

The Timelessness of Prophet Muhammad and the Nature of the Virtuous Civilisation*

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Abstract

This essay seeks to re-emphasise the ontological status and trans-historical nature of Prophet Muhammad as a timeless figure as well as central feature of Islamic civilisation as understood and venerated by Muslims. It presents critique on the misrepresentation of the Holy Prophet's noble character resulting from some modernist interpretations influenced by modern scientific method that deviates from sound reasoning from Islām's perspective on certain aspects of the Holy Prophet's nature. A special emphasis is placed on the moral leadership as well as great ethical quality of the Holy Prophet that raised people who brought forth the Islamic civilisation into fruition.

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Re-defining the Age of the Holy Prophet to be the Golden Age of Islām, this essay proposes the nature of Islamic Civilisation as a Virtuous Civilisation, the culmination of the Holy Prophet's virtuous character. Finally, comparing modern characterisation of Western civilisation as industrial-technological civilisation and recent effort by China to become an ecological civilisation, it concludes that Virtuous Civilisation is the current imperative for Muslims today alongside re-Islamising Muslim thought in a collectively intelligent and progressive manner with the Holy Prophet's age and its moral and ethical quality of social perfection as the reference point.

Keywords

Islamic Civilisation, Islamisation, Virtuous Civilisation, spiritual experience, moral leadership, religious and ethical principles, Seal of Prophethood, timelessness of the Prophet, Islamic society, Golden Age of Islām.

Introduction

All civilisations are the products of inter-generational thoughts and achievements of a group considered basic, praiseworthy, and lasting according to their respective worldviews and principles in responding to existential and historical challenges.

This article does not pretend to offer anything new. It, however, attempts to re-emphasise and reformulate a central feature of Islamic civilisation that is the trans-historical nature of Prophet Muḥammad some key aspects of which unfortunately have largely been taken for granted, forgotten, ignored and in some instances, purposely rejected. Forgetting, taking for granted, ignoring and rejecting these important aspects have perhaps inadvertently led many modern Muslims to emphasise on the relatively less fundamental elements of the Islamic civilisational enterprise, namely the socio-political and

materialistic aspects of human knowledge and achievements; and not on the more fundamental ones, such as the spiritual and ethical-moral development of humanity.

In the initial part of this article, it is instructive to understand what we mean by the concept of Islamic Civilisation. So far we have not seen a comprehensive and inclusive definition of this concept except the one offered by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas. Islamic civilisation is defined as one that:

...emerges among the diversity of cultures of Muslim peoples of the world as a result of the permeation of the basic elements of the religion of Islam which those people have caused to emerge from within themselves.... Whatever basic and praiseworthy elements of the pre-Islamic civilization that bind people together and are accepted as compatible with Islam become part of Islamic civilization. It is a living civilization whose pulse describes a process of Islamization, not in a dialectical sense of an evolutionary 'development', but in the sense of a progress involving every generation of Muslims towards realization of the original nature and spirit of Islam as something already established in history; in the sense of an unfolding of the theoretical and practical principles of Islam in the life of the people; in the sense of an actualization of the essentials and potentials of Islam in the realm of existence. This progress, unfolding, and actualization depend upon the levels of knowledge of Islam, of intellectual and cultural attainment of the peoples in which this (process) occur. Islamic civilization is therefore a manifestation of unity in diversity as well as of diversity in unity.¹

1. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Historical Fact and Fiction* (Kuala Lumpur: UTM Press, 2011), xv.

In connection with the above definition, this article will also attempt to shed a little light on those aspects of the Islamisation process which involve the unfolding of the original theoretical and practical principles of Islām in the life of the earliest Muslims who became the greatest references—the most important of whom is Prophet Muḥammad—for all later generations of Muslims throughout history. If the modern Western civilisation is generally characterised as an industrial-technological civilisation, and the modern Chinese civilisation seeks to become the first ecological civilisation, this article argues that Islamic civilisation was, and should always be a spiritual and moral-ethical one. As will be fully argued later, Islamic civilisation is really a Virtuous Civilisation. This is organically linked to the most basic *raison d'être* of human destiny and the role of the Prophets in Islām. Human beings and *jīns* are created to worship the One True God² and the former are to be His Vicegerents on Earth,³ while Prophet Muḥammad himself was raised to perfect human ethical conduct (*li utammima makārim al-akhlāq*).⁴ He is the Seal of the Prophets,⁵ the universal and final Messenger to Mankind⁶ whom he leads from darkness into Light,⁷ who is himself the Lamp spreading Light,⁸ God's mercy to all creatures,⁹ and God's favour to all Muslims,¹⁰ and even to the People of the Book,¹¹ who may later believe in Islām. He is a man with an

2. *Al-Dhāriyāt* (51): 56.

3. *Al-Baqarah* (2): 30; *Sād* (38): 26; *al-An'ām* (6): 165; *Yūnus* (10): 14.

4. Qadi Iyad ibn Musa al-Yahsabi, *al-Shifa' bi tarif huquq Mustafa. Muhammad Messenger of Allah: Ash Shifa' of Qadi Iyad*. Trans Aisha Abdarrahman Bewley. 7th printing. (Cape Town: Madinah Press, 2008), 50.

5. *Al-Ahzāb* (33): 40.

6. *Sabā'* (34): 28.

7. *Al-Talāq* (65): 11.

8. *Al-Ahzāb* (33): 46; *al-Talāq* (65): 11.

9. *Al-Anbiyā'* (21): 107.

10. *Āli 'Imrān* (3): 64; *al-Nisā'* (4): 170.

11. *Al-Mā'idah* (5): 21.

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exalted character as a standard for mankind;¹² and the perfect exemplar.¹³ God and His angels and all believers honour him as the greatest of men.¹⁴ In the Hereafter, God will grant him the Lauded Station.¹⁵

This was how he understood himself, and did his generation of Muslims, as well and the generations that came after them throughout history. Islamic civilisation regards the Prophet not only as someone who communicates the Truth through his words but also constitutes it through his actions and silence.¹⁶ For the Muslims, the Prophet transcends both physical space and is timeless. In this sense, the Prophet according to al-Attas, is always relevant, adequate, ‘modern’ or new, and ahead of time because it transcends history.¹⁷ Consequently the Age of the Prophet “became the Criterion for the future.”¹⁸

Obviously the Prophet has been venerated by all segments of Muslim society from the beginning of Islām until the present day. His name is mentioned in the five obligatory daily prayers as well as the optional ones, and in the daily supplications to God Almighty on various occasions. His birthday (*mīlād*) is celebrated in all Muslim communities and with great pageantry in most Muslim countries worldwide, especially in Turkey, the Indian Subcontinent, Africa, and the Malay world.¹⁹

Any attempt at caricaturing him or misrepresenting his noble character will receive strong, and sometimes even extreme reactions from some Muslims worldwide. The

12. *Al-Qalam* (68): 4.

13. *Al-Aḥzāb* (33): 21.

14. *Ibid.*, 56.

15. *Banī Isrāʾīl* (17): 79. See also al-Attas, *Islām and Secularism* (Petaling Jaya: Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia, 1978), 86.

16. Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 87.

17. *Ibid.*, 28.

18. *Ibid.*, 27–28.

19. See for example Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 213–227; al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 86–87.

most glaring example of this reaction was when the Danish Newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* on 30 September 2005 published 12 editorial cartoons, most of which had caricatured the Prophet Muhammad. Another example is the global reactions towards the British author, Salman Rushdie, for writing his novel, the *Satanic Verses* published in 1988, which denigrated the Holy Prophet and his wives. These reactions reached its crescendo on 14 February 1989, when Ayatollah Khomeini, then the Supreme Leader of Iran, made the fatwa urging Muslims worldwide to kill the author.²⁰

Transcending Space and Time

At the beginning of the last century, a certain untraditional trend has gradually appeared among some Muslim scholars in interpreting certain aspects of the Prophet's nature as a result of modern scientific method and of what al-Attas describes as a process of the "terrestrialization and secularization of man, his materialization and humanization".²¹ Such a trend of thinking views the Prophet as merely a man who received and conveyed Divine revelation for 23 years and as one of the greatest moral and political leaders in human history.²² Although these are two indisputable facts about the Prophet; as can be seen from the Qur'anic description of his stature and personality cited above, and as shall be further discussed in this article, he is certainly more than this.

It is a huge loss for Muslims and for others to look at the Prophet from the narrow prism of scientific method, thereby rejecting many reports about him that came from long chains of individuals of known intellectual and moral integrity; especially when these reports have been accepted by the

20. "Ayatollah sentences author to death." BBC News. 14 February 1989. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/em/fr/-/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/february/14/newsid_2541000/2541149.stm>

21. Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 37.

22. For a profound critique against this trend, see *ibid.*, 109–112.

established methods of hadith verification. Furthermore, some of these hadiths or reports help to provide a more profound explanation of certain aspects mentioned briefly in the Qur'ān and the Sunnah, while others are not opposed to them both nor to sound reason and valid experience.

To reject the numerous reports of the privileges unique to Prophet Muḥammad as compared to earlier prophets, and of his miracles and to limit the latter only to the Qur'ān as his greatest and most lasting miracle, is really an unjustified position, from the Qur'anic point of view, and is against sound reasoning and the long-standing historical attitude of Muslims, especially among the earliest generations.²³ Such an attitude would also deprive us from understanding the possible epistemological and spiritual factors that may have contributed to the rise of what the Qur'ān affirms as, “the best group ever raised from mankind (*khayr ummah ukhrijat li'l-nās*)”.²⁴ To reject a hadith tradition because it may be extra-Qur'anic may not be wise. In fact, Fazlur Rahman correctly stressed on the need to utilise extra-Qur'anic evidence to understand the great transformation that prophets in general had to undergo in order to receive Revelation:

But although one can make these technical distinctions based upon Qur'anic statements, one cannot stick strictly to them: what the Qur'an is

23. For an influential example of the attempt to purge all miracles of the Prophet except the Qur'ān, see the scholarly work of Muhammad Husayn Haykal, *Hayat Muhammad*. Translated from the 8th edition by Ismail Rāgi A. al Faruqi (n.p: American Trust Publications, 1976). Dr. Haykal gave his eloquent arguments that his study is “a scientific study, developed on the western modern method” (pp. li, liii, and lv) and accepted the declaration of the then Grand Sheikh of al-Azhar who wrote an Introduction that prophet Muhammad “had only one irresistible miracle—the Qur'an.” (p. lxxxv). It must be stated however that Dr. Haykal admitted to the limitations of modern scientific methods on psychological and spiritual matters on which Islamic thought had made many contributions (p. lv). For another scholarly attempt, see Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980) (chapters 4 and 5).

24. *Āli Imrān* (3): 110.

essentially saying is that God's prophets or human Messengers are recipients of some special or extraordinary power, which emanates from the ultimate source of all being and which fills the hearts of these prophets with something which is light whereby they see and know things the way others are not able to do. At the same time, this power determines them upon a course of action that changes the lives of whole peoples.²⁵

Contrary to all traditional Muslim thought throughout history, some modernists and neo-modernists argue that Prophet Muḥammad was not granted any other supernatural miracles (*muḥjizāt*) such as those given to earlier prophets and messengers; because these, they say, are not sanctioned by the Qur'ān, citing the verses where God declined the demands of non-Muslims for Prophet Muḥammad to produce miracles. These modernists also argue that the need to have miracles as a means to convince people of the truth of the revelation as being “out of date”.²⁶ Furthermore, they adduce Qur'anic evidence that such events did not by themselves make people accept the truth brought by earlier prophets and messengers. This latter argument would appear to be a contradiction to their very position that the Qur'ān is the greatest miracle, because many of those who understand Arabic, since the very first revelation till this very day, have chosen not to believe in its teachings and follow the religion of Muḥammad.

The traditional position which has shaped Islamic Civilisation—that while the Qur'ān is the greatest and most lasting miracle of the Prophet Muḥammad,²⁷ he was also granted by God many special privileges and other miracles, which befitted his role. It is true that miracles did not manage to convince everyone on the truthfulness of the claims of God's messengers, but they served as God's favours upon the messengers and heir followers especially in times of great

25. Rahman, *Major Themes*, 68.

26. *Ibid.*, 53.

27. Qadi Iyad, *al-Shifa'*, 207–208.

difficulty, crisis, and confusion. This is especially true in the case of Prophet Muḥammad.²⁸ According to al-Attas, the very name, *Muḥammad* (“one who is highly praised”), is also a lasting miracle. It is “a miracle of fulfilment, for he alone among all mankind is constantly praised in every age and generation after him without end, so that even taking into account the ages and generations before him, he still would be the only man to whom such praise is due.”²⁹ Even great Prophets like Ibrāhīm³⁰ and Mūsā³¹ requested for certain miraculous acts from God, not as proofs, but to further strengthen their already believing hearts, such as wanting to see how God creates life and death in the case of the former, and to see God Himself in the case of the latter. Those who deny that Prophet Muḥammad was granted other miracles besides the Qur’ān argue that Mankind, from the time of Muḥammad onwards has reached an intellectual maturity and thus does not need to be convinced by miracles anymore. They seem to ignore the numerous evidence that even modern man, who may be more mature in the scientific and technical sense compared to people of earlier prophets, are not truly mature especially in the moral sense, for often times they are plagued with great moral confusion.³²

Prophet Muḥammad is not just the last in the series of prophets and messengers of God. More than all of them, Prophet Muḥammad and the religion that he brought, are

28. Qadi Iyad, *al-Shifa’*, allotted the whole chapter 4 discussing his many miracles (*mu’jizāt*), *barakah* and *karāmāt* of Prophet Muḥammad, 134–205. A prominent Indonesian scholar H.M.H al-Hamid al-Husaini, *Riwayat Kehidupan Nabi Besar Muhammad SAW* (Sirah al-Mustafa SAW). 9th Reprint. (Bandung: Pustaka Hidayah, 2009) also devoted large spaces to enumerate the miracles, *karāmāt* and *barākāt* of the Prophet, 517–518, 809–819.

29. Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 86; see also al-Husaini, *Riwayat*, 519, 811.

30. *Al-Baqarah* (2): 260.

31. *Al-A’raf* (7): 143. For a brilliant traditional metaphysical explanation of this event, see Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islām*. Reprint of 1995 edition (Kuala Lumpur: UTM, 2014), 194–215.

32. Rahman, *Major Themes*, 46.

universal in nature which include all mankind and *jinn*s³³ and a mercy to all the worlds (*rahmat li'l-ʿālamīn*).³⁴ The way the Message was conveyed and demonstrated by the Prophet in his words, actions, and silence was intended to touch the minds and hearts of all mankind in different degrees; not only those who are thought to possess sophisticated minds (scholars, thinkers, and philosophers), many of whom, by the way, have been proven to be stubborn even in the face of overwhelmingly rational and compelling arguments. Islamic intellectual history calls such individuals *al-muʿānidūn*—the worst of the rejected Sophists (*al-Sufastāʾiyyah*).³⁵ The miracles of the Prophet—other than the Qurʾān—which are denied by modernists, played a significant role among many of those in the earliest generation of Muslims because these events provided certainty not merely at the cognitive level (*ʿilm al-yaqīn*), but also at the level of sight (*ʿayn al-yaqīn*) and experience (*haqq al-yaqīn*):³⁶ they saw and experienced the effects of these miracles or divine favours involving the Prophet. Perhaps this contributed significantly to their remarkable spiritual and ethical integrity. It must be admitted that even in modern times, the almost miraculous achievements of modern science and technology do impress many people who may not know the inner workings of scientific and technological products, and have helped to deepen their conviction regarding their importance, even though they are regularly confronted by the many adverse side effects to humans or to the environment.

33. *Al-Rahmān* (55): 15, 31, 33, 56, 74, and *al-Jinn* (72).

34. *Al-Anbiyāʾ* (21): 107; Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasūlullāh*. Trans. with intro and notes A. Guillaume. 1st published 1955 (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1978), 104; al-Hussaini, *Riwayāt*, 813.

35. For a more detailed discussion about the various modern Sophists including in contemporary Muslims thought, see Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, *The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas: An Exposition of the Original Concept of Islamization* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), 1998), 77–97.

36. On these three levels of certainty, see *al-Wāqīʾah* (56): 95; *al-Hāqqah* (69): 51; *al-Takāthur* (102): 5–7.

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Historical record indicates that Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd-Allāh was born in 570 C.E. on the 12th day of the Arabic month of Rabī‘ al-Awwal, received his Prophethood on the Mount Hirā’ around 609 C.E. at the age of forty, and died on 8 June 632 C.E. when he was around 63 years old. He went through life as a poor orphan, a successful trader, conciliator, preacher, ruler, law-giver and judge, military leader, and diplomat; as a person who was oppressed and abused by his people; as a shepherd and as a family man—as a husband, father, father-in-law, grandfather, cousin and relative.³⁷ However, the deeper reality of his existence transcends history. It must be stressed that Islām posits that ontologically, every human being is related to these two aspects of existence, for every one of them has the timeless spiritual aspect, and the transitory physical one.³⁸ Every human being, before he appears in terrestrial time was already created to uphold the Covenant with God in a time which higher Sufis such as Mawlānā Rūmī called the Day of *Alastu*:

And (remember) when thy Lord brought forth from the Children of Adam, from their reins, their seed, and made them testify themselves, (saying): Am I not your Lord (*Alastu bi-rabbikum*)? They said: Yea, verily. We testify....³⁹

The timelessness of Muḥammad as a Prophet and a man, in this article, is meant to describe the highest level involving both aspects: the first is at the spiritual existence, and the second at the terrestrial and historical existence.

37. For an easy contemporary analysis of many of these aspects, see M. Fethullah Gulen, *Muhammad The Messenger of God*. Translated from Turkish by Ali Unal (New Jersey: Tughra Books, 2013), chapters 5–8.

38. See Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *The Nature of Man and the Psychology of the Human Soul* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), 1990), 1–8; also Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Need for a Sacred Science* (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1993), 20.

39. *Al-A‘rāf* (7): 172; also al-Attas, *Prolegomena*, 193.

The timelessness of the Prophet Muḥammad as a created being starts, according to established reports, with his spirit, which was a light with Allāh 2,000 years before Adam was created.⁴⁰ He was a prophet when Ādam, the first man was yet to be created, existing in a state between water and clay. Hence, Muḥammad was the first Messenger created and the last to be sent.⁴¹ Ādam knew about Muḥammad when the former was in Heaven.⁴² Ādam saw the name of Muḥammad written in every place in Heaven: There is no god except Allāh and Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allāh which made Ādam realised that Muḥammad was the most honoured of creatures in the sight of Allāh. Hence, after realising his disobedience to Allāh, Adam sought His forgiveness by the right of Muḥammad.⁴³ When Allāh created Ādam, He cast the light of Muḥammad into Ādam's loins. The Prophet himself said: "Allah brought me down to earth in the loins of Adam, placed me in the loins of Nuh, and then cast me into the loins of Abraham. Allah continued to move me from noble loins and pure wombs until He brought me out of my parents."⁴⁴ The Prophet is regarded as the best of all creation, is the most excellent among the Prophets, is the Lord of the sons of Ādam, and his Community as the best raised among mankind. In the hereafter, Ādam and everyone after him will be under Muḥammad's banner.⁴⁵

40. Qadi Iyad, *al-Shifa'*, 43.

41. *Ibid.*, 23, 85; Martin Lings, *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources* (London: Islamic Text Society/George Allen and Unwin, 1983), 102; also al-Husaini, *Riwayat*, 809; Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *A Commentary on the Hujjat al-Siddiq of Nur al-Din al-Raniri* (Kuala Lumpur: Ministry of Culture, 1986), xviii–xix.

42. Qadi Iyad, *al-Shifa'*, 89.

43. *Ibid.*

44. *Ibid.*, 43, 85.

45. Abu Bakr al-Kalabadhi, *Kitab al-Ta'arruf li-madhhab ahl al-tasawwuf. The Doctrine of the Sufis*. Trans. by A. J. Arberry, Reprint of 1935 (Cambridge: CUP, 1979), 53–54.

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Higher Sufi metaphysical tradition has understood this very well. Hence, Mawlānā Rūmī summarises this view of the Prophet:

Therefore in form thou art the microcosm, therefore in reality though art the macrocosm
Externally the branch is the origin of the fruit;
intrinsically the branch came into existence for the sake of the fruit
If there had not been desire and hope of the fruit, how should the gardener have planted the root of the tree?
Therefore, in reality, the tree was born of the fruit, (even) if in appearance it (the fruit) was generated by the tree.
Hence, Mustafa said: “Adam and the (other) prophets are following behind me under (my) banner.”
For this reason that master of (all) sorts of knowledge has uttered the allegorical saying: “We are the last and the foremost.”
(That is to say), “If in appearance I am born of Adam, in reality I am the forefather of (every) forefather.”⁴⁶

In the Malay-Indonesian world, this understanding of the Prophet’s ontology is also deeply imbedded. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, who represents this tradition, puts it in a beautifully crafted Malay poem:

*Meskipun zahir bentuk basyari
Batannya bangsa terlalu safi
Kerana peri haknya ruhani
Pernah berkata lisannya murni:
Sebagai nabi aku terkandung
Dalam rahasia di Balai Agung
Padahal Adam masih terapung
Antara air dan tanah lempung*

46. *The Mathnawi of Jalaluddin Rumi*. Trans. and notes by R. A. Nicholson, vols. IV, books 3–4. Reprint of 1930 (Cambridge: The Trustees of E.J. W Gibb Memorial, 1982), 301.

*Meskipun rupaku anak Adam
Darjatku asal terlebih kiram*

*Tatkala Adam belum teringat
Tatkala Kalam belum tersurat
Dan Papantulis belum tercatat
Sudah terpandang oleh kunhi Dhat
Seri wajahku didalam mirat*

*Sinaran sani cahaya kamalat
Pancaran murni asma dan sifat
Rumusan seni segala makhlukat
Yang zahir pada cermin hakikat—
Dalam diriku semua terlibat.⁴⁷*

The Prophet's lofty stature and his timelessness were deeply understood by his companions and later Muslims. Some of the Prophet's many privileges, of which God had informed him, are reported in this tradition:

What I have given you is better than that (I have given to previous prophets). I have given you *kawthar*, and I have placed your name alongside My Name which is called out in the Heavens. I have made the earth a place of purity for you and your community. I have forgiven you your past and future wrong actions. You walk among people who are forgiven because of you. I have not done this for anyone before you. I have made the hearts of your community their Qur'ans. I have stored up your intercession for you and I have not stored it up for any prophet but you.⁴⁸

The experience of *al-Isrā'* and *al-Mi'raj* is one the greatest evidences for the space-time transcendence of the Prophet when he was brought to al-Masjid al-Aqsā in Jerusalem and

47. Al-Attas, *A Commentary on the Hujjat al-Siddiq*, xviii–xix.

48. Qadi Iyad, *al-Shifa'*, 87.

up to the Lote Tree of the Utmost End where he met and led the prayer of all the prophets, came to two bow lengths with God, and witnessed the future conditions and punishments in Heaven and Hell.⁴⁹ There also he was made to recognise the guardians of the Fire and the bearers of the Throne of God.⁵⁰

These revelatory experiences of the *Mi'raj* were nothing short of miraculous which according to modernists like Rahman “involved an expansion of the Prophet’s self by which he enveloped all reality and which was total in its comprehensive sweep....”⁵¹ In commenting on the Prophet’s greatness of character, echoing the traditional views on *‘alam saghīr* and *‘alam kabīr*, Lings says: “He (the Prophet) was a whole world in himself, comparable to the outer world, and in some ways mysteriously one with it.”⁵² Even the modernist Haykal describes that during *al-Isrā’* and *al-Mi'raj*, the Prophet...

...grasped the unity of being in all its totality and perfections....In that moment, all frontiers fell before Muḥammad’s insight: and all being was, as it were, gathered in his soul. In that moment, he came to know totality from beginning to end and represented this totality as the self-realisation of the process of goodness, truth, and beauty in their struggle against and conquest of evil, untruth, and fraud.⁵³

It is thus strange that Haykal would dismiss much of the traditionally accepted, more detailed accounts of these events as “the product of pure imagination” and “invention

49. Lings, *Muhammad*, 101–104; Safi-ur-Rahman al-Mubarakpury, *Al-Raḥeeq al-Makhtūm (The Sealed Nectar)* (Riyadh/Jeddah: Darussalam, 2002), 178–185; Rahman, *Major Themes*, 64–65.

50. Qadi Iyad, *al-Shifa’*, 36; Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat*, pp. 181–187; al-Husaini, *Riwayāt*, 403–411.

51. Rahman, *Major Themes*, 73.

52. Lings, *Muhammad*, 271.

53. Haykal, *Life of Muhammad*, 144–145.

of the fancy of the Sufis and others.”⁵⁴ It is instructive to note that Muhammad Iqbal’s insight on Muḥammad’s decision to return to Makkah “to insert himself into the sweep of time with a view to control the forces of history, and thereby to create a fresh world of ideals” after enjoying such glorious spiritual experience of *al-Miʿrāj* separates the Prophet from the mystic.⁵⁵ It may not be wrong to add that his decision to re-enter and transform history has no parallel in the story of mankind.

Among his many unique features is that the Seal of Prophecy was located between his shoulders, which was foretold by earlier prophets to their followers, hence his arrival in history was much anticipated.⁵⁶ The Christian monk Bahīrā saw it when Muḥammad was still a young adult,⁵⁷ as did Salmān al-Fārisī after the Prophet migrated to Madinah.⁵⁸ Like all prophets, his heart did not sleep even if his eyes were.⁵⁹ He could see angels and the devil and his frequent communication with the angels made him averse to consuming strong flavoured food such as those containing garlic and onions.⁶⁰ He also conversed with the *jinn*s that accepted Islām.⁶¹

The timelessness of Muḥammad extends beyond the life of this world into the hereafter. Lings summarises the continual beneficial role that the Prophet plays even after his earthly

54. Ibid., 144.

55. Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. Ed. and annotated by M. Saeed Sheikh (Lahore: Iqbal Academy/Institute of Islamic Culture), 99.

56. Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat*, 103–104, talks about Muhammad being mentioned in the Gospel with different names. For an informative interpretation on how earlier scriptures such as the Old and New Testaments, and Hindu and Buddhist texts, mentioned the arrival of Prophet Muhammad, see Ali Unal and Harun Gultekin, *The Prophet Promised in World Scriptures* (New Jersey: Tughra Books, 2013).

57. Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat*, 80; Lings, *Muhammad*, 30, al-Mubarakpuri, *al-Raheeq al-Makhtum*, 76, 576–577.

58. Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat*, 97; Lings, *Muhammad*, 122; al-Husaini, *Riwayāt*, 380.

59. Qadi Iyad, *al-Shifaʾ*, 78.

60. Qadi Iyad, *al-Shifaʾ*, 36; Lings, *Muhammad*, 167–168.

61. Lings, *Muhammad*, 99–100.

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sojourn: “Having delivered his message in this world, he had gone to fulfil it in the Hereafter, where he would continue to be, for them and for others, but without the limitations of life on earth, the Key of Mercy, the Key of Paradise, the Spirit of Truth, the Happiness of God.”⁶² In the next world, God will cause him to return the greetings of his Community to him, and their blessings for him were conveyed to him,⁶³ and on the Day of Judgment, he will be the first for whom the earth will open itself, and the first to intercede for his Community.⁶⁴

Moral Leadership of Prophet Muḥammad

Like all prophets, although he experienced the many human feelings such as pain, sadness, doubt, anger, hatred, success, happiness, he always demonstrated the highest level of truth and righteousness. Without overcoming such struggles, he could not have become the timeless example and model for others.⁶⁵

Everyone during the Prophet’s time, whether they were among his friends, companions, or those that opposed him, agreed on and affirmed the excellent and unblemished moral-ethical record of Muḥammad before he was appointed as the Prophet, which further strengthened his timeless quality as a spiritual moral leader. The appellation *al-Amīn* given to him by the pre-Islamic Arabs is the objective criteria to his moral quality, which did not change even when they later opposed his religious and social-political teachings. Allāh Himself informs us of how his opponents labelled him occasionally as a soothsayer, *kāhīn*,⁶⁶ and most often as a poet, *shā’ir*;⁶⁷ a sorcerer, *sāḥir*, or a victim of sorcery (*mashūr*), and a man possessed with

62. Ibid., 345.

63. Qadi Iyad, *al-Shifa’*, 262–263; al-Husaini, *Riwayah*, 519, 813.

64. Qadi Iyad, *al-Shifa’*, 12, and 69.

65. See also Rahman, *Major Themes*, 62.

66. *Al-Tūr* (52): 29; *al-Hāqqah* (69): 42.

67. *Al-Anbiyā’* (21): 5; *al-Ṣaffāt* (37): 36; *al-Tūr* (52): 30, *al-Hāqqah* (69): 41.

some evil spirit, (*majnūn*).⁶⁸ Some individuals even called him a liar but not without qualification: The staunch enemy Abū Jahl for example, told him: “We do not call you a liar, but we do not have faith in what you have brought.”⁶⁹ The Qurʾān confirms this: “it is not you that they deny (*lā yukadhhibūnaka*), but it is the verses of Allah that the unjust reject.”⁷⁰ Hence, even after 12 years into his prophethood when he consistently criticised their most fundamental religious and ethical principles, they still trusted his honesty and integrity by willingly depositing their valuables and other property in his care until the hour of his Migration. He instructed ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib to return all of them to their respective owners after the former had migrated to Madinah, the volume of which took the latter three days to perform it.⁷¹

The greatest ethical quality of a person is judged when he was victorious and powerful in which the attributes of mercy, forgiveness and generosity of spirit are demonstrated—especially against long-standing enemies who had incurred great personal and collective pains and injustices. Prophet Muḥammad consistently demonstrated these qualities more than anyone else in history: His granting of general amnesty upon the conquest of Makkah,⁷² pardoning the Jewish widow of Khaybar who had poisoned him and his companions, killing one of them, and who later contributed to his own demise.⁷³ He also pardoned numerous others, including the leader of the Medinan hypocrites, ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ubayy, upon whom

68. *Al-Dhāriyāt* (51): 52. See also Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat*, 121–122; Rahman, *Major Themes*, 74; Lings, *Muhammad*, 53.

69. Lings, *Muhammad*, 128–129; al-Mubarakpuri, *al-Raheeq al-Makhtum*, 579.

70. *Al-Anʿām* (6): 33.

71. Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat*, 224, 227; Lings, *Muhammad*, 117, 121.

72. Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat*, 547–560; Haykal, *Life of Muhammad*, 395–413; Lings, *Muhammad*, 297–303; al-Mubarakpuri, *al-Raheeq al-Makhtum*, 395–410; al-Husaini, *Riwayāt*, 684–687.

73. Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat*, 516; Lings, *Muhammad*, 268.

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he led the funeral prayers.⁷⁴ Treaties were respected even if some of his companions initially objected to their apparent disadvantages to the Muslims, as in the case of the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyyah wherein several good Muslim individuals suffered as a consequence.⁷⁵ Yet, grave treachery was dealt with swiftly following the accepted laws and customs of the time, as in the case of the expulsion of the Jews of Banī Qaynuqā' and the confiscation of their property.⁷⁶ In deciding on the punishment on them for the grave treachery of Banī Qurayzah, the Prophet requested the judgement be decided by Sa'd ibn Mu'ādh, a respected member of the Aws tribe, who used to have good relations with the Banī Qurayzah. Despite the Aws's appeal to the Prophet for leniency, Sa'd decided that the men should be killed, the property divided among the Muslim army, and the women and children taken as captives. Sa'd's judgement was approved by the Prophet, which was also in accord with Jewish law.⁷⁷ Reflecting upon the spiritual and moral-ethical qualities of the highest leaders as exemplified by the Prophet, Haykal correctly notes that "Islam places both mercy and forgiveness side by side with justice. It insists that if they are to be themselves at all, mercy and forgiveness must issue from power. Only then will their purpose be genuine good...."⁷⁸

His simplicity in personal habits and lifestyle even after attaining great political and material success were effectively transferred to his family members and companions, who became caliphs during an age when kings and emperors were practically regarded, and behaved as gods. Prophets, including Muḥammad, do not leave any inheritance for anyone, including

74. Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat*, 491–492, 623; Lings, *Muhammad*, 238–239, 331–332.

75. Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat*, 505, 507–508; Lings, *Muhammad*, 249–262; Haykal, *Life of Muhammad*, 240–259; al-Husaini, *Riwayāt*, 616–627.

76. Lings, *Muhammad*, 160–162.

77. Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat*, 463–464; Lings, *Muhammad*, 230–232, also note 1 on p. 232.

78. Haykal, *Life of Muhammad*, 189.

family members. He died in the house of ‘Ā’ishah who said that there was nothing in the house except for some barley on one shelf. Another report indicated that he left behind his armour, a mule, and some lands in Fadak and Khaybar which were turned into a charity.⁷⁹

In the context of Muḥammad being the Seal of Prophethood, it carries the necessary logic that he must succeed in communicating his message, embodying it in his actions and silent confirmations (*taqrīr*) and in creating a spiritual ethical-moral society. If he were to fail in any of this category, God would need to send another Prophet to complete his task.⁸⁰ Iqbal’s keen observation hits the mark when he said that in Islām, prophecy, which includes the spiritual, ethical, and social principles and contents, and the sources and methods of knowing, “reaches its perfection in discovering the need of its own abolition.”⁸¹

The late Italian scholar, Leone P diTeono Caetani, noted correctly that the Prophet’s greatest success is in creating a generation of truly excellent human beings as his companions who were:

...the true moral heirs of the Prophet, the future apostles of Islam, the faithful trustees of all that Muhammad had revealed unto the men of God. Into these men, through their constant contact with the Prophet and their devotion to him, there had already entered a new mode of thought and feeling, loftier and more civilized than any they had known before; they had really changed for the better from every point of view, and later on as statesmen and generals, in the most difficult moments of the war of conquests they gave magnificent and undeniable proof that the ideas and doctrines of Muhammad had been seed cast on fruitful soil, and had produced

79. Haykal, *Life of Muhammad*, 515-516; Qadi Iyad, *al-Shifa’*, 72; al-Husaini, *Riwayat*, 793.

80. Rahman, *Major Themes*, 58.

81. Muhammad Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, 101.

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a body of men of the very highest worth. They were the true depositories of the sacred text of the Qur'an, which they alone knew by heart; they were the zealous guardians of the memory of every word and bidding of the Prophet, the trustees of the moral heritage of Muhammad. These men formed the venerable stock of Islam from whom one day was to spring the noble band of the first jurists, theologians and traditionalists of Muslim society.⁸²

The exemplary virtues of this generation of Muslims are made possible by their correct attitude and understanding regarding the timelessness of the Prophet and his unique role in human history. In this context, al-Attas has correctly observed that:

(the Prophet's) Companions and contemporaries acted and behaved in a manner divinely inspired to become the standard and criterion for the future; and they questioned him urgently whilst he was yet among them on every conceivable and actual problem of daily life and right conduct and thought and action and guidance that summarized the needs of mankind and whose answers would suffice for man for all ages and generations to come. They all acted in a concerted and significantly knowing manner emphasizing their consciousness that this was the Final Revelation from God, the Ultimate Religion for Mankind, the Last Prophet to appear among men.⁸³

The companions firmly understood that they were witnessing the timelessness of the Prophet in the temporal order and were experiencing the unfolding of the eternal in the

82. Quoted by T.W. Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam: A History of the Propagation of the Muslim Faith* (Lahore: Sh Muhammad Ashraf, 1976), 41. For a good description of the qualities of many of the Prophet's companions and the generation that followed them (*ṭābī'ūn*), see Gulen, *Muhammad*, 369–397.

83. Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 27–28.

world of Time.⁸⁴ ‘Urwah ibn Mas‘ūd, the experienced Quraysh scout and envoy, reported to the Quraysh after his experience with the Muslims at Ḥudaybiyyah that the companions of the Prophet honoured their leader unlike the treatment given to the Caesars, Chosroes and the Negus by their own people: “If he commanded aught, they almost outstrip his word in fulfilling it; when he performed his ablution, they well nigh fight for the water thereof; when he speaketh, their voices were hushed in his presence; nor will they look him full in the face, but lower their eyes in reverence for him....”⁸⁵ On other occasions, his companions like Khālīd al-Walīd, kept his hair when he shaved his head.⁸⁶ Despite this, the companions, and all Muslims throughout history, had never accorded to him the status of divinity. The clear and unmistakable separation between God and the Prophet is deeply embedded in the most important testimony of Islām, the *shahādah*: There is no god except Allāh, and Muḥammad is His Messenger.

The excellent moral character of the companions was such that even when they were informed by the Prophet that they were destined for Paradise—Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthmān, ‘Alī, Ṭalḥah, al-Zubayr ibn al-‘Awwām, Sa‘d ibn Abī Waqqās, Sa‘īd ibn Zayd, ‘Abd al-Raḥman ibn ‘Awf and Abū ‘Ubaydah ibn al-Jarrāḥ—they remained ever humble and fearful of transgressing God’s limits, reflected in their attitude, lifestyles, policies and words even when occupying high public offices. For example, Abū Bakr lamented about the gravity of his responsibility as a Caliph when he said: “Would that I were a date pecked by the birds.” In the same vein, Caliph ‘Umar is reported to have said: “Would that I were a straw. Would that I were nothing.”⁸⁷

84. See Nasr’s description of a truly human being, in his, *The Need for a Sacred Science*, 20.

85. Cited in Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat*, 503; Lings, *Muhammad*, 250.

86. Lings, *Muhammad*, 255, and 334; also Qadi Iyad, *al-Shifa’*, 236–237.

87. Al-Kalabadhi, *al-Ta’arruf*, 61–62.

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Mawlānā Rūmī, in one place, describes that inner quality of these people of Paradise:

The Prophet said that the folk (destined for) Paradise are feeble (worsted) in quarrels, because of (their noble) accomplishments—
Because of the perfection of their prudence and thinking ill (of themselves), not from deficiency (of intellect) and cowardice and weakness of (religious) faith.⁸⁸

Because of the Prophet, and through him, his family and companions are most reliable role models and examples:⁸⁹ He said, “My companions are as even as the stars; whichever of them you follow, you shall be rightly guided.”⁹⁰ The Prophet regarded his companions are more worthy than the weight of gold, the size of Mount Uhud spent in the cause of Allāh.⁹¹ Of course, they questioned him, quarrelled with each other and made mistakes, but when the truth was revealed to them either from the Qur’ān or coming from the Prophet, they wholeheartedly submitted.⁹² The Prophet also said that the best Muslims are from his generation, followed by the next two generations.⁹³ He said that people who lived during his Age had grave responsibilities compared to later ones. Those in his Age who omitted one tenth of the *Shari’ah* shall be doomed, whereas there will come a time when those who fulfilled even one tenth of it will be saved.⁹⁴

The companions and family members of the Prophet and early generations of Muslims are regarded as “the best

88. *Mathnawi of Rumi*, vol. IV, bks 3–4, 255.

89. Qadi Iyad, *al-Shifa’*, 241–246.

90. Lings, *Muhammad*, 329.

91. Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat*, 562; Lings, *Muhammad*, 327

92. For examples see Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat*, 307–308, 454, 504–505, 596–597; Lings, *Muhammad*, 252–256; 311–312.

93. Lings, *Muhammad*, 329.

94. *Ibid.*, 269.

ever raised among mankind” due to their spiritual and ethical-moral virtues because “they enjoin what is good, forbid what is wrong and believe in God.”⁹⁵ They did all this because they were certain of the veracity and the promises of God through His Prophet.⁹⁶ Their most noble character, their sincere devotion to God and the Prophet, their sacrifice, courage, justice, and humility were made possible because they looked at the Prophet and his mission more in the transcendental sense, not merely in the historical sense.

The Unity of Muslim Identity

The timelessness of Prophet Muḥammad in Islamic civilisation, is because, in the words of al-Attas, he “represents the finality and perfection of ‘being’ in man.” He is the perfect model for every Muslim male and female; adolescent, middle-aged and old, such that Muslims neither suffer the crisis of identity, nor the fruitless and tragic search for separate meaning and destiny.⁹⁷

The Prophet was, and shall always be deeply loved by Muslims. He is closer to the believers than their selves, wives and mothers.⁹⁸ Al-Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ observed profoundly that there are three levels of reasons as to why something or someone is loved, all of which are applicable to Prophet Muḥammad: Love because of its perfection, because of its inner nobility, and because of its benefits to the lover.⁹⁹ The deep love for the Prophet demonstrated by the Muslims and the unity they achieved due to his presence was itself a miracle, as God says in the Qur’ān: “If thou hast spent all that is in the earth, thou couldst not have united their hearts. But God hath united their hearts.”¹⁰⁰ According to Lings:

95. *Āli ‘Imrān* (3): 110.

96. Rahman, *Major Themes*, 100.

97. Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 87.

98. *Al-Aḥzāb* (33): 6; Qadi Iyad, *al-Shifa’*, 29.

99. Qadi Iyad, *al-Shifa’*, 230.

100. *Al-Anfāl* (8): 63

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The presence of the Prophet was nonetheless one of the greatest means of realizing this unitedness. Providentially, the attraction of that presence had been made so powerful that no man of normal good could resist it. “Not one of you hath faith until I am dearer to him than his son and his father and all men together.” But this utterance of the Prophet was not so much a demand as a confirmation of the rightness of a love that had already been given—a love which found its expression so often in the words: “May my father and my mother be thy ransom.”¹⁰¹

The timelessness of the Prophet in Muslim understanding provides them with a sense of inter-generational and gender unity in identity and destiny. Al-Attas explains that because of the Prophet, “the external structure or pattern of Muslim society is not divided by the gaps of generations” such as that prevalent in modern secular society.¹⁰² The three generations of the young, middle aged and the elderly that comprise modern secular society are forever engaged in the search for identity and meaning of life. They are forever moving in a vicious circle of unhappiness in which each generation is constantly dissatisfied with its own self-evolved values of life. Each generation finds itself a misfit with the other generations.¹⁰³

In modern secular society there also exists a crisis of identity between the sexes, in that women are engaged, as women, in search for their own, separate identity. Islamic society, which is grounded in its worldview centred on the Holy Prophet as the model, is not beset by such condition.

The individuals within the generations that comprise it, whether male or female, have already established their identity and recognized their ultimate destiny; the former through recognition and confirmation of the Covenant, and the later through affirmation and realization of that Covenant by means of sincere

101. Lings, *Muhammad*, 210.

102. Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 87.

103. *Ibid.*, 89.

submission to God's Will and obedience to His Law...¹⁰⁴

There are many ways to demonstrate genuine love and respect for someone. Al-Qādi 'Iyād listed several comprehensive signs of love for the Holy Prophet that are always relevant. Besides loving, being ever conscious of Allāh, and obeying His commands and prohibitions, these involve:

1. Emulating and practicing his Sunnah, obeying his commands and refraining from his prohibitions and inculcating his *adab* in dealing with vicissitudes of life,
2. Being angry and making enemies only for the sake of God,
3. Mentioning the Prophet often, yearning to meet him and displaying humility and respect whenever his name is mentioned,
4. Expressing love and respect to his family members, and companions, and demonstrating hostility to all those who are opposed the Prophet, his family and companions,
5. Expressing love and respect for the Qur'ān,
6. Having compassion for fellow Muslims, and serving their best interests, and,
7. Willingly foregoing worldly interests in following the Prophet's teachings and Sunnah.¹⁰⁵

The genuine love for the Prophet and his authoritative and binding Sunnah is extended also to loving our parents, family members and all believers, dead or alive, as expressed in the *du'ā*, which observant Muslims recite many times daily. In their obligatory daily ritual prayers, during *tashāhud*, after they offer *salāms* to the Prophet, after which they offer *salāms* to all pious servants of God (*'ibādu-ʿLlāhi al-ṣāliḥīn*). After the ritual

104. Ibid.

105. Qadi Iyad, *al-Shifa'*, 228–229; for a contemporary non-technical discussion about the various aspects of Sunnah, see Gülen, *Muhammad*, chaps. 10–11.

prayers, Muslims generally offer supplication to the Almighty, which normally include asking for God's forgiveness for their parents and all Muslims whether they have passed away or still living. This spiritual care and concern, which is the extension of the true brotherhood of Islām, if sincerely and consciously upheld, can go a long way towards dealing with major socio-political divisiveness among Muslims.

A Virtuous Civilisation

Islamic civilisation is a living civilisation wherein every generation of Muslims knowingly and willingly struggles towards realisation of the original nature and spirit of Islām as something already established in history. This process unfurls the theoretical and practical principles of Islām in the life of the people, and actualises the essentials and potentials of Islām in the realm of existence.¹⁰⁶ The so-called Golden Age of Islām may involve great achievements on different aspects in different periods. The spiritual, ethical-moral aspects were certainly achieved at the highest level during the Age of the Prophet which form the foundation and essence of Islamic civilisation, while the other aspects—the scientific, economic, artistic, cultural and technical—came much later. As George Saliba has argued—based on truly original works, and not only on the quantity of scientific activities—the Golden Age of Islamic scientific achievement should be moved from the 9th–10th Century C.E., which greatly benefitted from the Greek scientific legacy, to the 13th–14th Century. In this later period, genuine Islamic sciences—one that is more in conformity with religious and social requirements of Islām—came into real fruition as can be seen in the works of al-Jazarī (d. 1205) in mechanics, Athīr al-Dīn al-Abharī (c. 1240) in astronomy, Mu'ayyad al-Dīn al-Urdī (d. 1266) in astronomy, Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 1274) in astronomy and mathematics, Quṭb al-Dīn

106. Al-Attas, *Fact and Fiction*, xv.

al-Shīrāzī (d. 1311) in astronomy, Ibn al-Shāṭir (d. 1375) in astronomy, Kamāl al-Dīn al-Fārisī (d. 1320) in Optics, Ibn al-Bayṭār (d. 1248) in pharmacology, and Ibn al-Nafīs (d. 1288) in medicine.¹⁰⁷

The Golden Age of Islām, which reflects the true spirit and character of man according to Islām is defined and measured by the spiritual and ethical standards and criteria set by the Prophet and the early Muslim generations. The Age of the Prophet is truly the Golden Age of Islām. Al-Attas reminds us that, “concepts such as development, and progress and perfection when applied to man’s life and history and destiny must indeed refer, in Islām, ultimately to the spiritual and real nature of man.”¹⁰⁸ Otherwise, it would mean only “the development, progress and perfection of the animal in man.”¹⁰⁹ The criteria and standards of spiritual, and ethical-moral excellence have been finalised in the Age of the Prophet.

It is clear that most, if not all, of the past great achievements of the Islamic civilisation, whether in restoring and improving the works of earlier civilisations or in creating original works in various scientific, artistic, medical, and technological fields, have been surpassed by contributions from other nations and civilisations, especially that of the modern West, but Islamic achievements in the spiritual, moral-ethical aspects that were achieved by the Prophet and his companions remain the highest watermark in human history. Hence, the labels given by Marshall Hodgson to the Muslims of the prophetic Age as “Primitive Muslims” and “Primitive Caliphate”¹¹⁰ as most misleading for the term “primitive” gives the impression that this religion shall undergo a developmental

107. George Saliba, *A History of Arabic Astronomy: Planetary Theories During the Golden Age of Islam* (New York/London: New York University Press, 1994), 65.

108. Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 81.

109. *Ibid.*, 81–82.

110. Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, 3 vols. (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), 1: 196; 198–230, 529.

process still waiting to reach final maturity. The Islām of the Prophetic Age was already the perfect Islām, and Muslims therein as a whole was the best ever raised for mankind as testified by the Qur’ān itself.

It should be further clarified that Islamic civilisation is not just an ethical-moral civilisation, because ethics and morality, as in the case of the Ancient Greeks and the Modern Secular West, can be derived from secular reason and social-democratic convention. In my opinion, modern ethical projects such as Global Ethics seem to be based on these two major pillars. So is the UN Declaration of Human Rights which does not reject sacred and religious principles as long as they do not contradict the secular philosophical and ethical framework. Since the bases of the civilisation of Islām are the sacred texts of the Qur’ān and the Sunnah of the Prophet, and every serious action and intention carries a religious virtue (*fadīlah*), Islamic civilisation can be called a *virtuous civilisation* (*al-hadārah al-fadīlah*). The Prophet had successfully established such a civilisation in history.¹¹¹ Since Islām and the civilisation it produced is fundamentally qualitative, the Prophet regularly reminded his companions about the utmost importance of the qualitative aspects—the spiritual, ethical and moral virtues—compared to the quantitative ones. The Holy Prophet prophesied about the dangerous dominance of the quantitative over the qualitative on at least two occasions.

111. On the ethical foundation of the new Islamic civilisation established by the Prophet in Madinah, see for example, Haykal, *Life of Muhammad*, 185–190; ethically based social order, Rahman, *Major Themes*, 58. Marshall Hodgson talks of Muhammad’s pursuit of “a new and total moral order”; *Venture*, 1: 197, also 1: 162–186. Our conception of Virtuous Civilisation has very little in common with the idea *al-madīnah al-fādīlah* of Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī (d. 950 C.E.) whose basic ideas are, according to Richard Walzer, taken from various Greek philosophical schools but ultimately derived from a tradition originating in the sixth-century Alexandrian tradition of Ammonius school. See Richard Walzer, in Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī, *Mabādi’ Arā’ Ahl Al-Madīna al-Fādīlah: Al-Fārābī on the Perfect State*. A Revised text with Introduction, translation and commentary by Richard Walzer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 9–11.

He said that there would be a future time in which the number of Muslims would be large but their moral-ethical quality was low because of their love for this world and fear of death: “You will be like scum and rubbish like that carried down by a torrent, and Allah will take fear of you from the breasts of your enemy and cast enervation into your breasts.”¹¹² On another occasion, the Prophet talked about a future condition when people would be so wealthy and lavish that they would wear one fine garment in the morning and another in the evening, and dish after dish would be placed before them, and their houses embellished like the Ka’bah, but they would be worse off than during the simpler time of the Prophet.¹¹³ The Prophet at the last stage of his terrestrial existence, once mentioned, “I was offered the keys of the treasuries of this world and immortality therein followed by Paradise, and I have been given the choice between that and meeting my Lord and Paradise.” He chose the latter.¹¹⁴ Haykal explains that the Prophet’s denial of the world and its luxuries, and his leading an ascetic life was not pursued for its own sake but for a much loftier purpose, which is to achieve power to overcome life: “In order not to allow anything to exercise any power over him, but rather, to enable him to determine it....”¹¹⁵

The early generation of Muslims was constantly reminded of the truly spiritual and ethical nature of their struggle. In the beginning of his mission, the disbelievers offered to the Prophet worldly rewards and on another occasion, they even asked him to pray to God to bestow upon himself gardens, palaces, and treasures of gold and silver; which he naturally refused, replying that he was not appointed in order to attain these.¹¹⁶ The Battle of Hunayn in 630 C.E.—

112. *Sunan Abu Daud*. English translation and explanatory notes by Ahmad Hassan. 4 vols. (Islamabad: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1984), 2: 1196, Hadith no. 4284.

113. Qadi Iyad, *al-Shifa'*, 187.

114. Lings, *Muhammad*, 337-338.

115. Haykal, *Life of Muhammad*, 188.

116. Lings, *Muhammad*, 62.

not long after the historic Conquest of Makkah—was hugely successful whence the Muslim army of 12,000 defeated an enemy double their size, and captured 6,000 prisoners, 24,000 camel and countless sheep and goats. More importantly, it fully integrated the new Quraysh converts into the Islamic polity. Yet during their return, the Prophet reminded them that they were returning from a Lesser Holy War to face a Greater Holy War, which is against their Soul.¹¹⁷

However, to entice some of the disbelievers to embrace his religion, the Prophet did not exclude the possible temporal benefits. He told them that if they were to accept Islām, they would have dominance over the Arabs and Persians.¹¹⁸ Nevertheless the spiritual and moral virtues remained the most central focus of his mission such that during his last days on earth, he made a public remark on the pulpit of his mosque in Madinah, inter alia, that: “I fear not for you that ye will set up gods beside God; but I fear for you this world, lest ye seek to rival one another in worldly gains.”¹¹⁹

Traditional writers such as Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406) and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 1505) understood the central role of the spiritual and ethical-moral virtues in the quality of leadership and governments in Islamic civilisation. Ibn Khaldūn’s famous analysis on the rise and fall of civilisations is clearly rooted in the strength of the spiritual and ethical virtues of key leaders, which determine the qualitative strength of the group. In fact, he basically echoes the Qur’anic and prophetic warnings that secular scientific developments and material wealth of a settled civilisation may contribute to the weakening of the spiritual, moral-ethical fibre of the group which would directly undermine its solidarity.¹²⁰ A century later, al-Suyūṭī’s great book on the history of the caliphs from the reign of the first Abū Bakr (d. 634 C.E.) until ‘Abd al-

117. Ibid., 327.

118. Ibid., 98.

119. Ibid., 338; Qadi Iyad, *al-Shifa’*, 86.

120. Abdul Rahman ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*. Trans. with notes by Franz Rosenthal. 3 vols. (New York: Bollingen Series/Pantheon Books, 1958), esp. 1: 249–310.

‘Azīz al-Mutawakkil ‘alā-ʿLlāh the last Abbasid Caliph (d. 1497), contains useful records of the spiritual, moral-ethical, intellectual, and cultural qualities of these individuals, besides their military and political ones.¹²¹ Written works representing Mirror for the Princes genre, by practitioners such as the *Siyasat Nameh* of Nizām al-Mulk (d. 1092), and especially of jurist-scholars such as al-Ghazālī’s *Nasīhat al-Mulūk* (d. 1111) and the Malay works of Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī (d. 1648), *Bustān al-Salāṭīn* and of Jawharī al-Bukhārī, *Tāj al-Salāṭīn* (used in the Malay world since the beginning of 17th century), clearly underline the sacred ethical-moral foundations of political governance, which provide the architectonic structure of Islamic civilisation.¹²²

Many have argued that failures of Western modernity and of the Industrial-technological civilisation it produced have significantly contributed to the rise of global problems such as axiological and moral relativism, economic-financial crises, ecological imbalances, and social-political extremisms, as well as the threat of nuclear war. Some non-Western nations are trying to frame and develop a better conception of civilisation. For example, China is actively seeking to be the first ecological civilisation not necessarily to replace the modern western one, but primarily to deal with its own ecological challenges arising from its fast-paced economic and technological changes. Some of the basic features of an ecological civilisation as espoused by the current Chinese leadership are that human beings should not regard themselves superior to other parts of Nature; that the relationship between humans and others should be one of

121. Abd al-Rahman ibn Abi Bakr (Jalal al Din) al-Suyuti, *History of the Caliphs*. Trans from original Arabic by H.S. Jarrett. First published in 1881 (Amsterdam: Oriental Press, 1970).

122. Nizam al-Mulk al-Tusi, *Siyar al-Muluk/Siyasat Nameh (The Book of Government)*. Trans. from Persian by Hubert Drake (London/Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978); Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali, *Nasīhat al-Mulūk (Counsels for Kings)*. Trans. from Persian by F.R.C. Bagley (London: Oxford University Press, 1964); Bukhari al-Jauhari, *Tāj al-Salāṭīn*. Romanised by Khalid Hussain (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1966).

equality, friendship, and mutual reliance; that human beings should feel indebted to nature as the source of their origin and to treat it well; that Nature should not be over-exploited; that the natural ecosystem and environment must be properly respected; that moral principles must be followed to ensure equity between peoples, nations and generations; that minimal and efficient consumption of natural resources and their conservation must be advocated; that sustainable development should be made the highest national objective as opposed to short-termed development goals and over-exploitation of resources; and that fruits of development must be enjoyed by all members of society, not only by a minority.¹²³

All the above general characteristics need to be systematically and coherently elaborated and put into practice and exemplified at the personal and community levels, which presupposes an inner spiritual and ethical transformation. It involves fundamental changes in the worldview of the Chinese population concerning the nature and destiny of man and the universe, the meaning of true happiness, and a radical transformation of societal lifestyle. It is not certain how the Chinese government plans to carry out this total and fundamental transformation. Compared to both the modern Western and Chinese civilisations, Islamic civilisation was a virtuous civilisation, and Muslims should always strive to establish it and uphold its comprehensive features.

123. See Jiang Chunyun, "Creating an Ecological Civilization". www.climateandcapitalism.com/2013/03/31/chinese-leader-calls-for-ecological-civilization/ (accessed on 9 June 2015). This article first appeared in the January issue of the English-language edition of *Qushi Journal*, a publication of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. The author is the former vice-chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress of China. See also Catherine Brahic, "China Battles to be the First Ecological Civilization". *New Scientist*, issue no. 2973 (13 June 2014), (accessed on 9 June 2015).

Conclusion

The right understanding of, and emphasis on the timelessness of the Prophet, which includes the metaphysical and moral aspects of his existence, may not necessitate major quantitative changes in the contents of the spiritual, ethical and legal features of Islamic civilisation, but it will surely contribute to the qualitative improvements in these features. Since one basic meaning of religion, *dīn*, is indebtedness to Allāh for our existence—realising these realities about the Prophet would make Muslims to be more profoundly indebted to Allāh for guiding them to be members of the Ummah of Prophet Muḥammad, hence making their living the *dīn* even more meaningful.¹²⁴ Being Muslims should not be taken as a privilege, as this would make some Muslims think that they are better than others, but rather, as a challenge to continue the prophetic mission, to inculcate within themselves and demonstrate all the virtues, to be witnesses to mankind as a whole and to be a source of mercy to all creations.

Muslims understand that all creations are signs (*āyāt*) of God: they are theatres of manifestation of God's Names, Attributes and Actions. The best of all creations are human beings, and the most praiseworthy are the prophets and messengers of God. Since Prophet Muḥammad is the highest ranked among these noble groups of humans, knowing him in the best manner would also make us understand divine qualities manifested in a creature in the best possible manner. Furthermore, since the end of all human activities is to attain lasting happiness, Muslims have understood that Prophet Muḥammad had successfully attained to such a state, and have thereby described him as the most happy of all creatures (*as'ad al-makhlūqāt*) in the true sense of the word. Furthermore,

124. For a profound explanation of the concept of *din*, see al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 47–66.

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his Age can correctly be called the Age of True Happiness.¹²⁵ Hence, the Prophet and his generation must be properly studied and analysed for every level of society and in every profession especially at the higher educational institutions. Haykal in the 1930s had already urged that scholars and historians study “the Age of Muhammad” in what he called, “a scientific and academic manner”.¹²⁶ In this regard, it is pleasing to note that the Islamic University of Madinah established a research institute in 1988, called The Center for the Services of the Prophet’s Biography.¹²⁷ Muslims must take great care that the study of the Prophet and his generation should be truly comprehensive by taking into account his timelessness as briefly discussed above. The warning by al-Attas should be seriously heeded that the life and person of the prophet should not be terrestrialised and despiritualised because that would prepare the ground for a ‘secularised’ Islām and corrupt its ethical and moral virtues, and distort the nature and mission of its civilisation.¹²⁸ The re-Islamising of Muslim thought and practice, must be intelligently and progressively embarked which refers fundamentally to the collective “striving towards realization of the moral and ethical quality of social perfection achieved during the age of the Holy Prophet who created it under Divine Guidance.”¹²⁹

125. See al-Attas, *The Meaning and Experience of Happiness in Islām* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), 1993; also idem, *Prolegomena*, chap. 2.

126. Haykal, *Life of Muhammad*, liv.

127. Al-Mubarakpuri, *Al-Raheeq al-Makhtum*, 9.

128. Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 114, 125.

129. Ibid., 42.

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