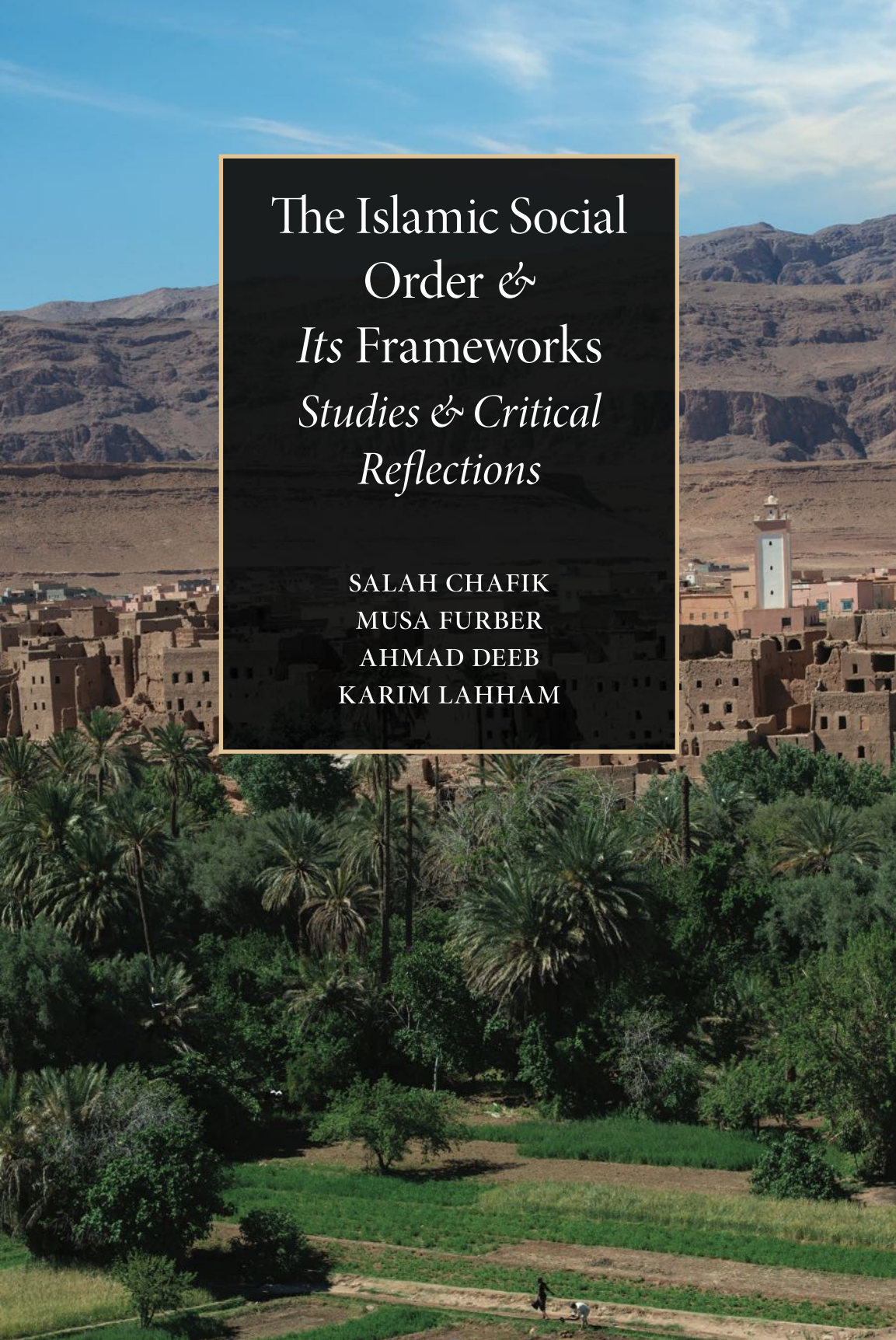

The Islamic Social Order & *Its* Frameworks

Studies & Critical Reflections

SALAH CHAFIK
MUSA FURBER
AHMAD DEEB
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All praise is to Allah alone, the Lord of the Worlds
And may He send His benedictions upon
our master Muḥammad, his Kin
and his Companions
and grant them
peace

Summary

This book aims to both rediscover and advance practical notions of commonweal, or common good, retrieval in an Islamic social order. The first chapter explores *shuʿab al-īmān* or "branches of faith," which is a holistic system of values and actions derived from various sound hadiths, though largely overlooked today. Musa Furber analyses classical texts and classification schemes of the *shuʿab* to demonstrate how these timeless branches can serve as a guide for spiritual refinement, ethical conduct, and social cohesion. In the second chapter, Ahmad Deeb traces how the metaphysical rupture caused by modernity fosters loneliness and erodes traditional structures of belonging, but then proposes a philosophy of community that is attune with and indeed can nurture psychological well-being and cohesion that is an innate human need. The third chapter maps out a skill-based social order animated by Islamic principles. In it, Karim Lahham illustrates how through intention, work is to become a communal obligation, serving both material needs and spiritual fulfilment, and ultimately steering the ethos of such a society towards upholding virtuous praxis whilst transcending the self.

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Contents

Preface

THE BOOK between your hands emerged from a discussion that took place over a walk in a central London park, on the rare occasion of a sunny Autumn day. The discussion, unlike the stroll itself amidst the gentle sway of the falling leaves, was weighted and solemn—it centred around how, in places where Muslims are present as either the majority community in society or amongst minorities, the commonweal is either increasingly marginalised or entirely lost. More lofty yet was our concern over how it could once again become a priority, in scholarship, policy, and most of all, practice.

To clarify, the word commonweal today is archaic in the English language, conventionally referred to instead as the common good (weal is derived from the Old English *wela*, meaning prosperity, well-being, good fortune). In Islam, perhaps the earliest conceptualisation of the commonweal we know of comes from Abū Naṣr al-Farābī (d. 339 AH/950 CE). Continuing and building upon the *eudaimonic*[1] tradition of Aristotle, al-Farābī referred to the framework of *al-sa'āda al-qaswa* or ultimate happiness, in the sense of a social order that allows, nurtures, and envelopes human flourishing, and indeed striving for its achievement as the fulfilment of a communal obligation to our Creator.[2]

Although a timeless obligation, the revival of the commonweal is particularly salient today given the immense challenges that the project of anthropocentric modernity has forcibly thrown upon—very often the most vulnerable of—us, e.g. extreme socio-economic inequality, precipitous psychological and emotional decline, merciless neo-colonial entrenchment, and unyielding environmental degradation and destruction. Indeed, as Ahmad Deeb alludes to in his chapter, the decline of the commonweal is not a challenge that pertains only to Muslims, but rather,

1. Janne Mattila, *The Eudaimonist Ethics of al-Fārābī and Avicenna* (Leiden: Brill, 2022).
2. Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī, *Book of Religion and Other Texts* [*Kitāb al-Milla wa nuṣūṣ ukhrā*], ed. Muḥsin Mahdī (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1986).

a critical matter for all people in any social order, and therefore, to address it well (even, or rather, especially in a way consistent with Islam) is of immense benefit to humanity. Naturally, any diagnosis or treatment of this decline should begin in the arenas where individuals can transcend themselves, in particular *the self*, to change or at least influence: families, communities, and institutions.

As such, we left the park with a clear intention: to crystallise and advance practical notions of commonweal retrieval in an Islamic social order. Our first task out of the gate was therefore to grapple with the question of what characteristics define or qualify a social order as grounded in Islam or, put simply, as bona fide Islamic? This of course led to an even more fundamental question, namely, being a faith tradition after all, what is the hallmark of faith in Islam? There are at least three distinct ways to answer the latter.

The first is the revealed or embodied route. As the chosen one elaborated (Allah's peace and blessings be upon him): "Every religion has a distinct characteristic, and the distinct characteristic of Islam is *ḥayā'* (modesty)."[3] Modesty, however, is likely an insufficient translation of *ḥayā'*, given that in addition to humility, the word is imbued with a moral sense of knowing one's limits and having an inherent uneasiness with and avoiding distasteful, let alone forbidden, actions or speech. As such, one may understand the essence faith in Islam as cultivating the soul to overcome and master the ego and lower self for the sake of Allah.

The second is etymological. The trilateral root of Islam in Arabic, *s-l-m*, contains the meaning of being safe from harm or peaceful, as The Prophet (Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) explained: "the Muslim is the one from whose tongue and hand people are safe."[4] Of course, the same *s-l-m* constellation of meaning contains the concept of submission, as in, to subscribe to Islam is to submit oneself uniquely to the majesty of The One, The True; which is how the soul can arrive at genuine peace.

A third manner is operational. As ʿUmar (may Allah be pleased with him) relayed and later anchored as one of the most oft repeated hadith: "Verily, actions are by intentions."[5] Accordingly, the hallmark of faith in Islam can be understood as the centrality of intention. Ibn al-Ḥāj provides a telling example with the Friday prayer of how in one action, there

3. Mālik, 2:905.
4. al-Bukhārī, 10.
5. al-Bukhārī, 1; Muslim, 1907.

can, and often should, be multiple intentions: fulfilling the obligation of communal prayer, following a practice of the Prophet (Allah's peace and blessings be upon him), venerate the house of Allah (i.e. mosque), honouring the blessed day of Friday, doing a good deed to others by applying a fragrance that concurrently disperses foul smells and emanates a pleasant one, etc.[6] Zooming out, it can be said that Islam calls for humans to simultaneously hold and operationalise two axial intentions. As the Qur'an asserts, the life of this world is fraught with peril and suffering that will ultimately have humans at a loss, save for the ones exhibiting two attributes: those possessing faith and doers of good.[7]

Through these three complementary understandings, we may therefore arrive at a workable heuristic of what defines an Islamic social order. The characteristic of *ḥayā'* serves as the guiding ethical force behind said society, and happens to be a direct normative injunction against individualism, profligacy, and totalising market logic. The first condition and ultimate goal, the departure point and final destination, of said society is the creation of a space where genuine peace can be established amongst humans and other facets of Allah's animate or inanimate creation. The central telos of all individual actions and communal forms of organising in said society is to both transcend the self and uphold virtuous praxis. As it were, the three contributions of this book each came to represent these three ways of understanding the hallmarks of faith in Islam.

Musa Furber takes up the revealed route, specifically on a topic that makes up an entire (sub) genre of hadith that in contemporary times has been largely overlooked. Known as the "branches of faith," his chapter explores how we are to taxonomise righteous actions, or doing good, in an Islamic social order. Ahmad Deeb then picks up on this thread by exploring their lived application, or lack thereof, in Muslim communities today. Akin to the etymological approach, Ahmad Deeb delves into roots, both in terms of issues and solutions, respectively: the metaphysical rupture caused by modernity which fosters loneliness and erodes traditional structures of belonging, and philosophy of community that nurtures psychological well-being and cohesion with innate human nature. In the final chapter, Karim Lahham sketches out an inspirational, yet practical vision of a skill-based social order animated by Islamic principles. By

6. Ibn al-Ḥāj, *Al-Madhkhal* (Casablanca: Dār Ar-Rashād Dār al-Ḥadīth, 2005), 18.
7. Qurʿan, 103:2–3.

constantly renewing and operationalising one's intention, work in the form of traditional vocational hierarchies—such as animal husbandry, agriculture, and craft—becomes a communal obligation, serving both material needs and spiritual fulfilment, all the while countering the alienation of late industrial capitalism.

Altogether, and to repeat, this book represents our intention of rediscovering and attempting to tread upon a path of commonweal retrieval in an Islamic social order. We ask Allah for sincerity and success towards reviving a world in which His mercy is manifest not only in the hearts of individuals, but in the very structures of our common life.

Salah Chafik (Editor)
Córdoba, Spain
April 2025

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IN THE NAME OF GOD, THE MERCIFUL, THE BENEFICENT

Shuʿab al-Īmān & Social Cohesion Crafting Ethical & Just Communities

by Musa Furber

THE QUR'AN AND SUNNAH of the Prophet Muhammad (may Allah bless him and give him peace) emphasise the concept of *shuʿab al-īmān* (branches of faith, henceforth: *shuʿab*), which encompass the beliefs, values, and actions integral to *īmān* (faith). These branches, described in Prophetic statements such as the famous hadith about the seventy-plus branches of faith, form the basis of a distinct field of study. The *'ulamā'* have produced works ranging from concise lists to encyclopaedic volumes, often organising the branches into classification schemes highlighting their significance for individuals and society. While there is no universally agreed-upon list, these branches collectively represent the core principles of faith and their practical implications.

These *shuʿab* are more than mere theoretical constructs; they serve as an actionable framework for personal and societal transformation. Beliefs provide the foundation for understanding one's purpose and accountability to Allah, values shape ethical priorities, and actions bring these principles to life through worship and service. Operationalised, the *shuʿab* contain the potential to foster spiritual refinement and social cohesion, contributing to a just and morally enriched community.

This chapter introduces the discipline of *shuʿab al-īmān* (branches of faith). To familiarise readers with the discipline in general, it begins with defining the discipline and its primary texts, along with classification schemes mentioned within the discipline's texts. It then examines the rationales and purposes behind eighteen branches in order to explore the role each branch would play in shaping the societal structure and envision the distinctive character of the society it would foster. It then

closes with a discussion on the impact and implications of *shuʿab al-īmān* (branches of faith) for both individuals and society and opportunities for applications and further research. It also includes an appendix presenting one of the most common lists, which includes a classification scheme and commentary for one branch of faith.

The Field

Introducing Shuʿab al-īmān (Branches of Faith)

In deference to the tradition, we begin with the position of the *ʿulamāʾ*[1] that one ought to become acquainted with the ten principles (the ten *mabādiʾ*) of a field of study prior to engaging with that field. Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Ṣabbān (d. 1791 AH/1206 CE) gathered these ten in the three following verses of poetry:

إِنَّ مَبَادِى كُلِّ فَنٍّ عَشَرَهْ * الحَدُّ وَالمَوضُوعُ ثُمَّ الثَّمَرَهْ
وَنِسْبَةٌ وَفَضْلُهُ وَالوَاضِعْ * وَالِاسْمُ الِاسْتِمْدَادُ حُكْمُ الشَّارِعْ
مَسَائِلٌ والبَعْضُ بِالبَعْضِ اكْتَفَى * وَمَنْ دَرَى الجَمِيعَ حَازَ الشَّرَفَا

The basic principles of every art are ten:
The definition, the subject, then the fruit,

A relationship, its virtue, the originator,
The name, the sources, the Legislator's ruling,

[And] the questions. Some sufficed with [mentioning] some of them.
And whoever knows them all has gained the nobility.[2]

1. n.b. I will use *ʿālim* and *ʿulamā* to refer to specifically to Muslim scholars of traditional Islamic disciplines.

2. In these lines: 1. Definition (*ḥadd*) refers to the essence, quiddity, or *māhiyah* of that science and its reality. 2. Subject (*mawḍūʿ*) refers to a general idea of what is researched in that science; it is what truly distinguishes one science from another. 3. Fruit (*thamarah*) is the benefit of knowing the subject. It can also be referred to as the benefit (*fāʾidah*). 4. Relation (*nisbah*) refers to the science's place among the other sciences, along with its relation to religion (*al-sharʿ*) and other areas. 5. Virtue (*faḍl*) refers to its relative nobility and merit amongst the rest of the science. 6. Originator (*wāḍiʿ*) refers to the person who is credited with either founding or recording the discipline. 7. Name (*ism*) designates the science; it distinguishes it from others and identifies it in the mind of the listener. 8. Sources (*istimdād*) refers

Regarding the *shuʿab al-īmān* (branches of faith) as a field of study:

1. Its name (*ism*) in Arabic is *shuʿab al-īmān*, translated as "branches of faith."
2. Its definition (*ḥadd*) is a compound term consisting of the words *shuʿab* (branches) and *al-īmān* (of faith). Both of these require additional clarification.
   - The word *shuʿab* is the plural of *shuʿbah*. In terms of conventional linguistic usage, it refers to a piece or segment. In terms of its technical meaning when used in Islamic discourse, it refers to a trait or characteristic.
   - The word *imān*, in terms of conventional linguistic usage, refers to absolute belief or affirmation. In terms of its technical meaning when used in the context of Islamic discourse, it refers to belief in what has been revealed by Allah and His Messenger (may Allah bless him and give him peace), accompanied by submission and compliance.
   - Therefore, the *shuʿab al-īmān (branches of faith)* are the traits through which faith is perfected.
3. Its subject (*mawḍūʿ*) is actions and beliefs.
4. Its ruling within the sharia (*ḥukm al-ṣhāriʿ*) for learning them is that it is obligatory, especially for those upon whom it is incumbent.
5. Its source (*istimdād*) is the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet (may Allah bless him and give him peace).
6. Its relation (*nisbah*) is that it is a branch of the Islamic sciences.
7. Its virtue (*faḍl*) is that it is among the most honourable of Islamic sciences.
8. Its benefit (*fāʾidah*) is attaining happiness in both worlds.
9. Its originators (*wāḍiʿ*) are hadith scholars such as Ibn Hibbān, al-Ḥalīmī, and al-Bayhaqī.[3]

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to which other sciences it depends upon, if any. 9. The Legislator's ruling (*ḥukm al-ṣhāriʿ*) refers to the legal ruling for being occupied with the field, whether as students, teachers, or practitioners. 10. Issues (*masāʾil*) refers to the propositions (*qaḍāyā*) whose predicates (*maḥmūlāt*) are sought to be related to its subject matter (*mawḍūʿāt*) via apodictic demonstration (*al-burhān*).

When introducing a discipline, presenting all ten foundation principles mentioned is unnecessary. Many authors prefer to present the ten in a logical order, as done in the text.

3. See Aḥmad Jābir Jubrān (1352–1425 AH), *Fatḥ al-Karīm al-Mannān bi sharḥ Nafḥat al-Raḥmān naẓm shuʿab al-īmān* (Jeddah: Dār al-Minhāj, 1434 AH/2013 CE), 32–33.

Thus, the discipline of *shuʿab al-īmān* (*branches of faith*) refers to the various components or branches that, in Islam, constitute complete faith. These branches encompass beliefs, actions, and traits that a believer should embody to achieve perfect and complete faith. For example, the Prophet (may Allah bless him and give him peace) said, "The faith (*īmān*) is [comprised of] seventy-seven odd branches. The best of them is saying, 'There is no deity except Allah,' and the nearest of them is removing harm from the path. And modesty is part of the faith."[4]

The *'ulamā'* have extracted, collected, and elaborated on these branches to guide Muslims in understanding and practising the facets of their faith. They detailed these branches based on the primary textual sources of Islam: the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet (may Allah bless him and give him peace). These sources contain many statements—such as the one given above—concerning the branches of faith, where something is indicated as being part of the faith (*īmān*) either directly and explicitly as part of faith or indirectly and implicitly as something that one possesses faith would do.

Their work led to the discipline known in Arabic as *shuʿab al-īmān* (branches of faith), which can be translated as *branches of faith*. The writings of the discipline include standalone monographs and multivolume encyclopaedias, as well as sections and chapters within more extensive works. Although there is a great deal of overlap amongst sources, and it is relatively easy to identify a core set, there is no comprehensive list of all the branches. The first explanation for this is that the number seventy-seven is often used, particularly at the time of the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace), as an expression to signify 'many' or 'a lot'—meaning the branches were perhaps always meant to be delineated and not exhaustively listed.

Nevertheless, many authors present the branches of faith as a list. Sometimes, there does not seem to be any rationale behind the order of their presentation, while at others, it is manifest. Some authors explicitly mention the rationale employed in presenting the branches, whether it be simple single-tiered groups or a more complex, multi-tiered hierarchy of groupings. These rationales—or classification schemes—usually highlight how an individual branch relates to individuals and society. Additionally, some of the classification schemes do not cover the complete core set.

The collation of *shuʿab* is not merely a conceptual exercise. These *shuʿab* represent core beliefs, values and actions that actively contribute to the

4. Muslim, 36 (58).

development of the individual and the shaping of Muslim society. Beliefs provide the foundational framework for understanding one's purpose, guiding an individual's worldview and sense of accountability to Allah.

Values derived from these beliefs shape moral priorities and ethical decision-making, fostering integrity, compassion, and justice in personal and social interactions.

Actions translate these beliefs and values into practice, embedding them into daily life through worship, community service, and adherence to Islamic teachings. At the individual level, this alignment cultivates spiritual refinement, self-discipline, and personal growth. At the societal level, the collective practice of these branches fosters social cohesion, mutual respect, and a shared commitment to justice and welfare.

When properly understood and implemented, the branches guide cultivating personal character while building cohesive, ethical, and spiritually enriched communities.

Understanding and implementing the branches of faith are essential for a Muslim's spiritual development and success in this life and the hereafter. Engaging with this discipline is deemed obligatory, particularly for those responsible for teaching and guiding others in matters of faith. The next section presents the *shuʿab* genre of texts, from its genesis to influential contributions and classification schemes.

A Survey of Influential Texts

Earliest Texts

The earliest works related to *shuʿab al-īmān* (branches of faith) include the Cordovan *ʿālim* Abū Isḥāq bin Ibrāhīm al-Tujībī (257–352 AH/871–963 CE)[5] *Al-Naṣāʾīḥ* (*The Sincere Advisements*) and al-Ḥāfiẓ Muḥammad bin Ḥibbān al-Bustī's (d. 354/965) *Waṣf al-īmān wa shuʿabuhu* (*The Description of Faith and Its Branches)*, which Ibn Mulaqqin (723–804/1323–1401) and others mention.[6] Neither work has survived, though they are mentioned in later works.[7]

5. Al-Dhahabī (d. 748 AH), *Siyar aʿlām al-nubalāʾ* (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 1427/2006), 12:175; ʿUmar Riḍā Kaḥḥālah (d. 1408), *Muʿjam al-muʾllifīn* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, n.d.), 2:229.
6. Ibn Mulaqqin, *Al-Tawḍīḥ*, 2:477.
7. c.f. Al-Qāḍī Iyāḍ, *Ikmāl al-muʿallim bi fawāʾid Muslim* (Egypt: Dar al-Wafāʾ li-l-Ṭibāʿah wa-l-nashr, 1419/1998), 1:282; Ibn al-Mulaqqin, *Al-Tawḍīḥ li-l-sharḥ Al-Jāmiʿ al-ṣaḥīḥ* (Damascus: Dār al-Nawādir, 1429/2008), 2:477.

NOTABLE AND INFLUENTIAL TEXTS

The first extent and most influential work in the field is the three-volume *Al-Minhāj fī shuʿab al-īmān* (*The Methodology in the Branches of Faith)* by al-Ḥusayn bin al-Ḥasan al-Ḥalīmī, al-Bukhārī al-Jurjānī (338–403/950–1012).[8] The book comprises an introduction and ten chapters, with the first nine chapters covering issues related to *imān* and taking up roughly one-fifth of the book. The tenth chapter covers the branches themselves, taking up the remaining four-fifths of the book. Al-Ḥalīmī provided evidence and an explanation for each of the branches. The explanations were often detailed and extensive, covering the same material and issues that would be found in other disciplines, such as creed, theology, jurisprudence and principles of jurisprudence (*ʿaqīdah, kalām, fiqh, uṣūl al-fiqh*). Al-Ḥalīmī mentioned seventy-seven branches. He started with matters related to beliefs (*imān*) and then mixed matters related to practice (*islām*) and excellence (*iḥsān*).

Many later authors followed al-Ḥalīmī's set of branches of faith and their ordering, including Abū Bakr Aḥmed bin al-Ḥusayn al-Bayhaqī (383–458/994–1066) in his encyclopaedic *Al-Jāmiʿ al-muṣannaf fī shuʿab al-īmān* (*The Comprehensive Compendium on the Branches of Faith*);[9] ʿUmar bin ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Qazwīnī (653–699/1255–1300) in his abridgement of the above titled *Mukhtaṣar Shuʿab al-īmān* (*Abridging* [*al-Bayhaqī's*] *Shuʿab al-īmān*); Zayn al-Dīn bin ʿAlī bin Aḥmed al-Malaybārī (872–928/1467–1522) in his *Shuʿab al-īmān;*[10] Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī (1145–1205/1732–1890) in his *ʿIqd al-jumān fī bayān shuʿab al-īmān* (*The Pearly Chain in Clarifying the Branches of Faith*);[11] and Muḥammad bin ʿUmar Nawawi al-Jāwī (1230–1316/1813–1898) in his *Qāmiʿ al-ṭughyān ʿalā manẓūmat Shuʿab al-īmān* (*Restraining the Flood:* [*Commenting*] *upon Versifying Shuʿab al-īmān*), a commentary on al-Malaybārī's poem.[12]

8. Al-Ḥalīmī, *Al-Minhāj fī shuʿab al-īmān* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1399/1979).
9. Al-Bayhaqī, *Al-Jāmiʿ al-muṣannaf fī shuʿab al-īmān*, edited by Muḥammad Saʿīd al-Zaghlūl, nine volumes (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah,1421/2000); al-Bayhaqī, *Al-Jāmiʿ al-muṣannaf fī shuʿab al-īmān*, edited by ʿAbd al-ʿAlī ʿAbd al-Ḥamiḍ Ḥāmid, fourteen volumes (Riyāḍ: Al-Rushd li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzīʿ, 1428/2003).
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11. Al-Zabīdī, *ʿIqd al-jumān fī bayān shuʿab al-īmān* in *Juzʾ fīhī Dhikr ḥāl ʿIkrimah*, edited by Niẓām Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ Yaʿqūbī (Beirut: Dār al-Bashāʾir al-Islāmiyyah, 1421/2000), 47–51.
12. Al-Jāwī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-madaniyyah*, within *Naṣāʾiḥ al-ʿibād* (Jakarta: Maktabat al-Turmusī li-l-Turāth, 1440/2019), 168–89.

The second notable work is *Shuʿab al-īmān* of another Cordovan scholar Abū Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Jalīl bin Mūsā al-Qaṣrī (d. 608/1211). He presents seventy-four branches. The first one-seventh of the book concerns matters related to the beliefs and cosmology of Ahl al-Sunnah. He concludes this part with the well-known ḥadīth where Jibrīl (peace be upon him) asks the Prophet (may Allah bless him and give him peace) about *īmān, islām, iḥsān*—that is: faith, submission (i.e. practice), and excellence, respectively. Al-Qaṣrī mentioned that matters of religion (*al-dīn*) all fall within the three categories mentioned in the hadith—*īmān, islām,* and *iḥsān*—and that the Prophet (may Allah bless him and give him peace) added further details and clarification in the hadith: "The faith (*al-īmān*) is [comprised of] seventy-seven odd branches," which he set out to present and explain in the remainder of the book. Al-Qaṣrī's set of branches begins with matters related to Allah and revelation and ends with matters related to the resurrection from the grave and the afterlife. For each branch, he justifies its inclusion as a branch of faith by providing its textual backing from the Qurʾan and Sunnah. His explanation of each branch examines each branch from several aspects:

1. Outward, which is related to the realm of the physical (*ʿālam al-ḥiss* or the sensory world and *ʿālam almulk* or the material realm), that is composed of bodies (*al-ajsād*) and corresponds to the station of *islām*.
2. Inward, which is related to the realm of the unseen (*ʿālam al-ghayb*), which divides into those related to:
    a. The realm of the unseen dominion (*ʿālam al-malakūt*), which pertains to the soul (*al-nafs*) and corresponds to the station of *īmān*.
    b. The realm of divine omnipotence (*ʿālam al-jabarūt*), which pertains to the spirit (*al-rūḥ*) and the heart (*al-qalb*) and corresponds to the station of *iḥsān*.

In this scheme, *islām* pertains to the outward practices related to that branch; *īmān* pertains to the inner wisdom of those practices; and *iḥsān* pertains to the inward practice and mastery of the branch.

Many later texts show apparent signs of being influenced by al-Qaṣrī's selection and organisation. Examples include Muḥyi al-Dīn Ibn ʿArabī's (560–638/1165–1240) discussion in *Al-Futūḥāt al-makiyyah* (*The Meccan Openings*);[13] and Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī in his *ʿIqd al-jumān* (*The Pearly Chain*).

13. Ibn ʿArabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyyah* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, n.d.), 4:479; Ibn ʿArabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyyah*, edited by ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Sulṭān al-Manṣūb (Tareem: Wizārat al-Thaqāfah, 1431/2010), 12:490–1. c.f. Ibn ʿArabī, *Al-Waṣāyā* (Damascus: Dār al-Imān, 1408/1988), page 16 §53.

The third notable work is by Ḥāfiẓ Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (773–852/1372–1449), who presented sixty-nine branches in his *Fatḥ al-Bārī* (*The Creator's Triumph*).[14] A translation of this text is include in the appendix. Many later texts expand on Ibn Ḥajar's work, such as Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (849–911/1445–1505) within the chapter on Sufism within his *Itmām al-dirāyah li-qurāʾ Al-Niqāyah* (*The Completion of Understanding for the Study of 'The Essence'*);[15] Aḥmad Jābir Jubrān's (1352–1425/1933–2004) *Fatḥ al-Karīm al-Mannān* (*The Granting of the Generous and Bestowing Lord*) is a commentary on his own *Nafḥat al-Raḥmān naẓm Shuʿab al-Īmān* (*The Gift of the Merciful: A Poetic Arrangement of the Branches of Faith)*, wherein he presents Ibn Ḥajar's seventy-nine branches of faith and classification scheme in fifty-one verses;[16] and Asʿad Muḥammad Saʿīd al-Ṣāgharjī's (d. 1436/2015) *Shuʿab al-īmān,* a four volume commentary on Ibn Ḥajar's branches.[17]

Notable Classification Schemes

While most writings on *shuʿab al-īmān* (branches of faith) present them as an uncategorised flat list, some writings introduce a classification scheme of varying levels of hierarchy.

The first classification scheme was introduced by Sirāj al-Dīn ʿUmar bin Ruslān al-Bulqīnī (724–805/1324–1403) in his *Turjumān shuʿab al-īmān* (*Explaining The Branches of Faith*), where he interprets the branches of faith as a whole in light of the aforementioned ḥadīth on the pillars of *īmān, islām,* and *iḥsān*. Accordingly, he presented the branches under three basic categories: belief in the heart (*imān*), visible deeds (*islām*), and hidden deeds (*iḥsān*).[18] This scheme reflects the comprehensive nature of faith, encompassing internal beliefs, outward actions, and the cultivation of inner sincerity and excellence.

Ibn Ḥajar introduced the second classification scheme in *Fatḥ al-bārī*

14. Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Fatḥ al-Bārī* (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifah, 1379), 1:52–53.
15. Al-Suyūṭī, *Itmām al-dirāyah li-qurāʾ al-nuqāyah* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyyah, 1405/1985), 169–79.
16. Aḥmad Jābir Jubrān, *Fatḥ al-Karīm al-Mannān* (Jeddah: Dār al-Minhāj, 1434/2013), 32–33.
17. Al-Ṣāgharjī, *Shuʿab al-īmān* (Beirut: Dār al-Kalim al-Ṭayyib, 1418/1997).
18. Al-Bulqīnī, *Turjumān shuʿab al-īmān* (Medina: Maktabat al-ʿUlūm wa-l-Ḥīkam, 1424/2004).

where he presented a set of sixty-nine branches, classifying them as acts of the heart, tongue, and body. He further subdivided acts of the body into those linked to the person himself (personal), to another person (interpersonal), and other people in general (societal). Ibn Ḥajar's classification highlights the multi-faceted nature of faith, illustrating how it governs internal dispositions, verbal expressions, and physical actions while addressing personal virtues, interpersonal ethics, and broader societal responsibilities.

Al-Zabīdī introduced the third classification scheme in his aforementioned *ʿIqd aljumān* (*The Pearly Chain*). While presenting his summary of the branches mentioned by al-Ḥalīmī and al-Bayhaqī, he did so under three major categories—belief in Allah, belief in the obligations of worldly life, and belief in the afterlife—which divide even further into additional subcategories. This multilevel, nuanced scheme captures the interconnectedness of theological understanding, ethical conduct, and ultimate accountability, emphasising how faith integrates life's spiritual, moral, and practical dimensions.

Each of these three schemes demonstrates that the branches of faith are not abstract categories but practical pathways for shaping individuals and cultivating Muslim societies rooted in justice, mutual care, and spiritual excellence. By addressing beliefs, values, and actions at every level—personal, interpersonal, and societal—they collectively offer a timeless blueprint for moral and spiritual growth.

A Sample of Branches of Faith and Their Societal Implications

Writings on *shuʿab al-īmān* (branches of faith) commonly provide evidence behind each branch of faith. A few writings also provide explicit rationales and purposes for their inclusion, such as the eighteen that Aḥmad Jābir Jubrān gives in *Fatḥ al-Karīm al-Mannān*. Some take a more implicit approach, leaving it up to the reader to understand the same from the quoted textual evidence or from its fruits (*thamarāt*), signs (*ʿalāmāt*), and the like.

If we select the branches of faith with explicit rationales and purposes and then examine those explicit rationales and purposes along with their implicit dimensions, we can gain insight into how each branch shapes

the societal structure and envision the distinctive character of the society it would foster.

Faith in Allah (al-īmān bi-Llāh)

Among the evidence for this branch of faith is that the Prophet (may Allah bless him and give him peace) was unambiguous regarding the pillars of faith (*arkān al-īmān*): "Faith (*īmān*) is that you believe in Allah, His angels, His books, His messengers, the Last Day, and fate (its good and its evil)."[19] Faith in Allah is therefore the first pillar and foundation of all branches of faith; without it, no other action holds significance.[20] This means a Muslim's every intention, state, and deed is built upon an unwavering belief in the Divine.

This foundation establishes a society built on a shared ultimate authority that transcends human authority. It creates a singular moral and metaphysical authority, preventing the fragmentation of moral standards. A society based on this faith does not root its ethics in transient human preferences or shifting ideologies but instead in unchanging Divine guidance. Such a society would orient all its actions, laws, and social norms around Divine guidance rather than purely human reasoning.

At the individual level, people would find purpose and value in their relationship with Allah rather than in social validation or material possessions, creating a sense of accountability beyond worldly consequences. Such a society does not suffer from moral relativism, nor does it elevate material success as the ultimate criterion of worth. Indeed, even nonhuman life and the environment would be viewed as creations of Allah, to be treated with responsibility rather than mere resources for exploitation.

Belief in and Following the Prophet (wujūb iʿtiqād wa-ttibāʿ al-nabī ﷺ)

Among the evidence for this branch of faith is that the Prophet (may Allah bless him and give him peace) said: "None of you believes until his desires follow what I brought."[21] Indeed, believing in and following the Prophet (may Allah bless him and give him peace) is among the pillars of

19. Al-Bukhārī, 4777; Muslim, 8 (1).
20. Aḥmad Jābir Jubrān, *Fatḥ al-Karīm al-Mannān*, 41.
21. Al-Bayhaqī, *Al-Madkhal ilā al-Sunan al-kubrā*, 209; al-Baghawī, *Sharḥ al-sunnah*, 104. It is considered *ḥasan*.

faith (*arkān al-īmān*). It is necessary for eternal happiness and salvation in both this world and the next.[22]

This branch of faith is significant because it establishes an authoritative model for human conduct, preventing ethical chaos and unguided personal moral experimentation. It ensures that religious practice is not a matter of personal whims but follows the perfected example of the Prophet (may Allah bless him and give him peace).

A society built on this principle would have a practical model for implementing Divine guidance by following the prophetic example. Individuals would orient their personal conduct around this example, while society would reference prophetic traditions for managing affairs and dispute resolution. Such a society would not be leaderless in moral or practical matters, nor would it elevate personal reasoning above revealed wisdom. It would not separate religious ideals from practical implementation or rely solely on abstract principles. It would be a society that looks to a historical and divinely guided precedent for decision-making rather than transient intellectual trends.

Love of Allah (Ḥubb Allāh)

Among the evidence for this branch of faith is that the Prophet (may Allah bless him and give him peace) said: "Whoever possesses three [qualities] will find the sweetness of faith: Allah and His Messenger being more beloved to him than everything else; loving an individual solely for Allah; and detesting returning to disbelief after Allah has saved him from it, just as he detests being cast into Hellfire."[23]

Love of Allah is among the *shuʿab* because it is the foundation for faith (*īmān*) and love (*maḥabbah*). This love of Allah is critical because it is what motivates worship and ethical behaviour, transforming obligations into devotions rather than burdens. It suggests a society motivated by divine love rather than mere obligation or fear.

Individuals would cultivate a spiritual connection to the divine, and society would value spiritual relationships alongside material concerns. A society founded on this love does not rely on coercion to maintain moral conduct but fosters willing obedience out of devotion. Such a society would

22. Aḥmad Jābir Jubrān, *Ibid*., 60.
23. Al-Bukhārī, 16; Muslim, 43 (67).

not prioritise materialism over devotion, nor would it cultivate indifference towards the Divine. It would not be governed solely by pragmatic considerations but would incorporate spiritual devotion into its social fabric. Instead, its culture would be one where reverence and longing for the Creator shape everyday interactions and institutions.

Uttering the Two Testifications of Faith (al-nuṭuq bi-l-shahādatayn)

Among the evidence for this branch of faith is that the Prophet (may Allah bless him and give him peace) said: "The faith (*īmān*) is [comprised of] seventy-seven odd branches. The best of them is saying, 'There is no deity except Allah,' and the nearest of them is removing harm from the path. And modesty is part of the faith."[24]

Uttering the two testifications of faith indicates one's faith to others, thereby entering Islam and safeguarding oneself and one's family.[25] It marks the transition from disbelief to faith and signifies one's commitment to a life governed by Allah's guidance. It is also among the pillars of Islam (*arkān al-islām*).

This declaration matters because it defines communal and individual belonging through a simple, accessible verbal declaration. It establishes the boundary between faith and disbelief, making it a statement with legal, spiritual, and social consequences. A society rooted in this declaration does not define belonging based on race, ethnicity, tribe, socioeconomic class, or nationalism but rather on shared faith and commitment to Divine guidance.

Society becomes defined by who has made this declaration, creating a community with explicit shared values. On an individual level, this provides protection and identity. Such a society would not experience fragmentation based on race or nationalism, nor would it reduce faith to a private, subjective experience detached from communal obligations. It would not base membership on race, ethnic, tribal, socioeconomic class-oriented, or nationalistic factors but on this declaration of faith.

24. Al-Bukhārī, 9; Muslim, 36 (58).
25. Aḥmad Jābir Jubrān, *Ibid*., 104.

Sincerity (al-ikhlāṣ)

Among the evidence for this branch of faith is that Allah (Exalted is He) says: "And they were not commanded except to worship Allah, being sincere."[26] The Prophet (may Allah bless him and give him peace) said: "The thing that I fear most for my nation is associating partners with Allah. I do not say they will worship the sun, moon, nor an idol, but rather performing deeds for other than Allah and for hidden desires."[27] As such, sincerity is included as a branch of faith because no intention, state, or act of worship or deed is valid without it.[28]

This branch of faith ensures that actions are not merely mechanical but are rooted in genuine faith and purpose. It protects against hypocrisy and performative religiosity, ensuring that the social fabric is not built on empty formalities but on sincere commitment.

A society valuing sincerity would emphasise internal intentions alongside external actions. Individuals would be encouraged to examine their motives, while societal interactions would be based on genuineness rather than mere formalism. Placing an emphasis on sincerity would avoid reduction of religion to rituals devoid of inner meaning, nor reward superficial displays of piety. Such a society would not judge actions solely by their outward appearance but would instead foster a culture where actions are valued for their true intentions rather than for public recognition and outward results.

Purification (al-ṭahārah)

Among the evidence for this branch of faith is that the Prophet (may Allah bless him and give him peace) said: "Purity is half of *īmān*."[29] Purification—both physical and spiritual—is included as a branch of faith because spiritual filth kills and blinds the heart, making it more dangerous than physical filth.[30]

This branch of faith matters because it recognises the profound impact of spiritual corruption and moral damage on both individuals and society. When people are morally and spiritually blind,

26. Qur'an, 98:5.
27. Ibn Mājah, 4205.
28. Aḥmad Jābir Jubrān, *Ibid*., 61.
29. Muslim, 223 (1).
30. Aḥmad Jābir Jubrān, *Ibid*., 130.

they contribute to societal decay through dishonesty, oppression, and heedlessness.

Additionally, physical purification is integral to daily life, covering both minor and major impurification (*ḥadath*) as well as physical impurities. Maintaining the purity of the body, clothing, and prayer spaces is fundamental to faith. Given that the entire world is by default a *masjid*, that it: a place for prayer,[31] this principle extends beyond personal cleanliness to maintaining the purity of one's home, streets, neighbourhood, workplace, market (*sūq*), parks, and broader society. A community that upholds physical cleanliness fosters an environment where spiritual awareness flourishes, reinforcing the connection between external purity and inner devotion.

A society built on this principle prioritises spiritual and moral cleanliness alongside physical hygiene. Individuals engage in practices of self-purification, while society establishes systems to promote moral growth. Purification is also linked to rejecting misguided ideologies—impurities include sins and corrupt beliefs. Thus, such a society does not focus exclusively on external purity or material development while neglecting inner cultivation.

Prayer (al-ṣalāh)

Among the evidence for this branch of faith is that the Prophet (may Allah bless him and give him peace) said to the delegation from ʻAbd al-Qays: "Do you understand what is *īmān* in Allah? It is testifying that there is no deity except Allah and that I am the Messenger of Allah, establishing prayer, paying zakat, and paying one-fifth of your spoils of war."[32] He (may Allah bless him and give him peace) also said: "Certainly, between a man and disbelief is abandoning prayer."[33] Prayer is therefore included among the branches of faith because it is a pillar of Islam and separates Islam from disbelief.[34]

This practice is significant because it maintains the spiritual connection between individuals and their Creator, preventing moral drift and ethical complacency. It disciplines individuals and aligns them with a

31. Al-Bukhārī, 328; Muslim, 523.
32. Al-Bukhārī, 523; Muslim, 17 (14), 17 (23).
33. Muslim, 82.
34. Aḥmad Jābir Jubrān, *ibid*., 132.

higher order. Additionally, congregational prayers bring the community together to act in unison, physically and spiritually aligned towards a single purpose.

Prayer creates a society structured around regular ritual observance. Individuals would organise their daily activities around prayer times, fostering discipline and regular divine remembrance. Society would accommodate these prayer requirementsin its schedules and spaces. A society that upholds prayer does not neglect structured worship or relegate faith to a secondary role in daily life. Such a society would not prioritise uninterrupted productivity over spiritual observance. It would be a society where spiritual discipline shapes time, priorities, and community gatherings.

Ḥajj

Among the evidence for this branch of faith is that Allah (Exalted is He) says: "And complete Hajj and ʿUmrah for Allah."[35] Also, the Prophet (may Allah bless him and give him peace) clarified that "Islam was built upon five," and Ḥajj was counted among them. Ḥajj is also a pillar of Islam and influential in uniting the global Muslim community. It brings together leaders and prominent figures for consultation, strengthening the Muslim community, exchanging views, resolving issues, and standing united against enemies.[36]

This branch of faith matters because it fosters unity beyond local or national identities, making Muslims aware of their global community. Historically, it has been an opportunity for Muslim scholars from throughout the world to exchange ideas and update one another on developments in scholarship, professions, and crafts, preventing insular thinking and nationalism from taking precedence over religious brotherhood.

A society valuing Ḥajj would prioritise international Muslim unity and cooperation. It would erase all racial, ethnic, tribal, socioeconomic, and nationalistic factors—allowing all members of the Muslim community to know one another as equals.

Individuals would aspire to participate in this global gathering, while society would benefit from the international exchange of ideas and collaborative problem-solving.

35. Qur'an, 2:196.
36. Aḥmad Jābir Jubrān, *ibid*.,171.

A society centred on the significance of Ḥajj does not fragment based on local allegiances, nor does it allow for permanent societal stratification based on class or region. Such a society would not operate in isolation from the broader Muslim community. Instead, it cultivates a collective consciousness that sees beyond immediate, narrow affiliations.

Generosity (al-jūd)

Among the evidence for this branch of faith is that the Prophet (may Allah bless him and give him peace) said: "Nothing erases Islam like the way stinginess erases."[37] He (may Allah bless him and give him peace) said: "Two qualities do not coexist in a believer: stinginess and bad character."[38]

Generosity, particularly feeding others, is high because it involves giving wealth with a generous heart and fostering love and closeness. It provides relief to people experiencing poverty, satisfies hunger, brings joy, and fosters love and closeness since hearts are naturally inclined to love those who treat them with kindness.[39] This branch of faith matters because it ensures that economic activity is not driven solely by self-interest or profit maximisation but by mutual care and responsibility. It creates bonds of affection and trust within society.

A society built on this principle would systematically address hunger and need through individual generosity. Individuals would cultivate generosity as a spiritual virtue, while society would develop networks of support beyond formal governmental structures. A society built on generosity does not tolerate economic selfishness, nor does it reduce human worth to financial productivity. Individuals know that the entire material world belongs to Allah; whatever wealth one receives is a trust (*amānah*), and all will be accountable for carrying out this trust. Such a society would not allow wealth concentration without mechanisms for redistribution. It would be a society where wealth is a means of fostering communal well-being rather than for personal luxury or for filtering the haves from the have-nots.

37. Abā Yaʿlā al-Mawṣūlī, *Al-Musnad,* 3488.
38. Al-Tirmidhī, 1962.
39. Ahṃad Jābir Jubrān, *ibid*.,158.

Spreading Greetings of Peace (ifshā al-salām)

Among the evidence for this branch of faith is that the Prophet (may Allah bless him and give him peace) said: "By Him in whose hand is my soul: You will not enter paradise until you believe. And you will not believe until you love one another. Shall I guide you to what will cause you to love one another when you do it? Spread greetings of peace amongst yourselves."[40]

Spreading greetings of peace fosters love, brotherhood, and solidarity among Muslims. It is key to fostering acquaintance in society and spreading love and unity, so Muslims become one family.[41] This branch of faith is essential because it creates a culture of mutual respect and familiarity. It prevents social alienation and hostility from taking root.

A society practising this would cultivate warm interpersonal interactions beginning with greetings. Individuals would initiate positive interactions with both acquaintances and strangers, while society would be characterised by hospitality and openness. A society based on this practice does not promote cold individualism nor tolerate habitual suspicion and rudeness. Such a society would not maintain cold, impersonal public spaces or discourage interaction between strangers. It would be a society where warmth and openness characterise daily interactions. It is a society that would reject today's pervasive alienating social media technologies.

Returning Greetings of Peace (radd al-salām)

Among the evidence for this branch of faith is that Allah (Exalted is He) says: "And when you are greeted with a greeting, greet with one better than it or return it [i.e. the same]."[42] Indeed, the return of greetings ensures safety and security for both parties, removes malice and resentment, and plants love and affection in hearts.[43] This branch of faith is crucial because it actively reinforces social cohesion. Greeting others eliminates social tension before it can escalate into division. It also prevents grudges and breakdown of communication from festering within a community.

This creates reciprocal social bonds through acknowledged greetings. Individuals would feel recognised and respected through this simple exchange, while society would maintain civility through these mutual

40. Muslim, 93–94 (54).
41. Aḥmad Jābir Jubrān, *ibid.*,162.
42. Qur'an, 4:86.
43. Aḥmad Jābir Jubrān, *ibid.*, 363, 366.

acknowledgements. A society rooted in returning greetings does not foster cold and indifferent interactions nor tolerate passive hostility between its members. Such a society would not allow individuals to feel invisible, unacknowledged, or alienated. Instead, it builds a culture where acknowledging others and offering warmth is a social expectation, ensuring a more interconnected and caring community.

Reconciliation Between People (al-ṣulḥ bayn al-nās)

Among the evidence for this branch of faith is that Allah (Exalted is He) says: "If two parties of believers fight, make peace between them [...] The believers are but brothers, so reconcile between your brothers, and observe your duty to Allah that you may receive mercy."[44] Reconciliation is therefore one of the most vital social contracts, as it removes grudges and resentment and spares society from disasters that arise from enmity and discord. It enables love and brotherhood, serves as a means of deliverance, and safeguards judges from erroneous judgments.[45]

This branch of faith is essential because unresolved conflicts erode the stability of any society. A commitment to reconciliation means that individuals and communities actively seek to heal rifts rather than allowing them to grow.

A society prioritising reconciliation would develop robust conflict resolution mechanisms. Individuals would be encouraged to resolve disputes amicably, while society would establish mediation systems to prevent escalation of conflicts. A society based on reconciliation does not permit prolonged enmities nor allow disputes to escalate unchecked. Such a society would not rely primarily on adversarial legal processes. Instead, it would be one where mediation is valued, and people actively work to restore harmony, creating a resilient and cooperative society.

Commanding Good and Forbidding Evil (al-amr bi-l-maʿrūf wa-l-nahyi ʿan al-munkar)

Among the evidence for this branch of faith is that Allah (Exalted is He) says: "And let there be from you a nation inviting to goodness, calling to

44. Qur'an, 49:9–10.
45. Aḥmad Jābir Jubrān, *ibid.*, 282–3.

what is right and forbidding what is wrong."[46] Commanding good and forbidding evil upholds the foundations of religion, strengthens its bonds, and prevents corruption and disorder. Without these practices, weakness enters, bonds unravel, and corruption spreads.[47] This branch of faith is significant because it ensures that moral values are actively maintained rather than passively hoped for. It prevents the erosion of religious and ethical commitments by demanding community-wide responsibility.

A society practising this would maintain collective moral responsibility. Individuals would feel obligated to uphold communal standards, while society would preserve its moral foundation through active reinforcement. A society that upholds this principle does not tolerate moral negligence, nor does it allow vice to spread unchecked in the name of personal freedom. Such a society would not view morality as merely private or personal nor the monopoly of the authorities. Instead, it creates a structured moral environment where individuals hold each other accountable for the collective good.

Adhering to the Muslim Community and Avoiding Division (wujūb jamāʿat al-muslimīn wa tajannub al-firqah wa asbābihā)

Among the evidence for this branch of faith is that Allah (Exalted is He) says: "He has ordained for you of religion what He commanded for Nūḥ and that which We have revealed to you [O Muḥammad], and what We enjoined upon Ibrāhīm and Mūsā and ʿĪsā: Uphold the religion and not be divided therein."[48] And He (Exalted is He) says: "O you who believe, obey Allah, obey the Messenger, and [obey] those of you who are in authority."[49] Unity strengthens Muslims by attracting Divine grace, while division weakens them and makes them vulnerable.[50] Broadly speaking, division within any group leads to internal strife and amenability to external manipulation. When people are united, they can collectively work toward greater societal goals without being hindered by infighting.

A society valuing this branch of faith would prioritise unity and consensus. Individuals would subordinate personal preferences to commu-

46. Qur'an, 3:104.
47. Aḥmad Jābir Jubrān, *ibid*., 289–90.
48. Qur'an, 42:13.
49. Qur'an, 4:59.
50. Aḥmad Jābir Jubrān, *ibid*., 274.

nity cohesion, while society would develop mechanisms for maintaining unity despite differences. A society based on this value does not allow for fragmentation along racial, ethnic, tribal, socioeconomic, or nationalistic lines, nor does it encourage personal ambition at the expense of communal well-being. Such a society would not celebrate ideological fragmentation or extreme individualism. Instead, it fosters a sense of belonging that transcends artificial boundaries, strengthening its people against external threats.

Lending (al-qarḍ)

Among the evidence for this branch of faith is that the Prophet (may Allah bless him and give him peace) said: "The best of you is the best of you in repaying."[51] Lending is a form of assisting in good works and piety.[52] This branch of faith is crucial because it ensures that wealth circulates in a way that benefits the community rather than being hoarded by individuals or institutions. It also fosters trust and cooperation between individuals. A society practising this would facilitate financial support through personal, *ribā*-free loans. Individuals would view lending as a spiritual act to be rewarded in the Hereafter, while society would develop networks of financial assistance beyond formal institutions. A society built on this principle does not cultivate economic selfishness and predatory financing nor allow financial hardship to be ignored. Such a society would not limit financial support to profit-driven transactions whose consequences are confined to the material world. Instead, it ensures that wealth is used as a tool to support the well-being of all, especially the most vulnerable and needed—rather than a weapon wielded by a privileged few.

Appointing the Supreme Imām and Just Rulers (qiyām al-ʿadal bi-l-imāmat al-ʿuthmā)

Among the evidence for this branch of faith is that Allah (Exalted is He) says: "O you who believe, obey Allah, obey the Messenger, and [obey] those of you who are in authority."[53] A just ruler unites Muslims, eliminates division, and prevents enemies from gaining power over them. Without this, chaos, corruption, and tyranny prevail.[54]

51. Muslim, 1601 (122).
52. Aḥmad Jābir Jubrān, *ibid.*, 322.
53. Qur'an, 4:59.
54. Aḥmad Jābir Jubrān, *ibid.*, 262.

This branch of faith is significant because leadership is necessary to maintain order and justice. Without a just leader, societies descend into chaos and vulnerability. A society implementing this would establish legitimate leadership through proper appointment processes. Individuals would recognise the importance of unified leadership, while society would maintain stability through legitimate authority. A society with this principle does not function without leadership, nor does it allow corruption to dominate governance. Such a society would not endorse fragmented leadership or power vacuums. Instead, it ensures that leadership is both just and unifying, creating a stable and secure environment for all.

The Prohibition of Rebelling Against the Supreme Imām (taḥrīm al-khurūj ʿalāl al-imām al-aʿẓam)

Among the evidence for this branch of faith is that the Prophet (may Allah bless him and give him peace) said: "I counsel you to fear Allah and to listen and obey—even if an Abyssinian slave [rules over you]."[55] And he (may Allah bless him and give him peace) said: "Whoever obeyed my commander has obeyed me. And whoever disobeyed my commander has disobeyed Me."[56] Rebelling against the leader leads to division, strife, and great societal harm[57]—what the Qur'an categorizes as more serious than murder.

This branch of faith is critical because disorder weakens societies from within, allowing greater destruction and instability. While rulers must be just, rebellion creates cycles of violence that often harm the innocent more than they correct injustice.

A society upholding this branch of faith would maintain political stability through loyalty to established, legitimate leadership. Individuals would prioritise stability over grievances, while society would develop non-rebellious means of addressing concerns. A society that upholds this value does not encourage constant political instability, nor does it accept violence as a solution to every disagreement. Such a society would not endorse revolutionary upheavals or frequent regime changes.

Instead, it cultivates patience, wise counsel, and structured means of addressing grievances.

55. Abū Dāwūd, 4607.
56. Al-Bukhārī, 3137; Muslim, 33 (1835).
57. Aḥmad Jābir Jubrān, *ibid.*, 274.

Carrying Out Prescribed Punishments (iqāmat al-ḥudūd al-sharʿiyyah)

Among the evidence for this branch of faith is that Allah (Exalted is He) says, "And do not let piety for them make you lenient in the religion of Islam [i.e. from carrying out the prescribed punishment] if you believe in Allah and the Last Day."[58] And he (may Allah bless him and give him peace) said: "Those before you were destroyed because when one of their nobles stole, they spared him. And when one of their weak stole, they enforced the punishment upon him."[59]

Punishments are proportional to the severity of crimes and their societal impact, acting as deterrents ensuring security and stability.[60] This branch of faith matters because justice requires mercy and consequences for wrongdoing. Punishments serve to protect society by preventing crime and maintaining social order.

A society implementing this would value the rule of law and maintain order through clear consequences for violations. Individuals would be deterred from harmful actions, while society would experience greater security and stability. A society that upholds this value does not tolerate unchecked crime, nor does it allow leniency to undermine justice. Such a society would not rely solely on rehabilitation without deterrence. Instead, it maintains a structured legal system that protects the rights and safety of all citizens regardless of racial, ethnic, tribal, socioeconomic, or nationalistic factors.

Implications for Individuals, Society, Non-Humans, and the Environment

Each of these branches of faith shapes the individual and society in profound ways. Individuals are constantly formed into people who prioritise faith, sincerity, and moral responsibility. They are not self-serving or indifferent to others but are engaged in bettering their communities. They cultivate generosity as a spiritual virtue, develop a spiritual connection to the Divine, and orient their personal conduct around the Prophetic example.

A society built on these branches of faith is structured, united, and morally grounded. It does not prioritise wealth, status, or personal ambition over faith and morality, nor allow individualism to erode social

58. Qur'an, 24:2.
59. Al-Bukhārī, 3475; Muslim, 1688 (8).
60. Aḥmad Jābir Jubrān, *ibid.*, 304–5.

responsibility. Such a society rejects moral relativism and the unchecked spread of vice while ensuring governance is guided by justice rather than power struggles. Religious practice maintains sincerity beyond mere ritual, and membership is based on the declaration of faith rather than racial, tribal, or socioeconomic factors.

As such, society becomes cohesive, stable, and just. It does not suffer from fragmentation, moral decay, or unchecked individualism. It orients all its actions, laws, and social norms around divine guidance rather than purely human reasoning. It maintains collective moral responsibility, develops robust conflict resolution mechanisms, and establishes systems to promote moral growth.

Moreover, non-humans (animals and others) are treated with care, as they are part of Allah's creation. They are not subjected to unnecessary cruelty or neglect but are viewed as creations of Allah to be treated with responsibility. The environment is to be safeguarded because faith fosters responsibility toward all of creation rather than viewing nature as merely a resource for exploitation.

This society integrates religious ideals with practical implementation instead of relying solely on abstract principles. It values devotion over materialism and cultivates a genuine connection to the Divine. Actions are judged not solely by outward appearance but by recognition of the importance of the intention. Both inner cultivation and external development receive attention, with spiritual observance taking precedence over uninterrupted productivity. Unity transcends local allegiances, preventing permanent societal stratification, while mechanisms for wealth redistribution prevent excessive concentration of resources.

Public spaces remain warm and personal, encouraging interaction between strangers so no individual feels invisible or unacknowledged. Society relies more on mediation than adversarial legal processes and views morality as a communal rather than merely a private matter. Instead of celebrating ideological fragmentation or extreme individualism, financial support extends beyond profit-driven transactions whose consequences are confined to the material world. Leadership remains unified rather than fragmented, stability is preferred over revolutionary upheavals, and the justice system balances deterrence with rehabilitation.

Reverence and longing for the Creator shape everyday interactions and institutions. Actions are valued for their true intentions rather than public recognition and visible consequences, with inner virtues cultivated

as actively as outward laws. Spiritual discipline shapes time, priorities, and community gatherings within a collective consciousness that sees beyond immediate affiliations.

Wealth serves as a means for communal well-being rather than personal luxury. Daily interactions are characterised by warmth and openness, with acknowledging others being a social expectation. People actively work to restore harmony through mediation, holding each other accountable for the collective good. A sense of belonging transcends artificial boundaries, allowing wealth to support everyone's well-being under leadership that is both just and unifying. The society cultivates patience, wise counsel, and structured means of addressing grievances while maintaining a structured legal system that protects the rights and safety of all citizens.

Discussion

Why Shuʿab al-Īmān (Branches of Faith) Matter

Al-Qaṣrī mentions that the fundamental purpose of creation is to know and worship Allah. These two principles—knowledge and worship—govern all of existence.

Nothing is created in vain; everything serves this divine wisdom, as stated in the Qur'an: "And We did not create the heavens and the earth and whatever is between them in play."[61]

As we have seen, the *shuʿab al-īmān* (branches of faith), encapsulate the core divine wisdom of knowing and worshipping Allah for all of creation. They also encapsulate the foundations for a society that both reflects divine knowledge and obedience in its structure and has human fulfilment of those two purposes as its highest goals. Thus, from the natural world to religious practice and social order, everything is interconnected in fulfilling this ultimate purpose: to know and worship Allah. The branches of faith guide both individuals and society toward realising that goal.

61. Qur'an, 44:38. See al-Qaṣrī, 27–8.

Shuʿab al-Īmān (Branches of Faith) in practice

Virtually every writing on *shuʿab al-īmān* (branches of faith) that goes beyond listing the branches and providing basic evidence from the Qurʾan and Sunnah is full of examples from the lives of the Companions and subsequent generations demonstrating how they implemented the branches in their practice. These earliest generations were selected because they were closest to the Prophet (may Allah bless him and give him peace) and whose practice, as a whole, best reflects Prophetic guidance. These examples show that the *shuʿab* had an impact on Muslim behaviour and society and were not mere theological constructs. Al-Ṣāgharjī presents an example of this, quoting al-Bukhārī:

Muʿāwiyah ibn Qurrah [said]:

> I was with Maʿqil al-Muzanī when he removed something harmful from the road. I saw something and hurried to remove it as well. He said: "What made you do what you did, O my nephew?"
>
> I replied: "I saw you doing something, so I did it too."
>
> He said: "You have done well, O my nephew. I heard the Prophet (may Allah bless him and give him peace) say: 'Whoever removes something harmful from the path of the Muslims will have a good deed recorded for them, and whoever has a good deed accepted will enter Paradise.'"[62]

Some *ʿulamāʾ* even mention that some would combine the highest and the lowest branches by saying "*Lā ilāha illa Llāh*"—thus affirming the existence and unicity of Allah—when removing annoyances from the path.[63] A practical takeaway here is that you can upgrade every good act simply by adding "*Lā ilāha illa Llāh*"—though the goal is to make it constant and manifest not only on one's tongue, but also the heart and mind.

The *shuʿab* together constitute the entirety of faith (*īmān*) and religion (*dīn*). This whole cannot be complete if even a single branch is missing or remains unfulfilled. Consequently, neither an individual Muslim's faith (*īmān*) nor their religion (*dīn*) nor Muslim society can be whole unless all branches are present and fully realised. Just as a single missing branch

62. Al-Ṣāgharjī, *Shuʿab al-īmān*, 4:569–70; al-Bukhārī, 593.
63. Aḥmad Jābir Jubrān, *ibid.*, 381.

leaves the whole incomplete, so does its absence prevent the wholeness of both the individual and the collective.

Understanding the holistic nature of the *shuʿab* helps explain why altering its branches or even focusing on some branches at the exclusion of others both result in its reduction.[64] If branches are removed one by one, it becomes impossible to claim that the naked, dried, hollowed husk of the trunk can be called a tree. With this in mind, it is no surprise that attempts to change or remove branches have resulted in Muslims and Muslim societies being dry, hollow husks compared to their former selves when more branches were followed.

Consequently, if we wish to know why Muslim individuals and societies have ceased to flourish and deliver, the first thing to examine is the branches of faith. Are the branches being wholly fulfilled? Do authorities and individuals know, follow, and hold themselves accountable to them? Are their institutions based upon them and facilitate their fulfilment? If the answer for a single breach is negative, therein lies a problem. And when the answer for the bulk is negative, therein lies a tragedy for both humanity and all of creation, as it means that humans are failing to fulfil their role as stewards and to fulfil the trust (*amānah*) they agreed to bear.[65]

Reviving the Branches of Faith

We would posit that education is the first step towards rectifying the problems mentioned in the previous section. Unsurprisingly, the branches of faith (*shuʿab al-īmān*) tend not to be emphasised in basic Muslim education. Some of the branches are taught through the well-known ḥadīth where Jibrīl (peace be upon him) asks the Prophet (may Allah bless him and give him peace) about *īmān, islām, iḥsān, ʿalamāt al-ṣāʿah*—that is: faith, submission (i.e. practice), excellence, and the signs of the end of times, respectively. More branches are taught as an individual's compulsory religious practice (*farḍ al-ʿayn*). A few more are taught through the five primary objectives of the divine legislation, namely: protection of religion (*dīn*), life (*nasfs*), intellect (*ʿaql*), family and honour (*nasal, ʿarad*), and wealth (*māl*). However, even combined, these remain a small subset of the branches of faith—meaning most remain unknown.

64. Musa Furber, *Beauty and the Sacred Law* (Abū Dhabī: Ṭabah Research, 2016), 20, 21.
65. See the Appendix for more details on this trust.

One of the reasons for this is that presenting and memorising a list of seventy-odd, unstructured, dissonant items is not a simple task. While the total number of branches cannot be reduced, both experience and psychological studies show that adding structure and harmony to the items facilitates presentation and memorisation.

The *manẓūmah*—versification—is one of the traditional tools of Islamic pedagogy to assist in the task of memorising. *Manẓūmah*s exist in most, if not all, disciplines. The *manẓumah* itself provides structure and harmony that facilitates memorisation and detection of errors. It is standard for students to memorise and study several during their foundational studies.

*Manẓūmah*s for the branches of faith already exist, including one contained within Zayn al-Dīn al-Malaȳbārī's *Shuʿab al-īmān* and Aḥmad Jābir Jubrān's *Nafḥat al-Raḥmān naẓm Shuʿab al-Īmān* (*The Gift of the Merciful: A Poetic Arrangement of the Branches of Faith).* Not everyone, however, has the wherewithal or interest in memorising a thirty or fifty-one-line poem.

Psychological studies show that breaking information into meaningful groups (chunking) and organising it in structured levels (hierarchical structuring) significantly enhances our ability to memorise lists.[66] These approaches reduce mental workload and align with how our brains naturally process information.

When we organise information into chunks, we combine smaller elements into larger meaningful units that are easier to remember. Think of how phone numbers are divided into segments rather than presented as a continuous string of digits. This technique capitalises on our brain's capacity to manage information in discrete packages. Research from a decade ago revealed that both information compression and sequential arrangement contribute to effective chunking and improved memory retention.[67]

Organising information hierarchically also boosts memory by creating structured information layers that facilitate encoding and retrieval. This

66. Chekaf, Mustapha, Nelson Cowan, and Fabien Mathy. 'Chunk Formation in Immediate Memory and How It Relates to Data Compression.' *Cognition* 155 (29 June 2016): 96–107. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2016.05.024; and Fonollosa, Jordi, Emre Neftci, and Mikhail Rabinovich. 'Learning of Chunking Sequences in Cognition and Behavior.' *PLoS Computational Biology* 11, no. 11 (19 November 2015): e1004592. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pcbi.1004592.

67. Chekaf, Mustapha, Nelson Cowan, and Fabien Mathy. *ibid*.

mirrors the brain's natural tendency to categorise knowledge from general to specific. It has been established that hierarchical chunking helps process complex sequences by dividing them into manageable, organised sub-sequences, thereby enhancing learning and recall.[68] Both strategies work because they complement our brain's innate information-processing systems, allowing us to better remember and access complex information.

These studies suggest that presenting the branches of faith organised into meaningful groups also aids in retention and memorisation. Chunking and organisation are already found in texts presenting the branches of faith and a classification scheme. Perhaps the most relevant example here would be al-Zabīdī's *ʿIqd al-jumān* (*The Pearly Chain*) which presented a summary of the branches mentioned by al-Ḥalīmī and al-Bayhaqī under three major categories, which divide even further into additional subcategories:

I. Belief in Allah
   A. What is related to the essence of Allah and His attributes
   B. What is related to His actions and wisdom
II. Belief in the obligations of worldly life
   A. What is related to the self
      1. Internal
         a. To be acquired (negative traits)
         b. To be purged (positive traits)
      2. External
         a. Verbal
         b. Performative
   B. What is not related to the self
      1. Domestic
      2. Civic
III. Belief in the afterlife

The civic category contains twelve items. While this does not miss the goal of facilitating presentation, it might require further structuring to maintain the goals of facilitating retention and memorisation.

68. Fonollosa, Jordi, Emre Neftci, and Mikhail Rabinovich. *ibid*.

Why The Classification Schemes Matter

Several classification schemes were presented earlier, which we now turn to understand their significance. Firstly, al-Bulqīnī's scheme highlights three dimensions: internal faith, visible deeds, and acts of sincerity. The emphasis on belief in the heart (*īmān*) positions internal conviction in Allah as the moral and spiritual foundation for a cohesive society. Individuals with strong and sound beliefs act as a unifying force, fostering ethical behaviour and social trust that create a harmonious community. Visible deeds (*islām*), such as prayer, charity, and acts of kindness, directly influence social interactions by promoting mutual assistance and modelling ethical behaviour. These actions strengthen communal bonds and encourage equity and supportiveness within society. Hidden deeds (*iḥsān*), rooted in sincerity and excellence without the need for recognition, enhance societal integrity. Such selfless acts inspire a culture of trust and generosity, which is essential for long-term social stability.

Secondly, Ibn Ḥajar's scheme takes a more granular approach by categorising faith into acts of the heart, tongue, and body. Acts of the heart shape virtuous individuals who form the ethical core of any community, such as gratitude, reliance on Allah, and avoiding envy. Cultivating these internal virtues reduces conflict and fosters cooperation, laying the groundwork for a more peaceful society. Acts of the tongue include truthful speech, giving good counsel, and refraining from harmful words. A society where communication is guided by responsibility and honesty benefits from reduced discord and greater trust, enabling collaboration and mutual respect. Acts of the body extend to physical prayer, charity, and service. These can be personal, enhancing individual discipline and responsibility; interpersonal, strengthening bonds through acts like helping others and maintaining familial ties; or societal, addressing collective needs through public welfare initiatives. These categories illustrate how faith governs personal conduct and extends to interpersonal ethics and societal responsibilities, offering a comprehensive blueprint for community organisation.

Thirdly, al-Zabīdī's scheme, in contrast, presents a highly nuanced framework that ties belief in Allah, obligations in worldly life, and belief in the afterlife to individual and societal well-being. Understanding Allah's essence and attributes fosters awe and humility, encouraging individuals to act justly and compassionately. Recognising divine wisdom promotes societal resilience and adherence to ethical principles, espe-

cially in times of hardship. Obligations in worldly life include internal development, such as purging negative traits and acquiring positive ones, and external practices encompassing domestic and civic responsibilities. Internal growth translates to ethical social behaviour, reducing conflict and fostering harmony.

External obligations ensure the stability and functionality of societal systems, such as maintaining healthy family units and contributing to public welfare. The belief in the afterlife reinforces accountability and altruism, motivating individuals to prioritise justice and long-term welfare over selfish gains. This integrative framework connects theology, ethics, and public duty into a unified moral and practical excellence vision.

Each scheme offers a distinct perspective on how faith influences the structure of society. Al-Bulqīnī's classification underscores the interplay between internal faith, external actions, and sincerity in fostering a balanced community. Ibn Ḥajar's approach maps the branches to personal, interpersonal, and societal dimensions, providing a detailed model for community development. Al-Zabīdī's scheme connects theological understanding with ethical and civic responsibilities, illustrating the holistic integration of faith into individual and societal growth.

Together, these schemes demonstrate how, when properly aligned, beliefs, values, and actions can cultivate individuals who contribute positively to justice, mutual care, and spiritual enrichment within their communities.

Problems And Future Expansions

Two obvious problems become apparent when comparing the various writings on branches of faith: the variance regarding the branches included and the classification schemes employed.

Regarding the former, not only do texts use a slightly different set of branches or order them in different ways, but they may even give different names to the same branch. Several branches presented as individual branches in one text are conjoined together in another text. A branch might be vague in one writing and more detailed in another (e.g. "Pilgrimage" vs "Ḥajj and ʿUmrah" vs "Ḥajj" and "ʿUmrāh"; "Prayer" vs "Prayer (Obligatory and Recommended)"). All of this can make it difficult to find a specific branch within a text or read about a single branch from multiple texts.

One way to reduce these variances is to split conjoined branches into individual branches and consider vague branches to encompass their

possibilities when all or none of their possibilities are mentioned. For example, "Prayer" refers to "Prayer (Obligatory and Recommended)" since both possibilities are mentioned. Finally, the names used for the branches should be normalised so that a given branch is referred to with a single name—perhaps the most common name in the writings.

As for the second problem, when a classification system is used, it is often unique and only applied to the particular set of branches included in that writing. Combined with the first problem, it means that all schemes have not been applied to the same set of branches, nor have all branches had one or more schemes applied to them all.

Should someone want to apply all schemes to a single set, they might start with one of the writings that already employs a scheme to a set of branches, such as al-Bulqīnī, Ibn Ḥajar, al-Zabīdī or Ibn Kirān. Ibn Ḥajar's popularity makes it a natural choice, but al-Zabidīnī's chunking and structuring make it a more appealing pedagogical choice.

Conclusion

This chapter investigated the concept of *shuʿab al-īmān* (branches of faith), tracing its evolution throughout Islamic intellectual history and examining various taxonomic approaches developed by traditional scholars. By analysing these diverse methodologies, we have uncovered how this discipline offers a comprehensive framework that integrates belief, ethics, and practice within the Islamic tradition.

The investigation of the *shuʿab* reveals faith as a multidimensional construct—one that transcends mere intellectual assent to encompass virtues and behaviours. These branches function as pathways for personal spiritual development and as foundations for ethical social organisation. The classificatory systems—whether al-Bulqīnī's triadic model, Ibn Ḥajar's categorisation based on bodily, verbal, and spiritual acts, or al-Zabīdī's synthesis of theological principles and communal obligations—each offer distinctive perspectives for conceptualising and embodying faith.

The practical significance of the *shuʿab* extends into multiple domains of human experience. For individuals, embracing these branches cultivates authenticity, self-discipline, and ethical consciousness. They establish principles for equitable governance, social harmony, and mutual responsibility in communal contexts. This integration of creedal tenets, moral

values, and practical conduct ensures that religious principles permeate both personal devotion and public engagement, influencing institutional development and interpersonal dynamics.

Moreover, this analysis has identified the methodological challenges presented by numerical and categorical inconsistencies across source texts. Addressing these variations through systematic frameworks and educational innovations—including hierarchical classification schemes and mnemonic versification—can enhance the understanding and implementation of this discipline. Scholars may further contribute by refining these organisational approaches and exploring contemporary applications of *shuʿab al-īmān* in present-day Muslim communities.

In conclusion, revitalising the tradition of *shuʿab al-īmān* within religious pedagogy and community practice presents an opportunity to reinvigorate faith-centred living. Through internalising these branches, adherents can develop a harmonious and principled existence aligned with sacred guidance, nurturing personal fulfilment and societal flourishing. This discipline remains a crucial element of Islamic thought, providing an enduring model for spiritual authenticity and moral excellence. ❧

Appendix

Ḥāfiẓ Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī

As mentioned earlier, Ḥāfiẓ Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (d. 852 AH) wrote about branches of faith in *Fatḥ al-bārī*, which he organised into three general categories: acts of the heart, the tongue, and the body.

His presentation is as follows:

(BENEFICIAL POINT)

Al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ said, "A group took it upon themselves to use *ijtihād* to precisely enumerate these branches. There is difficulty in judging that "this" is what was intended. Not knowing its precise enumeration does not harm [one's] *īmān*."

Those who counted the branches did not agree upon a single method for doing so. The most accurate one is the way of Ibn Ḥibbān, though we did not come across a clarification of it in his discussion. In what I will now mention, I have abridged what others have mentioned:

These branches extend from the actions of the heart, the actions of the tongue, and the actions of the body.

The actions of the heart consist of beliefs and intentions and are comprised of twenty-four traits:

1. Belief (*īmān*) in Allah, which includes believing in His essence; His attributes; His unicity in nothing resembling Him; conviction (*iʿtiqād*) in everything other than Him being contingent
2. Belief in His Angels, His books, His Messengers, fate (good and bad)
3. Belief in the Final Day, which includes the questioning in the grave, resurrection, and the gathering
4. Judgment and the scale
5. The bridge [over Hellfire]
6. Paradise and Hellfire
7. Loving Allah; loving and despising for His sake
8. Loving the Prophet (may Allah bless him and give him peace), believing in (*iʿtiqād*) his veneration; it includes sending blessings upon him
9. Following his Sunnah
10. Sincerity, which includes abandoning showing off and hypocrisy

11. Repentance
12. Fear
13. Hope
14. Thanks
15. Fidelity
16. Patience
17. Accepting the decree
18. Reliance
19. Mercy
20. Humility, which includes respecting elders and mercy to the young
21. Abandoning arrogance and conceit
22. Abandoning envy
23. Abandoning malice
24. Abandoning anger

The actions of the tongue are comprised of seven:

1. Saying "*Lā ilāha ill Allāh*"
2. Reciting the Qur'an
3. Learning knowledge
4. Teaching it
5. Supplication
6. Remembrance, which includes seeking forgiveness
7. Avoiding nonsense

The actions of the body are comprised of twenty-eight traits.

They include actions of the body linked to the individual himself. There are fifteen traits.

1. Purification, physically and legally, which includes avoiding filth
2. Covering nakedness
3. Prayer (obligatory and voluntary)
4. Zakat, likewise [i.e. obligatory and voluntary]
5. Freeing enslaved people
6. Generosity, which includes giving food and hospitality to guests
7. Fasting (obligatory and voluntary)
8. Ḥajj and ʻUmrah, likewise [i.e. obligatory and voluntary]
9. Circumambulation

10. Iʿtikāf
11. Seeking Laylat al-Qadr
12. Fleeing with [one's] religion, which includes migration from the abode of polytheism
13. Fulfilling vows
14. Taking care in oaths
15. Paying expiations

They include actions of the body linked to other individuals. There are six traits.

1. Chastity through marriage
2. Carrying out family duties
3. Devotion to parents, which includes avoiding disobedience
4. Raising children
5. Maintaining family ties
6. Obeying masters or kindness to enslaved people

They include actions of the body linked to people in general. There are seventeen traits.

1. Carrying out leadership with fairness
2. Following the community
3. Obeying authorities
4. Mending relations between people, which includes fighting armed rebels (*khawārij*) and dissenters (*bughāh*)
5. Assisting one another in righteousness, which includes commanding the right and forbidding the wrong
6. Carrying out prescribed punishments
7. Jihad, which includes guarding the frontier
8. Executing the trust, which includes paying the fifth [of the spoils of war]
9. Lending and settling debts
10. Honouring neighbours
11. Acting in good faith, which includes gathering wealth [only] from what is lawful
12. Spending wealth on what is rightful, which includes abandoning being tight-fisted and wastefulness
13. Returning greetings of peace

14. Saying "*Yarḥamakumu Llāh*" to someone who sneezed
15. Preventing annoyances from reaching people
16. Avoiding entertainment
17. Removing annoyances from the path These are sixty-nine traits [in all].

It is possible to count them as seventy-nine traits by isolating the ones that were mentioned joined together.

And Allah knows best.

(BENEFICIAL POINT)

Muslim's transmission includes an addition: "Its highest is '*Lā ilāha illa Llāh,*' and its lowest is removing annoyances from the path." It contains a hint that their ranks vary [and are not equal].[69]

❁ ❁ ❁

Fatḥ al-Karīm al-Mannān

As mentioned earlier, Aḥmad Jābir Jubrān's (1352–1425/1933–2004) *Fatḥ al-Karīm al-Mannān* (*The Granting of the Generous and Bestowing Lord*) is a commentary on his own *Nafḥat al-Raḥmān naẓm Shuʿab al-īmān* (*The Gift of the Merciful: A Poetic Arrangement of the Branches of Faith)*, wherein he presents Ibn Ḥajar's seventy-nine branches of faith and classification scheme in fifty-one verses.

His explanation of executing the trust (*al-amānah*) is as follows:

The third characteristic in this verse is discharging trusts (*adāʾ amānah*), and it is considered the thirty-fourth characteristic related to physical matters; it is the sixty-ninth branch.

The meaning of discharging trusts (*adāʾ amānah*) is preserving it and not neglecting any part of it.

Trust (*amānah*) is an all-encompassing noun for every good.

Some say: it refers to everything one is entrusted with regarding commands, prohibitions, and affairs in religion and worldly matters, so the entire Sharīʿah is trust (*amānah*).

Some say: trust (*amānah*) means putting everything in its appropriate place.

69. Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Fatḥ al-Bārī* (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifah, 1379), 1:52–53.

It encompasses known duties such that it is impermissible to assign a duty to someone who is incapable of fulfilling it. It also includes acts of worship: prayer is a trust (*amānah*) upon you, so you must perform it at its designated time with all its pillars, conditions, and manners, otherwise, you would be betraying it. The same applies to zakat, fasting, and hajj.

Trust (*amānah*) includes: that a person is diligent in the work entrusted to them, performing it thoroughly, and not exploiting their position to benefit themselves or a relative, for example.

Trust (*amānah*) includes caring for children and family, raising them with an Islamic upbringing, and, more importantly, the deposits given to a person to safeguard and return.

Trust (*amānah*) includes: keeping secrets whose concerned parties would not want disclosed. Thus, it is obligatory to preserve them and forbidden to reveal them. How excellent is the one who said:

> Indeed, the noble person is the one whose affection endures
> and who keeps secrets, whether in good times or bad.
>
> The noble one is not he who, when his companion errs,
> spreads what was among his secrets to become known.

Furthermore, discharging trusts (*adāʾ amānah*) is among the branches of faith (*īmān*) because of what is established regarding it from the book, the Sunnah, and the consensus of the Ummah, both legally and customarily.

As for the Book: Allah, exalted is He, says: "Indeed, Allah commands you to render trusts to whom they are due."[70]

And He, glorified is He, says: "Indeed, We offered the Trust (*amānah*) to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, and they declined to bear it and feared it; but man [undertook to] bear it. Indeed, he was unjust and ignorant."[71]

And He, exalted is He, says: "But if you trust one another, then let the one who is entrusted deliver his trust…"[72]

And the Mighty and Majestic says: "O you who have believed, do not betray Allah and the Messenger or betray your trusts while you know [the consequence]."[73]

70. Qur'an 4:58.
71. Qur'an 33:72.
72. Qur'an 2:283.
73. Qur'an 8:27.

[As for hadith:]

Narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim from Abū Hurayrah, may Allah be pleased with him, that the Prophet, may Allah bless him and give him peace, said: "The signs of a hypocrite are three: when he speaks, he lies; when he promises, he breaks it; and when he is entrusted, he betrays."[74]

And in another narration: "Even if he fasts, prays, and claims to be Muslim."[75]

And from him [i.e. Abū Hurayrah], may Allah be pleased with him, that the Prophet, peace be upon him, said: "Fulfil the trust (*amānah*) for the one who trusted you, and do not betray the one who betrayed you."[76]

Narrated from Ḥudhayfah, may Allah be pleased with him, who said: The Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and give him peace, told us two hadiths;

> I have witnessed one of them, and I am awaiting the other. He told us: "Trust (*amānah*) descended to the root of men's hearts, then the Qur'an was revealed, and they learned from the Qur'an and learned from the Sunnah." Then he told us about the removal of trust (*amānah*), saying: "A man will go to sleep and trust (*amānah*) will be taken from his heart, leaving a trace like a small spot. Then he will sleep, and trust (*amānah*) will be taken from his heart, leaving a trace like a blister, as if you rolled a hot coal over your foot and it blistered. You see it raised, but there is nothing in it."
>
> Then he took a pebble, rolled it over his leg, and said: "People will engage in business, but hardly anyone will fulfil trust (*adā al-amānah*) until it is said: 'Among the tribe of so-and-so is trustworthy (*amīn*),' and it will be said about a man: 'How hardy he is! How elegant he is! How intelligent he is!' Yet he does not have a mustard seed's weight of faith (*īmān*) in his heart." And there came a time when I did not care which of you I did business with; if he was a Muslim, his religion would return him to me, and if he was a Christian or a Jew, his guardian would return him to me. But today, I would not do business except with specific individuals.[77]

74. Al-Bukhārī, 33; Muslim, 59.
75. Muslim (109/59).
76. Al-Tirmidhī, 1264; Abū Dāwūd, 3530.
77. Al-Bukhārī, 6498; Muslim, 143.

Al-Jadhr (with *fatḥah* on the *jīm* and *sukūn* on the *dhāl*) means: the root of something. *Al-Wakt* (with *fatḥah* on the *wāw* and *sukūn* on the *kāf*, ending with *tāʾ* with two dots above) means: a slight trace. *Al-Majl* (with *fatḥah* on the *mīm* and *sukūn* on the *jīm*) means a blister on the body from the effect of fire or work or similar things. *Al-Muntabir* means: raised.

In the commonly known hadith related to intercession (*al-shafāʿah*) narrated by Muslim from Ḥudhayfah from the Prophet, may Allah bless him and give him peace, wherein he said: "Trust (*amānah*) and kinship will be sent forth and will stand on the sides of the bridge over Hell (*al-ṣirāṭ*), right and left…"[78] and it mentions that trust (*amānah*) benefits its possessor in that terrible situation.

[In another hadith:]

> The Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and give him peace, was asked: "When will the Hour be established?"
>
> He said: "When trust (*amānah*) is lost, then await the Hour."
>
> He was asked: "How will it be lost?"
>
> He said: "When authority/command is given to those who are not fit for it, then await the Hour."[79]

Narrated by al-Bukhārī.

And it came in an authentic hadith: "For every betrayer, there will be a banner on the Day of Resurrection; it will be said: 'This is the betrayal of so-and-so.'"[80]

Trust (*amānah*) related to knowledge is that when you are asked about an issue whose ruling is unclear to you or uncertain about its ruling, you say: "I do not know," for it is half of knowledge. Imām Mālik, may Allah have mercy on him, was asked about forty issues; he answered four and said, "I do not know" to thirty-six. It was said to him: "You say 'I do not know' while you are the Imam of the Abode of Migration?!" He said: "When you reach your people, tell them: Imām Mālik says: 'I do not know.' I have answered your questions." Therefore, it is said in this regard:

> Adhere to "I do not know" when you are asked,
> to reveal what you are ignorant about with certainty.

78. Muslim, 195.
79. Muslim, 59.
80. Al-Bukhārī, 6966; Muslim, 1736.

In summary: there is no person among us except that their work is Allah's trust upon their neck: The people are a trust (*amānah*) in the hands of those in authority; religion is a trust in the hands of scholars and students of knowledge; justice is a trust in the hands of judges; the truth is a trust in the hands of fighters; honesty is a trust in the hands of witnesses; patients are a trust in the hands of doctors; interests are a trust in the hands of employees; students are a trust in the hands of their teachers, instructors, and guides; companions are a trust in the hands of those who sit with them; children are a trust in the hands of their fathers; the home is a trust in the hands of the lady of the house; the home and those within it from the family are a trust in the hands of the head of the household and the elder of the house; and the homeland is a trust in the hands of everyone.

We ask Allah, Exalted is He, to grant us success in discharging those trusts (*adā' amānah*) in the manner He desires from us, and to help us in that, for He is the best helper, and to accept our repentance, forgive us, and pardon us for our shortcomings, by His favour and generosity. *Āmīn*. ❧

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Staying Human
Towards a Muslim Philosophy of Belonging & Community

by Ahmad Deeb

For over a millennium, Islam cultivated civilizations that were meant to be not only morally upright but socially cohesive—where community was not an accessory to religious life, but an essential condition. From the lantern-lit alleyways of Fez to the guild networks of Damascus, faith flowed into society like water into soil, adapting to local contexts, holistically nurturing the shared moral purpose. Wherever Islam settled, it fostered enduring institutions which reflected meaningful community: circles of learning, *zawiyya*s, endowments, marketplaces, and mosques—not merely as mystical spaces or fossilized repositories of religious rhetoric, but as vessels of social order and sanctuaries for all.

These communities were not shaped from arbitrary abstraction; they were driven by the foundational human impulse to belong. This impulse, embedded in the *fitrah* (primordial human nature), is not bound by time or place, rather, it is perennial. With it came a profound commitment to intentionality in designing these communities towards living the most beautiful expression of the values which they were built to preserve and invite to. In what follows, this chapter argues that the loss of meaningful community in the modern age is not merely a social inconvenience—it is a metaphysical rupture. Any remedy requires not only psychological frameworks or improved infrastructure, but a renewed philosophy of belonging: one rooted in our tradition and responsive to our time, the latter of which contains several hard realities that distract from or at times even contend with the former.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) is reported to have said: "The best of you before Islam are the best of you in it, if they

have understanding."[1] One potential interpretation of this prophetic narration is that there are universal human realities that become more refined after one embraces Islam. In another saying, "I have [only] been sent to complete good character,"[2] suggesting, yet again, that innate characteristics exist which become beautified or perfected through emulating the *sunnah*—the way of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) which Muslims believe to be the symbol of perfection in creation. These *ahadīth*, or prophetic traditions, seem to suggest a set of shared primordial characteristics of humanity across time, space, and cultures. The *fitrah,* which relates primarily to a human nature innately inclined towards faith or belief in God, can also be understood to denote universal human needs. This chapter argues that perhaps the most important of these is the need for a sense of belonging and community.

Shaykh Habib Ali al-Jifri underscores the point that even religiosity is not imposed upon a void but arises from an already-endowed structure of meaning within the human being, likened to a "natural law of the soul."[3] This aspect of the *fitrah* can be cast over and replaced with artificial alternatives that seem to leave the human unfulfilled, at times in perpetual suffering. Indeed, this artificial alternative is presented as an alternative lifestyle: individualism rooted in a secular narrative of moral progress as a consequence of modernity.

Critical inquiry is encouraged in the Muslim tradition: the pursuit of knowledge cannot happen without rational scepticism within reasonable limits. However, our age is one of radical revisionism, going beyond rational scepticism into an ideological revision of fundamental assumptions once taken for granted, without method or reason. It is obvious to anyone today that we are experiencing an unprecedented departure from norms and definitions that, even 50 years ago, much of humanity would have never questioned.

This radical revisionism is one of the core tenets of the "modern attitude" which carries with it a distinct set of values that have penetrated the collective consciousness of the Western public. Now, with globalization, these values have reached even the most protected localized cultures beyond the West. A particularly lucid definition of modernity is that of Dr Karim Lahham: "the discontinuity of attaching truth-values to a changing stand-

1. Al-Bukhārī, 3353, 3383, 3493, 3495; Muslim, 2397.
2. Aḥmad, 8952.
3. Habib Ali al-Jifri, *Humanity before Religiosity* (Abu Dhabi, Tabah Initiatives, 2009).

ard; a flux, determined by a social and political voluntarism shorn from any reliance on first principles."[4] This "modern attitude" has turned the involuntary nature of community, defined by shared human connections, traditions, and identities, into an ever-fluctuating set of options with no clear foundation. Why this attitude has emerged is perhaps owed to one of modernity's chief goals: progress at any cost. A sense of belonging and a healthy community have become some of the forms of collateral damage on the relentless march to progress. In capitalist societies, progress becomes a financialised metric that attaches value to something insofar as it oils the engine of a never-satiated economic machine.

In parallel, a prevailing secular[5] and materialist attitude has made religious values the subject of sweeping reform and scrutiny. Of primary concern is the unprecedented confusion on what it means to *be* a human being, and the shift from a prioritisation of relational living to the individualism described above. How must a human understand themselves? What are their fundamental needs? What does it mean to live a *good* life? How should they structure that life? As Shaykh al-Jifri warns, the loss of a person's humanity, rooted in the concept of *fitrah*, not only undermines one's ability to access the deeper meanings of religion but their deviation leads to a religiosity that mischaracterises the example of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) completely and is used to justify the very things he came to rectify.[6] This observation by Shaykh al-Jifri isn't simply a critique of misinformed religious practice; it reflects a deeper metaphysical crisis.

Without a shared understanding of what it means to be human—what a human is for—we lack the very ground upon which revelation can take root. This is precisely the challenge of the modern West: in severing religion from *fitrah*, and *fitrah* from metaphysics, we have created a culture

4. Karim Lahham, *The Vocational Society*, Tabah Lectures & Speeches Series, no. 3, (Abu Dhabi: Tabah Foundation, 2013), 31

5. Charles Taylor discusses the secular age as one characteristic of what he calls "disenchantment," where the illusion of knowledge through the primacy of materialist outlooks, prioritising scientific advancement at the expense of any metaphysical inquiry, leaves little to the religious or creative imaginary—resulting in a loss of meaning for many.

6. Habib Ali al-Jifri, *al-Insāniyyah Qabla al-Tadayyun* (Abu Dhabi: Tabah Foundation, 2009), 34, 115, 439. These passages relate to the thesis of this chapter in their emphasising the ethical precondition of recognizing human dignity (34), the distortion of Prophetic character through harsh religiosity (115), and the incompatibility of ideological systems that contradict human nature (*fitrah*) (439).

in which the Divine can be referenced but no longer meaningfully felt. The result is not just spiritual[7] confusion, but the collapse of coherence itself. The Qur'an references this problem, highlighting "those who forgot God, [and then] forgot who they were…."[8] In other words, a neglect of the Divine order—which includes a particular hierarchy of values and societal organization—eventually results in an unmitigated relativity and subsequent loss of self.

There were certain "universals" of a society that were simply unquestioned. For example, despite the diversity and often context-dependent nature of views regarding the purpose, benefits, and challenges of marriage since time immemorial, one would be hard-pressed to identify a premodern example of a society questioning whether marriage in itself as an institution was worth preserving. Like marriage, community formations for most of human history were organic, in the sense that their function and presence was an unspoken reality everyone recognized—fundamental social arrangements. As such, it was odd for anyone to ask the question: Why community? Rather, it was connected to one's very survival. This, of course, does not mean these questions should be ignored today simply because they were unnecessary then.

And yet for all its importance, the concept of community has been difficult to define. In essence, community is the broader cohesion and mutual commitment within a group, achieved through multiple elements of collective support. A sense of belonging within and to a community is an individual's personal feeling of acceptance and being valued by others, which can even be with one member and not necessarily the entire social group. These human values and needs are not simply important; they are fundamental to what defines, drives, and sustains us as human beings.[9] Recent scholarship highlights that a significant root of modern depression and anxiety is the lack of vital connections to others, emphasizing that our societal shift away from communal life towards individualism has left a

7. In colloquial usage, spirituality is often understood as the psychological experience of religious practice or its more inward reality; religion is often seen as the system and outward practice. At times, the terms spiritual and religious are used interchangeably in this chapter. A more detailed explanation of the technical differences between them and their impact from an Islamic perspective is addressed in a forthcoming work.

8. Qur'an, 59:19

9. Baumeister, Roy F., and Mark R. Leary. 1995. "The Need to Belong: Desire for Interpersonal Attachments as a Fundamental Human Motivation." *Psychological Bulletin* 117 (3): 497–529.

gaping void in our sense of belonging and community–essential for our mental health and overall wellbeing.[10]

These fundamental needs can be interpreted through an Islamic lens as part of the *fitrah*–the universal and primordial reality of human nature described above. As a profoundly social religion, whatever social philosophy emerges from the Islamic tradition would naturally entail a framework for approaching and supporting the benefits and necessity of community and belonging. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) is reported to have said "Faith is [made up of] seventy-some branches; the highest of which is [the internalized reality of] there is no God but Allah and the nearest of which is removing harm from the path [of others]."[11] These branches indicate priorities in the acquisition of excellence in faith, as illustrated in the earlier chapter. A notable observation is that the lowest hanging fruit of faith, which can also be understood as the starting point, is relational—thinking of others is fundamental to one's personal pietistic path. In other words, a Muslim begins their climb to the highest branch of faith with the empathic awareness of and service to others in the context of community.

Many of Islam's religious rites and rituals revolve around the wellbeing of the collective, as the performance of the former must occur in groups. Throughout the Qur'an, God addresses the *community* of believers with the various directives of sacred law, and never the individual, with the exception of the Prophets. This emphasis on addressing the human being in the plural highlights that the very practice and preservation of ethical guidelines are only truly actualized in the context of a collective. Even when God addresses humankind more generally, it is also in the form of collective calls.[12]

As for the hadith, the Prophet (peace and blessing be upon him) assured us: "The Hand of God is with community."[13] This indicates that it is precisely the effort and patience in cultivating and maintaining community that invites Divine aid and assistance. Additionally, the help and watchful

10. Johann Hari, *Lost Connections: Uncovering the Real Causes of Depression—and the Unexpected Solutions* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2018).
11. Muslim, 35.
12. This is evidenced by the plethora of verses that say "*ya ayyuhal-ladhīna āmanū*" or "O you who believe!" The other phraseology commonly used is "*ya ayyuhan-nās*" or "O people!"
13. Al-Tirmidhī, 2167

care of God is felt most in the context of a community—enforced by the saying "God remains in the aid of His servant so long as they remain in the aid of their brother."[14]

Surely, however, communities and relationships are not always effortless matters. In Islam, there is an explicit recognition of the inevitable challenges and conflicts that relationships bring, as the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) assured us: "the believer who mixes with people and is patient with their harm has a greater reward than the believer who does not mix with people, nor is patient with their harm."[15] Therefore, within Islam, there often exist legitimate, contextually variant trade-offs between community and individualism.

In parallel, the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) warned of the danger of social isolation: "whoever desires the best place in paradise must stick closely to the community, for Satan is with the loner."[16] This was not a rebuke of those who sporadically enjoy or even prefer their own company; rather, it was meant to indicate that it is usually in prolonged isolation that we begin to develop both an estrangement from social realities and the cognitive distortions which harm us and may motivate our harm of others and ourselves. We may develop internal dialogues that are damaging, at times rooted in completely fictional narratives of our own making. In the company of others, the reality we are trying to avoid in our coping is reflected in us; we are constantly reminded of it and grounded in it, because "the believer is the mirror of the believer."[17] As a result, in good company, we find our pathway to healing and growth.

In addition to scriptural sources on the role of community, we can empirically observe how community is the vehicle for cultural and religious preservation of a collective, and assists in fulfilling the most important life needs of an individual. Any parent or guardian or individual who grew up without mentorship fully understands the meaning of the adage "it takes a village to raise a child." Indeed, many of the social issues within families in Western societies are due to the over-reliance on the nuclear family—which many times emphasizes the immediate family at the expense of community.[18] Premodern cultures, or present-day cultures not

14. Muslim, 2699
15. Ibn Mājah, 4032.
16. Al-Tirmidhī, 2165.
17. Al-Bukhārī, *Al-Adab al-Mufrad*, 239.
18. David Brooks, "The Nuclear Family Was a Mistake," *The Atlantic*, March 2020.

yet consumed by individualism, understood that belonging was central to the development of every individual. Another famous African adage states: "those not accepted into the village will burn it down to feel its warmth." This speaks to a recurrent problem in Western society: lacking real communities, there is a tangible increase in "anti-social" behaviour as the lack of a shared framework hinders or at least complicates "pro-social" behaviour.

Indeed, it is precisely because of our membership in communities that humans adhere to social norms.[19] This is significant given that social norms are ultimately how a society functions without complete anarchy or perpetual revolution, and the foundation of law and stability. A healthy community is organic and flows through every institution, rooted in the value hierarchy which underpins the culture of that society. This requires, as Durkheim mentions, an adherence to social norms which, in essence, are the operative blocks of a society's value hierarchy—reinforced on a day-to-day basis by the various manifestations of community. Similarly, values impact how communities operate. As Robert Putnam demonstrates in *Bowling Alone*, shifts in American societal values—particularly the rise of individualism, increased mobility, and the proliferation of electronic entertainment—have contributed to a measurable decline in social capital across various communities, particularly the middle-class and working-class populations.[20]

Much more has been written on the psychological need for belonging and community. What happens when this need is no longer centred in one's life? Besides what has previously been alluded to, one of the most significant problems that could be said to have arisen from a disintegration of people's sense of community is loneliness. It is the problem of loneliness that has for the first time re-centred the role, and loss, of community in modernity, as the theory of moral progress reveals diminishing returns on prioritising voluntarism and individual freedom over the participatory social structures that define community.

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https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/03/the-nuclear-family-was-a-mistake/605536/.

19. Émile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society,* trans. W. D. Halls (New York: Free Press, 1984), originally published 1893.
20. Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

The Consequence of Individualism and the Epidemic of Loneliness

Remarkable as it is regrettable, loneliness has reached alarming levels across the world. As a concept, however, loneliness is not always consistently defined. For instance, social isolation—the absence of social connections—is commonly conflated with feelings of loneliness. Although certainly linked, the former is a subjective experience of feeling alone, while the latter is the objective reality of social atomization. One can experience loneliness despite not being isolated, and one can experience isolation without feeling lonely. The reality of loneliness is often referred to now as "an epidemic" by media and academe.[21] In America, for instance, this epidemic has reached alarming levels, with 36% of respondents in a national survey reporting serious loneliness in the prior four weeks.[22] This means they felt lonely either "frequently" or "almost all the time." Certain populations appear to be more vulnerable: by focusing on mothers with young children, the number reporting serious loneliness jumps from 36% to 51%; for young adults aged 18–25, a staggering 61%.[23]

The rates for Muslims seem to be very similar (see table 1).

Table 1. Loneliness Rates Amongst American Muslims

How often do you feel lonely (N= 408)	Response (N)	Percentage (%)
Non-Lonely Muslims	210	51.5%
Lonely Muslims	198	48.5%

***Note**: Non-Lonely Muslims (1–2: Never, Rarely); Lonely Muslims (3–6: Occasionally, Sometimes, Frequently, Always)*[24]

21. Dylan L. Surkalim et al., "The Prevalence of Loneliness across 113 Countries: Systematic Review and Meta-analysis," *BMJ* 376 (February 9, 2022): e067068, https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj-2021-067068.6.
22. Richard Weissbourd, Milena Batanova, Virginia Lovison, and Eric Torres, *Loneliness in America: How the Pandemic Has Deepened an Epidemic of Loneliness and What We Can Do About It* (Cambridge, MA: Making Caring Common Project, Harvard Graduate School of Education, 2021), https://mcc.gse.harvard.edu/reports/loneliness-in-america.
23. Ibid. The pandemic seemed to have only exacerbated this issue, with 28% of respondents feeling lonelier than they did before the outbreak—a substantial increase from the 25% who recalled experiencing serious loneliness in the two months prior to the pandemic.
24. Ahmad Deeb, "Remosqued: Loneliness, Governance and Psychological Sense of Community Towards Holistic Wellbeing in the American Masjid" (PhD dissertation, National Louis University, 2024).

Loneliness has several consequences for wellbeing, perhaps most saliently psychological distress. The question of *why* loneliness affects our mental health has been the subject of numerous studies and theories.[25] The "belongingness" hypothesis emerged three decades ago, which suggests that humans have a fundamental need to form interpersonal connections and feel like they belong to a group.[26] Without this, loneliness can become a breeding ground for a host of mental illnesses, including depression. Later studies found that a sense of belonging to a group enhances well-being and is also a source of support in challenging times.[27] Notably, a large survey of 5,000 respondents drew positive links between having in-person friends and a subjectively higher sense of well-being while having a larger online network was largely uncorrelated with a sense of well-being.[28]

However, the effect of loneliness goes beyond mental health issues, including heart disease, substance abuse, and domestic abuse.[29] Remarkably, "actual and perceived social isolation" are even linked to an increased risk of early mortality.[30] Prolonged loneliness has been found to be as harmful to your body as smoking or obesity,[31] and a robust link has been demonstrated between loneliness and increased blood pressure and an impaired immune function.[32]

Contemporary research continues to affirm the importance of community and the consequences when people don't have it. Increasingly, cross-cultural evidence that communities built with intentionality, where people remain embedded in interdependent relationships over time, are among the most significant predictors of both longevity and life satisfac-

25. Pamela Qualter et al., "Loneliness Across the Life Span," *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 10, no. 2 (2015): 250–64, https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691615568999.
26. Roy F. Baumeister and Mark R. Leary, *ibid.*.
27. Jolanda Jetten, Catherine Haslam, and S. Alexander Haslam, eds., *The Social Cure: Identity, Health and Well-Being* (New York: Psychology Press, 2012).
28. John F. Helliwell, Richard Layard, and Jeffrey Sachs, eds., *World Happiness Report 2013* (New York: Sustainable Development Solutions Network, 2013), https://worldhappiness.report/ed/2013/.
29. Richard Weissbourd, Milena Batanova, Virginia Lovison, and Eric Torres, *ibid.*
30. Julianne Holt-Lunstad et al., "Loneliness and Social Isolation as Risk Factors for Mortality: A Meta-Analytic Review," *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 10, no. 2 (2015): 227–37, https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691614568352.
31. John T. Cacioppo and William Patrick, *Loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008).
32. Louise C. Hawkley and John T. Cacioppo, "Loneliness Matters: A Theoretical and Empirical Review of Consequences and Mechanisms," *Annals of Behavioral Medicine* 40, no. 2 (2010): 218–27, https://doi.org/10.1007/s12160-010-9210-8.

tion e.g. within blue zones. These findings reaffirm what our tradition has always maintained: the human being does not thrive in isolation, but in togetherness. When this need is neglected, the consequences are not merely psychological—manifesting as loneliness, anxiety, or depression—but existential, resulting in the erosion of meaning, mutual responsibility, and the moral scaffolding that anchors a person to life itself.

In pre-modern Muslim societies, human identity and social formation was nested within concentric circles: family, clan, tribe, city, and ultimately, transcendent affiliations like the *Ummah* or spiritual kinship. These layers formed a web of belonging, binding individuals to both local and abstract communities. Loyalty expanded outward but never dissolved inward—the clan protected the family, the tribe mediated disputes between clans, and broader affiliations provided a shared purpose, amongst other things. This structure balanced autonomy with interdependence. By contrast, the modern world has collapsed these layers into a stark binary: the individual and the state. The intermediary institutions—family networks, guilds, religious bodies, and civic associations—have been stripped of formal authority, and replaced by a legal and political framework that enshrines the individual as the sole bearer of rights. The result is a society where belonging is transactional, community is optional, and loneliness festers as the shadow of unchecked individualism.

Central to this shift is the state's formalization and *de facto* monopoly on mediating rights. The modern state seeks to render social life "legible" by replacing context-rich, locally evolved institutions with standardized, bureaucratically manageable systems.[33] This transformation has meant that modern legal frameworks now recognize individuals as sovereign entities, entitled to protections and privileges that bypass traditional collectives. There are no "family rights" in a court of law, no tribal entitlements in constitutions. If a parent disputes custody, a citizen claims welfare, or an employee challenges unfair wages, the state arbitrates—not a council of elders, a guild, or a neighbourhood assembly. This legal individualism, while emancipatory in theory, severs the organic ties that once compelled mutual obligation. Nuclear families, for instance, are left to navigate crises alone; seeking support from extended kin or community networks is often stigmatized as dependency, even as state systems prove impersonal

33. James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).

and inadequate. The individual is told they are sufficient yet finds themselves adrift.

Material realities amplify this psychological isolation. Capitalist economies reward self-reliance and mobility, incentivising people to prioritise careers over communal bonds. Labuor markets reward or at times demand relocation, fracturing geographic ties, while consumer culture frames relationships as accessories to personal fulfilment. The state, meanwhile, interacts with citizens as taxpayers and beneficiaries, reducing care to bureaucratized services. This arrangement creates a paradox: individuals face a plethora of choices like never before, yet in tandem are more existentially vulnerable. Rights are abstracted into legal entitlements and needs are commodified into buffets of services one consumes. Why fulfil others' needs when the state is contractually obligated to address yours?

The consequence is a crisis of belonging and community. Stripped of the meso layer—the vibrant middle ground between private life and state bureaucracy—individuals are left to curate meaning in a vacuum. Social media connections replace communal rituals; therapy apps substitute for collective grief. The state cannot mandate solidarity, and the market cannot sell it. In this vacuum, loneliness has transformed into an epidemic. The pact between state and individual was meant to liberate people, but it has instead dismantled the structures that once shaped and formed people into something larger than themselves. Modernity has traded belonging for autonomy—a bargain on which the diminishing returns have grown clearer with each generation.

Community: A Psychological Perspective

The loss of community has resulted in a social dysfunction of loneliness and atomisation. But what is the "community" we have lost, and how can it be defined? This chapter presents a philosophy of community based on three primary elements: (1) psychological sense of community; (2) space; and (3) governance.

Before proceeding, it is important to distinguish between *community* and *intentional community*. The former refers to the organic bonds that emerge through proximity, shared practice, or unspoken social contracts—often unstructured, yet deeply felt. The latter, by contrast, is born of necessity. It is a community constructed with deliberate purpose, built in response to the erosion of the organic. Intentional communities are formed around

shared convictions, shaped by clarity of vision, and sustained by a commitment to governance and continuity. In the Western Muslim context, where communal life must often be forged from scratch, the distinction is not semantic but existential. These are not simply spaces of gathering, but frontiers of meaning-making.

Between physical space, governance and leadership, and psychological sense of community, the last is arguably the most important in assessing the success of community. This is because it forms the intangible atmosphere that, of the three, a sense of community is the most important in defining community, as it forms the intangible atmosphere that bonds individuals emotionally and psychologically to a particular set of people, in a particular location, under a particular mode of leadership–all of which contribute to people's general "sense" of community. Community psychologists began engaging this topic in the early 1960's and settled on a concept called "psychological sense of community," or PSOC, designed to explore individual perceptions of community competence.[34] The foundational scholarship on PSOC defined the concept as a feeling of belonging, a *sense* that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared belief that their needs will be met through their commitment to one another in the context of that collective.

PSOC answers the question: "Does Ahmad *feel* community?" Given how subjective feelings are, it is incredibly difficult to define a sense of community with precision and measurable concepts, without which our definitions will be whimsical and rooted in assumptions as opposed to what people need. Indeed, the perceived subjectivity of emotions in the sense of community make it difficult to be able to measure it with traditional empirical approaches.[35] Over the years, PSOC has been a crucial element in understanding how individuals perceive their connection and belonging within their communities, describing how real and perceived aspects of a community could mediate individual and community outcomes, and used to generate interventions towards improving community health and diagnosing community problems.[36] It contains four primary elements: (1)

34. "Psychological Sense of Community" will be henceforth referred to as PSOC throughout the chapter.
35. Seymour B. Sarason, *The Psychological Sense of Community: Prospects for a Community Psychology* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1974).
36. Anne E. Brodsky, Patricia J. O'Campo, and Robert E. Aronson, "PSOC in Community Context: Multi-Level Correlates of a Measure of Psychological Sense of Community

Membership; (2) Influence; (3) Integration and fulfilment of needs; and (4) Shared emotional connection.[37]

Membership is made up of several layers, the first being boundaries or, put simply, who belongs and who does not. Inclusivity requires a level of exclusivity, which challenges modern rhetoric around being "all-inclusive." Whether intentionally or not, we are always excluding some by including others. There is no functional space, nation, or home that does not have rules which determine the boundaries of membership, and the consequences of breaching them. The second layer is emotional safety, in the sense that "boundaries established by membership criteria provide the structure and security that protect group intimacy."[38] This reiterates the importance of fostering trust and openness among members, allowing individuals to feel comfortable expressing their vulnerabilities. Conversely, the third layer of membership is a sense of belonging which includes feeling accepted by the group such that one is willing to sacrifice for the greater benefit of it, reinforcing membership. This leads to the fourth layer: personal investment, which is the actual dedication, effort, or sacrifice one makes for the collective.[39] The fifth and final layer of membership is common symbols, which are aesthetic representations, rituals, or language that serve as cultural touchstones. The utilization of common symbols maintains the community's sense of identity and belonging, reinforcing internal cohesion and external distinction.

The second element of PSOC is influence, referring to how empowered individuals feel to make a difference within the group. It is also the mechanism by which a community influences its members towards alignment

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in Low-Income, Urban Neighborhoods," *Journal of Community Psychology* 27, no. 6 (1999): 659–679, https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1520-6629(199911)27:6<659::AID-JCOP5>3.0.CO;2-#.

37. In theory, one may be able to collapse both "governance" and "space" under PSOC, as some of its elements can address both. However, aspects of space and leadership style aren't as comprehensively addressed in this framework, beyond references to philosophies of science that inform one's application of PSOC (i.e. social constructivism vs. post-positivism). I have chosen to separate the elements in this way as a result, and to emphasize the challenge of governance.

38. David W. McMillan and David M. Chavis, "Sense of Community: A Definition and Theory," *Journal of Community Psychology* 14, no. 1 (1986): 6–23.

39. This problematises the modern bystander or consumer-based communities, which many mosques and community organizations have begun adopting, seeking to increase programming to garner greater participation, turning communities into buffets of consumer activity that may not result in a true and sustained investment.

with the communal culture or the mission and vision. This represents a balance of power and answers how this power is shared across the group. This is known as a "bi-directional" form of influence: "In one direction, there is the notion that for a member to be attracted to a group, he or she must have some influence over what the group does… On the other hand, cohesiveness is contingent on a group's ability to influence its members."[40] To summarise, influence is a two-way street: group cohesion depends on its ability to influence members, and members' alignment with that group's culture and mission or vision depends on their ability to influence the group.

The third element of PSOC is integration and fulfilment of needs. This is the process of reinforcing continued participation and membership in the community through various means, such as fulfilling needs and facilitating an exchange of resources across members. This entails cultivating a cohesive community that successfully weaves member needs with collective goals, ensuring that membership in the community is mutually fulfilling. Successful communities create environments where individuals feel their personal needs are being met through community resources, and recognizing their status within the community and the acknowledgment of their skills. These needs must also be holistic, providing tangible and intangible rewards for participation, and various forms of support, including economic, emotional, and social support.[41]

The final element of a strong psychological sense of community is shared emotional connection. It is the commitment and belief that members have shared and will continue to share history, common stories, rituals, and similar experiences. Community is bound by emotional ties, which as an intangible element is hard to quantify, but can roughly be articulated through two primary social-psychological hypotheses. The first is the contact hypothesis, which states that the more members interact, the stronger their emotional connections tend to become, reiterating the importance of shared experiences that engender this.[42] The second is the shared valent hypothesis. It theorizes that events members experience together, from crises to celebrations, greatly strengthen the community bond. The more important this event, the greater the bond—which reiterates the importance of shared values and cultural understandings in

40. McMillan & Chavis, *ibid*., 11
41. *Ibid*., 12.
42. *Ibid*., 9.

this framework.[43] Scholars in the community psychology space discuss emotional connection as a "spiritual bond." This sacred bond is, of course, largely dependent on the treatment of members and the effects of honour or humiliation in the community.

Of course, PSOC is not without its criticisms. The PSOC framework has been criticized for challenges in measuring the four elements given their multi-dimensional nature. Critics argue that PSOC often fails to adequately consider broader societal, economic, and political factors that significantly influence community dynamics and individual senses of belonging. Even the term "community" itself remains unclear within the field, often defined too broadly, and used as a catchall term to refer to diverse entities at different levels of analysis. This has led to conceptual confusion and artificial polarization when referring to different types of communities.[44]

Formulating Philosophy: Beyond Uncritical Islamization

A wholesale and uncritical Islamization of any secular psychological framework remains an insufficient strategy for the development of an authentic Muslim philosophy of belonging and community. However, the PSOC framework certainly contains valuable insights that align with the Islamic tradition and may serve as a starting point. For example, Muslims in the West can benefit greatly from an intentional approach to boundaries and emotional safety in the design of their community organizations, which was evident in the Prophet's (peace and blessings be upon him) time. The model community of Madinah was incredibly welcoming and safe, such that a bedouin urinated in the Mosque while the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) and his followers were praying. The response was a gentle education, recognizing it was bred out of ignorance. This, however, must not be interpreted as an "all-inclusive" space with no boundaries. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) at times expressed strong

43. *Ibid.*

44. This debate around the definition of community and sense of community is also reflected in critiques of McMillan and Chavis' definition for its focus on the characteristics of social group solidarity rather than the sense of community itself, which may lead to a conflation of terms across disciplines. See Kimberly D. Bess, Adrian T. Fisher, Christopher C. Sonn, and Brian J. Bishop, "Psychological Sense of Community: Theory, Research, and Application," in *Psychological Sense of Community: Research, Applications, and Implications*, ed. Adrian T. Fisher, Christopher C. Sonn, and Brian J. Bishop (New York: Springer, 2002), 3–22.

disapproval to protect the communal culture of Madinah. One famous example is of a man who entered the Mosque, announcing loudly "who will help me find my red camel?," upon which the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) replied: "may you not find it; the Mosques were built for their [specific] purposes."[45] In the first scenario, extreme mercy was shown despite an extreme violation, primarily because the bedouin did not know any better. However, in the second scenario, it was someone obviously from the elite class who should have known better, violating an ethical code of the community space. In addition to the obvious correction of not bringing worldly affairs into the Mosque or raising one's voice in it, there may also be a subtle and implicit boundary setting: your socioeconomic status does not give you the right to demand services from whomever you wish. In institutions that lack defined boundaries established by the leadership, adversarial incentives form in a "free-for-all" environment, normalizing counterproductive behaviour by individuals that violate membership emotional safety.

To return to the three core elements of our earlier framework—sense of community, sacred space, and principled governance—perhaps we may therefore put forth a Muslim philosophy that contrasts PSOC in 3 areas: (1) consultative authority; (2) the prioritising of needs over duties; and (3) democratic valuation of public interests. First, consultative authority may capture aspects of Islamic teachings on communal decision-making, which while reflected in concepts like *shūrā*, ultimately places sovereignty in divine law rather than pure democratic ethos.[46] Secondly, it can be understood that centring needs over rights aligns with the Western focus on individual rights, whereas Islamic social ethics may prioritise communal obligations and duties to fulfil the needs of others. Lastly, the valuation of public benefit in Islam does not align with a purely democratic determination of public interest; rather, it is guided by the immutable principles of *sharī'ah* that define and rank the community's values and goals, ensuring that the pursuit of public good remains consistent with religious principles–further highlighting the necessity of leadership being grounded in those principles.

Let us move on to the second element: intentionality in space, specifically physical space. This is essential to a strong sense of community, much

45. Muslim, 569.
46. Qur'an, 42:38

of which revolves around physical proximity despite the proliferation of online spaces.[47] Aesthetics and interior design can determine whether one feels a sense of community or belonging. It is common for one to choose whether to enter a coffee shop or bookstore based on identifying more closely with their architecture or interior layout. This is no different in community organizations. Space, by definition, necessitates boundaries. A detailed discussion on the interplay of space and the other elements is beyond the scope of this chapter. What is certain is that a community space's success, no matter how beautiful, is defined by what people *feel* in that space, or their psychological sense of community. Interestingly, the most important factor in determining this is a community's governance and administration structure.

Finally, the third element of governance is arguably the primary factor that separates a healthy intentional community from a toxic one. This is not surprising, given that organizations rely on effective leadership to succeed in any context–be it corporate or communal. The boundaries of a community's space are especially sensitive, and do not arise *ex nihilo*, but are set in place through trusted leadership. When that trust is broken, much less repeatedly, most of the layers of one's sense of community are also broken.

To return to the example of America, broken trust has led to divestment and the rise of a movement of "unmosqued" individuals.[48] A survey of over 400 American Muslims highlighted that the main obstacle to a Muslim's sense of community in the Mosque—the most prevalent community institution in the West—is bad governance and administration.[49] This provides evidence that divestment from being in religious communities and having a strong sense of belonging in them may not be a result of the decreasing relevance of religion, cultural identity crises, or individualism in the public discourse; rather, it is the lack of appropriate governance models within mainstream Muslim community institutions like the mosque. This shows the question of authority and leadership seems

47. Pew Research Center, *Striking Findings from 2023*, December 8, 2023, https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/12/08/striking-findings-from-2023/.

48. Being "unmosqued"—similar to the concept of being "unchurched"—became a popular descriptive for Muslim divestment from community institutions after a 2014 documentary titled "Unmosqued the Movie" brought to light many of the internal (and systemic) problems in Mosque communities.

49. Ahmad Deeb, *ibid*.

to be the most challenging obstacle in articulating a Muslim philosophy of belonging and community, which we turn to next.

The Need for a Muslim Philosophy and the Question of Religious Authority

A thorough diagnosis of the problem of authority in Muslim community spaces within the West, and constructing principles for intentional community development, requires an understanding of the varying socio-political contexts in which each community exists. In Muslim-majority countries, the question of community may not be as relevant. This does not mean loneliness is not a reality for Muslims there. However, Muslims seem to be inoculated against its severity due to two potential factors. The first is the preservation of communal culture in those lands. Despite the exporting of individualism and other Western values to Muslim-majority lands, family and a spirit of communalism more generally remain dominant, for now. The second is the role of Islamic governance in the identity formation of the Muslim-majority world. Despite these countries operating as nation-states that are often cheap imitations of the secular West, and despite the challenges of tyrannical dictatorship, most of the institutions in these countries still honour Islam. As a result, the experience of alienation, which of course amplifies feelings of loneliness, is not as pronounced, though not completely absent. With Islam as the dominant culture, their values are reinforced everywhere they go–from the barber shop to the Mosque. For Muslims in minority contexts, it is the opposite. The dominant culture is non-Muslim, and many times hostile to Islam and Muslims in both culture and policy. While Muslims share many of the values in secular liberal democracies, their lifestyles mirror the individualism of liberal modernity, and their identities are established through constant, often painful, negotiations as minorities. This is natural given that the institutions always reflect the value hierarchy of the political order, which is secular neoliberalism, and as a result will not reinforce Muslim values organically. In this environment, Muslims also lack political authority. Community in this context is designed from scratch, operating primarily as religious congregations in Mosques, and more recently, as social groups with various priorities in other third space institutions. For the remainder of this chapter, any mention of "community" will therefore refer to congregations within community organizations in the Western context.

A complete history of Muslim community development in the West goes far beyond the scope of this short chapter. It will suffice us to provide a quick overview of the United States as a case study, with overarching relevance to most Western Muslim societies. Communities in the United States are designed with very different priorities depending on the time, location, and group. All groups can be summarized into three: immigrant communities that were primarily built to reinforce the religio-cultural values of their homeland; "indigenous" communities primarily referring to Black American Muslim spaces; and finally, what we may call "transitional" communities which are primarily the children of immigrants who have different priorities and needs than their forefathers and often struggle to reshape them.

Each of these groups then has different models and priorities. Some are personality-driven, while others are quasi-democratic structures; some focus on religious preservation, while others focus on cultivating the holistic needs of the community even beyond their Muslim congregants. All of that is then influenced by whether you live in an urban or suburban context, notwithstanding other variables. This diversity poses its challenges to a concrete definition of community and where Muslims in the West may find it. Interestingly, when American Muslims were asked what community means to them, the most common answer was feelings of being "welcomed" and "at home," suggesting that emotional connection and familiarity are critical to their sense of belonging and community. This is particularly significant given that most participants listed "home" as the space where they feel the most community, followed by "local organizations" and then Mosques–the latter two almost identical in their percentage.[50] In other words, the feeling of home is the most important metric for feeling a sense of community. Interestingly, many community organizations have begun using "welcome home" as a mantra for their communal culture.[51]

This brief overview introduces briefly what have been some of the greatest challenges facing Western Muslims in the establishment of healthy communities: (1) the lack of an intentional philosophy for community

50. *Ibid.*

51. For examples of where this has been operationalised, one can look at institutions such as Ta'leef Collective, RootsDFW, and West Valley Muslim Association. The coinage and first usage seem to have been by the late Imam and teacher Usama Cannon, founder of Ta'leef Collective, however it is not impossible for different thought leaders to be coming to similar strategies given that the same problems have persisted for so long.

development; (2) utopian idealism; and (3) the problem of authority. The first is the most important, as it bears implications for everything else. Community, as mentioned above, is an organic process in a communal society; individuals and families cultivate connections with each other and fulfil each other's rights and needs. With nation-state individualism and a secular liberal dominant culture, this process had to be intentionally engineered for Muslims. As a result, community organizations had to be formed which provided them the space and sense of community with their like-valued family as frontiers against the threats of a social philosophy at odds with the Islamic (and ethnic) identity they sought to preserve.

Unfortunately, this intentionality seems to be largely absent in community spaces. Experts in community development seldom exist. Priorities and metrics of success fluctuate based on an ever-changing leadership and their personal opinions. Fundamental questions central to healthy community development are yet to be explored, much less answered with any longevity of impact. What is community? What are its objectives and priorities? What are its metrics of success? How do we evaluate progress? What are the best practices? None of these were contended with seriously, till now, and the constant unnerving flux and relativism associated with modernity seems to have become the culture of the Western Muslim community.

Part of this is certainly circumstantial. Immigrant communities, for example, did not have the time to deliberate on the most appropriate philosophy for community development nor did they have the expert resources to lean on. These were uncharted lands, with immigrants coming from postcolonial, often war-torn realities that naturally informed their social organizing and visions. Mosque organizations were immediately identified as the most important community institution, and remain so to this day. Those who took the initiative to build them were often wealthy professionals, and thus formed them with the priorities they felt were necessary at the time. Identity seemed to be the most important concern. For most, these Mosques were an extension of nationalistic nostalgia and to preserve the ethnic identity of their children, in addition to the basic priorities that a Mosque must centre such as daily prayers and Jumuʿah. As the Muslim community grew, transitional communities became an increasing reality. Power struggles to reshape these organizations to suit the new needs of a first, second, and even third-generation Muslim populace became the norm.

Another part was the influence of American values such as egalitarian and democratic social organizing. The subconscious logic that seemed to inform many spaces was: "If we are in America, and it operates as a democratic institution with things like voting structures, our community organizations must follow suit." Naturally, they imitated what was most familiar around them, however without a thorough analysis of the diversity in social organizing which existed in America. For example, in many ways, the board-led structure of most American mosques—where the imam is positioned more as a hired functionary than as a spiritual authority—mirrors governance models found in Reform Jewish congregations, where lay-led boards manage the institution and the rabbi functions as an employee. This is notably different from many churches, especially in evangelical and non-denominational settings, where the senior pastor often holds decisive authority and serves as the community's visionary anchor. While mosque structures may not have been modelled explicitly on synagogues, they emerged in a religious landscape where Jewish and Protestant institutions had already normalized nonprofit incorporation and lay governance. As a result, Muslim communities, consciously or not, inherited a system that privileges administrative boards over religious leadership.[52] Beyond these, the typical power struggles found in any organization seemed to have become increasingly prevalent given the lack of defined philosophies.

The absence of a grounded and systematically articulated philosophy for Muslim community development in America has, perhaps paradoxically, been accompanied by the widespread circulation of utopian ideals. Among these, concepts such as "unity" were routinely championed in sermons, conferences, and strategic plans, yet they often lacked definition beyond rhetorical affirmation. This gap between ideal and implementation was exacerbated by institutional dysfunction and the persistent imagery of a fractured Muslim world, frequently represented as embroiled in internal conflict. Rather than provoking sober institutional analysis, these chal-

52. Kambiz GhaneaBassiri, in *A History of Islam in America: From the New World to the New World Order* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 199, documents how mosques at times reflected the structural influence of Masonic and fraternal orders—widespread among Protestant Christian Americans—on Muslim institutional formation. While these were often pragmatic choices in uncharted territory, it is significant to note the influence of other religious institutions on the operational frameworks in Muslim communities.

lenges gave rise to a discourse of moral idealism—one in which visionary goals were advanced without sufficient attention to the complexities of local realities.

The vision for the "model" community and the "ideal Muslim" in America became one that had unrealistic goals, and as a result could not face the hard realities on the ground, from drug addiction to sexual abuse. In contrast, the Prophet's community in Madinah–often used as an archetype for this discourse–was far from "ideal." A companion of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) who struggled with intoxication was disciplined on multiple occasions, to whom the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) responded with kindness and an affirmation of his belief despite those challenges, without normalizing the problem by saying "verily he loves God and His messenger." Adulterers confessed to him their infidelity, and hypocrites sought to undermine his authority consistently. What made it the model community were concrete principles modelled by the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) himself first as the vanguard of the ideals, and an adaptability of priorities which reflected the realities and needs of the people on the ground—not just visions by the professional elite or the pressures of Western society.

Dr Sherman Jackson summarises another obstacle to healthy communities—the problem of authority. He observes that result of postcolonial realities from which Muslims immigrated, or vicariously experienced in the West in their belonging to the greater *Ummah*, has caused them to be upon one of two extremes: "to either worship authority or be anti-authority."[53] When the constantly dysfunctional Muslim governments abroad and their conflicts are the primary reference points, and when much of the community leadership mirrors these dysfunctions, it is natural for Muslims in the West to be incredibly suspicious and project concerns of authoritarianism on any form of long-term authority–even if it is successful. Western individualism compounds this with its inherent and default suspicion towards any form of authority, which Muslims may have embraced knowingly or unknowingly.

Alongside this, the tendency to "worship authority" can be seen as a response to instability. In the context of postcolonial uncertainties and cultural upheaval, some Muslims relegate authority to an unhealthy sta-

53. Sherman Jackson, "Building Consensus and Unity in an Age of Polarity" (lecture, ALIM Winter Program, MCC East Bay, Pleasanton, CA, February 14–16, 2025).

tion to anchor their identities and find stability, viewing strong leadership as a bastion against the chaos of modern life. This reverence for authority provides not just a sense of security, but a framework to preserve their values and traditions in rapidly changing environments brought about by the flux of modernity. In both these scenarios, the problem is using the wrong reference point (i.e. governments) as a framework for building communities or uncritically adopting the frameworks of religious communities around us which may not be effective. As a result, Dr Jackson explains that Muslims [in the West] become "allergic to the very things they need."[54]

In Islamic history, communities[55] seemed to have been led by sage-scholars who had the heavy responsibility to make the final decisions, as opposed to the more prevalent quasi-democratic structures we see today that often come with arbitrary measures in selecting leadership and making decisions. That being said, their authority came from how well they were able to initiate and collect feedback, through which to identify expertise for needs beyond their capacity to fulfil, identified by merit and competence. Their expertise in Islam ensured that the communities they led remained anchored to the primary objective: God and His directives. Decisions were consistently filtered through that frame, reflecting a form of conservative egalitarianism evident in the time of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him). While his companions fully recognized him as the ultimate decision-maker—a notion that today may make some Muslims uneasy, particularly regarding deference to religious leadership—there existed a constant dialogical exchange. It was not un-

54. *Ibid.*

55. It is essential to recognize what is being mentioned here is in the context of leading religious congregations and spiritual communities—spaces of community rooted in the primary objective of drawing closer to God and a sense of belonging revolving around the pursuit of beauty in that objective. These happen to be the primary Western Muslim communities, and usually revolve around the Mosque. Outside of this context, other forms of leadership structures may work, and may even be needed that go beyond the standard understanding of "Islamic." This is illustrated in Dr Jackson's *The Islamic Secular,* where he writes: "Islam as a *dīn* consists of not one but two distinct yet mutually reinforcing registers of religiosity, one *shar'ī*, or religious in the proper religious sense, the other non-*shar'ī*, in effect, ultimately a religious secular." For more on this, see Dr Sherman Jackson's *The Islamic Secular.* All of this of course translates to different leadership and governance models, and while I contend that religious community spaces must have a defined hierarchy with the sage-scholar/Imam at the top, other models may fulfil many of the objectives people seek in these spaces—including the primary one, albeit incomplete and perpetually laden with foundational problems in my view.

common for companions to ask, "Is this your opinion, or is it revelation from God?"[56] This was not a challenge to his authority, but an affirmation that their creative agency and critical insight were not only permitted but encouraged. This was not an undermining of the Prophet's (peace and blessings be upon him) religious authority. It was a recognition that there was room for their creative agency and insight into various matters, even to the extent of advising the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) in worldly affairs, such as during the strategic planning of the Battle of the Trench. In this reality, authority did not always mean authoritarianism.

In contrast, what has emerged is a reactionary posture characterized by a deep suspicion of hierarchy, an overcorrection in favour of democratized leadership models, and a general scepticism toward religious authority. This is partly the result of colonial legacies that rendered authority suspect—especially religious authority—and partly due to the widespread export of underqualified religious figures whose presence often could not meet the contextual demands of their communities, amongst other reasons. In their wake, community priorities were frequently set in a manner detached from Islamic principles, by those unqualified to speak on behalf of Islam, and guided less by vision than by convenience or internal politics. Authority, in many spaces, became measured not by scholarly integrity, merit, or expertise; rather, by visibility and appeal—arbitrary markers increasingly shaped by the algorithms of social media or one's socioeconomic standing.[57]

Conclusion

Community is a fundamental human need. Without community, we lose our sense of belonging and fall prey to numerous ills, such as individualism and loneliness. Community provides both that sense of belonging and a shared framework for which to navigate the complexities of life. While

56. The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) once advised companions against pollinating date palms, thinking it unnecessary. When the crop failed, he clarified: "If I command you regarding your religion, take it; but if I speak from personal opinion, I am only human." In another version, he said, "You know best concerning your worldly affairs." Muslim, 2363.

57. The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) stated: "many a person with shaggy and dusty hair, dusty and driven away from doors [because of their poverty and destitute appearance] were to swear by Allah [that something would happen], Allah will certainly make it happen." Muslim, 2622, 2854.

frameworks like PSOC help to partially identify and solve the issue of a lack of community, they are not exhaustive, and regarding Muslim communities, lack a necessary theological rootedness. Muslim communities require both the development of an "expertise in community" and a religious framework. An ideal starting point towards a Muslim philosophy of belonging and community may be the Prophet's (peace and blessings be upon him) first address upon entering what was to become the model community: "O people, spread peace [widely], feed people, reconnect [and maintain] family bonds, and pray while others are asleep, and you will enter paradise in peace."[58] In this address, the priorities were clear: creating both oases of peace and being individual sources of peace, serving others, keeping families strong, and never forgetting one's personal piety–which facilitates all the other goals with ease–suggested by the Prophet's wording of entering paradise "in peace."

Community development should be an area of expertise, not performed on an ad-hoc basis by whoever initially funded and/or established the community. Given the diversity of Western Muslim communities and the impossibility of a one-size-fits-all approach, this necessitates eventual establishment of best practices in all communities–regardless of form and context–incentivised through certifications and other means. These must be rooted in the timeless principles of the Islamic tradition, as well as modern tools in so far as they assist in the application of those principles. This also requires a commitment to continuous evaluation, internally and by external expertise.

Finally, the metrics of our success must no longer be merely quantifiable, such as physical expansions and the number of attendees or programs; rather, it must prioritise the objectives of the religion and the professionalisation of identifying–and fulfilling–the communal obligations in the varying contexts. Are people growing in their faith? Are communal obligations being met? Are people feeling a sense of peace, home, and love in our spaces? If the answers to these are undefined, there is little hope for any substantial growth.

Other foundational questions emerge from this chapter and must be explored with utmost seriousness: What is community in a Western Muslim context, and how do we move from unexamined assumptions to coherent, intentional design? Should mosques serve as all-encompassing third

58. Ibn Majāh, 3251

spaces, or must they be supported by other institutions like Zawiyyahs or wellness centres to meet the holistic needs of their communities? What governance model best reflects Islamic values while ensuring accountability, competency, and sustainability? Who should hold decision-making power and what structures are needed to prevent abuse, burnout, or the rise of personality cults? Should there be a separation between religious and administrative affairs in community spaces? Can best practices in community development be identified, adapted, and incentivised across diverse communities without collapsing contextual nuance in a Muslim community as diverse as the West? What does unity look like in these increasingly diverse communities, shaped by racial and ethnic plurality, as well as ideological variance? What training and evaluative standards should be applied to community leadership, and who decides them in the absence of a centralized authority? And what kind of spaces allow individuals to feel truly at home, nourished, and transformed? These questions are not marginal—they sit at the very centre of an attempt to build truly intentional and exemplary Muslim communities in the West.

As a final note, it is critical to recognize that functioning communities are arguably the greatest protection against pervasive secularisation and religious apathy among Muslims in the West. If the preservation of religion (*hifdh al-dīn*) is understood as the top objective in the *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*, or the objectives of Divine law, then this cannot be meaningfully achieved without healthy communities that intentionally cultivate and sustain their members. If Muslims in the West also seek to offer their tradition as a source of healing for society, then the dissonance between idealistic preaching and dysfunctional community realities will remain a persistent obstacle. At the very least, there must be a shift toward introspection and the creation of spaces for civil discourse around endemic issues that have remained unresolved for decades—symptomatic of the deeper systemic dysfunctions examined throughout this chapter and affirmed by "unmosqued" individuals across the Western world.

In short, community is not ancillary to religious life and in the first instance not even a religious one; it is a fundamental human need embedded in the *fitrah*. When community is not taken seriously, treated as a byproduct of programs, a passive social outcome or extensions of philanthropic and cultural legacies, the consequences are clear: disconnection, loneliness, spiritual apathy, and eventually, disillusionment with religious life altogether, accompanied by the erosion of the very ethical

and spiritual commitments meant to anchor it in an age of shifting foundations. Frameworks such as Psychological Sense of Community (PSOC) offer a useful starting point by providing a language of belonging and community, with a set of empirical categories for analysis which seem to be largely absent in Western Muslim communities. However, they are still insufficient for Muslim contexts, as they remain secular, and do not account for the metaphysical, theological, and ethical dimensions that define the Islamic conception of community. While principles such as emotional safety, shared values, and fulfilment of needs are crucial, they require intentional leadership and institutional governance to be realized. In fact, the core challenge facing Muslim communities today is not a lack of vision but a failure of administration. The time for ad-hoc whimsical community building is over, however sincere.

The Western Muslim community has unprecedented human and material resources to accomplish something truly extraordinary. One future pathway is to perhaps begin treating this as an area of expertise—with trainings, accountability, and most importantly, a coherent Muslim philosophy of community that draws authentically from both Muslim tradition and context. Given that the discussion revolves around religiously-informed communities, a deep understanding of Islam must be the starting point, and professionals lacking this grounding are ill-equipped to determine communal priorities, regardless of scale. From this can emerge best practices. These can serve as guiding principles regardless of the context or leadership model, regardless of the context or leadership model, especially when wholesale change is neither immediate nor likely in any context. This can inform manuals with adaptable implementation models which can serve communities at all stages of their development. Of course, such an approach depends on a deliberate raising of collective consciousness—among both leadership and the broader community—around the urgency and value of principled community development, eventually towards an independent certifying body that incentivises applying these principles, given that there is no centralized authority beyond that for Muslims in the West.

If this intellectual and practical infrastructure can be established, communities will not just survive fulfilling the bare minimum requirements; they will become true sanctuaries—spaces where individuals feel seen, held, and transformed in their path to God as was intended, anchoring Muslims not only in one another, but in the very *fitrah* that makes faith livable and sustains what it means to be fully human in a fragmented

world. In a world increasingly unmoored from a sense of meaning, this may represent one of the most compelling forms of *da'wah*—an embodied invitation to the universal efficacy of Islam as a worldview which can holistically heal society, as the great American Imam and community leader Malcolm X believed it could be. ❧

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IN THE NAME OF GOD, THE MERCIFUL, THE BENEFICENT

Farḍ al-Kifāyah as the Juridical Foundation of the Islamic Social Apparatus

by Karim Lahham

One of the central contributions of Islamic civilization is in its integrated conceptions of human society, the order of nature, knowledge, and art as realities with a purpose or end, the attainment of which by their harmonious cooperation of all their powers constitutes their perfection in the service of God. This integrality serves as a principle of effectiveness, where no power is applied in opposite directions nor independently of the other, thus leading to a principle of intelligibility that permits a perfectible understanding of reality. This posits a need for true knowledge, which cannot simply be the knowledge of unrelated facts but rather the perception of unity in the many and their respective relation. Indeed, in the delineation of the framework of Muslim society that this chapter seeks to explore, the careful balance of communal and individual obligation that is adverted to is overwhelmingly present, especially historically speaking, precisely because of the integral way in which the above conceptions are seen and lived. When examining communal obligations (*farḍ kifāyah*), we find that the singularity of purpose in such obligations is entirely in harmony with that of individual obligations, in furtherance of the overriding principle and purpose of existence stipulated in the Qur'an: "Nor have I created jinn and Man, but to worship Me,"[1] worship here also implying knowledge according to the commentators.[2]

Certainly a normative social framework in any principled society is a fragile interlacing of relationships premised on various forms of kinship

1. Qur'an, 51:56.
2. Ibn ʿAjība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 5, ed. Bassām Muḥammad Barūd (Abu Dhabi: n.p., n.d.), 575.

but above all on a common social goal, what philosophers used to refer to, in less fashionable times, as the common good. This common goal ensured the desire for a common unity rooted not in limitation but perfection. Human beings are generally capable of performing tasks in singularities due to the obvious limitation of their faculties of knowledge and action. The integration of a community ensures that in their successive acts, human beings are able to direct social activity towards a unitive goal. The interdependence of the individual on others implies that the human being is a social animal not by instinct alone but by the metaphysical nature of his being. If we invoke the common goal or the common good we necessarily imply a need for a juridical power without which this social life would not be able to subsist. This is the power that revelation provides, namely by way of the Shari'ah, whose primary role is not to coerce but to direct.

Juristic theories have long falsely defined the individual as the unit of society, self-sufficient and atomized within a wider collective of individuals. It is difficult to see how, in such a framework, one is able to arrive at any identification of a common good that transcends personal whim, given the function of positive law in such a scheme. As Roscoe Pound once put it:

> According to this theory, justice is the maximum of individual self-assertion; it is the function of the state and of the law to make it possible for the individual to act freely. Hence the sphere of law is limited to the minimum of restraint and coercion necessary to allow the maximum of self-assertion by each, limited by the like self-assertion by all.[3]

In the modern atomized society, what is at issue is the resolution of conflicting interests as an extension of a wider project of social engineering in the service of a questionable social philosophy. The first victim of the above stated view of law is the authority of law stretching beyond the general acceptability of a necessary social fetter on individual wills for the satisfaction of political convenience. Such authority, naturally, is easily rescinded when discovered to be politically expedient. True authority, however, must be metaphysically posited, and not merely morally posited, to survive at all – an authority therefore that is more recognized than im-

3. Roscoe Pound, "Law and Liberty" in *Lectures on The Harvard Classics, Political Science. V. Law and Liberty*, ed. William Allan Nelson et al. in *The Harvard Classics*, ed Charles W. Eliot (New York: P.F. Collier and Son, 1909–14), vol. 51, 347–51 at 349.

posed. This sovereign authority can only be Divine Authority, as manifested by revelation and the nomocratic nature of the Islamic polity. The unholy spirits haunting the former byways of traditional Western philosophy may still believe in the possibility of legitimate authority whilst at the same time rejecting natural hierarchies, but this symptom of irrationality can only amount to a state wherein reason can no longer issue any mandate, *facilis descensus Averno*.[4]

As extraordinary political upheavals and military adventures continue to overwhelm and plague the ordinary life of the central heartlands of the Muslim world, the importance of the notion and basis of the Islamic social life has become even more pronounced. The architecture of the social framework in this context has become of paramount importance to understand so that any effective maintenance or renewal may be coherently implemented in subsequence. Any discourse on the social order today is naturally enunciated within an intellectual context, overcrowded by ideological permutations inherent in public bodies that affect and litter the contemporary mindscape. A redundant philosophy of economics that refuses to recognize the finitude of the world is now universally applied in tandem with an equally redundant political philosophy that refuses to understand the distinction between freedom and license, principle and ideal. From this ill-begotten union has sprung conceptual monsters, even dragons, that are increasingly difficult to slay in the mind. The question though at the outset remains, namely, whether an alternative vision and order can exist, and whether such a vision and its application can be true, and if true then necessarily effective. It is this contention that one seeks to explore in what follows.

The Relation between Society and Polity

There is a half-truth that states that the best government is the least government, a half-truth based on the misunderstanding of the organic relation between the social order and the state. The more complete truth is that the best society has always been that of the least political coercion, the state being a reflex of the social order and not the other way around. The new

4. Publius Vergilius Maro, *Vergil, Aeneid, Book vi.*, ed. with intr., notes etc. by A.H. Allcroft and B.J. Hayes (with tr.), (London: W.B. Clive & Co., 1891), 21.

European Liberalism of the 18th century in misconstruing the nature of man proceeded to raise higher expectations in direct contrast to the low expectations of the *ancien* regimes it overturned. The high expectation was that the goodness of man was bound to be manifested and given free rein once provided with liberty and a free social order that would obviously then require very little policing. A social order though, made up on the whole of diffused property ownership, needed a competent and effective public authority to guard it from competitive mercantile greed, which served as the foundation of all industrial and financial capitalism. In effect this take-over took place in 19th century in Europe as the instruments established to secure liberty had the opposite effects. That is to say that new institutional powers of certain members of society, namely, bankers, politicians, bureaucrats, trade-union or labour leaders assumed the power to restrict the arena in which human beings may act by choice rather than compulsion.

Liberalism, the central political paradigm extolled till this day, has never been a theory of liberty, although all liberals generally believe in liberty without any agreed definition as to what exactly liberty is. One could safely conclude that the early 19th century concurred that Liberalism was freedom from political, ecclesiastical, social and economic control, a view rendered obsolete in the second half of that century, so rather than seeking freedom *from* something, ideologues sought freedom *for* something. This conversion of a negative freedom into a positive concept was the consequence of the realization that the pursuit of a negative freedom, once attained, became meaningless. Naturally the search for freedom *from* something cannot be an end in itself, since once attained, the liberal stance has nothing further to contribute as no further action can be delineated. Hence no socio-political program could possibly be built on the basis of a negative concept of liberation. Moreover, it was difficult to see how a program for society could be devised on the basis of a positive concept of liberation without the premise of a principial definition of the social unit.

Democracy, one should note, is not synonymous with liberalism. The terms "democracy" and "democratic" are political terms only, democracy being the rule of the *demos*, the people. Democracy as practised can be illiberal or liberal. Its two broad tenets can be said to be legal and political equality (universal franchise) for all, and self-government based on the rule of the majority of equals. This self-government may be representative, in which case we are dealing with indirect democracy, or rule by

the populace, in which case we are dealing with direct democracy. In an indirect democracy, the representatives must be the mouthpieces for the desire and wishes of the electorate. If they are not, then one can no longer speak of the presence of a democracy but then that of a republic.

Democracy also does not have to ensure the respect for minorities vis a vis majoritarian demands nor freedom of speech, as these are liberal tenets and not democratic tenets. The election of Hitler in 1933 to the Chancellorship was entirely democratic, as was the national socialist program ensuring the suppression of the rights of minorities. Lenin's dictatorship of the proletariat was more democratic than the republicanism of the United States or the constitutional parliamentarism of Britain. Compare for example the absolutism of the reigning houses of Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries and the sheer compulsion and power wielded by the introduction of the income tax in 1917 by presumably more enlightened systems of government.

Ancient autocracy could never achieve the control of present contemporary systems of democratic rule. Autocratic rulers of earlier ages, although held to be far from democratic, can yet be considered liberal in many tenets. So, Democracy is a particular type of political arrangement, *simpliciter*. Democracy is concerned solely with who should be vested with ruling authority, liberalism, on the other hand, is concerned with the freedom of the individual regardless of who rules or what political arrangement is in place.

The development of philosophic liberalism that is of interest here is the current manifestation of ideological nihilism that believes truth is either prejudice or a matter of intellectual arrogance, or worse still, a sensual or emotive subjective posture. There are those that also state that truth is humanly unattainable or unattainable by reason. This leads naturally to a despair that is the preceding stage of any effective political totalitarianism. This is the totalitarianism of subjectivity. The self by its nature is tyrannical, a usurper, one that rationalises caprice as a greater good than another's rationalised caprice.

The manifestation of Liberalism that we intend then denotes a set of conditions or circumstances wherein a person may act from choice in the way that one pleases, a sphere of unconstrained actions without any fetter from external compulsions or prohibitions. Freedom, on the other hand, is a subjective conception. It designates a consciousness in us of what we are, an inner illumination that permits us to acknowledge that

we are moral agents, having the capacity to discern right and wrong and to exercise the power of moral choice. No one can be said to be free who does not arrive at this acknowledgement. Liberty can be conferred from without, even imposed from without, whereas freedom can only be had by men knowing what kind of creatures God has fashioned them to be.

The above is an important distinction. Freedom is therefore a kind of self-knowledge, and self-knowledge is a state of being and not an act. This entails a movement necessitating a type of transcendence of the soul, and thus subject to a science of the soul. The roots of freedom therefore are spiritual and not political or economic. The emancipation of political classes or redistribution of property rights, the right to own, can never be but superficial determinations of an activism that can never achieve freedom but only the simulacra of freedom. In other words, the re-arrangement of socio-economic or socio-political furniture in the modern polity can never accede to the emancipation of the human soul. Here lies the overriding fallacy of Marx's materialist sociology.

This preamble on the relation of society to the polity is the basis from which to attempt an intimation of the nature of the functional society, or vocational society, manifested in Islamic history.[5] The vocational society is that association which is premised on the service of all in the service of God, and the facilitation for all in attaining the fullest capacity for the worship and knowledge of God. This necessitates natural hierarchical frameworks, since those who know have a duty to tutor those who do not know, those who can lead have a duty to provide leadership to those

5. The great economic historian Richard Tawney summed up the understanding of the functional society in the following terms: "A society which aimed at making the acquisition of wealth contingent upon the discharge of social obligations, which sought to proportion remuneration to service and denied it to those by whom no service was performed, which inquired first not what men possess but what they can make or create or achieve, might be called a Functional Society, because in such a society the main subject of social emphasis would be the performance of functions. But such a society does not exist, even as a remote ideal, in the modern world, though something like it has hung, an unrealized theory, before men's minds in the past. Modern societies aim at protecting economic rights, while leaving economic functions, except in moments of abnormal emergency, to fulfil themselves… Such societies may be called Acquisitive Societies, because their whole tendency and interest and pre-occupation is to promote the acquisition of wealth… The secret of its triumph is obvious. It is an invitation to men to use the powers with which they have been endowed – by nature or society, by skill or energy or relentless egotism or mere good fortune – without inquiring whether there is any principle by which their exercise should be limited." Richard Tawney, *The Acquisitive Society* (London: G. Bell & Sons Ltd., 1921), 29–30.

who cannot lead, those who can make or possess a particular skill must produce for those who cannot produce, lacking that particular skill.

The Islamic Social Framework

Premises

Any examination into the nature of a society and its implications must begin with definitions as to the unit of that society and its identification. Primarily the notion of society is ordinarily understood to be the preserve of the science of sociology, a recent Western science established by Auguste Comte in 1839.[6] Its subject matter however has been the object of study for many centuries prior to the Comtian system, namely in its relation to moral psychology, philosophy, jurisprudence, architecture and ethics to name a few disciplines. The framework within the Islamic world varied in accordance with the living parameters of semi-urban, urban and nomadic people. Essentially what we seek to look at are the first two categories of urban and semi-urban. It is to be noticed that these categories are relational to the integration of nature in the built environment, in that the priorities of social cohesion do not necessarily become more acute in the rural landscape than in the market-place, but rather more specifically applied in each to maintain the effectiveness of their common principles in context.

In examining the unit of society, the Qur'an makes us aware that we are in the abode of duality, "And We have created everything in pairs of two; that haply you may remember the One,"[7] also "And We have created you in pairs."[8] These verses are naturally in the context of the first verse of al-Nisā', "O mankind, fear your Lord who created you from a single soul and from it created its mate, and spread far and wide from them a multitude of men and women; And fear Allah by whom you entreat one another, and fear what is due to the wombs of your kinship: Verily was Allah a Watcher over you."[9] The human being can only truly function in society since he is commanded to practice the virtues, thus stipulating the necessity of the presence of a recipient and furthermore a requisite relationship with the recipient of the virtuous act.

6. See Karim Lahham, *Metaphysics and Sociology* (Abū Dhabi: Ṭābah Foundation, 2012), 17.
7. Qur'an, 51:49.
8. Qur'an, 8:18
9. Qur'an, 78:8.

The human being is thus born as a social creature since he is born in a society, first the society of his parents, and second the wider society in which he worships, procreates and pursues his earthly ends within the context of his final end. This includes a specific importance to the community (and the *Umma* as a whole), one necessarily premised on brotherhood, and if brotherhood then good character as its basis. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said, "I was sent to perfect noble character (*makārim al-akhlāq*),"[10] and also in the hadith of Usāma bin Shurayk: "We said: O Messenger of God, what is the best thing that a human being can be granted? He said: Good character (*khuluqun ḥasan*)."[11] When the *ṣaḥābī* Abū Ḥurayra asked what good character was, the Prophet (peace be upon him) replied: "To maintain a tie with the one who has severed it, to forgive the one who has oppressed you, and to give to the one who has deprived you."[12]

In a nomocratic order, such as that created by the Islamic society, all members of the community are considered equal before the law, whereas the distinction or rather the hierarchy amongst the polity arises from that of knowledge or *taqwa*, integral piety.[13] The foundation of all social hierarchy stems from the Qur'an, "Obey God and obey the Prophet and those among you who hold authority."[14] Also, "Say, O God, owner of the sovereignty! You give the sovereignty to whom You will, and You take it away from whom You will. You strengthen whom You will, and You humble whom You will. In Your hand is the choice of what is best. Verily You are powerful over everything."[15] This, however, does not do away with the notion of seeking social justice (*al-ʿadl al-ijtimāʿī*), the sultan or leader being the agent of justice or its guarantor. Social justice in any case is essentially to be sought in accordance with the virtues espoused by good character so that a standard of human conduct is established. The virtues (*al-faḍā'il*), once perfected, create the balance that is justice, a balance

10. Bukhārī, *Al-Adab al-mufrad*, 273.
11. Ibn Mājah, 3436. Imām al-Qushayrī in his *Risāla* quotes al-Kattānī as saying that: *Tasawwuf* is *khuluq* (espousing the virtues, good character), so the one who has outstripped you in *khuluq* has outstripped you in *ṣafā'* (*al-tasawwufu khuluqun fa man zāda ʿalayka fī al-khuluqi fa qad zāda ʿalayka fī al-taṣawwufi*). *Al-Risāla al-Qushayrīyya* (Beirut: Dār al-Minhāj, 2017), 529.
12. Al-Bayhaqī, *Shu'b al-Imān*, 8678.
13. Qur'an, 49:13.
14. Qur'an, 4:62.
15. Qur'an, 3:26.

that is at the root of all social and political justice.[16] It also ensures on an individual level the balanced exercise of our faculties as human beings, so that our creative powers may be ably expressed and acted on, and so that our exercise of will attains mental, spiritual and physical health.[17]

This attempt to perfect an equilibrium on the plane of the individual soul prior to any ethical regulation of the polity is at the heart of the understanding of the practical sciences. In this scheme it is ethics that determines economics which in turn determines politics. Reform of society or of politics by metaphysical necessity must be at the level of the reform of the individual, spiritually and ethically. Once this is in play, then a reform of economics becomes possible, in that all economics rests on a particular articulation of value that is postulated from a higher science. The implication of value, however, can only be ascertained as a judgment in the science of economics once a balance on the ethical level has been arrived at, or else no true determination can be made. Intellectual capacity, or one should say, clarity, is narrowly determined by moral capacity, as true intelligence is always dependent on moral conduct. Al-Ghazālī in his *Iḥyā'* stated that *adab* was the key to the sciences and the basis or source (*manbaʿ*) of all intellectual understanding.[18] Knowledge, consequently, can never be considered a cognitive act alone but must also necessarily be subject to a moral state.

The Islamic social framework is one premised on two types of obligations (*wujūb*): personal (*farḍ ʿayn*) and communal (*farḍ kifāyah*). The first category entails a personal responsibility to perform a specified (*muʿayyan*) obligation, the omission of which would lead to an *ithm*, the intentional commission of a sin. The second category is an obligation on the entire community which after its performance by any member of the community becomes immediately lifted. Some obligations are time specific, so for example the saving of a drowning man, once saved, the obligation becomes extinguished. Some are non-time specific such as medical services or animal husbandry. The trades and crafts therefore are examples of longstanding communal obligations that are required to be fulfilled by a member, or members, of the community. The pursuit of a trade or the

16. Al-Ghazālī, *Mizān al-ʿAmal*, ed. Sulaymān Dunyā (Cairo: Dār al- Maʾārif, 2003), 272.
17. Ibid, 298–9.
18. This notion forms the essential theme of the first book, *Kitāb al-ʿilm*. See ʿAbd al-Rahmān al-Shaʾār and Marwān al-Kātib, *Tuḥfat al-sālikīn min Iḥyā'* *ʿUlūm al-dīn wa tiryāq al-muqbilīn min aqwāl al-ʿarifīn* (Cairo: Dar al-Iḥsān, 2021), 51.

earning of a livelihood is naturally incumbent on every Muslim whether responsible to himself, or with dependents and family (*ṭalabu al-kasbi farīḍatun ʿalā kulli muslim*).[19]

A trade or a craft entails by necessity an acquisition of knowledge that is of benefit to others, and as the hadith states: "The most beloved people to Allah are those who are most beneficial to the people."[20] The most beneficial of trades or crafts, following upon this, are those which are of greatest benefit to the community, those that serves its needs the most, and the needs of the non-human community. Trades or crafts are activities which come under the science of fiqh, the science that regulates the realm of human action. If we examine the literature of *al-qawāʿid al-fiqhiyya*, the general legal principles of jurisprudence, those maxims that represent comprehensive principles of the science, one can safely ascertain the quality of society envisaged and engendered by their application.

Take for instance one of the principal governing maxims, namely: "Injury is to be eliminated," *al-ḍararu yuzāl*, we find that it is premised on, and derived from, the hadith that states: "No harm is to be done and no reciprocation of harm (*lā ḍarara wa lā ḍirār*)," [21] implying that any corruptive practice is also to be eliminated.[22] Much of fiqh is premised on this maxim, in that it interiorises a mercy and an element of forgiveness in the application of the rulings of jurisprudence. It has a fundamental application also to the type of social framework that is engendered by it, as well as the implementation of modern technology and the use of modern machines, the kind of architecture espoused by a society, and above all the modern use of land. From this one central maxim alone, the trajectory of a whole society may be elicited and clarified. The maxim is also pertinent to the perfection of skill in the art of making, so that the negligence of skill is to be considered a harm. The more perfect a work the less harm it possesses, and the less perfect a work the more harm it entails.

When examining the crafts and trades in any Islamic society and their central importance, the underlying economic context above all is that which situates their *raison d'être*. Modern structures of society have for the most part replaced personal and functional responsibilities by impersonal and formal contractual relationships, wherein activities that are socially desir-

19. Al-Shaybānī, *Kitāb al-kasb* (Cairo: Dār al-Salām, 2016), 71.
20. Al-Ṭabarānī, *Al-Muʿjam al-awsaṭ*, 6026.
21. Imām Mālik, *Al-Muwaṭṭa'*, Book 36, Hadith 31.
22. Al-Saqqāf, Abd al-Raḥmān, *Al-Qawā'd al-fiqhiyya* (Kuwait: Dār al-Diyā', 2017), 307.

able may be deemed uneconomic, and undesirable activities considered economic. This can be easily understood when one ascertains the effect of the new morality in modern economics which recognises expediency as the economic counterpart of political freedom.[23] This sets the foundation for social disintegration in that the pursuit of self-interest is redefined as acquisition. In the *Wealth of Nations*, Smith provides Karl Marx's future and cardinal economic principle:

> Labour alone, therefore, never varying in its own value, is alone the ultimate and real standard by which the value of all commodities can at all times and places be estimated and compared. It is their real price; money is their nominal price.[24]

Marx similarly does not define nor understand fully the distinction between utility value and exchange value. He confounds the value things possess in themselves with that which accrues to them from the aptitude they hold to be bartered for others. For Marx, things do not and cannot possess any other value than one, that which labour affords them. Outside of this there is nothing else that can increase value. In *Das Kapital*, he states:

> The exchange values of commodities must be capable of being expressed in terms of something common to them all, of which thing they represent a greater or lesser quantity. This common something cannot be either a geometrical, a chemical or any other natural property of commodities…The exchange of commodities is evidently an act characterized by a total abstraction from use-value…If then we leave out of consideration the use-value of commodities, they have only one common property left, that of being products of labour, …human labour in the abstract.[25]

23. See Dugald Stewart on Smith's Moral Philosophy lectures in, *The Works of Dugald Stewart: Account of the Life and Writings of Adam Smith, LL.D.* (Cambridge: Published by Hilliard and Brown, 1829), Vol. VII , Section IV, 49–66.
24. Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes* of *the Wealth of Nations* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1904), Vol. I, Bk. I, Ch. V, 35.
25. Karl Marx, *Capital* (London & Toronto: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1930), Vol. 1 Chap. 1, 5–6 .

Marx seeks to objectify exchange value in a physical sense, which is largely impossible, as exchange values are a relational basis of allocation. In simple terms, the exchange value of a thing, i.e. the amount of other things to be given by another person as a fair equivalent for it, cannot possibly be something attached to the thing itself. It does not primarily concern things at all but rather is decided by the inter-relationship between persons, price being ultimately settled with reference to incomes. If we look at mass-production in the contemporary industrialised manufacturing industries, especially with regard to food production, it is impossible to determine the cost or price of an individual article considered in isolation since unit cost is usually calculated by dividing the total output by the total cost.[26]

Labour decontextualised or detached from an organic setting and regarded simply as a unit of energy is no longer an expression of creativity, a divine trait, nor an activity contributing to a social goal. Labour thus becomes something that is sold at the highest price to be utilised by the capitalist purchaser for the maximum profit. This economic instrumentalism naturally vitiates any common social purpose and provides the ground for the labourer to be seen simply as a consumer, wherein consumption becomes the sole end of production.[27] In this scheme, all things capable of having a utilitarian aspect are to be treated as a commodity in a self-regulating market, since positive regulations were to be avoided in the liberal order. Money, despite being proclaimed as the nominal value of labour, nevertheless becomes the master in any free economy as it is the most mobile commodity, dominating any market mechanisms in turn. The cult of "cheapness" essentially arises from the transmutation of Smith's notion of labour-content, for the calculation of price, to the amount of limited money available as purchasing power at any one time. Value therefore is calculated on the basis of money subject to a highly abstracted quantitative credit control detached from any reference points relating to the real world.

The above is to be considered when examining the basis of the Islamic social order made up of craftsmen and tradesmen. The economic portrait set out above, nurtured by the belief that the inorganic is subject to natural growth, exemplified by usury, cannot be allowed to form a systemic basis,

26. Rudolf Kaulla, *Theory of the Just Price: A Historical and Critical Study of the Problem of Economic Value*, trans. from the German Robert D. Hogg (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1940), 59-62.

27. Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 3rd Ed., 1922), Vol. II, Book IV, Chap. VIII, 159.

despite its dominance, for the analysis of the viability of the traditional order of the vocations. This is so, because as a purported science, modern economics, detached from morality and proceeding on the basis of unexamined postulates, is neither based on metaphysical principles nor on any established and demonstrated positions. Furthermore, its bias for the quantitative rather than the qualitative, entails a necessary bias for the machine-made over the hand-made, the synthetic over the natural. The subdivision of labour, as opposed to the normative division of labour, becomes the paramount view of this school of thought, instituting the factory system in the workshops and eventually leading to industrialization. Subdivision of labour, moreover, led to the experience of work as being felt and seen as meaningless, since no particular skill other than physical application was needed.

The integral understanding of the place of work and its division is in sharp contrast to the introduction of the subdivision of labour in the 18th century in western Europe, namely the subdivision of a single craft into several separate specialized processes, with the intent of eliminating all unnecessary motions of the workers that do not contribute directly to the quantitative efficiency of production. This quantitative standard needless to say robbed the craftsman of any intellectual responsibility for the work made, and if intellectual then spiritual.

To return to economics, one should point out that it is not a quasi-physical science but rather deals with juridical human relationships, which in turn presupposes an institutional and legal background. A debt, therefore, is not primarily the thing owed but the obligation to pay, i.e. not something physical but moral, so also property is the owning of a thing and not the thing owned. Again, when one purchases something, such as land, one purchases an estate in land, one obtains the right to the land in some measure according to the terms of the purchase. This is the traditional understanding. In the middle of the 18th century, a confusion set in the form of a corruption of juridical language. Words meaning rights, such as property, dominion, estate farm, rent credit and debit came to be used to designate things rather than a relation to things.

Similarly, exchange is a moral not a physical act, because exchange-values, unlike the creation of use-values, are not existent in nature, they are not the product of any natural process, they are juristic and ethical, since without an organized system of rights there cannot be a balancing of claims and counterclaims. Exchange, simply put, is a moral valuation

directed towards the orderly functioning of society. Things have value and exchangeability not because they are the result of labour but because they contain a desirable utility satisfying a legitimate need. It is on this basis that work is applied to produce goods to serve social ends. In other words, those goods are produced because they are valuable, but they are not valuable merely because they are produced.

Exchange value in this scheme is dealing with a very different concept as shown previously. If we have two types of commodities or services, **A** and **B**, which have value in the sense of utility for human life, the exchange value is calculated by working out how much of **B** is equivalent to, or justly exchangeable with, how much of **A**. Following from this, the value of that amount of **A** will be so much of **B**, so much of **C** and **D**, which can be expressed as so much money or purchasing power. Use value is the end of production; exchange value is the means of social distribution of the product. These remain distinct in traditional Islamic economics and must not be conflated.

The Order of the Crafts

The common denominator of all crafts or vocations is skill, which can be defined as the capacity (*malakat*) to perfect the manufacture or doing of something. Prior to being a physical capacity though, skill is also a moral quality preceded by a sincere intention. The notion of perfecting is a moral principle before being a principle of action. Perfecting is the principal activity in the fulfilment or completion of an obligation or a task. It is redemptive in that it fulfils the incumbent responsibility that arises in the act of making, which is always tri-dimensional, namely, intellectual, moral and physical. This responsibility arises from the understanding that tasks, in order to be morally fulfilled, must be perfected as a matter of artisanship. The perfecting of making guarantees the quality of beauty, so that all things well made are also by necessity beautiful. Beauty therefore is not in the eye of the beholder as a whim, but rather as a vision of that which is well ordered, or in other words, well-made. This is an objective principle above all.

The loss of a skilled society, following from above, is one of the defining factors in the loss of community. The relationship between skill and spiritual refinement is adverted to historically as well as metaphysically. The craft and trade guilds have long been historically associated with spiritual

sufi orders, the *ṭuruq* or *esnāf*, where the master of the guild very often was also the spiritual master of the *ṭarīqa*. The craft became therefore not only an avenue of securing livelihood but also the plain within which one sought spiritual realization and fulfilment. Needless to say, the skilled artisan was and is identifiable with balance and poise, good judgment and even stable character, one who has mastered the realm of actions due to humility and courage. These characteristics are also at the root of *futūwwa*, spiritual chivalry, dominated by the poles of *ḥayā'* (modesty) and *karam* (generosity). In one hadith collated in *Kanz al-'ummāl*, in *bāb al-buyū'*, it is narrated that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) asked the people of the 'Abd al-Qays: *mā al-marū'atu fīkum*? (what are your concepts of chivalry). They answered: *al-'iffa wa al-ḥirfa* (virtuousness and craftwork).[28]

There are many hadiths extolling the life of crafts and occupations requiring handiwork. In one hadith that is often encountered, although possibly not authenticated, but whose meaning and context is nevertheless widely agreed upon, the Prophet (may Allah bless him and give him peace) states: "God the Exalted taught Adam, peace be upon him, a thousand crafts and said to him: 'Tell your sons and descendants: If they do not have patience, they may seek *dunyā* by these crafts and not by the *Dīn*; for the *Dīn* is purely for Me alone, and woe betide those who seek *dunyā* by way of the *Dīn*, woe unto them.'"[29] This hadith, as will be shown below, was taken very seriously by the scholars in connection with supporting themselves by ways other than their religious vocation. Self-sustenance and self-reliance and constancy in maintaining a trade is also adverted to in the hadith: "If one obtains a way of making a living then let him observe it (*man aṣāba min shay'in fa-l-yalzamhu*)."[30]

The crafts in the Islamic tradition all stem from the Prophets, who are their patrons and from whom mankind obtains an occupational *nisba*, or appellation. Each of the Prophets possessed and practised at least one craft by which they earned their sustenance. Adam (peace be upon him) was a ploughman (*ḥarrāth*) and a weaver (*ḥā'ik*); Ḥawwā' (peace be upon her) was a spinner (*ghazzālah*); Idrīs (peace be upon him) was a tailor

28. *Kanz al-'Ummāl fī sunnan al-aqwāl wa al-af'āl*, 'Alā' al-Dīn 'Alī al-Muttaqī bin Ḥusām al-Dīn al-Hindī (d.975), (Damascus, n,p: 1989), 4:4–23.
29. Jamāl al-Dīn al-Ḥubayshī, *Al-Barakatu fī faḍli al-sa'ī wa al-ḥarakat* (Beirut: Dār al-Minhāj, 2016), 43.
30. Ibn Mājah, *Sunan*, 2147.

(*khayyāṭ*) and calligrapher (*khaṭṭāṭ*); Nūḥ and Zakarīyyā (peace be upon them) were carpenters (*najjārīn*); Hūd and Ṣāliḥ (peace be upon them) were merchants (*tājirīn*); Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him) was a farmer (*zarrāʿ*) and a carpenter (*najjār*); Ayyūb (peace be upon him) was a farmer (*zarrāʿ*); Dāwūd (peace be upon him) was an armourer (*zarrād*); Sulaymān (peace be upon him) was a basket-maker (*khawwāṣṣ*); Mūsā, Shuʿayb (peace be upon them) and the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him) and all the Prophets were shepherds (*ruʿāt*).[31] The significance of this is that by pursuing a craft in order to seek sustenance, a Muslim emulates the path of all the Prophets.

One of the main characteristics of the above cited crafts, which are to be found listed in many sources, is that they all concern work by hand. ʿĀ'isha stated: "[The Prophet,] peace and blessings upon him, was never seen to be idle amongst his family: He was either [to be found] making a sandal for a person in need or sowing a robe for a widow."[32] The notion of *mihna*, a craft or trade, is also found in its more proper linguistic form as *mahna*, which means service, *khidma*, emphasizing the understanding that all crafts are a form of service. In several well-known hadiths, the importance of handiwork is adverted to by the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him): "Man cannot earn any more lawful sustenance than that which his handiwork can provide (*mā kasaba al-rajulu kasban aṭyaba min ʿamali yaddihi*).[33] This element of using the hands to manufacture something is also related to the equilibrium and perfection of character. In *al-Tibr al-masbūk*, al-Ghazālī recounts the Prophet Dāwūd's search for a craft (peace be upon him):

> It is related in the Traditions that Dāwūd, peace be upon him, used to go out at night in disguise so that he would remain unrecognised, and ask all whom he met their secret opinion about Dāwūd's character, so Jibrīl came to him in the form of a man and Dāwūd said to him: "What do you say about Dāwūd?" So he replied: "The most excellent of men (*ni'm al-ʿabd*), except that he seeks his sustenance from the Public

31. al-Ḥubayshī, 43. As to all the Prophets having been shepherds see the hadith in *Sunan* Ibn Mājah, 2149.
32. Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1995-2000), 4:101.
33. Ibn Mājah, *Sunan*, 2138.

> Treasury and not from the toil of his own hands."[34] Dāwūd then withdrew to his *miḥrāb* weeping with sadness and said: "O Lord God, teach me a craft (*ṣanʿa*) that I may live by the toil and exertion of my own hands." Then God taught him the craft of the armourer (*al-zard*).[35]

The vocations can all be classified under three heads, agriculture (*zirāʿa*), manufacture (*sanʿa*) and trade (*tijāra*). There have been differences amongst the scholars as to which branch was pre-eminent. Many have championed the trades above all, but according to Imam al-Nawawī, the most pre-eminent of crafts is that of agriculture.[36] Al-Mawardī also stipulates that agriculture is the most excellent because it is that which impels its practitioners to *tawwakul*, reliance on God, and "God loves those who rely on Him."[37, 38] As was stated above, there is a relation of hierarchy between that which benefits the community the most and the trade that delivers this benefit and that accords most fully with the fulfilment of *farḍ kifāyah*. This is reinforced by many hadiths such as:

> There is not a Muslim that plants a tree except that he has the reward of *ṣadaqa* (charitable gift) for him, for what is eaten out of that is *ṣadaqa*; what is stolen out of that, what the beasts eat out of that, what the birds eat out of that is *ṣadaqa* for him. (In short) none incurs a loss to him but it becomes a charity on his part.[39]
>
> There is none amongst the Muslims who plants a tree or sows seeds, and then a bird, or a person or an animal eats from it, but is regarded as a *ṣadaqa* (charitable gift) for him.[40]

34. As in Qur'an, 38:30.
35. Al-Ghazālī, *at-Tibr al-masbūk fī naṣīḥat al-mulūk* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Kulliyyāt al-Azharīyya, n.d.), 21. See also *Ghazālī's Book of Counsel for Kings* (*Naṣīḥat al-Mulūk*), translated by F.R.C. Bagley (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 17. See also Qur'an, 21:80.
36. Imām al-Nawawī, *Al-Minhāj fī sharḥ Saḥīḥ Muslim bin al-Ḥajjāj* (Beirut: Dār al-Khayr, 1999), Vol. 10, 165.
37. Qur'an, 3:159.
38. Al-Ḥubayshī, 47.
39. Muslim, 1552a.
40. Al-Bukhārī, 2320.

Imam al-Juwaynī, as well as many others, stipulates that the community obligation (*farḍ kifāyah*) is more beneficial or of more importance than the individual obligation (*farḍ ʿayn*) since the result of performance or omission in the latter only affects the individual, whereas, in the former the performance relieves the community of its obligation before God, and its omission implicates the community in an offence to God's command for the fulfilment of the obligation.[41]

Abū al-Ḥasan al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058) in his treatise *Adab al-dīn wa al-dunyā*, states that the assets of mankind are attained by application of labour to natural sources.[42] This dependence on natural materials to satisfy primary needs of nourishment and material goods determine the forms of *kasb* (livelihood). According to al-Māwardī, there are four categories of livelihood reflecting the needs of mankind, starting with the arts of agriculture (*al-zirāʿa*), which serve as the bedrock of all civilization. The second category encapsulates animal husbandry and its products (*nitāj al-ḥayawān*), while the third covers commerce (*tijāra*), a category necessarily tied to the first two. The fourth category is that of *ṣināʿa* (craft or art) which exists in three parts.

The first part is *ṣināʿat al-fikr* (the art of thinking), such as the art of seeking speculative knowledge as well as the art of governance. The second is tied to this first category, and is the *ṣināʿat ʿamal*: the practical crafts. The third is *ṣināʿa mushtaraka bayn fikr wa al-ʿamal* (a craft that combines intellect and practice) such as calligraphy or architecture, that craft being the highest which is more intellectual. For al-Māwardī, *ṣināʿa* is the operation of the intellect joined to handicraft (*ʿamal al-yadd*). This intends that the whole human being be engaged in the work, and hence mankind's historic predilection for the primacy of the manufacturing and skilled crafts over and above trade, and subject to the primal establishment of agriculture on which all social values depend.

The example of the Prophets is naturally followed in Islamic history by the *ʿulamāʾ* and imams. Imām Muslim bin al-Ḥajjāj, for example, earned his living as a draper. Imām Abū Ḥanīfa was an exporter of *khazz*-silk, whilst Imām al-Junayd was also a dealer in silk cloth. Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal was a weaver of cords for undertrousers (*nāsij al-tikak*).[43] All practically

41. Imām al-Juwaynī, *Al-Ghiyāthī*, ed. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīm Maḥmūd al-Dīb (Beirut: Dār al-Minhāj, 2014), 448–49.
42. Al-Māwardī, *Adab al-dīn wa al-dunyā* (Beirut: Dār al-Minhāj, 2014), 337–42.
43. Hayyim J. Cohen, "The Economic Background and the Secular Occupations of

engaged in some form of food production, at the very least for their own consumption.

Within the crafts as we saw with al-Māwardī, a hierarchy was perceived to be in place classifying the various vocations according to intellectual inclinations within the craft, but also within the understanding of communal obligation, it is clear that a hierarchy exists in relation to the essential nature of the social benefit it promoted. The first criteria of distinction are important because they underline the integrality of intellect and will required for true work, one that demanded a discipline of body and mind, and if body and mind then soul. The communal benefit classification is also important as it designated a clear protocol to follow when engaging in the reanimation of any society by addressing the centrality of its needs, and so that it may be brought back to life as a community.

A further important element of the classification of the crafts and trades is the principle of subsidiarity where each level of society is engaged with its responsibility so that no centralised or higher echelon of civic administration had a right to interfere with the process of the fulfilment of this responsibility by the discreet realm to which it belonged. This "administrative respect" entailed a political elasticity that allowed civil societies who followed this principle to safeguard a certain independence and freedom untouched by the machinations of centralised governmental interests. This remarkable phenomenon is clearly manifested throughout Islamic history, where immense political upheavals and dynastic fratricides, are seen to have had largely very little effect on the everyday life and economy of civil societies.

The Social Order and Nature

The natural order and our interaction within it have long determined the manner of our social existence and the temper of our built environment. The modern economic approach mentioned above is severely flawed by its lack of recognition of the true nature of wealth. All economic planning or policy ought then naturally to be based on the foundation of agriculture, which alone conserves natural resources rather than consuming them. Its produce, food, is the true material wealth because, inevitably, all other "values" disappear at starvation point. All civilizations have been and remain

Muslim Jurisprudents and Traditionists in the Classical Period of Islam: (Until the Middle of the Eleventh Century)" in *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Jan, 1970, Vol. 13, No. 1 (Jan, 1970), 16–61.

dependent on the provision of sufficient food. The present food surplus mountains, for example, that are often referred to today are not the result of over-production by way of secure processes but actually exist due to a lack of an acceptable entry price-value for the produce in the market place. The commoditisation, or monetisation, of food production is potentially the most dangerous outcome of the present neo-classical model of economics, one that is also at odds with international state obligations.

The pre-modern or traditional system of land tenure was an interaction between the needs of a secure income-producing asset, the needs of the state for revenue, and the need to keep the military classes paid from a dependable source such as land taxes. In the Islamic tradition, land holdings are of three types, holdings of private property held in full ownership, holdings of *waqf* lands (land held in perpetuity with the income devoted for the upkeep of a charitable purpose or for the family of the constituter), holdings that are state owned of varying types of tenure. In the Qur'an it is clear that "the earth belongs to God. He provides to whom He chooses."[44] Each type of land holding engaged the responsibility of a duty of care to the thing owned or administered and also to the continuing sustenance of the benefit of the assets in question for the community and future generations.

A much-neglected aspect of the examination of social frameworks in Islamic history is the place and inclusion of animals, domestic and wild, in the life of Muslims. Animals are largely perceived in contemporary studies as adjuncts to social life, peripheral much like agriculture, and yet no social reality can exist without them. The urban bias that such writings with their anthropic focus betray has caused this alienation to be further enhanced. Modern positivist technology produces dependence in societies on systems that are out of reach of the ordinary member of society and furthermore induces and promotes social infantilism, supplanting normative understanding of civil structures.

Traditional animal husbandry implied an intimate relationship with the only other visible creatural companions we have. From a perspective gained from the Qur'an, it is understood that they share many characteristics with human beings. Above all, they praise God and are wedded to the universal prayer mode that pervades the entirety of existence. In the Qur'an we are told: "The seven heavens, the earth, and all those in them

44. Qur'an, 7:128.

glorify Him. There is not a single thing that does not glorify His praises—but you cannot comprehend their glorification. He is indeed Most Forbearing, All-Forgiving."[45] Also, "Do you not see that Allah is glorified by all those in the heavens and the earth, even the birds as they soar? Each [instinctively] knows their manner of prayer and glorification. And Allah has [perfect] knowledge of all they do."[46]

The animal world together with the vegetal and the mineral is endowed with capacity to praise God, to have essentially within them a reflection of the Divine order of creation and its precepts. Apart from the ethical responsibilities of our duties towards them as human beings, there is also the understanding that our lives on earth are dependent on them. If the insect world stopped pollinating, animals stopped recreating, then life on earth would swiftly come to an end. This places a burden on human collectivities to safeguard the normal operations of nature, by primarily protecting and promoting natural habitats for their continued existence. That which goes against this trajectory, promoting economic models that serve to enrich a minority at the cost of the continuity of these habitats, is directly in opposition to the overriding legal maxim stated above, *lā ḍarara wa lā ḍirār*.

In the social dimension, which is the focus in this chapter, the husbandry of the domesticated animal world ensures once again the fulfilment of a *farḍ kifāyah*. When we examine the social implications of husbandry, two categories of effect are pertinent. The first concerns the shaping of the built environment and the second is the ethical impact on human beings. In a recent study, to take the second category first, the academic Alan Mikhail has shown in the case of Ottoman Egypt how the displacement of

45. Qurʾan, 17:44.

46. Qurʾan, 24:41. Al-Ṭabarī states in his *tafsīr* that there is a distinction here to *tasbīḥ* and *ṣalāt* (in *kullun qad ʿalima…*), *ṣalāt* is what is given to Adam (peace be upon him) and his descendants, humanity, and *tasbīḥ* is apportioned to all others in creation. According to Sufyān as found in al-Qurṭubī, the flapping of a bird's wings is its *ṣalāt*. Ibn Kathīr relates that the inclusivity of *man fī'l-samawāt wa'l-ard* includes the mineral, and vegetal worlds as well as the animal kingdom. This language of praise that is sung by all in creation, like the low buzzing of bees in the background, conscious and constant. See Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl āyy al-Qurʾān* (Mecca: Dār al-Tarbiyah wa-l-Turāth, n.d.), 19:200; Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām al-Qurʾān*, ed. Aḥmad al-Bardūnī and Ibrāhīm Aṭfīsh, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣrīyah, 1384 AH/1964), 20 vols. in 10, 12:286; and Ismāʿīl ibn ʿUmar ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿaẓīm*, ed. Sāmī ibn Muḥammad al-Salāmah, 2nd ed. (Riyadh: Dār Ṭayyibah li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzīʿ, 1420 AH/1999), 6:72.

animals from urban human habitats entailed the growth of manumission and cruelty in the social realm.[47] Animals were critical in the formation of character of the lived shared spaces in the Islamic world. Their inclusivity in society marked a temperamental quality in people's lives. The domesticated animal by its nature is dependent on human service. It has to be fed, or led to food, it must be milked, sheared, tended to. This relationship of service, mutual in its kind, attended to something deeply present in the human character that impelled it to serve another. This altruistic daily litany of service impressed the character of human beings, so much so that the interrelationship of human beings in such societies became equally marked by service and attentive care.

Concerning the first category spoken of above, the hoof, paw and soft feet of the animal world determined the fabric of the built environment. Streets, passages or tracks were constructed or laid out in line with the need for the movement of animals and thus their size was of paramount importance. The height of arches of cities such as in al-Quds were measured on the basis of the height of a man riding a camel.[48] Other cities measured arches based on a man riding a horse. The fabric of roads and tracks was premised on the convenience of the service for animal feet. Houses in turn had to accommodate animals, facilitate their feeding, their protection from wild animals. The disposal of rubbish, still organic until 1950 in much of the World, was an ingenious operation marked by a practicality that was typical of traditional solutions to waste. Packs of dogs, cared for and doted on in every city quarter and village served a dual function. The first was as an early warning system identifying the presence or approach of strangers into their area, and second, their consumption of rubbish that was left out in specified areas by the inhabitants.[49]

Just as in the human realm, no one was deemed expendable, so in the animal world, no creature was deemed expendable. The proximity of animals in the lived spaces also ensured the proximity to land, since no animal could survive for very long outside of natural spaces. Cities consequently were garden cities with punctuations of wide-open spaces for the congregation of flocks and other beasts of burden. The presence of animals also ensured that towns, village and cities retained a low density of occupation.

47. Alan Mikhail, *The Animal in Ottoman Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
48. Besim Selim Hakim, *Arabic-Islamic Cities: Building and Planning Principles* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1986), 21.
49. Mikhail, *The Animal in Ottoman Egypt*, 86–7.

This latter point was a determining factor in how future structures were planned and also as to the manner in which urban growth was managed.

Conclusion

The Islamic viewpoint of the social realm is one that produces structures to facilitate and reveal principles that are already organically present in society. This entails hierarchies by right rather than by fact. It is sometimes stated, and acted on, that the world has changed and can no longer be measured, understood or governed by those principles of old that have been heretofore the common heritage of man. The scientific revolution has been a harbinger of significant change, wealth and danger. The world that has been fashioned by these forces may be different than before but the components of human nature that direct and control these forces have not changed nor altered. Greed or generosity at the time of Aristotle is still the same now as it was ever then. The human propensities that control the technological world are the same as those found amongst the nomads that tended flocks in the Ancient World. Human nature being fixed, deviation or elevation remains its two possibilities. What is at stake at present however is not so much the loss of a civilisation as the loss of that which allows us to be truly human.

The primal needs of the human being are constants throughout the ages, namely the securing of food, clothing and housing. The search for effective community thus must take into consideration these three categories and their effective provision by the members of a proposed community. The impoverishment of those skills required to service these elemental communal needs by necessity ensures the social failure and stagnation of any attempt to form effective societies. We are born placed within the organic bond of the community that requires reciprocity and association, and both must be operative for society to succeed. This reciprocal dependence on the well-being of others is not only a de facto relationship but, crucially, one that is determined by the fulfilment of our religious obligations ensuring dignity and peace of mind. ❧

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THE ISLAMIC SOCIAL ORDER & ITS FRAMEWORKS

THIS BOOK aims to both rediscover and advance practical notions of commonweal, or common good, retrieval in an Islamic social order. The first chapter explores *shuʿab al-īmān* or "branches of faith," which is a holistic system of values and actions derived from various sound hadiths, though largely overlooked today. Musa Furber analyses classical texts and classification schemes of the *shuʿab* to demonstrate how these timeless branches can serve as a guide for spiritual refinement, ethical conduct, and social cohesion. In the second chapter, Ahmad Deeb traces how the metaphysical rupture caused by modernity fosters loneliness and erodes traditional structures of belonging, but then proposes a philosophy of community that is attune with and indeed can nurture psychological well-being and cohesion that is an innate human need. The third chapter maps out a skill-based social order animated by Islamic principles. In it, Karim Lahham illustrates how through intention, work is to become a communal obligation, serving both material needs and spiritual fulfilment, and ultimately steering the ethos of such a society towards upholding virtuous praxis whilst transcending the self.

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