps is that it provides us comfort and anchors us in a world of so many distractions. The Quran reminds us:

الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَتَطْمَئِنُّ قُلُوبُهُمْ بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ ۗ أَلَا بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ
تَطْمَئِنُّ الْقُلُوبُ ۗ ﴿٢٩﴾

That is, “Those who believe, and whose hearts find comfort in the remembrance of Allah. Aye! It is in the remembrance of Allah that hearts can find

comfort” (Holy Quran, 13:29). At the most basic level, prayer is good—even *necessary*—for sound mental health. The human mind is in a state of constant contemplation. No second goes by when we are not thinking, planning, and even becoming anxious due to our thoughts. Prayer is meant to clear our minds so that we leave all our worldly anxieties and find an inner peace. This is first done in the form of congregational prayer but also enjoyed through *nawaafil*—prayers offered in seclusion and privacy.

The ultimate goal is to seek a spiritual union with God. God is *As-Salaam*—the ultimate source of peace. A true, sincere relationship built with Him ensures that we also partake of that peace. As the Promised Messiah^{as} has said, “Our paradise lies in our God. Our highest delight is in our God for we have seen Him and found every beauty in Him”.³

My prayers are not being answered. What do I do?

In life, we pursue goals and we try to achieve them through various means. Prayer should be seen as *one* of the means, not the *only* means. This is a subtle but very important difference that many people do not seem to understand. In his book *Blessings of Prayer*, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad^{as} discusses this subject at length. He compares prayer to the taking of medicine. If a person has a disease, he would use that medicine as a means to become healthy again. If the medicine does not work or lead to the right result, it would not mean that *all* medicines are ineffective. It would only mean that in that certain context, the prayer is not effective.⁴

As humble servants of God, our responsibility is to continue to pray. Accepting prayers or rejecting them is up to Allah. Sometimes, we may think of

something as good for us while it is not good for us at all. Allah says:

وَعَسَىٰ أَنْ تَكْرَهُوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ وَعَسَىٰ أَنْ
تُحِبُّوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ شَرٌّ لَّكُمْ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا
تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٢١٧﴾

That is, there are times when we dislike something but it is actually good for us, and there are times when we think that something is good and likeable, but in fact it is bad for us. Allah is the only One who knows all things (Holy Quran, 2:217). This verse prompts us to do an exercise. Think of those times when we prayed for something that turned out to be bad for us later on. Thinking of this from another angle, consider the example of a baby crying and pleading with his mother to let him put his hand in fire. Would the mother allow it?

There are other times when it is not in the Decree of Allah to grant what we are seeking from Him. For instance, if a person asks for his life to be extended to 1,000 years, that is a wish that will not

be granted as it is not part of the Decree of Allah, and not part of His grand and wise plan for creation. In fact, as the Promised Messiah^{as} has written, “There are times when saints and Prophets^{as} consider it disrespectful to pray for a certain thing”.⁵ When confronted with a trial, they would ask their heart if they should pray or not. If the heart is not inclined to pray, they would endure the trial instead. At such an occasion, it is best to be patient and recite much *Istighfar* in order to safeguard ourselves from any kind of sin. Hazrat Musleh Mau’ud^{ra} explains this with an analogy. God is our Creator and the Master or King of the universe. Even in worldly matters, when we take requests to the king or president, we do not expect that every one of our requests would be approved and granted. How then can we expect that the God of the universe will accept every one of our requests and prayers? If that had been the case—if God were required to accept every prayer—it would make Him our servant and the people the kings.⁶

Regardless, we should stay motivated and keep on praying to God. In his book *Bustan*, the Persian

poet, Sheikh Sa'di, writes the story of a worshipper which is also narrated by the Promised Messiah^{as} in *Malfuzat*. Whenever the worshipper would get up for prayer, he would hear the words, "Go, take your way, for your prayers are not acceptable at this door!". At one point, a disciple of his heard this voice from heaven and said, "Now that the verdict has passed, what is the use of this futile action?" The man wept profusely and said, "If I am to leave God, where else should I go? If accursed I am, then so be it. At least I am fortunate enough to be accursed". These discussions were still going on when a voice was heard saying, "You have been accepted"⁷ (that is, all your prayers offered thus far have been accepted). The moral of this story is that we should always humbly present our requests to God. Our responsibility is to pray, and to get closer to God and become His servants who are worthy of being heard. Despair comes from Satan and should be avoided in our lives—whether it is related to prayer or any other goal in life.

I have sinned! What do I do?

First, sin should not be something that leads us to despair, for despair and guilt has the danger to lead to more sin, which in turn leads to more guilt, and it becomes a vicious cycle. Despair is Satan's trick to make us fall back into sin. The Quran says:

قُلْ يُعْبَادِي الَّذِينَ أَسْرَفُوا عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِهِمْ لَا تَقْنَطُوا مِن رَّحْمَةِ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَغْفِرُ الذُّنُوبَ جَمِيعًا إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْغَفُورُ

الرَّحِيمُ ﴿٥٤﴾

“Say, ‘O My servants who have committed excesses against their own souls! Despair not of the mercy of Allah, surely Allah forgives all sins. Verily He is Most Forgiving, Merciful’” (39:54).

The Holy Prophet^{sa} once narrated the story of a person who murdered 99 people and then felt remorse. He asked for the most knowledgeable

person around and was told about someone. When he asked him if he had any chance at repentance and salvation, the other man expressed shock, and the murderer took out his sword and killed this man too and now the number of murders stood at 100. Then he searched for another knowledgeable person and he was told about another person. When he went to him and asked him about the possibility of repentance, he was told, "Leave the evil town where you are living and go to a good town". The murderer decided to do this but he died while on the way. Then, according to the *hadith*, the angels of mercy and punishment argued over him. Eventually, God sent an angel who made the final judgment in the words, "Look and see which of the two towns he was closer to, and put him with its people". Since he was closer to the town of good people, he was forgiven.⁸

This story has a clear, take-away moral message, which is, the door to repentance is always open till a person's death. In another *hadith*, the Holy Prophet^{sa} said:

الَّتَائِبُ مِنَ الذَّنْبِ كَمَنْ لَا ذَنْبَ لَهُ

That is, “The one who repents from sin is like one who did not sin”.⁹ The Quran calls God *Ghafoor* (The One Who forgives), and states:

قَالَ عَذَابِي أُصِيبُ بِهِ مَنْ أَشَاءُ^٥ وَرَحْمَتِي وَسِعَتْ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ^٦

That is, “God said, ‘I will inflict My punishment on whom I will; but My mercy encompasses all things’” (Holy Quran, 7:157). God has given us great hope in this verse and clearly declared that His mercy encompasses everything else. No sin is beyond the mercy of Allah as long as there is sincere repentance prior to a person’s death.

When a person has committed a sin, the important thing to do is to keep on reciting *Istighfar*, in the words:

أَسْتَغْفِرُ اللَّهَ رَبِّي مِنْ كُلِّ ذَنْبٍ وَأَتُوبُ إِلَيْهِ

That is, “I seek forgiveness from Allah for all my sins and turn towards Him in all sincerity”. It should be kept in mind here that some people have

the habit of reciting the Arabic alone without any understanding of the meaning, and it is presumed that they have done *Istighfar*. However, the Promised Messiah^{as} has taught us that *Istighfar* should come from the heart and can be done in a person's own language, if it is difficult to keep track of the meaning of the Arabic words. The Holy Prophet^{sa} used to recite *Istighfar* 70-100 times daily. We should be following his example, especially at a time when a sin has been committed.

Second, we should try to do good deeds to remove the aftereffects of evil. The Quran says, "Good works drive away evil works" (Holy Quran, 11:115). Some of the good works include offering prayers in congregation, offering *nawaafile* with special prayers in the *sajdah* in our own language seeking Allah's mercy, giving some *sadaqah*, doing various forms of *zikr*, doing Jama'at work, and so on.

Third, we should try to find good company. Seeking out friends who are positive and motivate us to do good works is a great asset in self-reformation. Congregational prayer at the mosque

or *Namaz* centre, for instance, can help us achieve that goal.

Fourth, if we ever relapse and fall back into evil, we should refrain from self-loathing, guilt and despair. We should acknowledge it as a setback and keep on striving—even with greater zeal—to implement these points and make a positive change in our lives.

Fifth, we should try to improve our knowledge of faith, and our understanding of sin and how to safeguard ourselves against it. Reading the answer to this question is a great start. Books of the Promised Messiah^{as}, such as *Noah's Ark*, *The Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam*, and *How to be Free from Sin*, discuss the issue of sin at length. Similarly, books of Hazrat Mirza Bashiruddin Mahmood Ahmad^{ra}, such as *Way of the Seekers* and *Ahmadiyyat or The True Islam*, discuss these topics comprehensively.

Why are there so many prayers in Islam?

Human beings tend to get distracted very easily. This is a fact and there is no denying it. It is because of this that most worldly corporations also ensure that their employees follow a routine. Routines turn into habits that ensure that people become accustomed to a work ethic. This in turn improves their productivity. By introducing a regimen of five daily prayers at prescribed times, Islam has enabled the building of a good habit of remembering God multiple times a day.

This serves many benefits. For instance, it allows us to seek forgiveness for our sins on a regular basis. It keeps us in check, and prevents us from falling prey to evil inclinations. Without this check, many people would just falter and become sinful as they would not have the frequent reminders to turn back to God or to seek His refuge from a life of sin.

Furthermore, prayer itself is full of moments of reflection which ultimately humble a person and melt his or her heart at the threshold of God Almighty.

Similarly, the Prophet Muhammad^{sa} said:

الصَّلَوَاتُ الْخَمْسُ وَالْجُمُعَةُ إِلَى الْجُمُعَةِ وَرَمَضَانَ
إِلَى رَمَضَانَ مَكْفَرَاتٌ مَا بَيْنَهُنَّ إِذَا اجْتَنَبَ الْكَبَائِرَ

That is, “The five daily prayers, and one Friday prayer to the next, and one Ramazan to the next, are all expiations for any sins committed in between them, as long as one abstains from the major sins”.¹⁰ In other words, each prayer expiates and washes away the sins that a person may have committed since the previous prayer. The same point is made in another *hadith* where the Prophet^{sa} likens the five prayers to bathing five times a day, and how spiritual purification can be maintained on a daily basis due to the five prayers.

To the casual observer, it may seem like much. However, the keen observer can see that just as an alcoholic or a drug addict cannot survive a single

day without a dose, so too a sincere worshipper cannot survive a day without speaking to his or her God multiple times a day. The Promised Messiah^{as} has spoken of this subject numerous times. He says, “I would like to say that we should pray to God Almighty with incredible pain and passion that He should enable us to taste the pleasure of prayer and worship—even once—just as he has granted us the different kinds of pleasures of other fruits and things”.¹¹ Then, the Promised Messiah^{as} compares a worshipper to an alcoholic who keeps on drinking alcohol until he becomes intoxicated. The one who worships should have a similar goal of continuing to worship until he or she is *intoxicated* with spiritual pleasures.¹²

That is why Allah says in the Holy Quran, “Observe Prayer at the two ends of the day, and in the hours of the night that are nearer the day. Surely, good works drive away evil works. This is a reminder for those who would remember” (11:115). Similarly, Allah says:

إِنَّ الصَّلَاةَ تَنْهَىٰ عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ وَلَذِكْرُ اللَّهِ أَكْبَرُ

That is, “Surely, Prayer restrains one from indecency and manifest evil, and remembrance of Allah indeed is the greatest virtue” (Holy Quran, 29:46). The frequent reminders of prayers keeps a person in check and reminds him or her of duties to God, and that he or she should keep himself or herself on a path of righteousness.

What is more is that prayers are like a time-out from the stresses of life. In an age where there is so much interest in meditation and finding ways to reduce the stress of modern life, the five daily prayers could not be more useful. When a Muslim takes the 10-minute spiritual break from all worldly pursuits, it only helps to soothe his or her mind. Our minds are constantly, perpetually thinking about things. Prayer is a means to tap ourselves out of those thoughts and pay attention to something greater and find our peace. That is why God says, “Aye! It is in the remembrance of Allah that hearts can find comfort” (Holy Quran, 13:29).

Why is the Arabic language so important in prayers?

Language is taken very seriously by most people and is often valued as an integral part of an individual's identity. In Canada, for instance, there are some francophone who are always seeking their rights and distinction in Canada. Such distinctions sometimes even impact political matters and decisions. It is understandable then that a person's language is very dear to them and when it comes to prayer, they wish to speak to God in their own language. That is their right, and Islam does not take away that right from anyone.

The Promised Messiah^{as} writes about the importance of this matter by stating, "When you offer your prayer, besides the verses of the Quran which are the Word of God, and besides the various prayers taught by the Holy Prophet^{sa}, which are the words of the Messenger, make all your other

entreaties in your native tongue so that the humility and meekness that they are born of may touch your heart".¹³ Speaking to God in prayer in our own language is actually very much encouraged and brings about humility and passion in expressing our feelings to God Almighty.

However, this is not done at the expense of giving up the original language altogether. Fundamentally, this is necessary because loss of the original language would mean the loss of the whole religion. This is something that Islam lays a claim to with great pride. The Islamic religion has retained the original language in which Prophet Muhammad^{sa} spoke and delivered his message from God. The revelations bestowed upon him are all retained in the original language and come to us in the Holy Quran. The Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at recognizes that people have a very personal relationship with their own respective language. Hence, the Jama'at has published more than 70 translations of the Quran but care has always been taken to place the translation next to the original Arabic. The basic goal is to ensure that the original words are not lost to history.

Such care was unfortunately not taken with the Bible, for instance, and it led to the loss of much of the original language in which it was first written. According to scholars, Jesus Christ^{as}, for instance, spoke in Aramaic—a language closely related to Hebrew—but none of his original words have been preserved. They were translated into Greek and the oldest documents containing his words are all written in Greek. This was then further translated into Syriac and Latin and then translated into English. Hence, parts of the Bible that we read today are a translation of the translation of the translation!

By keeping the main parts of the prayer in Arabic, Islam has ensured that the original wording is always retained and available to be translated into whatever newer languages that exist at a time. Language itself evolves and translations will keep on getting updated to conform to modern usage, but the original will always be there to ensure that the revised translation is accurate.

As far as the Salat is concerned, there is no doubt that it takes some effort to learn it in Arabic, which is a foreign language for many people, and may

appear to be difficult. However, those who have made the effort always give testimony that Arabic is actually the easiest language to memorize! The fact that millions of people have memorized the Holy Quran in its entirety and many millions of others have memorized portions of it, is a testament to the ease with which this language can be memorized. It should be noted that among those millions are many for whom Arabic is not the mother tongue and they learned it later in life. The poetic, rhythmic, eloquent flow of the language is far superior to any other language, making it much easier to memorize. Once the Arabic portion is memorized, and its translation is also learned, it actually becomes very easy to offer the prayer in Arabic. After all, it is just a handful of sentences that are to be repeated multiple times in a matter of a few minutes. It is an overstatement to say that this is too difficult or too much of a burden.

The most intimate and personal part of the Islamic daily prayer is prostration, where the worshipper says:

سُبْحَانَ رَبِّيَ الْأَعْلَى

Transliterated as, *Subhaana rabbi-yal-aalaa*, meaning, “Glory be to my Lord, the Most High”. The instruction is to repeat these words at least three times. This can be done in a matter of a few seconds and the worshipper can then speak to God in whichever language he or she prefers.

An additional benefit of retaining the original language is that it enhances the spiritual experience of a person. The Arabic language is *mubeen*—the most eloquent language in the world. Hence, a single word or phrase can have multiple meanings and connotations that can carry much guidance for the spiritual seeker. In-depth exploration of these meanings only goes to deepen the understanding of spiritual and religious matters for the keen seeker, and makes his or her path all the more fruitful and satisfying in the long run.

Yet another benefit of retaining the language is that it maintains unity and cohesion in the worldwide Muslim community. It does not matter what culture a Muslim adheres to, or what

background he or she has, and it does not even matter what his or her mother tongue is. All Muslims are united together with *one religious book* and *one religious language*.

GENDER ROLES IN ISLAM

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Is Islam a misogynistic faith?

Equality is a very misunderstood topic in the modern age. As far as men and women are concerned, there is no inequality whatsoever. Allah says in the Holy Quran:

Surely, men who submit themselves to God and women who submit themselves to Him, and believing men and believing women, and obedient men and obedient women and truthful men and truthful women, and men steadfast in their faith and steadfast women, and men who are humble and women who are humble, and men who give alms and women who give alms, and men who fast and women who fast, and men who guard their chastity and women who guard their chastity, and men who remember Allah much and women who remember Him—

Allah has prepared for all of them forgiveness and a great reward (33:36).

Here, the Quran is clear in stating that men and women are both *absolutely* and *unequivocally* equal in their status in front of God, and in expectation of the reward that they are to receive from Him. The length of the verse, with a specific mention of 10 different qualities, only goes to show how gravely important this subject is in the Holy Quran. Had Islam considered men and women unequal, such a verse would not have existed.

Critics of Islam or those doubting Islam usually tend to point to issues related to inheritance, testimony of women, or the *ahadith* where it is stated that women are “deficient” or they are told to “obey” their husbands. However, all of this evidence is presented with a laser focus on certain phrases or statements, without looking at the bigger picture that Islamic teachings present to the world. In fact, if we want to be fair, and place this kind of laser focus with a completely different intention, it may be declared that Islamic teachings favour women too much and Islam may be accused of misandry. For instance, at one point, a man asked

the Holy Prophet^{sa}, who is most deserving of best treatment from him? The Prophet^{sa} said, “Your mother”. He asked the question two more times and got the same response, and only when he asked the question the fourth time did he receive the response, “Your father”.¹⁴

A critical mind may look at this *hadith* and another *hadith* where it says, “Paradise lies under the feet of the mother,”¹⁵ and declare Islam a misandrist faith. However, that would be a gross misrepresentation and misunderstanding of the faith of Islam. Where the *role* of women is being discussed, light is shed on female responsibilities, and where the *role* of men is being discussed, light is shed on male responsibilities. To the men, Islam says, *treat your wives in the best manner* (Holy Quran, 4:20), and to the women, Islam teaches obedience and kind treatment of their husbands. The Prophet^{sa} sums it up beautifully when he says, “You have rights over your wives, and they have rights over you”.¹⁶

Every statement that appears to be siding with one gender needs to be understood within its own

context. If women are called “deficient,” it is not a generalization nor a broad-brush representation of women in every aspect. It is only an indication of some of the challenges that they face while fulfilling the requirements of the law of Islam, and some of the concessions they are given due to menstrual cycles or to fulfill their responsibilities as mothers. In fact, there is much laxation in Islamic rules for women due to their role as mothers—a role Islam considers very sacred as they are preparing the leaders of tomorrow.

Comparatively, men have the role of being the breadwinners and providing for their wives and children. Such separation of roles is intended in Islam to lead to a harmonious family life that brings pleasure and comfort for the whole family and ultimately contributes to societal peace. As Hazrat Mirza Tahir Ahmadth explains, if the woman of the household is fulfilling the requirements of her gender role and is providing and maintaining the best care for her children, she has the option to work and earn her living, and “the husband doesn’t stop her, but will not have any share in whatever earning the lady makes”.¹⁷

Why is there segregation at Islamic events?

Islam encourages gender segregation at the mosque or other places of gathering with the intention to provide a 'safe space' to women. There is no ill-intent nor is it a way to 'suppress' women as critics of Islam like to suggest. Provision of such spaces is actually a *right* that women are entitled to, and that Islam granted to them 1400 years ago.

In the West, segregation already exists, albeit to a lesser extent. Locker rooms, washrooms, and sports activities are a few examples where segregation already exists. Islam only goes the extra mile in ensuring that the intent of this kind of segregation, that is, modesty, is achieved with greater caution. However, what is interesting is that many in the West are now inclining towards increasing the segregation between genders.

At the New Year's celebration in Berlin, a "safe zone" was set up for women only, due to a large number of sexual assaults reported in the past.¹⁸ The world's first women-only music festival was held in Gothenburg, Sweden, in 2018 due to reports of sexual abuse at previous festivals.¹⁹ Women-only ride-sharing apps are becoming more and more popular, and are becoming the norm, as women feel safer with other women during rides.²⁰ Women-only office spaces are also becoming increasingly popular, and in demand in the business world.²¹ These trends demonstrate that they are only going to grow in the future. This is just the beginning.

Allah says in the Holy Quran:
"O Prophet! Tell thy wives and thy daughters and the women of the believers that they should draw close to them portions of their loose outer coverings. That is nearer that they may thus be distinguished and not molested. And Allah is Most Forgiving, Merciful" (33:60). Hence, an essential goal of *purdah* in Islam is to safeguard women from being molested, harassed or assaulted. Segregated spaces have the same purpose. The Promised Messiah^{as}

notes, “What ails our people is that they do not reflect upon the consequences of things. Let them at least take counsel with their consciences whether the condition of men is so much improved that women may go about among them unveiled”.²²

We ask, do the benefits of free mixing of genders outweigh the harms and disadvantages? Islam contends that even if one woman in a 1000 is harassed in the slightest manner due to being in a gathering where men and women interact freely, it is *not* okay. Islam takes the dignity of women with utmost seriousness. What is more is that women who experience such spaces feel that they have much more liberty and freedom, and are much less conscious of looking attractive in front of men.

Women who do not wear the veil are treated differently.

Why?

At the fundamental level, men and women who do not choose to follow their faith devotedly should not be treated any differently. They are all to be given equal treatment, as the Quran says:

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ

That is, “There is no compulsion in religion” (Holy Quran, 2:257). Any behaviour, attitude, or cultural inclination, that intends to compel other adults in any way is sinful and not allowed in the religion of Islam. However, that does not mean that organizations cannot have rules for behavior or codes of conduct expected from members holding important positions.

If a university, for instance, makes the rule that no students are allowed to smoke marijuana within its premises, it would not mean that it is discriminating against the students. It only means that certain types of behaviour are not being promoted within a university environment, despite the law allowing marijuana consumption elsewhere. Similarly, as far as the organization or *nizam* of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at is concerned, certain things are expected from those members who hold important positions within the *nizaam*. This includes having a beard (for men), or having a hijab (for women), among other expectations.

It may be argued that such outward appearances may have little bearing on a person's spirituality, and seems to be a superficial way of determining a person's faithfulness in his or her religion. However, this criticism is drawn from little reflection over the issue. As far as a person's innermost connection with God is concerned, that is a matter between him/her and God. There is no way for anyone to determine it with absolute conviction. At the same time, it is also true that a person's devotion in faith would mean that he is

sincerely following the dictates of his faith both inwardly and outwardly. In the case of Islam, a sincere Muslim man would naturally be inclined to follow the practice of the Holy Prophet^{sa} and keep a beard. Similarly, a sincere Muslim woman would naturally be inclined to follow the commandment in the Quran to wear a head-covering. This may not be true for every single person, but it is true for the truly devoted followers of Islam, who are well-educated about its teachings. These may be called indicators which point to the *likelihood* or *high probability* of a person's sincere faith.

Furthermore, those who hold any position in the *nizaam* are expected to be role models for others. Hence, it would be natural for the Jama'at to select those individuals for high positions who are following Islam, at least as far as the indicators are concerned. The real, *inward* sincerity of a person can be determined in the long run through his/her performance of religious duties.

Why is dancing forbidden in Islam?

Islam intends to create a society where human beings can progress both in the worldly and spiritual sense, in the best environment. It may appear at first that there are many rules in place, but a closer look would reveal that those rules are meant for the betterment of human beings, and are only meant to make their lives better. The issue is not about dancing or any other rule in particular. The issue is in relation to the greater goal of creating an Islamic social climate, as Hazrat Mirza Tahir Ahmadth called it. He wrote, "Particularly in the free societies of the world, it is very difficult for the people to understand why Islam is so puritan to the extent of dryness. Islam is not at all dry and boring; howsoever it may seem so from a distance".²³

Discussing the issue of dancing, Hazrat Mirza Tahir Ahmadth points out that dancing is not

something to be associated with noble traditions of prophets of God. Instead, it can be observed that dancing is associated with Satanic influences on the “baser yearnings” of human beings.²⁴ Satan is simply looking for ways to excite sexual desires in people, causing many to become slaves of their own desires. A close analysis of those people who live such free lives where dancing is permitted, would reveal that, in many cases, lives are spent in fulfillment of baser desires which in turn leads to a loss of peace. In some cases, it leads to infidelity in marriage, and in some cases, the very meaning of marriage is lost. Places where dancing is enjoyed in the company of strangers become breeding grounds for adultery. Ultimately, the peace of a household is lost, homes are broken up, and children grow up in difficult conditions. In some cases, drugs and alcohol become involved, and yet in other cases, crime is involved.

All these dangers associated with dancing point to the fact that it is a *laghw* or vain pursuit (Holy Quran, 23:4), and it is something that can take a person nearer to adultery (Holy Quran, 17:33). The ultimate goal of Islam is to place safeguards so that

the society avoids these pitfalls and provides an environment—a social climate—for the growth of humans, both for worldly progress as well as spiritual progress. As Hazrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad^{rh} puts it, in the Islamic social climate, “excitement, exhilaration, intense sensual experiences and explosive raptures are bartered for peace, tranquillity, equilibrium, growing sense of security, nobility and contentment, which as a reward per se is the noblest of all rewards”.²⁵ It is indeed hard to find examples of societies where dancing, alcohol, drugs, and other vain pursuits, are given a free hand, and yet they are advancing in spirituality and devotion to God. In fact, at the individual level, the opposite is true. As these pursuits become more and more prevalent in some societies, the further away they are turning from God.

Who has the final word in marriage? Husband or wife?

There is a powerful saying attributed to Hazrat Abu Bakr^{ra} as follows, “I wish I were a tree that would be cut and done away with”.²⁶ At other times, he would say, “I wish I were a blade of grass, whose life ended with the grazing by some beast”²⁷. He also said, “I wish I were a hair on the body of a believer”.²⁸ Once he went to a garden, where he saw a bird singing. He sighed deeply and said, “O, bird! How lucky you are! You eat, you drink and fly under the shade of the trees, and you fear no reckoning of the Day of Judgement. I wish I were just like you”.²⁹

These sayings demonstrate the importance of accountability that directs the actions of a believer. Even the knowledge that a person will be held accountable for their actions should motivate them to act in the best manner. In some cases, it is such a

big responsibility that a person would gladly relinquish their responsibility and look for a way out. This is especially true if they know that failure to fulfill the requirements of the given responsibility will result in severe punishment, and that too from Allah, as He says, “Know that Allah is severe in punishment” (Holy Quran, 5:99).

In Islam, men and women have been charged with responsibilities for which both will be held accountable. Although they share equal rights, the responsibilities and their accountability is different based on the physical, emotional and psychological capacities and inclinations of each gender. A wise man once said, “It is more important to treat one fairly than equally because not everyone is equal”. Sometimes treating someone equally could be unfair. Islam adheres to this rule and gives a fair and just responsibility to men and women.

Concerning the question under discussion, the Holy Quran states, “And they [the women] have rights similar to those [of men] over them in equity; but men have a rank above them” (2:229). In this verse God tells us that as far as personal rights are concerned, women and men are equal. But in some

matters a husband has the final say because of the responsibilities that men have. A man is not only the breadwinner of the house, but he has to help the wife take care of the internal matters of a house as well. In addition to this, a man is the guardian of a woman and is responsible for protecting her. In light of all these responsibilities, a man has been given a final say in certain matters and such situations where things might get out of hand and can ruin a family. But a very important point that needs to be understood is that immediately after granting this right to men, God warns men and reminds them that He is Mighty. This reiterates the fact that the husband is not free to use the authority as he pleases but he will be held accountable for any unjust actions.

If the husband misuses this authority, God will deal with him accordingly. This thought, that God Himself will punish any man who does not carry out his responsibilities with justice is enough to shake any man to the core. The fact that a man has been given this slight authority is not a matter of gender inequality or a matter of celebration for men. This is a grave misunderstanding. This authority

only puts the man under greater scrutiny and accountability with God Almighty. Even in general terms, Islam does not see authority as a matter of pride and arrogance. For all leaders, Islam gives the beautiful advice in the words of Prophet Muhammad^{sa}, “The leader of a nation is their servant”.³⁰

In the case of the husband and wife relationship, the husband is like a leader and has the final say on a few things which means that he should act and decide matters in service of his wife and family. The Prophet Muhammad^{sa} has said, “The best of you is the one who is best to his wife, and I am the best of you to my wives”.³¹ Hence, men should see the commandment of Allah in regard to their authority in a few matters as a warning that, if they possess any faith, they should care for their wives responsibly, and remember the fact that Allah is Mighty, before making a decision.

Taking everything into account, in accordance with the commandments dictated by Allah the Almighty, it can be concluded that although all things should be mutually decided, the man has the

final say in a marriage due to the differences in their assigned responsibilities in Islam. That being said however, men have the added duty of ensuring that matters relating to their wives and the protection of their family are dealt with in a fair and morally proper manner. For those unfortunate men who are granted the responsibility of the final say and abuse this privilege, Allah the Almighty will designate for them a dreadful punishment.

MORALITY

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Is it possible to be good without God?

Many atheists argue that we do not need God in order to live decent, moral lives. In so doing, they become judges over God and try to declare a moral ground higher than God Himself. Consequently, those who are doubting religion are also impacted by the apparent beauty of such an argument.

What all such people fail to see is the internal inconsistency and contradiction within such a belief. Once God is removed from the picture, the basis and foundation for morality vanishes as well. A moral compass ceases to exist and any attempt to define morality becomes a completely meaningless exercise.

What most people are usually arguing when they say that morality can exist without God is the utilitarian model for morality. This model states that any action that brings about happiness is

moral, and any action that brings about suffering is immoral. Sounds good? Well, there are weaknesses with this theory. Dr. Austin explains:

A standard objection to utilitarianism is that it could require us to violate the standards of justice. For example, imagine that you are a judge in a small town. Someone has committed a crime, and there has been some social unrest resulting in injuries, violent conflict, and some rioting. As the judge, you know that if you sentence an innocent man to death, the town will be calmed and peace restored. If you set him free, even more unrest will erupt, with more harm coming to the town and its people. Utilitarianism seems to require punishing the innocent in certain circumstances, such as these.³²

Since punishing the innocent person would reduce the suffering of many, and also increase their happiness, utilitarianism would require that the innocent person be punished in such a scenario.

Another scenario that scholars bring up is that of gang rape. While rape by a single individual brings immense suffering to the victim and pleasure to the

rapist such that utilitarianism would call this action immoral, the situation is very different when there is more than one rapist. The greater the number of people committing this heinous crime, the greater their pleasure. Since the utilitarian model of morality sees everything as a utility and not from the lens of justice, it would see gang rape as less evil compared to rape by a single individual. This puts us in a moral conundrum that is impossible to get out of.

Another example that illustrates this is that of a mother preventing her child from holding a glowing piece of charcoal. The child sees it as a bright toy that she desires earnestly to hold, while the mother knows that if she gives it to the child, it will cause injury. However, the utilitarian model would have much difficulty resolving this moral dilemma, because the longer the child waits, the greater her suffering and the lesser her happiness. The mother obviously knows what is best for the child and makes her suffer—albeit temporarily—to save her from greater harm in the *future*. In this case, at least the *present* suffering cannot be seen as a utility that must be avoided.

What is essentially absent from the utilitarian model is justice. In Islam, on the other hand, morality comes from God. God is the ultimate source of all moral qualities. We learn to be gracious, because God is Gracious. We learn to be merciful, by emulating God's Mercy, in our own spheres and at our own level. We learn beautiful, undeniable moral principles to follow in our lives that are unlike any other, as God says:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُ بِالْعَدْلِ وَالْإِحْسَانِ وَإِيتَائِي ذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَيَنْهَىٰ
عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ وَالْبَغْيِ يَعِظُكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ

That is, God enjoins equity, beneficence and treatment like that between relatives; and forbids evils which concern the individual alone and are not manifest, and those that are manifest and offend the feelings of others, and those that injure others. He admonishes you, so that you may be rightfully guided (Holy Quran, 16:91).³³

Explaining this verse, Hazrat Mirza Bashiruddin Mahmood Ahmad^{ra} writes that there are three stages of virtue. The first stage is '*Adal* or justice,

which basically means that human beings should reciprocate the treatment of others to the same extent as they would themselves wish to be treated. The second stage is that of *Ihsaan* or beneficence. At this stage, a person tries to repay others by doing good to them in a much greater proportion than their goodness. The third stage is described as *Eetaa'izil Qurbaa*, where a person does good to others regardless of whether someone has done good to him or not.³⁴

This is just one example, among many, of the beautiful, well-defined virtues that God lays down for human beings to follow. It further proves that morality really, truly comes to us from God, and human beings cannot invent it for themselves.

Why is the religion of Islam so restrictive and boring?

To a young person growing up in a materialistic society, it may seem so. To a person growing up in a world full of worldly attractions, it may seem so. To a person advancing a career in the corporate world where most—if not all—people are driven by greed, it may definitely seem so. On the surface, it may appear that there are too many rules and too many restrictions in the religion of Islam. In fact, such a statement may be made regarding all religions.

However, those who have tasted the beautiful, satisfying fulfillment of spiritual progress, would beg to differ. The restrictions help to create an environment through discipline that fosters and encourages spiritual development and a connection with God. Even in worldly pursuits, there are restrictions and rules created for worldly benefits. Some employers, for instance, require their workers

to come to work sharp on time and leave only when the required time has been spent. To the casual observer, it may seem like an unnecessary restriction as there might be time spent on the office desk that is going to waste and no work is being done. But the employer may argue that it is those same rules that help drive the company forward and enable it to excel in its field.

Islam—as a religion—is seeking that excellence in spiritual matters. The daily prayer regimen for instance is not meant to be performed like a ritual with nothing much achieved. Instead, it is meant to eventually cause a person’s heart to melt at the threshold of God and become absolutely dissolved in the love of God. Worldly pursuits on the other hand make humans slaves to sexual desires, and greedy for wealth and power, without any comfort and peace in their lives.

There is no doubt that consuming alcohol, taking drugs, and going to dance parties, is very exciting and exhilarating. But, we ask: At what cost? According to the Canadian Institute for Health Information, in the years 2015-2016, there were about 77,000 hospitalizations caused by alcohol,

which equates to 212 hospitalizations every single day.³⁵ To put it into perspective, this was more than the hospitalizations caused by heart attack. Out of these, 4,000 result in death every year.³⁶ Similarly, regarding the pursuit of pleasure, Dr. Susan Krauss notes, “Researchers examining the mental health associations of hookup sex report that participants who were not depressed before showed more depressive symptoms and loneliness”.³⁷ A lifestyle involving hookup sex, alcohol, dancing, taking drugs, and parties with free-mixing of the sexes is definitely “fun” in the moment. But, we ask: Is this fun really worth it despite the increase in depression, anxiety, hospitalizations, and even suicide?

The rules in Islam are meant to make life more pleasant and heaven-like. Islam sees the larger picture and a life lived to its fullest potential with the greatest possible happiness. The Promised Messiah^{as} writes, “Does he who owns a treasure, weep, cry and become sorrowful unto death over the loss of a single coin? Had you been aware of this treasure and knew that at every time of need God is

able to fulfil your requirements, why would you look to the world so restlessly? God is a precious treasure; appreciate Him accordingly, for He is your Helper at every step”.³⁸ Similarly, he writes:

اس جائے پُر عذاب سے کیوں دل لگاتے ہو
دوزخ ہے یہ مقام یہ بُستاں سَرا نہیں

Meaning, “Why do you attach yourself to this world which causes so much pain? This place is akin to hell. It is not a garden that is permanent or eternal”.³⁹

What does Islam say about platonic relationships?

The idea that men and women can be in a platonic relationship—a relationship that is only a friendship and nothing more—is a relatively modern concept. More recently, psychologists have started to research this form of relationship and the results are far from promising, at least from an Islamic perspective. One study, published in the *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, for instance, notes that 62 percent of men and women reported that “sexual tension was present in their cross-sex friendships”.⁴⁰ Similarly, a survey of 1450 members of the Match.com dating site revealed that 62 percent of respondents admitted that the platonic friendship “crossed the line and became romantic or sexual”.⁴¹ Another researcher, Dr. Jeremy Nicholson, writes in *Psychology Today*:

Can men and women be just friends? In many cases, the answer is no. Sometimes that is a good thing, when both people see friendship as a step to mutually-satisfying love, sex, and/or commitment. At other times, men and women cannot be just friends because only one friend desires something more. Those mismatched desires between men and women lead to unequal friend-zone situations, where one person's needs are completely satisfied at the other's expense. Those unfortunate instances and the frustrations around them are the friendship problems we hear so much about.⁴²

The fact of the matter is that research clearly indicates that such friendships are extremely dangerous and can easily turn to adultery.

The Islamic position is quite clear, as the Quran notes:

وَلَا تَقْرُبُوا الزَّوْجَىٰ إِنَّهُ كَانَ فَاحِشَةً ۖ وَسَاءَ سَبِيلًا ﴿٣٣﴾

That is, “And come not near unto adultery; surely, it is a foul thing and an evil way” (17:33). There is no doubt that a certain number of individuals can

maintain a platonic friendship without committing adultery or fornication. However, Islam does not make rules for the minority. Rules are always made for the betterment of the majority. Even regarding alcohol, the Quran states that there are “some advantages” (2:220) in it, but as its dangers are much greater, it is forbidden.

The same is the case with platonic relationships. As there are too many dangers involved, Islam has forbidden them and clearly said that women should guard their *zeenah* or beauty from men who are outside the prohibited degrees. Such men are called *ghair mahram*, and those to whom women can show their beauty are called *mahram*. They have been identified in 24:32 of the Holy Quran. The ultimate goal of this teaching is to promote *hayaa* or modesty, and to safeguard the society from the spread of lewdness and immorality.

Discussing this issue, the Promised Messiah^{as} writes, “A fair-minded person will appreciate that the free mixing of men and women and their going about together would expose them to the risk of succumbing to the flare of their emotions...To avoid such untoward situations from arising, the Law-

Giver of Islam has forbidden all such acts as might prove to be a temptation for anyone".⁴³ The Prophet Muhammad^{sa} has said:

أَلَا لَا يَخْلُونَ رَجُلٌ بِامْرَأَةٍ إِلَّا كَانَ تَالِثَهُمَا الشَّيْطَانُ

That is, "Beware! A man is not alone with a woman, except that the third among them is Satan".⁴⁴ The above statistics are ample evidence for the truth of this statement of the Holy Prophet^{sa} which teaches that relationships between men and women outside the bounds of marriage have a greater potential of Satanic influence which then leads to romance and sex.

The Promised Messiah^{as} also notes, "It is necessary therefore, that before granting such freedom as is being advocated, the moral condition of men should be improved and rectified. After men have developed enough self-temperance to restrain their passions, you may consider whether the veil is necessary or not. To insist upon unrestricted freedom in the present circumstances would be like putting sheep at the mercy of lions".⁴⁵

Why is one person—the Khalifa—dictating our lives?

Allah, the Exalted, sends His chosen servants to guide mankind and steer them away from paths of vice and immorality. These divinely appointed individuals are Prophets and their Khulafa'/ Caliphs. A Khalifa does not preach his own message but continues the work of the Prophet who came before him. In the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, the Khalifatul Masih spreads the message of the Promised Messiah^{as} as his successor, and the Promised Messiah^{as} is himself the successor of the Holy Prophet^{sa} and came to remind the world of his teachings.

As human beings, we have limitations. Our knowledge of our future and what is best for us is minimal, making us hasty in decision-making. On the contrary, God is All-Knowing and He alone knows with absolute certainty about the positive

and negative impact of worldly matters. There are times when we think we know what is best for us but since our connection with Allah is not as strong as that of the Khalifatul Masih, we cannot always make the best decision. Sometimes, we follow trends just because everyone else is doing them without realizing what the harm may be. Allah, Who possesses complete knowledge of all things, guides His Khalifa to warn us from indulging in harmful behaviour. A Khalifa, like a Prophet, has a greater understanding of what is best for us and can admonish us to refrain from evil. In the Holy Quran, Allah says, “Admonish, therefore, for you are but an admonisher” (88:22).

An example of the sheer wisdom behind the guidance of a Khalifatul Masih is exemplified by Huzoor (may Allah be his Helper) who recently warned members of the Jama'at of the drawbacks of social media. Huzoor formally addressed this topic in a few Friday Sermons and drew the attention of all Ahmadis to the (at the time) unpopular opinion that social media can be harmful. There are many children today who use social media as a pastime but are being exposed to peer pressure, cyber

bullying, predators and other ill effects. Even when parents are unaware, God is not! The Khalifa warned us of the dangers of excessive and unsupervised use of social media and showed it for what it is. Even the founders of different social media and Internet companies have kept their children away from these platforms at some point. Many experts now frequently talk about the harms of social media.

After a Prophet, Allah appoints a Khalifa to continue the system of guidance so that an everlasting relationship is created between the Creator and His creation. This is beautifully expressed by the Promised Messiah^{as} when he writes, "Since no one can live forever, Allah the Exalted ordained that the *Anbiya'* [Prophets], who are the most honourable and the best people of the earth, continue their existence upon the earth by way of reflection. For this purpose, God instituted Khilafat so that the world should at no time be deprived of the blessings of the *nubuwwat* [Prophethood]".⁴⁶

The directive of a Khalifa has been laid out in the Holy Quran where Allah tells us that a Khalifa is to

ensure that people come towards Him, worship Him alone and do good deeds, so that we fulfill our purpose and are granted salvation (24:56). Whether it is a sensitive subject such as how family matters are to be addressed, or to warn us against something as appealing as social media, the divine guidance of a Khalifa honours our faith and helps us maintain a living connection with our God.

We are surrounded by influences that visibly contradict fundamental teachings of Islam, and then there are some that are subtler and easy to overlook. To be able to hear the wise words of the Khalifa, whose prayers are directly heard by God, is a great privilege that can ultimately lead to our salvation.

As ordinary individuals, we are innately weak and require a constant source of guidance to help us stay on the path of the righteous. Although some social vices may seem harmless, we can never have an absolute guarantee that we will be able to distinguish what is best for us in the long term, due to our mental and spiritual limitations. Therefore, by listening to the Khalifa and following his guidance, we are actually protecting ourselves from things that may harm us and destroy our inner

peace. Time and time again, this has been proven in the lives of those who are close to the Khalifa of the time. All of them testify to the immense blessings that they have received, and the signs of Allah they have seen, in their lives. Abid Khan sahib has narrated many incidents and testimonies of Ahmadi Muslims from around the world who attest this truth in their lives.⁴⁷

Why are Islamic punishments so strict?

The concept of punishment in Islam may be deemed harsh by some, but when the rationale behind it is understood, it becomes clear that it is not intended to impose baseless cruelty. It encourages a path away from deviance and advocates for the reformation of society as a whole.

The objective behind Islamic punishments is betterment of the individual. Rather than being slandered or tortured for their actions, they are told why their actions are deemed unacceptable and why they must not be repeated. There is no doubt that severity is a part of certain Islamic punishments and it is meant to deter or prevent others from committing criminal acts, so that a just and moral society can be established instead of a dark and evil one.

Allah says in the Holy Quran, “These are the limits set by Allah, so approach them not. Thus, does Allah make His commandments clear to men so that they may become secure against evil” (2:188). In this verse, Allah exhorts us to stay away from the limits so that we can *secure* ourselves against evil. The concept of punishment in Islam is described with certainty. This verse highlights that the intention is not to be cruel or unjust. If that was the case, this verse would mention something about how punishment is deserved, but rather it focuses on the protection and security of the individual and society as a whole.

In the Holy Quran, there are 4 major vices that carry a severe punishment: adultery, slandering, murder and theft. This is to ensure the protection of the family institution, property, honour and social order that is in place. That being said, Islamic punishments are applied in accordance with the circumstances where certain conditions must be met in order to constitute a punishment to that degree. For example, someone in a financially deprived country, with no other provisions, may resort to theft to satisfy their hunger. In this circumstance,

the Islamic punishment designated to theft cannot be applied. The person in this situation did not steal to acquire worldly appreciation or to gain an unfair advantage over others; they stole in order to survive during a time of difficulty. In order for a punishment to be appropriately administered, it must first be proven that a deliberate effort was made to commit that crime.

However, taking the example of the same crime, if a theft or robbery is committed with the sole intention of selfish greed, it would be deemed a punishable crime. This is because, despite the many blessings they have been granted, their unjustified actions prove that they deliberately chose to do something that would cause the displeasure of God, harm to another individual or individuals, and fear in the society at large. Every time a severe punishment is administered, it serves as an example of the moral boundaries that Islam has established and emphasizes why we must refrain from engaging in deviant conduct.

The question then is: How are such severe punishments to be meted out? Are they given out randomly? Are they given out in each situation

where the motives are evil? Are they given out rarely? The answer is provided by Hazrat Mirza Tahir Ahmadth in his book, *The Relationship between Religion & Politics in Islam*. For those interested in a thorough understanding of this topic, this book is strongly recommended for reading. In this book, Hazrat Mirza Tahir Ahmadth argues that imposing Shariah has practical issues that would need resolution. For instance, there are so many interpretations, of so many different sects. Whose interpretation would apply? In fact, most Shariah matters are confined to the individual with no government required to “impose” such requirements. They are a natural expression of the free individual’s devotion to his/her faith.

As far as the strict punishments are concerned, they first require an environment to be created as was done by every Prophet. Once a pious and healthy environment has been created, the society becomes ready for the imposing of certain strict rules. At such a time, strict punishments would be meted out very rarely, if at all, and would mostly serve as a deterrent.

Furthermore, the Quran lays out certain rules when giving out punishments. One is that *absolute justice* should be the moral compass based on which punishments are given, as the Quran states:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُونُوا قَوِّمِينَ لِلَّهِ شُهَدَاءَ بِالْقِسْطِ وَلَا
يَجْرِمَنَّكُمْ شَنَاٰنُ قَوْمٍ عَلَىٰ أَلَّا تَعْدِلُوا ۗ إِعْدِلُوا هُوَ أَقْرَبُ
لِلتَّقْوَىٰ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٩﴾

That is, “O ye who believe! be steadfast in the cause of Allah, bearing witness in equity; and let not a people’s enmity incite you to act otherwise than with justice. Be always just, that is nearer to righteousness. And fear Allah. Surely, Allah is aware of what you do” (5:9).

Second is the rule of thumb when deciding between punishing and forgiving any individual. The Quran says:

وَجَزَاءُ سَيِّئَةٍ سَيِّئَةٌ مِّثْلُهَا ۗ فَمَنْ عَفَا وَأَصْلَحَ فَأَجْرُهُ عَلَى
 اللَّهِ ۗ إِنَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٤١﴾

“And the recompense of an injury is an injury the like thereof; but whoso forgives and his act brings about reformation, his reward is with Allah. Surely, He loves not the wrongdoers” (42:41).

In other words, the punishment of a crime should be equal to it, and if forgiveness of the criminal would lead to rehabilitation, then that is the better way. The door to repentance is wide open, and the path to absolute justice is secured. In fact, this is such a beautiful teaching that it is only found in the Quran and no other religious scripture has such a teaching!

Commenting on the above verse, Hazrat Mirza Bashiruddin Mahmood Ahmad^{ra} writes:

If there is hope of reforming [the criminal] by forgiveness, he should be forgiven and should not be punished merely out of revenge for the wrong done by him. If on the other hand, punishment would prove more salutary than

forgiveness, then he should be punished, and not forgiven out of mere squeamishness, for, otherwise, he would be deprived of a chance of reforming himself, and it would be cruel and not merciful to forgive in such a case.⁴⁸

In addition, it is narrated in a tradition by Hazrat Ayesha^{ra} that the Holy Prophet^{sa} said, “Avert the legal penalties from the Muslims as much as possible. If he has a way out then leave him to his way, for if the Imam makes a mistake in forgiving, it would be better than making a mistake in punishment”.⁴⁹ This *hadith* further demonstrates that the teaching of Islam is to seek reformation and rehabilitation, not revenge. There is no place in Islam for holding a grudge.

The bottom line is this: If a strict punishment is given to a serial rapist of children where his crime has been proven without a shadow of doubt, it would become a deterrent and save hundreds of lives in an entire generation. However, if a soft punishment is meted out to such a dreadful criminal, some others may be motivated to follow him and hundreds, if not thousands, of lives may be

destroyed along the way. This is such a straightforward truth that no one can deny it. Whenever there is news coverage of a criminal who has committed a horrible crime, most people desire that their punishment is severe, and no one asks for a light punishment as it would obviously leave the door open for further crimes.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

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*I get anxious when thinking
about religious matters.
What should I do?*

Anxiety can certainly result from deep contemplation of religious matters, especially existential questions like those which relate to God, the vastness and limitlessness of His attributes, death, accountability after death, and so on. Anxieties and fears of such things, or other religious matters, can be due to any number of reasons.

There are certain types of fears, however, that are actually good for the believer. For instance, the Quran says, "True believers are only those whose hearts tremble when the name of Allah is mentioned, and when His Signs are recited to them they increase their faith, and who put their trust in their Lord" (Holy Quran, 8:3). Here, it does not mean that every time God's name is taken, He should be feared as if one is afraid of other fearful

things like snakes, harmful animals, disease, etc. Instead, the verse implies that belief in God should not be lip-service and should be “something real and living”.⁵⁰

“Fear of God” as discussed in Islam and other religions is not a fear of the Being of God Almighty. It is a fear of His punishment. Hazrat Mirza Tahir Ahmadth observes, “The fear of God which we find mentioned in Divinely revealed religions has nothing to do with the idea of terror related to beasts and other fearsome objects. The threat of Divine punishment is merely used as a deterrent against crime, preventing people from transgression against themselves”.⁵¹ Just as a person fears causing displeasure to his or her loved ones, so too does religion encourage fear of displeasing God Almighty. In the first chapter of the Holy Quran, *Surah Al-Fatiha*, this point is made clear, as the believer beseeches God for guidance to the right path; that is, the path of those who have been blessed by God, and not of those who incurred His displeasure (Holy Quran, 1:6-7).

Similarly, the concept of *hashyah* or fear of God is mentioned in the following verse of the Quran:

وَالَّذِينَ يَصِلُونَ مَا أَمَرَ اللَّهُ بِهِ أَنْ يُوصَلَ وَيَخْشَوْنَ رَبَّهُمْ
وَيَخَافُونَ سُوءَ الْحِسَابِ ﴿٢٢﴾

That is, “And those who join what Allah has commanded to be joined, and fear their Lord, and dread the evil reckoning” (Holy Quran, 13:22). Here too the fear of God is connected to “reckoning” or accountability, not the fear of God Himself. Explaining this verse, Hazrat Mirza Bashiruddin Mahmood Ahmad^{ra} states that *hashyah* refers to the “fear of losing something that has excellent attributes, after having recognized its greatness and beauty”.⁵² This is not a fear of harm or injury, but a fear of losing something very valuable due to one’s carelessness. Considering it in relation to God, it means that human beings cannot bear to even think of losing their connection with God in whom they have come to find their true comfort, peace, contentment, and excellence. As such, they are always worried about protecting this relationship,⁵³

just as people are worried about protecting their relationship with their loved ones, be it the spouse, mother, father, sibling, or a friend.

Comparatively, it is Satan who causes a kind of fear that is destructive, as the Quran says, “It is Satan who only frightens his friends; so fear them not but fear Me, if you are believers” (3:176). Here, the fear of God is contrasted with fear of Satan and his friends. The point is clear: Satan’s fear is harmful and leads to destruction, while fear of God is due to love and being afraid of displeasing God.

How do I know that I have been forgiven for my sins?

A tiftl once asked Huzoor (may Allah be his Helper) a similar question and Huzoor responded by saying, "There is one way to know if you have been forgiven and that is if you abstain from wrong acts in the future. If you keep repeating your mistakes it means you are not forgiven but if you stop and have no desire to do that wrong thing again you can consider that Allah has accepted your repentance".

This demonstrates the fact that the true essence of repentance lies in never repeating the action again. God bestows His grace on those who repent with absolute sincerity and a longing to be forgiven. Huzoor further said:

You should always have the habit of seeking forgiveness from Allah and doing *Istighfar* as much as possible. It is not necessary that Allah

the Almighty will forgive instantly. There are narrations that show it can take much longer. For example, there is a story of an elder who sought forgiveness for a very long period and it was only after thirty years had passed that he was forgiven by Allah. At that time, Allah Almighty said that He was now accepting all the prayers that the man had made over the past thirty years.⁵⁴

Similarly, during a meeting with Khuddam from Germany, on February 9, 2019, a Khadim asked Huzoor, “When a man seeks forgiveness, can he take the standard of his worship to the extent that he knows he has been forgiven?”. Huzoor (may Allah be his Helper) responded by saying:

“If a person does not turn back to the same sins, and mistakes and he begins to hate those very things, then his repentance has been accepted”. Huzoor further stated, “It is not necessary that Allah Almighty reveals onto you that you have been forgiven... Allah Almighty has His own ways. If you were informed, then you would commit a new sin every day and then seek forgiveness for it.

Hence, Allah has kept us in suspense that we continue to seek forgiveness and repent.”

Huzoor (may Allah be Helper) continues by saying:

Even the Prophets used to repent so that they can elevate their ranks. Even if your repentance is approved, continue to seek forgiveness and repent, and Allah will continue to elevate your status, and you begin to hate sin. This is true repentance...You should be concerned with the fact that Allah does not allow you to return to the misdeeds, as [there is] much effort that man puts into staying away from evil and Satan.⁵⁵

Why are we encouraged to write letters to Huzoor (may Allah be his Helper)?

It is our belief that the Khalifatul Masih is a chosen man of God and spiritually elevated, having an extraordinary connection with Allah. In the Holy Quran, Allah says:

Allah has promised to those among you who believe and do good works that He will surely make them Successors in the earth, as He made Successors from among those who were before them; and that He will surely establish for them their religion which He has chosen for them; and that He will surely give them in exchange security and peace after their fear: They will worship Me, and they will not associate anything with Me. Then whoso is ungrateful after that, they will be the rebellious. (24:56)

One reason that Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad, Khalifatul Masih V (may Allah be his Helper) himself has emphasized is the importance of forming a personal attachment with the divine system of Khilafat that has been established for our guidance. Although writing letters is not obligatory, it is an opportunity to develop a connection with the one who is very near to Allah. Once this everlasting bond is made, a heightened sense of respect and love is naturally created within the hearts of believers whose relationship with Huzoor is similar to the relationship between a child and a parent. The Khalifa is a spiritual father for Ahmadi Muslims, and writing to him becomes one way of expressing one's attachment to one's father.

The Holy Prophet^{sa} has stated, "He who dies having defected from obedience (to the Amir) and discards his association with the main body of the (Muslim) community, dies the death of ignorance".⁵⁶ These are very strong words that indicate the importance of remaining connected to the Amir or leader, who is the Khalifa of the time for the Muslim community.

Another reason as to why we are encouraged to write to Huzoor is to increase the acceptance of our prayers. Since Huzoor is someone who is loved by Allah and is close to Him, our belief is that Allah listens and accepts his prayers. The Promised Messiah^{as} has stated:

At times it is as if the prayer is not being accepted; there is one thing that can be done on such occasions. One should ask some very pious person to pray and then he himself should pray to God that He may hear the prayer of that pious person. It has been observed quite often that the prayer has been accepted in this way. I have experienced it myself and it has been happening in the case of many people before me, as well.⁵⁷

Since the Khalifatul Masih is the head of our community and our spiritual father, we write to him to seek his guidance and prayers. Being able to write to Huzoor directly and have him guide us through difficult matters, even private ones, is actually quite a great privilege! The letters that members write are very dear to Huzoor and he prays for each and every person with whole hearted and earnest dedication.

Once, Hazrat Mirza Bashiruddin Mahmood Ahmad, Khalifatul Masih II^{ra}, expressed this relationship between the Khalifa and his people in very painful, compassionate, and powerful words. These words are worthy of being written in stone. He said:

*“You have someone who has true sympathy for you; who truly loves you; who considers your pain and sufferings to be his own; and who is always praying to Allah for you”.*⁵⁸

What can I do if I am addicted to pornography?

By reading the response to this question, you have already taken the first, correct step in trying to resolve a problem. That is a great place to start. Many people get into addictive behaviours—whether it is obsessive viewing of pornography or other behaviours—and refuse to acknowledge that there is even a problem. Some time ago, a person wrote to us regarding pornography, “I can quit if I want to!”. This illusion of control is the first problem to contend with. Pornography is an addictive, problematic behaviour that is unhealthy both for the soul and the body, and is hugely detrimental to a person’s spiritual growth. Admitting that it is a problem is the first step to eliminating this behaviour from one’s life.

Secondly, pornography damages a person psychologically by putting him into the habit of

objectifying women, and the human body in general. Further, it creates a view of sexuality that is far removed from reality. Pursuing such unrealistic goals in the real life would lead a person to a life of dissatisfaction, depression, and anxiety. In his Friday Sermon, dated July 6, 2012, Hazrat Khalifatul Masih V (may Allah be his Helper) speaks about the issue of pornography and says that “viewing such vain things, such films is a kind of addiction”.⁵⁹ Huzoor advised against forming friendships which cause a person to further indulge in such vain pursuits. Once a person gets into it, it can be very difficult to get out.⁶⁰

The Promised Messiah^{as} states, “Desires of this world create a form of impure greed which in turn increases yearning and thirst (for more)”.⁶¹ The same is the case with pornography and other addictive behaviours. Advising those who are engaged in such bad habits, Hazrat Khalifatul Masih V (may Allah be his Helper) stresses that attention should be paid to remembrance of Allah, *Istighfar*, *Durood*, and prayers.⁶² In other words, the

best way to fight against such bad behaviours is to seek God's help.

Furthermore, Huzoor directed our attention to a prayer of the Holy Prophet^{sa} in his Friday Sermon, dated May 20, 2016. This prayer is as follows:

O Allah! Create love in our hearts. Reform us, and guide us to the paths of peace. And take us from darkness to light. And save us from manifest evil, whether inward or outward. And bless our ears, our eyes, our hearts, our wives, and our children. And turn to us with Mercy. Indeed, You are the Oft-Returning, the Merciful. And make us grateful for Your blessings, remembering them with praise, and accepting them. And O Allah! Complete Your favours upon us.⁶³

Along with prayer, it is also useful to study about such addictive behaviours from the works of psychologists. One psychologist who has earned a reputation in this field is Dr. Patrick Carnes. Reading up on the problem and seeing what issues in one's life make one susceptible to certain behaviours and addictions is another way to understand and deal with the problem effectively.

Overall changes to our lives, our schedules, and the amount of time we give to prayer and our spiritual growth are also things to consider. In his book *Noah's Ark*, the Promised Messiah^{as} explains the problem of evil and the fundamentals needed to fight against it. Furthermore, Hazrat Mirza Bashiruddin Mahmood Ahmad^{ra} has given a step-by-step guide to defend against sin in his book, *Way of the Seekers*. These books and other resources are available on www.alislam.org.

Why are some people expelled from the Jama'at?

The *nizam* or organization of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community is aimed to reform and guide members so that everyone is able to worship and practice the true teachings of Islam in the best way possible. Unfortunately, there are some individuals who deviate from righteous deeds and commit acts that call for disciplining. Concerning this, Hazrat Khalifatul Masih V (may Allah be his Helper) says the following:

We do not expel the person without a reason. There are certain reasons for it. Someone has committed a wrong action, or an un-Islamic action, an action against Sharia, then that person gets punished. Or there is a case in the *Qaza* Board, and he willingly takes the case there, and says that whatever decision the Board takes, I will accept the results or punishment of the

Board. And if the person doesn't accept the decision, then that person gets punished.⁶⁴

Furthermore, no two cases are ever identical and thus no two cases are dealt with in the same manner. Although all ill acts are innately stemmed from similar roots, there is a difference between the punishments administered to those who deviate. Huzoor clarifies further when he says:

There are two types of punishments. Sometimes if a person has done something wrong, then [the Jama'at] says that we will not take Chanda from that person nor any help in Jama'at work... If the person commits a huge action that is wrong, [it should be noted that] the Jama'at does not have a police force or a jail. Punishment is actually given to help reform. So, in this case, we say that the person will not have any connection with the Jama'at. The person who has been expelled from of the Jamaat, he remains an Ahmadi of course. If he believes in the Promised Messiah^{as}, he will be called an Ahmadi. And there is no doubt he may have respect for Khilafat in his heart, and is connected to it. But the administrative action that is taken against

him is that organizationally he is not part of the Jama'at.⁶⁵

This is an important element of the discussion. When a person is expelled from the Jama'at, it does not mean that they are no longer Ahmadi Muslim. Faith is a private matter and the best judge of a person's relationship with God is God Himself. The Jama'at never declares anything about a person's private faith, nor prevents him or her from worship at the mosque. Instead, such a person is removed from the *nizam* or organization, and may lose certain privileges, such as holding an office position within the community.

The genuine intention behind this practise is the reformation and personal development of members of Jama'at. After a punishment has been administered, and a substantial change has been seen in the individual, the door is open for them to be forgiven and re-enter the *nizam*, and even excel other members of the Jama'at in devotion, righteousness and service. Huzoor explains this as follows:

After a while he repents, [or] asks God for forgiveness. It may be six months later, a year

later, two years later, whenever he does. Or, he may have wronged someone. Say you [i.e. the tiftl who asked the question] have to give someone £2000 that you owe them, and you agree to give that money in a month or two months. When two months pass by and you have not even give a penny back, you will be punished, right? So, when you give the money back, your punishment will be forgiven, and you will be back [in the *nizam* of the Jama'at]. Punishment is given for reformation. I gave a Khutbah a while ago that when a wrongdoing is corrected, the punishment is over. But we cannot [ever] say that the person is not Ahmadi [Muslim]. Deen is in the heart. He sincerely believes in the Promised Messiah^{as}, and believes in Khilafat, so he is Ahmadi; but administrative action is taken against him and he is expelled from the Jama'at.⁶⁶

From this, it is evident that despite the Jama'at's best efforts to keep all of its members on the right path, there are a few unfortunate cases where individuals go against the teachings of Islam and thus require reprimanding. However, contrary to

popular belief, the purpose of the system is to designate a just punishment and motivate the individual to reform, make amendments, as well as seek forgiveness.

MENTAL HEALTH

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How can I be happy?

As happiness is something that comes and goes with the ups and downs of life, the Holy Quran focuses on the importance of finding inner peace and tranquility. For example, when we lose a loved one sadness overtakes us, but our hearts can still be at peace if we are firmly grounded in faith. Remembrance of Allah is the key to this, as stated in the Quran, “Surely in Allah’s remembrance do the hearts find peace” (13.29). If you are feeling like you do not belong anywhere, find comfort in your faith and the community around it. You can remember Allah through many avenues. This can be through offering Salat, paying Zakat, and even reading books to increase our own religious knowledge. Even a quick visit to the mosque can offer a sense of belonging.

If boredom is causing you unhappiness, find things to keep yourself busy. This can include focusing on more school work, finding a new job,

volunteering more in your community, and so on. Sometimes spending more time with family and friends can help boost your mood as well. If you want to boost your mood by yourself, take up more physical activity. Exercise is a great way to relieve any stress you may have. It can range anywhere from yoga and a hike to swimming and playing a sport. You can also boost your mood by taking up a new hobby through something creative. This can include painting, cooking, and even drawing.

A very easy fix to try and be happy is to be positive. If you wake up and look at everything with a negative outlook on the world, you will ultimately not feel great about your day; however, if you look at life in a positive manner, you may be able to see the good in things. This is closely associated with the concept of *shukr* (gratefulness) which is heavily emphasized in Islam. Allah says:

لَئِنْ شَكَرْتُمْ لَأَزِيدَنَّكُمْ

That is, “If you are grateful, I will, surely, bestow more *favours* on you” (Holy Quran, 14:8). An immediate result of gratefulness is that we realize

the enormity of God's blessings no matter what the situation and are saved from taking things for granted.

If something is weighing your mood down, try talking to someone you trust to get your feelings off your chest or write it in a journal. In addition to this, keeping a gratitude journal can also help you remember what things make you happy and give you peace of mind. It is important to remember that every person struggles in their day-to-day life including matters related to wealth and health. Feelings of unhappiness are not uncommon and can happen to everyone at any time. You are not alone. In turn, if you are constantly in a feeling of sadness with no positive change, it may be time to go seek professional help, since this can be a symptom of clinical depression. This can be done easily by going online and finding a therapist in your local area.

I feel lonely. What can I do?

Feeling lonely is a normal thing and happens to everyone from time to time. In these instances, it is important to remember that you may feel lonely at this time, but you are not alone. It is important to combat this feeling head-on since a repetition of this feeling could lead to depression and anxiety. Firstly, try and identify what is making you feel this way. There are many things you can do to boost your morale in order to combat this feeling. If it is low self-esteem, start keeping a self-gratitude journal. This keeps a record of all positive, rewarding, and pleasant experiences you can look back to every night to increase joy. Positive self-talk on a daily basis, as well as keeping company around you that is sympathetic, encouraging, and motivating, can help your overall mood.

With supportive family and friends around you, these feelings of worthlessness and loneliness diminish. Sometimes, it is we who are being lazy

about reaching out to friends and family, thus feeling lonely. Getting together with friends or family may just be a phone call away to arrange. In conjunction with solidifying positive relationships between yourself and others, it is essential to keep yourself busy. You can achieve this through getting a job, participating in volunteer work, school, and exercise. If you cannot afford a gym membership, even taking a walk outside, in the neighbourhood, is a good way to refresh both your mind and body. Another form of exercise other than joining a gym, is to join fitness classes such as yoga or a drop-in basketball class.

If you feel lonely persistently, even coming to a congregational prayer at the mosque or Namaz center can improve your mood. It is Islam's way of ensuring that no one feels lonely as it gives multiple opportunities every day to meet up with other members of the Jama'at, build new friendships, and ultimately improve both our spiritual lives and worldly connections. Another way to meet new people is to see what is happening in your community online or at your local community

center. If you are not keen on physical activity, you can do something creative, such as a puzzle.

Another activity you can participate in is mediation, which in its best form, would be spiritual closeness to God Almighty through offering Salat with both sincerity and hope. A simple way of improving Salat is to set aside a good amount of time for a voluntary Salat, ensuring that the time allocated is going to be quiet and no one will disturb, and doing it in a closed room. This will allow you to open up to God about how you may be feeling and can ultimately make you feel better. In addition to this, sometimes volunteering and offering a helping hand can help you realize your own value and worth. The most beneficial thing you can do for your mental health is to try to identify what brings you joy and what activities bring you peace, so that you can participate in more of them. In turn, if you are constantly having a feeling of loneliness with no positive change, and none of these suggestions help, it may be time to go seek professional help, since this can be a symptom of clinical depression.

I feel very depressed. What can I do?

Firstly, depression is not something to be ashamed of and one should always feel comfortable enough to open up and talk about it. It can range from being sad, due to the ups and downs of life, to a serious medical illness that needs to be treated through professional help. It can happen to anyone at any time and any age. It is very important to recognize that feelings of hopelessness, shame, and suffering are all normal feelings; however, they should not take over our whole life and prevent us from living life to our fullest. There are several different types of depression: major/clinical depression, chronic depression, situational depression, bipolar disorder, atypical depression, postpartum depression, and seasonal affective disorder.

The first action you can take to aid your depression is to seek professional help from a family doctor or a psychiatrist. They may suggest a treatment method, including taking pills like anti-depressants. The effectiveness of taking pills is still being questioned by many experts. Hence, you should first give precedence to those kinds of treatments that do not involve taking pills. These treatments may include making lifestyle changes, such as diet and exercise, or going for counselling or therapy so that you can decide the best course of action for yourself.

In addition to a medical intervention, a spiritual approach can also aid in your ailment. In this time, prayer can be very helpful to bring comfort and peace to you. Islam grants us security and gives us strength through faith. A sense of belonging and purpose surely gives anyone peace of mind. We must remember that everyone faces hardships and grief throughout their lives. For example, the Holy Prophet Muhammad^{sa} was persecuted for thirteen long years, lost many friends and family members and chose to live a life of simplicity. Studying his life can teach us many lessons on how important it

is to achieve peace of mind through Allah. Allah has allowed us to build a spiritual and strong connection with Him. Striving for that connection can be an additional method that aids in the process of treating depression.

Many of us may fall into depression about sins we may have committed in the past, but you must remember that Allah forgives all. In the Holy Quran, it states:

قُلْ يٰٓعِبَادِيَ الَّذِيْنَ اَسْرَفُوْا عَلٰٓى اَنْفُسِهِمْ لَا تَقْنَطُوْا مِنْ رَّحْمَةِ اللّٰهِ ۗ اِنَّ اللّٰهَ يَغْفِرُ الذُّنُوْبَ جَمِيْعًا ۗ اِنَّهٗ هُوَ الْغَفُوْرُ
الرَّحِيْمُ ﴿٥٤﴾

That is, "Say, 'O My servants who have transgressed against themselves [by sinning], do not despair of the mercy of Allah. Indeed, Allah forgives all sins. Indeed, it is He who is the Forgiving, the Merciful'" (39:54).

Moreover, it is important to remember that Islam encourages the preservation of life and Allah has completely forbidden suicide. However, if you are

feeling suicidal it is important to reach out to someone you trust. If you find talking to a loved one too difficult, call/text your local crisis line. If you require immediate assistance, go to your local hospital or call 9-1-1 (or your regional equivalent).

Why can I not use marijuana?

Drugs and all other intoxicants are forbidden in Islam because they are deemed harmful. Islam says that anything that is harmful for our physical and spiritual health is not allowed. For example, at the time of the Holy Prophet^{sa}, people would consume large quantities of alcohol but that would prevent them from offering their prayers as they would be intoxicated. Some people argue that marijuana has health benefits and it is not as harmful to health as perceived by society. This claim is addressed in the Holy Quran, Chapter 2, verse 220, where God says:

يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْخَمْرِ وَالْمَيْسِرِ قُلْ فِيهِمَا إِثْمٌ كَبِيرٌ وَمَنَافِعُ
لِلنَّاسِ وَإِنَّهُمَا آكْبَرُ مِنْ نَفْعِهِمَا ۗ يَسْأَلُونَكَ مَاذَا يُنْفِقُونَ ۗ قُلْ
الْعَفْوُ ۗ كَذَلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ الْآيَاتِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَفَكَّرُونَ ﴿٢٢٠﴾

That is, “They ask thee concerning wine and the game of hazard. Say: ‘In both there is great sin and also *some* advantages for men; but their sin is greater than their advantage.’ And they ask thee what they should spend. Say: ‘What you can spare.’ Thus does Allah make His commandments clear to you that you may reflect”.

This verse very clearly highlights that even if something has some benefits, but causes more harm to our physical and spiritual health, it is unlawful. Added to this is the *hadith* where the Holy Prophet^{sa} said, “Whatever causes intoxication in large amounts, a small amount of it is (also) unlawful”.⁶⁷ With marijuana, we see that there are some medical benefits but studies suggest that frequent and improper consumption of marijuana can cause detrimental side effects such as confusion, hallucinations, anxiety and paranoia. In other words, small amounts taken over a long period of time are harmful. In addition to this, long-term use can lead to having a severe psychotic disorder like schizophrenia.

The Promised Messiah^{as} cautions and reminds us that not only do intoxicants cause harm

physically to our bodies but they also take a toll on our spirituality. He states:

All those wealthy persons who consume alcohol also carry the sins of the people who intoxicate themselves under their influence. You who claim to possess understanding! Know that this world is not eternal, so take hold of yourselves. Eschew all immoderation and abstain from every type of intoxicant. It is not alcohol alone that ruins a person. Opium, ganja, charas, bhang, tarhi and all other addictions are similarly destructive. They ruin the mind and destroy lives. So, shun all such substances. I cannot understand why one would choose to indulge in these intoxicants when, year on year, they claim the lives of thousands of addicts—not to mention the torment of the hereafter.⁶⁸

He further states in Malfuzat:

When a person becomes addicted to drugs then it becomes difficult for him to stop. What are drugs? On the one hand they destroy life and on the other hand they are also sustenance for life.

If a drug addict does not get a dose of the drug then his condition can reach death.⁶⁹

Hence, we do not consume marijuana and other drugs simply because they are harmful for our health. No one takes poison knowingly. No one puts his/her hand in a hole where they have seen a snake enter. People who sell drugs are doing it only to earn large sums of money, especially hoping that their clients will come back to them over and over after becoming addicted. What we need to understand is that God is *Rahman* or Gracious, as per the teachings of the Holy Quran, and His commandments are a source of comfort, peace, and safety for all of humanity. It is time humanity realizes the beneficence of God Who gave us these commandments for our own well-being.

I have been sexually abused. What do I do?

Sexual abuse involves any unwanted sexual activity which can, but does not always, include touching. This can involve any unwanted touching of a private area, forced to have sex, and being forced to touch someone else in a sexual manner. In addition to this, it includes being forced to look at a naked person, picture, video, or any media shown in a sexual manner. It can also be used to demonstrate power or authority. If you have been sexually abused, it is important to know it is not *your* fault. Whether it has happened recently or in the past, help is always available to you. If this has happened recently, please get medical help. Many hospitals provide care for sexual assault. You can receive medicine and testing for sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

No one deserves sexual abuse and it is a crime. If you wish, the hospital can collect evidence of the assault using a "rape kit," in case you want to talk to the police. It is up to you, if you would like to press charges or not. It is never the victim's fault, and no one has the right to make someone do something that they don't want to. It can happen to anyone, at any age and any time. Any reaction you experience is normal and there is no right or wrong way to react to it.

The important thing is for you to begin the process of healing and recovery. If the person abusing you is still around and you are still in danger of being abused, the first step is to file criminal charges with the police so that you can get out of the dangerous situation. The second step is to find someone you trust, preferably a safe adult. This can be your parent, murabbi, or teacher. Start by taking your time to talk about what has happened, at your own pace. This can be a very hard subject to open up about. These two steps are the hardest and take an enormous amount of courage.

After taking these initial steps, you can then begin your journey towards healing. You can start

by offering Salat and venting out your feelings to God Almighty, and seeking His mercy, love, and strength to heal. This is especially possible in Sajdah where, after reciting the Arabic portion, you can pray to God in your own language so that you are able to best express yourself. This will allow you to get your thoughts out if you are having a hard day, as well as achieve peace of mind.

It is also very important to be patient with yourself, since healing takes time and some days may be harder than others. It is important to recognize any feelings of depression that may occur after this abuse. This is completely normal; however, it may be time to go seek professional help if it is causing you to have feelings of depression and anxiety. If you are feeling suicidal, it is important to reach out to someone you trust. If you find talking to a loved one too difficult, call/text your local crisis line. If you require immediate assistance, go to your local hospital or call 9-1-1 (or your regional equivalent).

THEOLOGY

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Is it possible to be successful without religion?

Everything in life requires a certain set of guidelines to ensure that things work properly and fulfill their purpose. For our physical body and survival, there are certain things required. They include eating, drinking, sleeping, work, and exercise, all in moderation to ensure that our bodies are functioning properly and only then can a person be able to work towards success. Similarly, one of our missionaries gave the example of a how a car needs engine oil to run. If we do not put oil in a car, it will eventually seize the car's engine, the car might run for a bit but its condition will start to deteriorate.

The same concept is applicable to the necessity of religion in our lives. There are many people who have convinced themselves that religion holds no significance but they are void of those spiritual

instructions given to us by our Creator. Hence they can be compared to the car that ends up being useless because the conditions for it to function adequately were not followed.

The answer to this question about success without religion is linked to the question, 'What is our purpose?', or, 'Why do we live?'. The answer is that our purpose is to recognize God, our Creator, and have a relationship with Him, and that we fulfill the rights owed to the Creation of God—our fellow human beings. In order to help us fulfill our purpose and to live our lives to the fullest, Allah sent Prophets and revealed certain commandments to them.

Another aspect we have to keep in mind is that this world is not our end goal. If we were limited to this world only and ceased to exist afterwards, there would only be one type of success that we would give significance, that is, worldly success. One may argue that there are so many people in the world that do not follow religion and are successful in terms of their worldly pursuits, where they have an abundance of wealth and materialistic amenities. But since all humans are eventually going to die

and meet their Creator, we will be held accountable for our every action in this life. The Quran says:

إِنَّا جَعَلْنَا مَا عَلَى الْأَرْضِ زِينَةً لَّهَا لِيَبْلُوَهُمْ آيَاتِنَا أَحْسَنُ
عَمَلًا ﴿٨﴾

That is, “Verily, We have made all that is on the earth as an ornament for it, that We may try them as to which of them is best in conduct” (18:8).

As a result, the truly successful one is the person who is successful in the eyes of God. Human beings cannot define success in their own terms. It is God who decides, and as He has laid out in the above verse, this world is a place of trials and successful is the one who goes through the trials in accordance with the Will of God, regardless of how rich, famous, or ‘successful’ they may consider themselves to be. What matters is their position in the sight of Allah, no matter how highly they think of their own selves. God says in the Quran, “Verily, the most honourable among you, in the sight of Allah, is he who is the most righteous among you” (49:14). In other words, *taqwa*, righteousness,

piety, and virtue, of a person is a measure of success, not worldly gains.

Therefore, it is vital to understand that religion not only directs us to strive for worldly success but informs us that our journey continues from this world to the Hereafter where we also need to be successful and that success has been defined by religion. Contrasting between worldly success and the more permanent success associated with the Hereafter, the Quran says:

قُلْ مَتَاعُ الدُّنْيَا قَلِيلٌ ۖ وَالْآخِرَةُ خَيْرٌ لِّمَنِ اتَّقَى

That is, “Say, ‘The benefit of this world is little and the Hereafter will be better for him who [has *taqwa*, or] fears God’” (4:78). No matter what a person gains in this world, it will remain “little” and true gains are ones associated with *taqwa*.

The purpose of religion then is not to bind us with laws and regulations just for the sake of controlling us, rather it is to guide man to attaining spiritual prosperity so that we can please our God. Yes, religion does give us rules and laws but having laws is the very hallmark of civility. Take the

example of the roadways in developed countries. Having traffic rules is never criticized as “limiting” or “restrictive”. Instead, it is seen as a means to an end. The end being the safety of all those who use the roadways. The same is the case with religion. Without it, we would have no sense of direction in our lives.

Why should we love Allah? What is the benefit?

Before asking this question, we must understand what “love” is. This is addressed by the Promised Messiah^{as} as follows:

Love is not pretence or ritualistic, rather it is a faculty among human faculties. Its reality is that the heart likes something and is drawn to it. Just as the real qualities of something are made evident when it reaches a state of excellence, so is the case of love. Its treasures are made apparent when it reaches its climax and highest point...In fact when a person completely loves someone it is as if he permeates him or consumes him and is imbued with his morals and manners. The greater the love, the more one is naturally drawn to the qualities of his beloved so much so that he becomes an image of the beloved. This is also the indication when man

loves God he attains God's light on a reflective basis in accordance with his own powers.⁷⁰

When we see something beautiful or aesthetically pleasing, it is human nature to grow a natural inclination towards that thing in our hearts. Similarly, when a person reads the majesty of Allah mentioned in the Quran and follows the tenets of Islam, they develop an inclination towards Allah. This love automatically multiplies as a person tries to adopt the beauty or have a link with the Being that their heart is inclined towards.

When the love of Allah manifests itself into the mind and soul of a believer, respecting the commandments of Allah and seeking His pleasure becomes an honour and a source of pleasure itself, and such lovers of Allah become fiercely obedient to His directives. This love is then reciprocated by Allah Himself who blankets His creation under His gracious protection.

In a *hadith*, the Holy Prophet^{sa} tells us exactly what the benefit of loving Allah is. He states:

Allah said: I will declare war against him who shows hostility to a pious worshipper of Mine. And the most beloved things with which My

servant comes nearer to Me, is what I have enjoined upon him; and My servant keeps on coming closer to Me through performing *nawafil* (praying or doing extra deeds besides the obligatory) till I love him, so I become his sense of hearing with which he hears, and his sense of sight with which he sees, and his hand with which he grips, and his leg with which he walks; and if he asks Me (for anything), I grant it to him, and if he asks for My protection, I grant him protection. And I do not hesitate to do anything, but I hesitate to take the soul of the believer, for he hates death, and I hate to disappoint him.⁷¹

This *hadith* tells us that by gaining the love of Allah, the most Powerful Being—the Creator of the universe—Himself becomes our protector; what more could one ask for? What greater privilege could there be?

An outcome of loving Allah is that it eradicates the stain of sin from us and grants us eternal salvation. The Promised Messiah^{as} states:

The source of true salvation, therefore, is personal love for God, which, in turn, draws His

love through man's humility, supplication and constant *Istighfar*. When a person carries his love to perfection and the fire of love consumes his carnal passions, then, all at once, a flame of God's love—which He has for His servant—falls upon his heart and cleanses him of the dirt of his mundane existence. He then acquires the complexion of holiness of God, Who is *Hayy* and *Qayyum*, and partakes of all Divine attributes by way of reflection (*zill*). He then becomes a manifestation of Divine glory, and all that is hidden in God's eternal treasure is disclosed to the world through him. Since God—Who created this world—is not a miser, and His blessings are everlasting, and His names and attributes are never suspended, He grants to the people of the latter days the same bounties that He gave to earlier people, but on the condition of piety and effort.⁷²

Hence, developing love for our One true God, Who has blessed every one of His creations abundantly, is an essential duty of all believers. Not a "duty" that is seen as a burden, but a "duty" that is done through a natural yearning for a relationship with

God Who is the ultimate source of all pleasures and peace. The intimate connection of communication between a human and the Creator is one that cannot be mimicked by any other relationship in this world, thus it would be foolish to not make every effort to build it.

What is the purpose of life?

Among the many creations of God, the creation of humans holds a very unique position. In a world where both good and evil exists, humans are directed to establish a morally esteemed designation and enrich their life with worldly and spiritual pleasures. God says in the Holy Quran, “And I have created Jinn and men so that they should worship me” (51:57).

What then is worship? It is to act upon the commandments of Allah and to follow Him seeking His pleasure. Elaborating on this, Hazrat Hakeem Maulawi Nur-ud-din^{ra} gives the example of commandments related to fasting and praying. If these acts themselves were part of worship, doing more of them would be beneficial and a source of reward. However, we are forbidden to pray at certain times of the day, and also forbidden to keep a fast on certain days like Eidul Fitr and Eidul Adhaa. Giving the example of the relationship

between a man and a woman, Huzoor says that the acts of walking together, expressing love, private conversations, and intercourse, when done with one's spouse are a means to gain reward from Allah. But when a man does the same things with a woman who he has not married, it becomes something worthy of punishment. The acts are the same, but in one case they are rewarded and in the other case they are punished. This means that acts themselves are not worship. Worship (*'ibadat*) is essentially obedience to God (*ita'at*).⁷³

Life holds great value in Islamic philosophy. As creatures of God, human beings enter a world where the potential to advance in both spiritual and worldly terms is endless. Humans do not have the authority to appoint the true purpose of their life, as they did not enter this world with their own will nor will they depart with their own will. Simply put, the purpose of life for God's creation is to find God and lose oneself in Him. This can be accomplished by two means. Firstly, humans must strive to attain absolute moderation in their worldly pursuits and work tirelessly for the service of humanity. And secondly, humans are to use the

external and internal limbs bestowed on them to establish an everlasting and sacred attachment to God Almighty.

That then is the ultimate goal and the true fulfillment of the purpose of existence. All acts of righteousness, or articles of faith, hold importance, but they are only a means to an end. And that end is to connect with God. The practice of the ritualistic prayer should never be just that: a *ritual*. That is not what defines the purpose of life. The true purpose of life can only be fulfilled when humans actively utilize these practises of worship and other virtuous acts as aids to find God and devote their heart to pleasing Him.

One's life can only be fulfilled when man reaches his spiritual peak and is in divine communion with God. This very goal forms the foundation of Islam. Believers are encouraged to present themselves before God in the utmost humility and desperately seek His Mercy in order to create an intimate bond with their Master. This relationship, between man and his Creator, is one that cannot be mirrored by any other relationship in this world.

Some individuals take God's love for granted. For example, they may offer the obligatory prayers to God yet they do the bare minimum in terms of helping humanity to attain His pleasure and do not strive to heighten their spirituality when times are good. However, at the first sight of trouble, the intensity and fervency in their prayers increases exponentially and they change their actions to win God's pleasure for the time being. It is simply foolish to turn to God only during times of hardship. Is it not our duty as believers to thank God for His mercy when our lives are peaceful?

Contrary to what other religions claim, God is not aloof from His creation. For those who are sincere in their worship, humble in their ability, compassionate in their actions and honest in their words, God is closer to them than they could ever imagine. When humans intend to win the love of God, no effort of theirs is ever wasted or left unnoticed. Fortunate are those who have found God, for they have contentment in their hearts and peace in their minds.

Why does the Quran have such 'harsh' language?

It is felt by some that the Quran has very strong language that is very intimidating and sounds cruel. This is actually due to a misunderstanding of the purpose of the Quran. The Quran is not a diplomatic document meant to use false pretences to lure people into the faith. In fact, if the Quran had used such language, it may have been accused of hypocrisy and falsehood and no one would have accepted it. On the contrary, the Quran uses straightforward, transparent language so that the truth is conveyed as openly and clearly as possible. It does not mince words. What needs to be stated is stated with absolute clarity.

It may sound offensive to some but the Quran does not shy away from stating what it is presenting as truth. The Promised Messiah, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad^{as}, explains this in light of the

incident when the same question was put to the Holy Prophet Muhammad^{sa}. When the Quran was being revealed in the early days and straightforward, truthful statements were being made about the false idols of the Quraish, they were offended and came to the Prophet's^{sa} uncle, Abu Talib, to pass on their demand to the Prophet^{sa} that he change his language.

Abu Talib then called the Holy Prophet^{sa} and told him that the people are offended by his language, and may even be enraged enough to try to kill him, and advised him to tone down his language, and refrain from using words that offend others. The Holy Prophet^{sa} responded by saying that it is not abusive language that he is using. Instead, the language is a clear expression of truth, and stating of facts at the appropriate time, and this is precisely in accordance with his mission. The fear of death will not prevent him from stating what is true.⁷⁴

In other words, the intention of the Quran is not to sound intimidating, harsh, or cruel. The Quran is filled with very beautiful passages and prayers, and reminders of how Allah blessed nations in the past.

However, when it comes to evil, and Satanic thoughts and actions, the Quran makes its stance clear, and expresses its revulsion. What is more is that the clear language is meant to motivate individuals to act for their own betterment. If the Quran had not been clear on sin, many may have taken it lightly and may have suffered immensely by not taking a vile thing like sin seriously.

In the very beginning of the Quran however, Allah made it clear that He is the *Rabb*—One Who provides sustenance and cares for the well-being of His creation; *Rahman*—One Who provides for His creation even without any action from the Creation; and *Rahim*—One Who rewards those who do good. Hence, the Quran makes it clear that God is a loving God who cares for His creation, and it is in fact an expression of His love that He is also clear about sin and other things that are harmful and destructive to humans.

How do we know that Islam Ahmadiyyat is the only true religion?

The first point that needs to be understood is that Ahmadiyyat does not present new teachings that are separate from Islam; rather Ahmadiyyat was established to revive the true teachings of Islam, and the essence of spirituality that had been forgotten by Muslims.

Hazrat Mirza Bashiruddin Mahmood Ahmad^{ra} was once asked as to why he believes in Islam and he replied by explaining that the fundamental belief of all religions is existence of God and the central goal is to build a relationship with Him. As such, the religion that is most successful in establishing the bond between God and the human being must be true. If the religion is true, it is obvious that we must believe in it.⁷⁵

He further stated, "Islam claims that the Creator of this universe is a living God and that He reveals Himself to His creatures in this age in the same manner in which He used to reveal Himself in the ages past".⁷⁶ So we see that for a religion to be true it has to fulfill the requirement of guiding us to create that relationship with our Creator. If one, despite following the tenets of a religion cannot reach this level, then that religion cannot be considered true.

Then Huzoor^{ra} further breaks down his answer and states, "I believe in Islam as it does not base itself upon the experience of people who have passed away, but invites everybody to a personal experience of that which it teaches and guarantees. It claims that every truth can, in some manner or the other, be put to the test in this world, and it thus satisfies my reason".⁷⁷

Islam challenges an individual to foster their own relationship with God. One's own experience is valued greater than the supposed experiences of others. The individual is asked to build faith in God from their own prayer rather than simply following

the words of others. In order to judge anything, we first need to try and experience it, to see if the claims it makes are true or not. Islam offers a personal relationship with God, and without making a sincere effort towards this goal, it cannot be dismissed.

Another way to judge a religion is by its religious scripture, and for Muslims that is the Holy Quran. It is imperative for the Word of God to be able to prove that it has actually been sent by God. And when one studies the Holy Quran they see that it presents its own evidence and not just claims. For example, Allah Himself says, “Verily, We Ourselves have sent down this Exhortation, and most surely We will be its Guardian” (Holy Quran, 15:10). In 1400 years, not a single verse has been changed, therefore testifying the truth of its legitimacy. Furthermore, the Holy Quran makes prophecies that were fulfilled just in the recent past, for example, “Their skins will bear witness against them as to what they have been doing” (41:21). This verse of the Quran talks about the process of fingerprinting and DNA, which are a recent phenomenon but the Holy Quran addressed this 1400 years ago.

Moreover, in this day and age, we have seen and are seeing the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Promised Messiah^{as}, who is a sincere follower of the Holy Quran and the Holy Prophet^{sa}. If he is not from God, how did those prophecies come true? For example, in 1905, the Promised Messiah^{as} prophesied a great war and the miserable end of the head of state of Russia, who at that time was Czar Nicholas II. He stated, “And the Czar himself will, at that hour, be in a pitiable state”.⁷⁸ And this happened in 1918 when the Czar and his family, after a long series of events were brutally executed. How could the Promised Messiah^{as} know this back in 1905? This and many other prophecies of the Promised Messiah^{as} are listed in his books. Some were fulfilled in his lifetime, some immediately after his death in 1908, some in the century since, and others are being fulfilled today, and yet others are for the future.

It would be unfair to try to look for a shortcut answer to this question. The answer requires a person to analyze, study and apply the teachings accordingly to see if Islam Ahmadiyyat takes them

to that level, where a true religion from God is supposed to lead.

Hazrat Musleh Mau'ud^{ra} was someone who analyzed, studied and applied the teachings of Islam and he finishes his aforementioned answer to this question by stating:

In short, I find that Islam provides conditions of peace and comfort for me and for all those who may wish to tread the path prescribed by it, whoever they may be, whatever they may be and wherever they may be. In whatever position I place myself, I find that Islam is equally useful and beneficial for me and (those who are) mine, for my neighbours, for people whom I do not know and have not even heard of, for men and for women, for the aged and for the young, for the employer and the employed, for the rich and for the poor, for great nations and for small, for internationalists and for the nationalists, and that it establishes a sure and certain relationship between me and my Maker. I believe in it and how indeed could I give it up and accept something else in its place.⁷⁹

Epilogue

The pursuit of knowledge is something highly valued in Islam. The Quran teaches us the beautiful prayer:

وَقُلْ رَبِّ زِدْنِي عِلْمًا

Meaning, “And say, ‘O my Lord, increase me in knowledge’” (20:115). Similarly, the Holy Prophet^{sa} taught us the following prayer:

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَسْأَلُكَ عِلْمًا نَافِعًا وَرِزْقًا طَيِّبًا وَعَمَلًا مُتَقَبَّلًا

Meaning, “O Allah! I ask You for knowledge that is beneficial, and goodly provision, and deeds that are acceptable (to You)”.⁸⁰

We have addressed a small number of questions on contemporary topics in this book that are most commonly asked by the youth of today. However,

the pursuit of knowledge and the possibility of further questions obviously does not end with this book. For the purpose of further increasing one's knowledge and understanding of the Islamic faith, especially in light of contemporary discussions, we recommend the following books:

1. *The Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam*
2. *Noah's Ark*
3. *Blessings of Prayer*
4. *Haqiqatul-Wahi (The Philosophy of Divine Revelation)*
5. *Ahmadiyyat or The True Islam*
6. *Islam's Response to Contemporary Issues*
7. *An Elementary Study of Islam*
8. *World Crisis and the Pathway to Peace*

All of these books, and others, are available on www.alislam.org.

Peace be on those who follow the guidance!

NOTES

1. *Sahih Muslim*, The Book of Purification, Chapter: The five daily prayers...
<https://sunnah.com/muslim/2/18>
2. *Jami' At-Tirmidhi*, Chapters on Parables
<https://sunnah.com/urn/631010>
3. *Noah's Ark*, p. 36
4. *Blessings of Prayer*, p. 12-13
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