

Chapter Two

The Lessons of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in Housing

Introduction

In this chapter, I will discuss the lessons of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in housing which he under the aegis of revelation has bequeathed to us. Since Muhammad (pbuh) was the last Messenger of Allah to mankind, such lessons are to be viewed as both universal and everlasting. That, in fact, is the case with the whole legacy of the Prophet (pbuh) in relation to each and every life activity. Hence, the Holy Qur'an makes it clear that believers must look up to Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) so as to admire and endeavor to follow his most beautiful pattern of conduct: "Certainly you have in the Messenger of Allah an excellent exemplar for him who hopes in Allah and the latter day and remembers Allah much." (al-Ahzab, 21)

On the sublime conduct of the Prophet (pbuh), which is bound to inspire, awaken and transform every truth seeker, Allah says: "And most surely you conform (yourself) to sublime morality." (al-Qalam, 4)

About this reality, the Prophet (pbuh) himself has said that it was nobody else but Allah who educated him and who perfected his good manners. He also said that the sole objective of him being sent as the last messenger of Allah to people was the completion of highest moral standards (*makarim al-akhlaq*) in order for people to follow them (him).¹

It follows that the Prophet (pbuh) must be the role model to Muslims in virtually everything, from pure worship rituals to the matters concerning the incubation and growth of a civilization. The subjects of architecture and urban development are no exceptions to this rule.

This chapter is divided into the following sections:

1. The Qur'an and the Prophet's *sunnah* (traditions) as the foundation of Islamic architecture;
2. The house and the institutional ideological dichotomy;
3. The house as a family development center;
4. The form of the house;

¹ Al-Qurtubi, *Tafsir al-Jami' li Ahkam al-Qur'an*, <http://www.altafsir.com>.

5. Housing and the importance of neighbors;
6. Housing and the social integration;
7. The house and the subject of privacy;
8. The house and the subject of recreation;
9. Housing and comprehensive excellence.

The Qur'an and the Prophet's *sunnah* (traditions) as the foundation of Islamic architecture

It is appropriate at the outset of the chapter to examine what it means that the Prophet (pbuh) and his *sunnah* (traditions) serve as the foundation or the source of Islamic architecture, and so the foundation or the source of Islamic housing.

To begin with, however, it must be said that if we want to talk about the *sunnah* as the foundation of Islamic architecture, and by extension as the foundation of Islamic culture and civilization, a regular and appropriate reference to the Holy Qur'an ought to be made as well. This is because to talk about the *sunnah* means in so many ways to talk about the Qur'an. The Prophet (pbuh) and his *sunnah* cannot be separated from the Qur'an for the reason that it is the latter that the Prophet (pbuh) directly received from Allah as an inspiration and guidance, which he then earnestly applied before anybody, and like nobody, else. In the process, and through a constant divine supervision and inspiration, the Prophet (pbuh) extensively explained and also complemented the message of the Qur'an wherever such an initiative was needed and was divinely sanctioned. Thus, the Prophet's lifestyle or *sunnah*, as an accumulated legacy resulting from the mentioned process, accounts for an explanation, interpretation, extension and the first and most exemplary implementation of the Qur'an.

It stands to reason that the *sunnah* is the Qur'an in action, or the Qur'an-implemented, at the hands of the infallible and most trusted person, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). The *sunnah* thus cannot be observed and rightly understood except through the prism of the Qur'an. The *sunnah* owes its very existence to the Qur'an. Both of them, with clearly outlined respective roles and positions, have been revealed by Allah to people to support each other in guiding people to the accomplishment of their divine purpose on earth. The Qur'an and *sunnah*, therefore, constitute the first and second source of Islam, in the latter's capacity as an ideology, religion, culture and civilization.

To Muslims, while discharging their earthly vicegerency mission (*khilafah*), the Qur'an and *sunnah* are the fountains of all wisdom and goodness. From their infinite treasures, every idea, plan and enterprise in Islam originates and, once accomplished, returns to the same sources for authentication and approval.

Allah explicitly says about this status and role of the *sunnah*: "I swear by the star when it goes down. Your companion (the Prophet) does not err, nor does he go astray; nor does he speak out of desire. It is naught but revelation that is revealed. The Lord of Mighty Power has taught him, the Lord of Strength; so he attained completion." (al-Najm, 1-6)

"...And Allah has revealed to you the Book and the Wisdom, and He has taught you what you did not know, and Allah's grace on you is very great." (Al-Nisa', 113)

"Even as We have sent among you a Messenger from among you who recites to you Our communications and purifies you and teaches you the Book and the Wisdom and teaches you that which you did not know." (al-Baqarah, 151)

"He it is Who raised among the inhabitants of Makkah a Messenger from among themselves, who recites to them His communications and purifies them, and teaches them the Book and the Wisdom, although they were before certainly in clear error." (al-Jumu'ah, 2)

The word "wisdom" or "*hikmah*", which is mentioned in the above quoted Qur'anic verses, and in many other verses, is normally understood to mean the *sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). A very few scholars of Islam, before and now, disagree with this premise. The term "wisdom" or "*hikmah*", therefore, is always mentioned in the same verses immediately subsequent to the term "book" or "*kitab*", which means the Qur'an. The relationship between the two, their one and same divine source, and their unified purpose, are thus all clearly spelled out. The Prophet (pbuh) once said that he was given, as revelation, the Qur'an and "another thing similar to it", i.e., the *sunnah*.²

A'ishah, one of the Prophet's wives, when asked about the demeanor of the Prophet (pbuh), replied: "His conduct was the Qur'an."³ That means that the Prophet (pbuh) was a walking Qur'an.

² Ahmad b. Hanbal, *Musnad Ahmad b. Hanbal*, Musnad al-Shamiyyin, Hadith No. 16546.

³ Al-Tabari, *Jami' al-Bayan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an*, <http://www.altafsir.com>.

He was the embodiment of the Qur'anic message. He was the personification of everything that Islam stands for. The Prophet's life is what we now call his *sunnah*.

How is it possible that the Prophet (pbuh) serves as our eternal and most sublime role model when he lived more than fourteen centuries ago?

In a nutshell, the answer lies in a proper, total, systematic and wholehearted understanding of both the Qur'an and the Prophet's *sunnah* and how they are to be implemented in different and fluctuating life conditions which are dictated and governed by the time and space factors. Certainly, one's ignorance of, or indifference towards, the Qur'an and *sunnah* and how their leading roles in the lives of Muslims are to be restored, even if coupled with a large dose of poise and zeal, is not an answer. Such an attitude may bring more damage than benefit.

The answer lies, furthermore, in striking a delicate balance between the permanent and the temporary, between the absolute and the relative aspects of existence, granting each pole its due consideration, merit, treatment and task. Certainly, being keen and enthusiastic, but not rational and pragmatic enough, and being devout and sincere, but not wise, competent and resourceful enough, is not an answer either. Such an outlook too, just like the previous one, may cause more harm than benefit to those who subscribe to it. Among other things, it could generate and then through a variety of means perpetuate a deadening formalism, not only in religion but also in matters pertaining to cultural and civilizational expressions and goals, apathy, regression, prejudice and narrow-mindedness.

If we were to apply this philosophy on the position of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) on architecture, the following would be a set of concise inferences.

The Prophet (pbuh) viewed architecture as neither a sheer religious ceremony nor a completely and solely secular business. In fact, it is a combination of both, in that Islam is a complete way of life and there is no human activity in Islam that is ever devoid of a spiritual connotation, as well as in that there is no religious ritual that is directly linked to, and is totally dependent on, any architectural activity.

The Prophet (pbuh) has said and done a lot of things that can be related to architecture, explicitly or implicitly. He did so in different contexts and under different circumstances. He did so at times as an

educator and leader, at other times as an ordinary citizen and user, and yet at other times as an active protagonist and participant in the field. He sometimes wanted to advise a person, not the whole community, and at other times he wanted to establish a principle which was binding then and upon everyone without exception, and which will be binding forever. He often and in matters concerning religion and his duties as a prophet acted under the divine guidance of revelation, in which case he was unquestionably infallible and his actions and judgments perfectly flawless, but at times and in some sheer worldly matters he acted using his own discretion in isolation from the revealed word, in which case the Prophet's infallibility and the flawlessness of his actions and judgments have not been absolute.

Thus, if one studies the Prophet's, i.e., Islam's, attitude towards architecture, one must be very careful taking into account and scrutinizing all the issues mentioned above. The plain spiritual is not same as the plain secular. An action of the Prophet (pbuh) in his capacity as the Messenger from Allah is not like an action in his capacity as an ordinary human and citizen minding his own business and the business of his household. A counsel for a person in a situation is not necessarily always a counsel for everyone in all situations. The temporary is not equal to the permanent, and the absolute is not equal to the relative. Indeed, anything short of a universal and systematic approach to studying the Prophet's life, both his words and actions, would mean a recipe for failure that is bound to trigger a confusion and myriads of misconceptions.

Furthermore, the role of both the Qur'an and the Prophet's *sunnah* in architecture is to provide Muslims with an inspired outlook on life, in general, and on those issues that are pertinent to architecture, in particular, and with some broad rules of morality and guidelines of proper conduct which may or may not be directly related to architecture. Upon such a divine outlook and general principles and guidelines Muslims are invited to establish architectural theories, systems and styles that are consistent with both their religious preferences and the requirements of their diverse eras, geographic regions, cultures and other practical needs. Islamic architecture is a symbiosis between constancy, which is represented by the constant innate inclinations of essential human nature and the heavenly guidelines and rules meant for it, and inconstancy, which is

necessitated and controlled by the time and space factors. It is the latter that changes while the former is continual and remains firm.

Indeed, this is the thrust of Islamic architecture's powerful identity. Due to it, Islamic architecture was able to rise above the precincts of the geographic and cultural contexts in which it was planted. Due to it, furthermore, Islamic architecture was able to transcend the restrictions of the historical moments during which it was fashioned outliving the generations of its engineers, craftsmen and users. Islamic architecture with the ideals that it personifies dominates its people and their thinking patterns. It is never the case that the people subjugate to their personal interests and wishes, and control the world of Islamic architecture. When that happens, that spells out a drastic degeneration of Islamic architecture which can lead to its end.

Islamic architecture likewise enlightens and inspires. Some of its facets can be inspired by a fine and purified vision, philosophy and thought approved by the Islamic consciousness which are then fully Islamized and made subservient to the same Islamic consciousness. However, no segment of Islamic architecture that can be inspired by such ideas and attitudes that stem from the sources that are contradictory to the source from which Islamic architecture originates, that is, revelation in the forms of the Qur'an and the *sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). Such would be a blasphemous act and an act of gross injustice towards the Muslim users of the concerned segments of architecture.

Islamic architecture declined, struggling to retain its conspicuous identity, only when its two defining aspects were traded, that is, when the sacred in Islamic architecture became compromised and was regarded as a transient and man-generated legacy, and when either a building system or a style of an age or a geographic region became excessively venerated and was regarded as a sole inspiration and guidance, or when a complete detachment from the religion of Islam and its civilization occurred and an inspiration and guidance were sought from foreign sources. It follows that successfully reviving the real meaning and vigor of Islamic architecture depends on properly conceptualizing its basic notions and its ideological framework, which then must be followed by finding and actualizing appropriate strategies and methods for it.

The roles of the Qur'an and the Prophet's *sunnah* in shaping the identity of Islamic architecture are as follows:

1. The Qur'an and *sunnah* afford a perfect guidance on how Muslims are to perceive the creating, using and possessing of architecture. Such is an integral part of the total Islamic worldview. The two holy sources also educate on the importance of architecture and its purpose in life. The goals of architecture are seen as closely linked to man's life purpose and goals, and are treated as such. The two in fact complement each other.
2. The Qur'an and *sunnah* afford sets of general values and principles which are central to the body of Islamic architecture: from the ideological and abstract aspects concerning the philosophy of Islamic architecture to the practical and tangible ones concerning the functions of many of its components. If one expects to find in either the Qur'an or the *sunnah* a concrete formula for designing a dwelling or a mosque, for example, one is then seriously misguided.
3. The Qur'an and *sunnah* with their approach to architecture serve as an everlasting source of inspiration and a catalyst for matchless ingenuity. And the two notions: inspiration and ingenuity, are fundamental to every successful architectural story. For instance, the Qur'an and *sunnah* do not speak about how to design a house entrance and windows, but they speak about the issues which are pertinent to the subject of the house entrance and windows. Nor do they speak how to organize inner spaces inside a house, but they speak about many issues which are related to that particular subject. Nor do they speak about the ways mosques are to be designed, but they speak about mosque activities and many other issues that are pertinent to the mosque and so must be considered when designing mosques. Nor do they speak about how to make buildings environment friendly, but they are very much eloquent about the meaning and significance of the environment and our many duties towards and rights over it. Nor do they speak about how to make buildings perfectly safe, secure and clean, but they are categorical in establishing safety, security and cleanliness among the most important principles in Islam.

These are only some examples where the contents of the Qur'an and *sunnah* can function as the sources of inspiration and the catalysts for creativity. This however is to be seen as

just a starting point from where a Muslim architect sets off to express himself architecturally and create such architectural forms that he deems most suitable insofar as his spiritual inclinations and life interests are concerned, using the same divine guidance as a point of reference for authorization whenever an architectural accomplishment is made. This divine arrangement renders the idea of Islamic architecture ever alive and applicable. It also signifies Allah's acknowledgment of the talent and potential possessed by man, Allah's vicegerent on earth, which, after all, are Allah-given.

4. The Qur'an and *sunnah*, apart from being a divine guidance, also serve as a powerful restraining force every time people develop a tendency to lose their way and start using architecture as both a means of and field for committing certain evil practices. Since architecture is a powerful and effective medium for expressing ideas, status, reputation, personal and social achievements, etc., it has a potential to be both abused and misused at the hands of its designers, patrons, builders and users, proportionately to the extent of their deviational tendencies. Hence, in Islam such wrongdoings as squandering and extravagance, showing off, arrogance, ungratefulness, greed, jealousy, corruption, discriminating against people and immoral competition, all of which can easily find a breeding ground in an erroneous architectural vision and style, are regarded as grave sins punishable by severe punishments on the Day of Judgment.
5. The Qur'an and *sunnah* speak of many examples of some past nations' experiences in relation to quite a few aspects of architecture, thus furnishing us with many invaluable lessons. Those examples cover virtually the total human history from the first man and prophet on earth, Adam, to the events related to the prophetic mission of the second last prophet, 'Isa (Jesus). The examples of past nations' experiences at times focus on believers and at other times on the wicked. The two threads are interwoven into what is called the historical aspect of the Qur'anic *mu'jizah*, the miracle or sensation. The Qur'an proclaims: "There is, in their stories, instruction (lesson) for men endued with understanding. It is not a tale invented, but a confirmation of

what went before it, a detailed exposition of all things, and a guide and mercy to any such as believe.” (Yusuf, 111)

6. The *sunnah* and to a much lesser extent the Qur’an shed light on how the Islamic broad vision of architecture, and the notion of development in general, was translated onto reality when Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and the first generation of Muslims developed the city of Madinah, the prototype Islamic city, from an oasis with a few loosely interrelated settlements to a cohesive and dynamic city. Undoubtedly, this is the most comprehensive and at the same time emphatic dimension of the *sunnah* and somewhat the Qur’an in their capacity as the foundation of Islamic architecture. In it, one can find something on virtually every aspect of the true character of Islamic architecture, either explicitly or implicitly. This was the case because notwithstanding its simplicity, the physical form of the city of Madinah presented to the Prophet (pbuh) and the first Muslims the first physical locus of the first actualization of the Islamic message. The experiences of the Prophet (pbuh) and those around him thus overflow with lessons on a wide selection of issues relating to architecture. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was a universal personality and so must be taken as an excellent example in all matters: “You have indeed in the Messenger of Allah an excellent exemplar for him who hopes in Allah and the Final Day, and who remember Allah much.” (al-Ahzab, 21)

The roles of the Qur’an and the Prophet’s *sunnah* in shaping the identity of Islamic architecture can be summarized in the following concepts: education, guidance, inspiration, thrust, point of reference and contentment. It follows that any recipe for reviving Islamic architecture must address firstly the subject of the Qur’an and *sunnah* as the conceptual base, which will then be followed by mastering the building technology and engineering of the day, and by duly answering the requirements of the general circumstances of a given age and a geographic zone.⁴

The house and the institutional ideological dichotomy

⁴ Spahic Omer, *Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and Islamic Architecture*, <http://www.islamonline.com>.

The house in Islam is not just a shelter or a place to relax and unwind. To regard the house as no more than that would be tantamount to a slur on both the all-inclusive message of Islam and the phenomenon of the house which Islam perceives as a principal blessing bestowed upon man. Possessing a house is thus one of the fundamental human rights in Islam. The opposite, that is, to live with no roof over one's head, is deemed as a major ailment which both a person and a society in which he lives must constantly put up with. There could be no more adverse condition for a person than homelessness. It begets the worst problems for the homeless people and also for their surroundings. It begets all the negative elements which stand at the diametrically opposite side of those positive elements which the house as a family development center and a microcosm of culture and civilization can generate.

In Islam, the house is an institution that has a clear mission, vision and orientation. Not just possessing houses but also rearing the favorable socio-political and economic conditions where planning, building and acquiring suitable, functional and affordable houses would be a norm, does Islam see as very crucial. In other words, Islamic housing signifies a multidisciplinary and multi-levelled process where all the tiers, phases and aspects are equally important. It is almost impossible to identify a tier, or a phase, or an aspect in that process and consider it more important than the others. The Islamic housing process starts with having a proper understanding and vision which leads to making a right intention. It continues with the planning, designing and building stages, and ends with attaining the net results and how people make use of and benefit from them. Islamic housing is a fine blend of all these factors which are interwoven throughout the entire process with the treads of the belief system, principles, teachings and values of Islam.

Islam promotes a housing culture that will from the initial phase of planning to the final phase of using houses typify much of what Islam stands for, given the amount of time people normally spend at home which, in turn, evokes the inexhaustible potential the house has for ingeniously diversifying and intensifying its roles and functions. The same housing culture, furthermore, will promote and facilitate to Muslims the realization of their most gracious vicegerency mission on earth. Muslim houses function as the physical locus of, or a launching pad for, the fulfilment of much of such a mission.

However, since the house in Islam is an institution which hand-in-hand with other societal institutions and establishments spurs Islamic society towards a cultural and civilizational excellence, there must exist the highest level of mutual understanding, cooperation and support between the house and other institutions and establishments in society. The success of a society depends on the success of the functions of its major institutions and establishments, the house institution leading the way, and how closely they cooperate and support each other in achieving the goals of the society. Conversely, the breakdown of a society is linked with the breakdown and lethargy of the functions of its major institutions and establishments, the house institution again leading the way, and how far they are alienated from each other in terms of their societal commitments and responsibilities. If there is a dichotomy, or a conflict, either at an ideological or a practical plane, in the services those institutions and establishments render to society and its people, that connotes that such a society is one without a clear orientation, purpose, vision, system and strategy. In such a society, the hardly procured, and sometimes scarce, resources, energy, skills and competence went wasted and abused. Because they are used for a set of different, often conflicting, objectives and agendas, with differing and incompatible protagonists in the game, they, at best, failed to generate the impact that was anticipated, or that would definitely have been generated if the valued resources, energy, skills and competence were utilized for a unified purpose, by a unified and concerted effort and strategy, and at the hands of compatible, truthful and dedicated individuals.

This means, for example, that there is something chronically wrong in a Muslim society where the purpose, mission and functions of the house are not in the vein of, or worse yet, are at odds or clash with, the purpose, mission and functions of the educational institutions of the same society. Apart from education, the same code applies to the rest of the segments of society: business, politics, the media, leisure and entertainment. That means, furthermore, that there is something fatally wrong if Muslims in their societies are exposed to, taught and made to duly subscribe at home to the worldview of Islam and its system of values and moral principles, but no sooner do they step outside from the domain of their houses and subject themselves to the direct influences of the domains of the other sectors of society, than they become exposed to and

aggressively bombarded with the promotional or actual elements of other alien-to-Islam worldviews and life systems.

The children, the main target of our educational and training efforts, and the future standard-bearers of society's development, are more than anybody else susceptible to falling prey to this perilous state of affairs. If they are taught or trained something at home, but outside it they are taught, trained or aggressively exposed to something else, which however conflicts and is incompatible with the former, the children's fragile, subtle and embryonic mind will suffer. Although they will be able, hopefully, to distinguish between the truth of Islam and the falsehood, remaining faithfully committed to the former, the free existence, coupled with a freer propagation, of quite a few types and manifestations of the falsehood alongside the banner of Islam, all vying against each other for an ultimate triumph, supremacy and dominance, would prove too much to bear for so many nascent minds. Many will eventually crack, albeit inadvertently, under the strain of being persistently targeted by the agents of diverse, but contradictory, ideas, philosophies and dogmas. Widespread confusion, cynicism, indifference and mediocrity, and occasional cases of outright apostasy and blasphemy, on the one hand, and frequent cases of deadening religious formalism, bigotry, fanaticism and extremism, on the other, are some of the chief psychological and spiritual disorders that Muslim societies will have to suffer as a result of the mentioned institutional ideological dichotomy, if such is allowed to be established and to thrive. In short, Islam at home alone is not enough for completely transforming, correcting and bringing forward Muslim societies, especially if there is a powerful active presence of some anti-Islamic forces inside the societal spheres other than the housing sphere. An institutional ideological unison, cohesion and collaboration, rather than a conflict and dichotomy, is the key for the progress of Muslims and their societies, with Islamic housing playing a markedly decisive role in the process.

It goes without saying, therefore, that the best and most ideal scenario would be that the quintessence of what the Muslim children in Muslim societies learn and are exposed to at home, is the quintessence of what they learn and are exposed to in schools, shopping centers, through the media, on the street, etc. Striving towards making this scenario a tangible and total reality, in point of fact, denotes no more than striving towards the dutifully discharging of our duties towards the children whom Allah has entrusted to us. To

do otherwise would mean but a betrayal of Allah's trust upon us, and the betrayal of the faith that children have placed in us in matters pertaining to their growth and maturity: physical, psychological, intellectual and spiritual.

Finally, the institutional ideological dichotomy, which is here strongly repudiated, is by no means synonymous with the impartial and scientific exposure of the Muslim youth to other ideologies, religions and worldviews, which, as a matter of fact, is highly recommended to be promoted and integrated in Muslim educational systems. That is for the sake of enriching and broadening the minds of the Muslim youth, as well as for the sake of instilling in them a sense of understanding, tolerance and respect for others, which, at the same time, is bound to cause them to become far better grounded in Islam and more understanding and appreciative of their own Islamic religious experiences. They will then become a more pragmatic, sensible and productive lot. Their genuine contributions not only to the cause of Islam and Muslims, but also to the universal causes of man and mankind, will considerably increase too. Indeed, an institutional ideological cohesion and unison warrant a success to Muslims at all the planes of their existence. The opposite, i.e., an institutional ideological dichotomy, warrants a failure and hopelessness also at all the planes of the existence of Muslims.

The house as a family development center

One of the prime lessons of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in housing was the one that the house is to function as a family development center. This lesson was clearly spelled out once the Prophet (pbuh) had arrived with the rest of migrants (*muhajirun*) from Makkah to Madinah, and once the development of the city-state of Madinah got under way.

The first urban element that the Prophet (pbuh) created was his mosque, the principal mosque in Madinah and the second most important mosque on earth after the Ka'bah in Makkah, which since its inception functioned as a community development center. In terms of its form, the mosque was very simple. It consisted of an enclosure with walls made of mud bricks and an arcade on the *qiblah* side (towards Makkah) made of palm-trunks used as columns to support a roof of palm-leaves and mud. There were initially three entrances which pierced the east, west and southern walls. The fourth, i.e., the

northern, wall was the *qiblah* side facing the al-Masjid al-Aqsa – the first *qiblah* that lasted about one year and a few months. However, as the *qiblah* was changed to face south towards Makkah, the southern entrance was subsequently bricked up and a new one on the northern side pierced. Before the *qiblah* change there was, in all likelihood, no roofed area in the mosque, but after the change an arcade on the southern side facing Makkah was created. There was no decoration or ornamentation of any kind within or without the mosque.

The following is a standard description of the Prophet's mosque as given by most scholars: "In the construction method a stone foundation was laid to a depth of three cubits⁵ (about 1.50 meters). On top of that adobe, walls 75 cm. wide were built. The mosque was shaded by erecting palm trunks and wooden cross beams covered with palm leaves and stalks. On the *qiblah* direction, there were three porticoes, each portico had six pillars. On the rear part of the mosque, there was a shade, where the homeless *Muhajireen* took refuge. The height of the roof of the mosque was equal to the height of a man, i.e. about 3.5 cubits (about 1.75 meters)."⁶

Its unpretentious and rudimentary structure notwithstanding, the Prophet's mosque from the very first day served as a community development center quickly evolving into a multifunctional complex. It was meant not only for performing prayers at formally appointed times, but also for scores of other religious, social, political and administrative functions. The main roles performed by the mosque were as follows: a center for congregational worship practices, a learning center, the seat of the Prophet's government, a welfare and charity center, a detention and rehabilitation center, a place for medical treatment and nursing, and a place for some leisure activities.⁷

The Prophet's mosque was the nerve-center of the wide spectrum of the activities and aspirations of the fast emerging Islamic community (*Ummah*). So eventful and bustling with life was the Prophet's mosque that after several years of existence it started to show signs that it could no longer comfortably accommodate the ever growing number of worshipers, especially on Fridays. It therefore had

⁵ One cubit is about 50 cm.

⁶ Abbas Hamid, *Story of the Great Expansion*, (Jeddah: Saudi Bin Ladin Group, 1996), p. 226.

⁷ Spahic Omer, *The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and Urbanization of Madinah*, (Kuala Lumpur: International Islamic University Malaysia, 2005), p. 61-81.

to be enlarged, which the Prophet (pbuh) did following the conquest of Khaybar in the 7th year after the migration. At first the mosque measured about 35 meters X 35 meters. After the enlargement, it measured about 50 meters X 50 meters.

The structural enlargement of the mosque was the culmination of a process whereby the physical set-up and shape of the mosque was constantly undergoing sets of changes. This was so because since the people's social roles and responsibilities, and so their built environment requirements, were increasing, the functions of the mosque were multiplying, as an answer to those requirements, in turn calling for some noteworthy structural improvements in the mosque's original austere form. It is a fundamental tenet in architecture, by the way, that the three elements: people's needs, the function and form of their buildings are inseparable, interlaced, and in the same order, they call for and sustain each other. At the outset, the Prophet's mosque was very simple because its initial roles following the migration were simple. And the mosque's roles were simple because the Muslim community in Madinah was in its infancy slowly growing and its undertakings gradually expanding.

Thus, during the Prophet's time, his mosque evolved from a simple roofless and plain enclosure to a complex institution that featured, among other elements, a roofed section, a pavement outside one of its entrances, a *minbar* (pulpit) and a *dakkah* or *dukkan* (seat, bench) for communication purposes, lamps as a means for lighting up the mosque, several compartments that facilitated the various social functions of the mosque, a person or persons whose job was to keep the mosque clean, and so forth.

However, for the Islamic society to succeed and prosper – then, as well as now, and in every time and space – it was not sufficient for the mosque alone to pull the strings as regards the enlightening and developing the human resources of the community. The supplementary roles of other societal institutions, the roles of the house institution in particular, are essential. No societal institution that is larger than the society itself. Although the house and mosque institutions are most vital, all the institutions and establishments in a society must perform and rise to the challenge of developing, sustaining and defending that society in all the relevant fields, but especially in the educational, ideological, spiritual and psychological fields. Society is an organic entity where all its constituents depend on and draw its orientation and strength from each other. The

success lies in unity, alliance and harmony. The failure, conversely, lies in conflict, division and degeneration.

The unity of the Islamic society and the hierarchy of all of its institutions and organizations: their respective philosophies, visions and missions, only reflect and reverberate the unity and universality of the Islamic message which targets as much society as individuals. Islam with its unique *tawhidic* (the idea of Allah's Oneness) worldview champions that Muslims are brothers and sisters to each other. Their similitude is like a wall whose bricks enforce and rely on each other. They are like a solid cemented structure held together in unity and strength, each part contributing strength in its own way, and the whole held together not like a mass, but like a living organism. Muslims, furthermore, are related to each other in such a way that if one of them (a part of an organic and formidable formation called *Ummah*, the Community) is troubled by a difficulty or a disorder of any kind and degree, the rest of the body parts will remain worried and restless until the matter became completely and fairly solved.⁸

It was for this reason that the Prophet's mosque inevitably became the first urban element the Prophet (pbuh) and the first Muslims had built after they had embarked on the project of transforming and developing Madinah from an area which heretofore was called *Yathrib* and which consisted of several loosely interrelated unpretentious settlements, to a complex, multi-functional and dynamic urban entity. The mosque functioned as the center of gravity in the affairs and developments instigated and flavored by the aspirations and goals of the new Madinah community. It was the nerve center of the city-state of Madinah. In the mosque, every idea and initiative in connection with the future of Islam and Muslims took off, and once realized, returned to the same source or authority for the final endorsement and approval.

No sooner had the building of the Prophet's mosque been completed than the people started building their houses in closest proximity to it, under the Prophet's supervision. The Prophet (pbuh) himself was involved in allotting and marking out many houses. Quite a long list of such houses, both their locations and owners, is supplied by some historians.⁹ Likewise, the Prophet (pbuh) may have been involved in some way in planning and building some houses as

⁸ Al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Kitab al-Adab, Hadith No. 5552.

⁹ Al-Samhudi, *Wafa' al-Wafa*, (Beirut: Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, 1997), vol. 2 p. 717-734.

well.¹⁰ Such was the impact of the institutional complex of the Prophet's mosque on the development of Madinah that the core of the city eventually grew to be just about ring-shaped centering round the complex. Following in the footsteps of the Prophet (pbuh) and the prototype Islamic city of Madinah, most Islamic cities throughout Muslim history are known to have been more or less ring-shaped. In those cities, their principal mosques occupied the central position, both in the morphological and serviceable sense, followed by the housing areas that normally clustered around the mosques.

Some of the houses that were built around the Prophet's mosque were so close to it that some walls of the mosque functioned at the same time as the walls of some sections of the houses concerned. The walls shared between the mosque and the houses the people even perforated in order to create small wickets (*khawkhah*) in them, which served as doors through which the people used to enter the mosque. In one of his accounts, the Prophet (pbuh) is reported to have once close to his death ordered that all the house doors that opened directly into the mosque proper be closed. However, he exempted the doors of Abu Bakr and Ali b. Abi Talib from the ruling. It is generally believed that exempting the house door of Abu Bakr from closing was an unmistakable hint that he will succeed the Prophet (pbuh) as his caliph, or successor, and the leader of the Muslims. Ali b. Abi Talib was exempted from closing his door that opened directly onto the mosque area because his house had no other door.¹¹

The close proximity between the Prophet's mosque and people's houses symbolized their decisive and mutually complementing societal roles. Indeed, one cannot perform to its utmost potential without the other. It does not really matter which one: the mosque and its role, or the house and its role, comes first and which one comes second in terms of their importance, but the performances and achievements of one of them, certainly, once fulfilled, are further refined, enhanced and even brought to another level within the confines of the other.

The mosque institution can fully function as a community development center only when the house institution plays the role of a supplier of quality "materials" to the mosque; when the house plays

¹⁰ Ibid., vol. 2 p. 489.

¹¹ Ibid., vol. 1 p. 471.

the role of an active supporter and promoter of the mosque's mission, as well as the role of a cherisher and the first institution that will embrace and put into practice the mosque's initiatives and its achieved end results; and, finally, when the house plays the role of an active and equal "partner" in fulfilling the sets of goals which correspond not only with the goals of the mosque, but also with each and every body in the hierarchy of societal bodies, organizations and institutions.

Similarly, the house can fully function as a family development center only if there exists the mosque institution that spearheads and dominates the realms of other public institutions, all of them possessing the same direction, mission, spirit and vigor as those embodied by the house institution. This way, people's movement or transition from the private realm of their houses to the realms of other public institutions and bodies will be a smooth and fruitful one. There will be no such thing as shocking, repulsive or even regressing experiences in people once they step beyond the domains of their houses and get into contact with the forces of the outside world. People will be then assured that the values and principles which they subscribe to, espouse and observe at home are the same values and principles as outside it, and are just being cultivated at different levels, by different means and with different intensity. This will be so because those values and principles of the outside world are presided over, first and foremost, by the authority of the mosque institution and the authority of the Islamic message which the former exemplifies.

This state of affairs, undoubtedly, will generate in people a sense of composure, self-esteem, enthusiasm, strength and desire to become as positive and constructive players in the development of society as possible, and to contribute greatly and sincerely towards the realization of its mission and vision which, as a matter of fact, will mirror people's own and their families' life mission and vision. And frankly speaking -- when all's said and done -- only in case of an institutional ideological harmony and collaboration, and not dichotomy and conflict, in a society, will it be fair and reasonable to ask the people to wholeheartedly listen, obey and set out to put in their expected share in the long and demanding community building and sustaining process. By the same token, only then will it be fair and reasonable to ask the people to unreservedly commit themselves to safeguarding their society and the ideals upon which it rests against

both internal and external threats, sacrificing in the process many of their personal whims, interests and, if necessary, lives.

As far as the position of the Prophet's houses is concerned, it is a common belief that they stood against the outer side of the eastern wall of the Prophet's mosque. The wall was between the mosque and the houses. The mosque's eastern wall formed the western wall of the houses. The doors of the houses opened into the mosque proper. In total, there were nine houses.

However, some accounts suggest that the Prophet's houses concentrated not only on the eastern side of the mosque. Rather, they were located either on all the mosque's sides, except the western one, or on the eastern and northern sides of the mosque only.¹² Such might have been the arrangement of the Prophet's houses - the sizes of which varied, yet all were as spacious as needed for living a decent and convenient family life - that they did not necessarily form a regular row against the mosque's eastern wall and have not been standardized in terms of their form and appearance. Some of them were attached to the mosque, while the others might have been somewhat standing apart, some more and some less.¹³ The possibility that one house stood between the mosque and another house -- that is to say, the latter did not stand directly next to the mosque -- could not be utterly precluded either, more so if we accept that all the nine houses were positioned on the mosque's eastern side only, which was for about the first seven years of the mosque's existence just about 30 to 35 meters long, and then after the first mosque enlargement about 50 meters long. In other words, to imagine nine houses aligned with the mosque wall, which was only 50 meters when longest -- not counting some passageways between the houses, as well as an entrance with a kind of pavement (*balat*) big enough for some beasts to be fastened, and for a death penalty by stoning to be carried out, on it --¹⁴ is, to all intents and purposes, quite difficult and even impossible. But then again, our concern does not only raise the prospect of having the Prophet's houses arranged against the mosque's eastern wall in such a way that some of them did not border the mosque, but also makes the other scenario, i.e., that the Prophet's houses were situated on more than just one side of the mosque, appear quite strongly as a realistic

¹² Al-Samhudi, *Wafa' al-Wafa*, vol. 2 p. 459.

¹³ *Ibid.*, vol. 2 p. 460.

¹⁴ Al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Kitab al-Jihad, Hadith No. 113; Kitab al-Hudud, Hadith No. 6320.

proposition. There is even a suggestion -- surely in order to accommodate the above-raised objections -- that the Prophet's houses stood on the eastern side of the mosque only. They were in a row, but because they needed more space than what the size of the mosque which they abutted was offering, about four or five houses in that row extended beyond the northern boundary of the mosque.¹⁵

Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani even stated, on the authority of Ibn Bital and Ibn Habib, that *Musalla al-Jana'iz* (a vast plain area designated for offering Funerary prayers) bordered the mosque proper on its eastern side where the Prophet's nine houses are supposed to have existed.¹⁶ The word *lasiq* (literally adhesive, agglutinative, sticking, etc.) used by Ibn Hajar to indicate the position of *Musalla al-Jana'iz vis-à-vis* the mosque, could signify nothing but that the two stood next to each other with nothing standing between them. Without a doubt, this account further adds to the complexity that surrounds the contention that all the houses of the Prophet (pbuh) adjoined the eastern side of the Prophet's mosque only.¹⁷

Certainly, the virtual integration of the Prophet's houses with his mosque, as well as their closest proximity to the people and their own houses, implied the Prophet's utmost care, vigilance and guardianship insofar as leading, educating and closely monitoring the spiritual and civilizational growth of the Muslims was concerned. Since he also was the head of the city-state of Madinah, the position of the Prophet's houses *vis-à-vis* his mosque and the people's houses also signified the need for a powerful presence of the notions of transparency, accountability, accessibility and mutual understanding and respect between leaders and people, the factors that are perhaps most pivotal in ensuring the success of any government, its citizens and their civilizational agenda.

Failing to come fully to terms with the nature of the relationship between the Prophet's mosque as the Madinah community development center, and the Prophet's abutting houses as his family development centers, as well as failing to grasp the mutually supporting and complementing roles of the mosque and the house as the two major social institutions in Islam, quite a number of scholars,

¹⁵ Muhammad Ilyas Abd al-Ghani, *History of Madinah Munawwarah*, (Madinah: al-Rasheed Printers, 2003), p. 93.

¹⁶ Ibn Hajar Al-'Asqalani, *Fath al-Bari bi Sharh Sahih al-Bukhari*, (Cairo: Maktabah al-Kulliyah al-Azhariyyah, 1978), vol. 6 p. 243.

¹⁷ Spahic Omer, *The Origins and Functions of Islamic Domestic Courtyards*, p. 101-102.

when studied the theme of the Prophet's mosque and his houses, felt compelled to erroneously conclude that the mosque complex and the Prophet's adjoining houses, in fact, functioned initially only as the Prophet's residential complex with the mosque's vast courtyard serving as no more than the Prophet's domestic courtyard. There was no such thing as the Prophet's mosque at all. The mosque as an independent social entity evolved from the Prophet's residential complex after a while. For example, Enderlein Volkmar wrote: "This was where Muhammad received guests, who left their camels in the courtyard. It was only gradually that the courtyard became a special place where the faithful assembled for prayer."¹⁸

While dwelling on the same subject matter, Creswell went further and did not even call the Prophet's mosque as such. Rather, he only talked about "Muhammad's house" which encompassed the whole area with all of its compartments. To him, even after the Prophet's death, the place was yet to be transformed into a mosque, in spite of the collective worship activities that had been carried out in it for years. Creswell wrote: "...No further change had taken place in Muhammad's house at the time of his death on 8 June 632 AC / 11 AH. He was buried in the room which he had occupied in his lifetime. His house had not yet become a mosque and its transformation to such was by no means a rapid process. It apparently remained a house long after his death, for Abu Bakr, on being elected *Khalif*, or Successor, made use of it in the same way as Muhammad himself. It was still a house in 35 AH / 655 AC, when the Khalif Uthman was murdered there, in the room next to that in which the Prophet lay buried."¹⁹ According to Creswell, the full transformation of the house to a mosque was completed only in 55 AH / 674 AC, forty two years after the Prophet's death.²⁰

As a lesson to his followers, the Prophet's houses functioned as his family development centers. This legacy of the Prophet (pbuh) and his household, Muslims are obliged to keep up and emulate. As an illustration, Allah instructed the Prophet's wives, who primarily were in charge of the houses, to stay at home without making a

¹⁸ Enderlein Volkmar, "Syria and Palestine: the Umayyad Caliphate", in "Islam: Art and Architecture", edited by Markus Hattstein and Peter Delius, (Cologne: Konemann, 2000), p. 67. See also: Robert Hillenbrand, *Islamic Art and Architecture*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999), p. 15. K.A.C. Creswell, *A Short Account of Early Muslim Architecture*, (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1989), p. 4.

¹⁹ K.A.C. Creswell, *A Short Account of Early Muslim Architecture*, p. 5-6.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

dazzling display, like that of the former times of ignorance, to establish regular prayers, give charity and obey Allah and His Messenger, and to accept, practice and promulgate the Qur'an and the Prophet's *sunnah* that are rehearsed to them in their houses. (al-Ahzab, 33-34) The unparalleled services of the Prophet's wives to the early Islamic community were on the basis of the activities mentioned in the verses above, which at a first glance appeared to be confined to the house realm only. The reality, however, was much different. The impact of the social services of the Prophet's wives was such that it extended beyond their houses and to some of the furthest frontiers of the public issues, interests and concerns.

Since the Prophet (pbuh) was Allah's messenger to people, everything pertaining to his divinely inspired and administered lifestyle, including his family and the houses where they all conducted their exemplary lives, was an abounding source of inspiration, knowledge and guidance to the people. The Prophet's houses to the Muslims were the beacons of eternal hope and light. Such was the role of the Prophet's wives, who were the care-takers, guardians or the shepherds inside his houses, that the Qur'an calls them the Mothers of believers (*Ummahat al-Mu'minin*), (al-Ahzab, 6). Due to their extraordinary stature and role in society, even the Prophet (pbuh) used to consult some of his wives in some of his most delicate worldly matters and situations. After the Prophet (pbuh), his wives are ranked as the greatest teachers to the Muslim community.

The Prophet (pbuh) once even said that the members of his family (*ahl al-bayt*), together with the Holy Qur'an, constitute the two things which he will leave behind, and which, if people follow them, will never lead them astray.²¹ In another tradition of his, however, the Prophet (pbuh) mentioned that the two things which he will leave to people to follow, lest they go astray, are the Holy Qur'an and his *sunnah* (traditions and way of life).²²

These two statements of the Prophet (pbuh) not only do not contradict each other, but also greatly support and explain each other. The Prophet's *sunnah*, as a way of life, was perfectly typified by each and every member of his household, certainly more than by anyone else, due to their constant closeness to the Prophet (pbuh) which allowed them to be the immediate, and often first, recipients of

²¹ Al-Tirmidhi, *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, Kitab al-Manaqib 'an Rasulillah, Hadith No. 3720.

²² Malik b. Anas, *Muwatta' Malik b. Anas*, Kitab al-Jami', Hadith No. 1395.

his knowledge, wisdom and counsel. That qualified them to become the legitimate sources of the Islamic jurisprudence, as well as the ideal exemplars to be emulated by the succeeding generations of Muslims. Hence, the way of life of the members of the Prophet's family, spirituality-wise, was in so many ways the way of life of the Prophet (pbuh) himself. Talking about the way of life of the Prophet's family members is tantamount to talking about the way of life (*sunnah*) of the Prophet (pbuh). This status of the Prophet's family members was possible, principally, because of the successful functioning of the Prophet's family as an institution and his houses as family education and development centers. At any rate, however, in the two above mentioned traditions of the Prophet (pbuh), it is meant that the Holy Qur'an, first, the Prophet's *sunnah*, second, and then the members of the Prophet's household, and also all the companions of the Prophet (pbuh), are the guarantors that a person or a society that sticks to them will not go astray.

Let us take A'ishah, one of the Prophet's wives, as an example. It is generally said about A'ishah that she was always demonstrating a character of exceptional merits. "She was brought up in a home of learning. Her father, Abu Bakr, excelled in genealogy, which was given special importance in the Arabian tribal society. When A'ishah arrived in the Prophet's home, she soon realized that it was a home of superior knowledge and great wisdom. The Qur'an mentions that every prophet who preached Allah's message among his own people was granted a high degree of knowledge and wisdom. That was necessary for them to discharge the mission assigned to them. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was Allah's last messenger, whom He sent to all mankind and whose message was to provide guidance to humanity for the rest of time. Hence, the knowledge and wisdom granted to him had to be exceptional.

Since A'ishah was endowed with sharp intelligence and an excellent memory, she learned much from the Prophet (pbuh). She was to become one of the major scholars who transmitted Islamic knowledge after the Prophet (pbuh) had passed away. Indeed, many consider her to be the top scholar of the period. She was the first point of reference concerning the *hadith* and the practical *sunnah*. We have reports mentioning that a number of the more distinguished figures among the Prophet's companions used to consult her about the division of property after a person's death. This is one of the most detailed branches of Islamic law, because of the endless variety of

situations that exist in human society. Later scholars were unanimous in praising her knowledge, giving her one of the most distinguished positions in this respect.”²³

Some scholars went so far as to say that after the Prophet’s death, the house of A’ishah functioned as a school and an academy, so to speak. Not only in *fiqh* or Islamic jurisprudence did A’ishah excel, but also in many other knowledge fields including medicine and poetry. The following has been stated in an on-line encyclopedia on Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) concerning A’ishah and her intellectual acumen: “Many of the learned companions of the Prophet and their followers benefited from A’ishah’s knowledge. Abu Musa al-Ash’ari once said: “If we companions of the Messenger of Allah had any difficulty on a matter, we asked A’ishah about it.”

Her nephew, Urwah, asserts that she was proficient not only in *fiqh* but also in medicine (*tibb*) and poetry. Many of the senior companions of the Prophet came to her to ask for advice concerning questions of inheritance which required a highly skilled mathematical mind. Scholars regard her as one of the earliest *fuqaha* (jurists) of Islam along with persons like Umar ibn al-Khattab, Ali and Abdullah ibn Abbas. The Prophet, referring to her extensive knowledge of Islam, is reported to have said: “Learn a portion of your religion (*din*) from this red colored lady.” “*Humayra*” meaning “Red-coloured” was an epithet given to A’ishah by the Prophet.

A’ishah not only possessed great knowledge but took an active part in education and social reform. As a teacher she had a clear and persuasive manner of speech and her power of oratory has been described in superlative terms by al-Ahnaf who said: “I have heard speeches of Abu Bakr and Umar, Uthman and Ali and the *Khulafa’* (Caliphs) up to this day, but I have not heard speech more persuasive and more beautiful from the mouth of any person than from the mouth of A’ishah.”

Men and women came from far and wide to benefit from her knowledge. The number of women is said to have been greater than that of men. Besides answering enquiries, she took boys and girls, some of them orphans, into her custody and trained them under her care and guidance. This was in addition to her relatives who received instruction from her. Her house thus became a school and an academy.

²³ *A’ishah: a Scholar with Insight*, <http://www.islamonline.com>.

Some of her students were outstanding. We have already mentioned her nephew Urwah as a distinguished reporter of *hadith*. Among her women pupils is the name of Umrah bint Abdur Rahman. She is regarded by scholars as one of the trustworthy narrators of *hadith* and is said to have acted as A'ishah's secretary receiving and replying to letters addressed to her. The example of A'ishah in promoting education and in particular the education of Muslim women in the laws and teachings of Islam is one which needs to be followed."²⁴

Moreover, the Prophet (pbuh) is reported to have once declared that every single person is a shepherd, a guardian or a care-taker (*ra'in*) and is thus responsible for his or her herd (*ra'iyyah*), that is to say, for what he or she has been entrusted with.²⁵ While man is responsible for the total needs and overall condition of the family, woman is responsible for the way the house functions. Although the roles of man and woman are complementary and are very much interlaced, their respective scopes, where each one of them leads the way, are clearly outlined. As far as woman is concerned, her primary role rests within the realm of the house, the role for which she more than anybody else is answerable to Allah. There is no contribution or service to society which woman can undertake that is able to offset the damage which woman's negligence or compromise of her contributions or services to society through the house institution can generate.

Undoubtedly, both man and woman can, and under certain circumstances are even encouraged to, expand and diversify their respective contributions and services to society. They are to share the burdens of serving Allah and advancing society. They are to help each other. They are to be partners in discharging their respective dimensions of the vicegerency (*khilafah*) project on earth. Once a man asked A'ishah, one of the Prophet's wives, whether the Prophet (pbuh) was doing (helping) anything at home. She replied: "Yes, Allah's Messenger used to mend his own shoes, sew his own clothes, and was doing all the things you people do in your houses."²⁶

However, for woman the house and her family remain her first and biggest priority. Everything else comes as a second pick. Woman's contributions and services to society outside the house

²⁴ *The Life of A'ishah - a Role Model for all Women*, <http://www.rasoulallah.net>.

²⁵ Al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 3, Book 46, Hadith No. 730.

²⁶ Ahmad b. Hanbal, *Musnad Ahmad b. Hanbal*, Baqi Musnad al-Ansar, Hadith No. 25039.

domain must not have a negative bearing on her duties and performances at home. The performance of the house as a family development center by no means can be compromised because there is so much at stake. As said earlier, the future of a society depends on the ways its family and house institutions function. Hence, as soon as woman's involvements outside her house start having a negative affect on her performances at home, her outside involvements become doubtful. In the worst scenario, neglecting the institutions of the house and family could mean for a family concerned a spiritual suicide. It could mean, furthermore, that the people not only failed to guard themselves and their family members against the chastisement of the Hellfire, but also that they were inducing and shoving each other towards it. Allah thus warns: "O you who believe! Save yourselves and your families from a fire whose fuel is men and stones; over it are angels stern and strong, they do not disobey Allah in what He commands them, and do as they are commanded." (al-Tahrim, 6)

The Prophet (pbuh) has said that the prayer of a woman inside her house is better than in the courtyard of the house, or near the house's main entrance, that is, in the places of the house where woman's privacy is most vulnerable. However, a woman's prayer in her bedroom, or inside those inner spaces of the house where she is hidden most, is better yet.²⁷

The Prophet (pbuh) also said that woman is closest to her Lord when she is inside her house.²⁸

It has been reported, furthermore, that some women came to the Prophet (pbuh) telling him that their men get a hold of the best of deeds in the form of struggling and fighting for the sake of Allah (*jihad*). Thus they queried if there was a feat which they could accomplish and attain thereby the huge reward reserved only for *jihad*. The Prophet's reply was: "If you stay at home (doing what is required and expected from you to do), you will surely attain the reward of the men who struggle and fight for the sake of Allah (*mujahidun*)."²⁹

Indeed, herein lies one of the strongest hints as to the nature of education both Muslim men and women must obtain. The main purpose of every educational system is to ready its people to be able

²⁷ Abu Dawud, *Sunan Abi Dawud*, Kitab al-Salah, Hadith No. 483.

²⁸ *Mukhtasar Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, vol. 3 p. 94.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. 3 p. 93.

to actively participate in the total development of their society, to help them achieve and live their personal dreams that are expected to be both part of, and in consonance with, the dreams and aspirations of society, and, finally, to groom them to become and remain their society's assets and not liabilities. The case of Islamic education is no exception to this rule. It is a basic tenet in Islam that seeking knowledge is mandatory upon every single man and woman, from the cradle to the grave.³⁰ Knowledge Islam sees as light; ignorance it sees as darkness. Knowledge is power and drive, ignorance is feebleness and spiritual stupor. Knowledge brings one closer to Allah, ignorance brings and keeps one away from Him. The Qur'an asserts that "those who truly fear Allah among His servants are those who have knowledge" (Fatir, 28).

The Islamic community is one of knowledge and learning. However, the teaching and training of Muslim men and women, naturally, must be along the lines of the Qur'anic message, the infinite treasure and the perpetual fountain of knowledge, and along the lines of the pattern set by the Prophet (pbuh), the greatest teacher and himself another infinite source of knowledge and wisdom. The knowledge obtained by Muslim men and women must correspond to the philosophy, mission and goals of the Islamic community as ordained by Allah and His messenger. Any deviational step from this paradigm is destined to bring in a long term more harm than benefit to Muslims.

The Prophet (pbuh) is reported to have sought Allah's protection against a knowledge that brings no benefit.³¹ A "knowledge" that does not bring one closer to his Creator and Master, yet it drives him further away from Him, is not knowledge. A "knowledge" that does not support the idea of one fulfilling his genuine purpose and objectives in society, and by extension on earth, yet it contradicts, hinders and even tends to wreck it, is not knowledge. Such modes and styles of "knowledge" are no more than an inflated and embellished illusion, deception and perhaps the highest degree of disobedience and wrongdoing. At best, such "knowledge" could be perceived as mere sets of flawed, disoriented and fractional inquiries into the phenomenon of existence and its manifold realities, rendering lots of their results and conclusions

³⁰ Ibn Majah, *Sunan Ibn Majah*, see the introduction to the book, Hadith No. 220.

³¹ Ahmad b. Hanbal, *Musnad Ahmad b. Hanbal*, Awwal Musnad al-Kufiyyin, Hadith No. 18503.

correspondingly flawed, disoriented and fractional. The positives of those scientific inquiries and their findings are too few and too scant to be able to compensate for the consequences of failing to recognize and attend to the most real, critical and compelling dimensions of knowledge and wisdom.

For example, what knowledge is more important, and thus more rewarding, than the knowledge that leads one to recognizing, appreciating and submitting to the will of the Creator and Sustainer of man, nature and the whole universe? Which knowledge is more important than the knowledge that makes one comprehend the most essential secrets of life, nature and the universe, as well as makes one comprehend his and her actual position, role and purpose in life vis-à-vis the rest of life realities and phenomena? Which knowledge is more important than the knowledge that leads one to understanding the meaning of life and death, and what one is supposed to do in order to attain salvation? The answer to all these questions is a categorical “none”. Hence, Muhammad Iqbal (died in 1357 AH /1938 AC) is reported to have said that Europe – then the symbol and standard bearer of purely secular and materialistic knowledge and civilization – is the greatest hindrance in the way of man’s ethical advancement.³²

Allah explicitly says that knowing only the outer or the physical dimensions of life, without penetrating into the secrets of the spiritual and unseen dimensions with the help and guidance of revelation, will not avail people of ultimate happiness and salvation: “They know but the outer (things) in the life of this world: but of the End of things they are heedless. Do they not reflect in their own minds? Not but for just ends and for a term appointed, did Allah create the heavens and the earth, and all between them: yet are there truly many among men who deny the meeting with their Lord (at the Resurrection)!” (al-Rum, 7) The following supplication is thus often on the lips of the believers: “O Allah, do not make this world our greatest concern, nor the acme of our knowledge and wisdom.”

Also, Allah reveals that the residents of Hell will bitterly be reproaching themselves for what had befallen them. However, as the chief cause of their misery, they will pinpoint their misuse of their cerebral faculties, saying: “Had we but listened or used our

³² Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, <http://www.allamaiqbal.com>.

intelligence, we should not (now) be among the Companions of the Blazing Fire!" (al-Mulk, 10) Their words that they neither listened nor used their intelligence could be interpreted as acquiring a "wrong knowledge" and remaining oblivious to the "real" one.

So therefore, it goes without saying that the education of Muslim women must focus, primarily -- albeit not exclusively -- on equipping them to be able to activate, enliven and keep up their houses as dynamic institutions and family development centers. They must be taught, trained and be given the necessary skills, guidance and all the material and spiritual means and media that will enable them to rise to the challenge of contributing their intrinsic share to the society, culture and civilization development enterprise where margins for error are extremely small. Of course, the education of Muslim women must cover many other areas and issues, because of the gravity, intensity and diversity of their roles, services and contributions, which extend, directly or indirectly, beyond the sphere of influence of the house. However, things must be prioritized according to both the divine guidance and the natural order of things. Muslim women must be taught and trained, firstly and most importantly, how to perform as exemplary wives, mothers, house guardians and educators. After these roles, other legitimate, instinctive and beneficial societal roles and services can come in. However, mixing up the priorities of the education of Muslim women, where their inherent roles as wives, mothers and house guardians and educators are relegated to a degree of lesser importance, is unnatural and is bound to bring about unnatural consequences. If truth be told, for women to have a say in scores of matters that stay outside the physical boundaries of the house, be it in their neighborhoods or beyond, is still an implication of the house functioning as an institution and a family development center wherein woman serves as the guardian. For women to stay completely aloof from the outside world without leaving their mark on some of its aspects, would be as erroneous a scenario as to allow women to get so engrossed in pursuing their careers outside the house that they neglect their duties inside it.

Truly, providing an inappropriate education for Muslim women, partly or completely, is utterly unfair. It is a form of gross injustice perpetrated against women and against the whole of society, in that women, firstly, the family institution, secondly, and the entire society, lastly, will suffer greatly. The happiness and functionality of the family

unit depend, principally, on the happiness and performances of women, whereas the happiness, success and functionality of society depend, mainly, on the happiness, success and functionality of the family unit where women play a critical role. The significance of the house, which contains the family unit, is here readily apparent.

About the primary roles of Muslim women inside the house, and how such roles can be harmonized with certain roles and under certain circumstances outside the house, Isma'il Raji al-Faruqi wrote: "So many Muslim women are copying the West in seeking a career through which to achieve economic independence and personal freedom, that something must be said about Islam's position on the problem.

As far as the overwhelming majority of Muslim women are concerned, there is little or no doubt that they are moving towards a full-time permanent career as housewives and mothers. It is needless to point out that such career demands as much or more training as any career outside the home. It is to warp that noble career to describe it in terms of cooking and domestic chores. It involves taking care of humans, old and young; and that is the most difficult job on earth. It requires all the mature wisdom, intelligence, artistry, creativity, ready wit and experience the person can have. Training is certainly in order for all the time that the person can spend in it, whether in the discipline of homemaking, or those of education, of literature and the arts, of history, psychology and culture.

Although homemaking, childbearing and childrearing are a universal career, it remains true that it does not exhaust the energies of a woman throughout her life. Her membership in the extended family, whether on her side or on that of her husband, will provide her with assistants and therefore with more leisure. Her childbearing cares may not last beyond two or three decades at the longest. Her life may be three whole decades longer. Is it right that Muslim women waste this valuable time on family gossip when they could be helping the *ummah* (community) with their talents and energies? There are women equally who may not be fortunate enough to marry at all, or to have children or even live in an extended family.

Every woman, like every man, must carry the burden of serving Allah and benefiting the *ummah*, according to his or her talents and best disposition. This task is doubly imperative today because of the decay and dormancy of the *ummah*. Nobody can and should be spared. Our present circumstances demand that every woman be a

career woman at least during some portion of her life. This could be during her student days, or during her motherhood period if she lives in a large extended family, or after her motherhood period.”³³

It was for the reason that the house must function as a dynamic family development center that the Prophet (pbuh) advised that all the voluntary prayers be performed at home. Only the compulsory prayers are to be performed in mosques. The voluntary prayers are the light of the house.³⁴ For women, nonetheless, both compulsory and voluntary prayers are better to be performed at home, even though they can perform them in mosques too. For the compulsory prayers, all the rewards that men can procure while performing them in mosques, women can procure too when they perform them at home as part of their duties that reflect their noble mission as the house guardians.

This precept obviously requires that inside the house there should be a space, irrespective of its size and position, which will be earmarked to function as a place for conducting certain worship activities, both individually and collectively. That is exactly what happened with many people during the time of the Prophet (pbuh). Not only that the Prophet (pbuh) agreed that his companions have such designated spaces in their houses, but also, when he could, he did not hesitate to grace some houses with such spaces by personally praying in them.³⁵ The space inside the house designated for worship could be used exclusively for that purpose or, should the size of the house and its organization of inner spaces disallow that luxury, it can be shared with some other house functions and purposes.

The Prophet (pbuh) advised, furthermore, that no house can be made completely devoid of acts of worship and other deeds that breed a culture of a spiritual and intellectual enlightenment. To the Prophet (pbuh), a house free from such activities is like a grave, that is to say, the house is dead, enveloped in darkness and can cause and nurture but waywardness and sin. As such, Satan and those who follow in his footsteps are fond of patronizing that type of the house.³⁶

³³ Isma'il Raji al-Faruqi, *Al-Tawhid: its Implications for Thought and Life*, p. 138.

³⁴ Ahmad b. Hanbal, *Musnad Ahmad b. Hanbal*, Musnad al-'Asharah al-Mubashsharin bi al-Jannah, Hadith No. 82.

³⁵ Ibn Majah, *Sunan Ibn Majah*, Kitab al-Masajid wa al-Jama'at, Hadith No. 146, 747, 748.

³⁶ Muslim, *Sahih Muslim*, Kitab Salah al-Musafirin wa Qasruha, Hadith No. 1300. Al-Tirmidhi, *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, Kitab al-Salah, Hadith No. 413. Al-Darumi, *Sunan al-Darumi*, Kitab Fada'il al-Qur'an, Hadith No. 3208.

Angels run away from it. The character of this housing type is incompatible with the way of life of a believer. The Prophet (pbuh) said, for example, that Angels do not enter a house where there is a statue or a dog.³⁷ It is, perhaps, due to this that the Prophet (pbuh) once remarked that the house could become a source, or a cause, of a misfortune to its people.³⁸

The Prophet (pbuh) also said that the Day of Judgment will not take place until, among other things and occurrences, “the bad ones amongst you (Muslims) inherit your houses”.³⁹ The Prophet (pbuh) had in mind here, apparently, a phenomenon which will be a sign of the extent of many Muslims’ abandoning of their faith towards the end of this world, and the extent of their engrossment in an illegal behavior and sin. These novel behavioral patterns will be clearly reflected and typified in the erroneous ways the people responsible will build, perceive and use their houses. A deterioration in their spiritual orientation and strength will mirror itself in a corresponding deterioration of the status and function of their houses, the two phenomena encouraging, aiding and sustaining each other. The spiritual failure of the people in question will signify the failure of their housing systems, and the failure of all of their civilizational undertakings. They will succeed in transforming the notion and sensory reality of the house from being a source, symbol and beacon of goodness into a source, symbol and beacon of evil.

The house of a believer, conversely, accounts for a fountain of light, righteousness, dynamism and confidence. In short, the house of a believer functions as a form of the mosque, as it were, i.e., the place of worship. Angels patronize it; Satan runs away from it. The house of a believer is a source, or a cause, of his happiness and fortune. It is a symbol of his robust civilizational strength and achievements. It is a symbol of his graceful role on earth.

To what extent the houses in Madinah during the Prophet’s era functioned as family education and development centers, as well as to what extent the roles and functions of certain houses had to be diversified for that purpose, bears witness the fact that some family businesses were conducted inside houses. Perhaps, one of the most attention-grabbing instances is the house of the foster-family of the

³⁷ Abu Dawud, *Sunan Abi Dawud*, Kitab al-Libas, Hadith No. 3623.

³⁸ Ahmad b. Hanbal, *Musnad Ahmad b. Hanbal*, Musnad al-Mukaththarin min al-Sahabah, Hadith No. 5692.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, Baqi Musnad al-Ansar, Hadith No. 22213.

Prophet's son Ibrahim, Umm Sayf, the foster-mother, and Abu Sayf, the foster-father who was a blacksmith. The house of Abu Sayf was in one of the Madinah suburbs. One day, the Prophet (pbuh) went to see his son Ibrahim. He was accompanied by his servant Anas b. Malik. When they reached the house, they found Abu Sayf blowing fire with the help of blacksmith's bellows and the house was filled with smoke.⁴⁰

In addition, some women were very active and productive at home. They performed various household duties. Some jobs that they did could even bring an additional income to the family. According to one incident, a woman brought to the Prophet (pbuh) a woven cloak with an edging. She told the Prophet (pbuh): "I have woven it with my own hands and I have brought it so that you may wear it." The Prophet (pbuh) accepted the gift, and at that time he was in need of it.⁴¹

Many women were busy spinning (*gazi*), i.e., making thread by drawing out and twisting wool or cotton, in their houses. Spinning was regarded as women's favorite pastime which could give pleasure to the soul and at the same time show Satan the door.⁴² It could preoccupy a woman away from some potentially dubious activities that could eventually lead her to a form of wrongdoing. Besides, the outcomes of the pastime of spinning were the finished products which greatly benefited the whole family.

How productive and hard-working the women of Madinah were during the Prophet's time, not only inside the domains of their houses but also beyond them, can be seen from the following two accounts.

Firstly, the Prophet's daughter Fatimah, the wife of Ali b. Abi Talib, went one day to her father's house complaining about the bad effect of the stone hand-mill on her hand. She wanted to ask the Prophet (pbuh) to provide her, if he could, a servant. At the time of Fatimah's visit, the Prophet (pbuh) was not around, so she spoke to A'ishah, the Prophet's wife. No sooner had the Prophet (pbuh) returned home and had been told of his daughter's request, than he paid a visit to her. He told Fatimah and her husband Ali: "Shall I direct you to something better than what you have requested? When you go to bed say '*Subhan Allah*' (glory be to Allah) thirty three times, '*Alhamdulillah*' (all gratitude is due to Allah) thirty three times, and

⁴⁰ Muslim, *Sahih Muslim*, Kitab al-Fada'il, Hadith No. 5733.

⁴¹ Al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Kitab al-Jana'iz, Hadith No. 367.

⁴² Al-Kattani, *Al-Taratib al-Idariyyah*, (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi, 1980), vol. 2. p. 120.

'*Allahu Akbar*' (Allah is greatest) thirty four times, for that is better for you than a servant." Ali b. Abi Talib said that he never failed to recite this ever since.⁴³

Secondly, Abu Bakr's daughter, Asma, said that when she got married with al-Zubayr, a companion of the Prophet (pbuh), they had neither land nor wealth nor slave. She grazed his horse, provided fodder to it and looked after it, and ground dates for his camel. Besides this, she grazed the camel, made arrangements for providing it with water and patched up the leather bucket and kneaded the flour. She was not good in baking the bread, so her female neighbors used to do it for her. Asma continued: "I was carrying on my head the stones of the dates from the land of al-Zubayr which the Prophet (pbuh) had given to him, and it was at a distance of two miles from Madinah." Sometime later, Asma's father, Abu Bakr, sent a female servant to her who took upon herself the responsibility of looking after the horse, thus partly relieving Asma of her burden.⁴⁴

The form of the house

While building, observing others doing the same, and while using houses, the Prophet (pbuh) taught his followers that in housing the function of the house is paramount. It is more important than the sheer form. It is more important how a house functions than how it looks like. It is more important that a house functions as a lively family development center, regardless of how it looks like, than that its exaggerated and embellished form leaves a nice impression on neighbors or passers-by, but leaves in terms of its expected function much to be desired. The sophistication of the function in a house easily makes up for the simplicity of the form rendering it as marginal, whereas the sophistication of the form cannot mask or compensate for the flaws and defects of the function. It may even cause such flaws and defects to be more conspicuous and wanting. The Prophet (pbuh) alluded to the importance of the function and the overall life and soul of the house as a leading criterion in determining whether a house is good or otherwise, when he said: "The best Muslim house is the one where an orphan is treated kindly, and the worst Muslim house is the one where an orphan is treated harshly."⁴⁵

⁴³ Al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Kitab al-Nafaqat, Hadith No. 274, 275.

⁴⁴ Muslim, *Sahih Muslim*, Kitab al-Salam, Hadith No. 5417, 5418.

⁴⁵ Ibn Majah, *Sunan Ibn Majah*, Kitab al-Adab, Hadith No. 3669.

As a general principle, in Islamic architecture the function with all of its dimensions: physical, intellectual and spiritual, is preferred over the form, especially if the latter is divorced from the former. This, however, by no means implies that the form plays no role in Islamic architecture. It does play a prominent role, but its relevance is a supportive one supplementing and enhancing the function. The form is important, but in terms of value and substance it always comes second to the function and its wide scope. The form follows, enhances and facilitates the function; it is not the other way round.

However, the form cannot be taken lightly, or be totally neglected, as such may have a serious negative effect on the function. The two are interrelated and intertwined. They depend on each other, needing each other for their respective self-expression and self-attainment. Without the function, there will be no form, and without the form, there will be no function either. Without the function, the form will be superfluous, worthless and dead. Without the form, on the other hand, the function will be unfeasible and reduced to a mere abstract theorizing, fantasizing and a wishful thinking. Thus, each and every architectural idea and expression must be a synthesis of both the form and the function, each one of them performing their respective tasks. Indeed, the relationship between the form and function in a building is like the relationship between the body and soul in a person. The function to a building is what the soul to a person is, and the form to a building is what the body to a person is.

Moreover, there must be the closest relationship between the ideals that underpin the form of buildings and the ideals that underpin their functions, with which the users of buildings must be at ease. A rift or a conflict between the two is bound to lead to a conflict of some far-reaching psychological proportions in the users of buildings. In this way, the roles of the form become equivalent to the roles of the function.

The houses of the Prophet (pbuh) and those of the first Muslims in Madinah were the first examples of this philosophy in architecture, in general, and in housing, in particular. Their houses aimed at the sophistication concerning the function, but in terms of the form, they insisted on having only as much as was necessary for meeting the requirements of the function. Anything above that was deemed as unnecessary. It was deemed as the squandering of precious time, energy and people's limited resources. As such, it could upset one's

focus on one's continuous and demanding intellectual and spiritual development. Giving too much attention to the form of the houses could get in the way of the required performances of the houses and the people in relation to the personality and community building processes that were of a great importance in the initial, and thus most crucial, phases of the development of the Madinah city-state.

Towards this end are some of the Prophet's ostensibly disapproving traditions (*hadith*) on housing which must be carefully studied and must be placed in their proper perspectives. Superficial readings will not help. Such a methodology can easily create confusion about the Prophet's stance on housing, building and architecture in general. Some of those traditions of the Prophet (pbuh), some explicitly on housing and others on building in general including housing, are as follows:⁴⁶

1. 'Atiyyah b. Qays reported that the main building material in the houses of the Prophet's wives were date-palm branches. When once the Prophet (pbuh) went off for a military expedition, Umm Salamah, one of the Prophet's wives who was wealthy, replaced date-palm branches with bricks. When the Prophet (pbuh) returned, he asked: "What is this?" She replied: "I wanted to protect myself against the people peeping at me." At that, notably without asking Umm Salamah to pull down what she had built, the Prophet (pbuh) said: "O Umm Salamah, the worst thing for which the wealth of a believer could be spent is building."⁴⁷
2. The Prophet's uncle al-'Abbas b. 'Abd al-Mutallib once built a compartment, however, the Prophet (pbuh) asked him to demolish it. When he asked if it is better for him to demolish it or to give it away as charity, the Prophet (pbuh) told him: "Demolish it."⁴⁸
3. "When Allah intends bad for a servant of His, He (as a mode of punishment) makes handling or molding bricks and the soil to be easy for him so that he could build."⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Spahic Omer, *Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and Islamic Architecture*, <http://www.islamonline.com>.

⁴⁷ Ahmad Sa'duddin, *Da'if al-Tarhib wa al-Tarhib li al-Mundhiri*, <http://vb.arabsgate.com/archive/index.php/t-410651.html>.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

4. "When Allah intends humiliation for a servant of His, He (as a mode of punishment) makes him spend his wealth on making buildings."⁵⁰
5. "He who builds more than what is sufficient for him, will be asked on the Day of Judgment to carry the extra of what he had built."⁵¹
6. "Every act of kindness is a form charity. Whatever a person spends on his family is written for him as charity. Whatever a person does to safeguard his honor is written for him as charity. Whatever a person spends, if he leaves it to (if he does it for) Allah, Allah is the Guarantor, except for building and wrongdoing."⁵²
7. "All wealth that is spent is for the sake of Allah, except (wealth spent for) building. In it, there is no good."⁵³
8. "When a person raises a building more than seven cubits (3.5 m), he is called out: 'O the most immoral one, where to...?'"⁵⁴
9. "Every building is a misfortune for its owner, except what cannot, except what cannot, meaning except that which is essential."⁵⁵

However, these and other similar traditions of the Prophet (pbuh), some of which are authentic and some of which are seriously questionable, do not represent his total or actual view of building, be it houses or any other segments of the built environment. The Prophet (pbuh) did not regard building as intrinsically wrong. These traditions are conditional. They are meant for those building activities which are superfluous or are meant for a proliferation and competition rooted in bragging, showing off, materialism and jealousy. They are meant for building activities which are based on intentions and goals that go against the spirit of the Islamic message. They are meant for those building activities which are bound to bring upon their executors more damage than benefits.

This principle applies not only to all the types of building activities but also to all actions of men. It is for this, certainly, that people's actions are judged solely on the basis of their intentions, as

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Abu Dawud, *Sunan Abi Dawud*, Book 41 (Kitab al-Adab), Hadith No. 5218.

said by the Prophet (pbuh).⁵⁶ A deed that stems from a wrong intention is always wrong no matter how it is presented or seemed on the exterior. In Islam, neither the end nor the means could vindicate a bad intention.

The benefits of legitimately erected buildings are to be maximized by all means. They are not to be diminished or obstructed by associating with buildings some damaging perceptions and functions. One's wealth constitutes a major portion of what one has been assigned from this fleeting world, which is to be meticulously managed for the benefits of both worlds. Both wealth and built environment are to be perceived only as means; neither one represents an end in itself. If one possesses a positive perception about wealth and the notion of creating buildings, which, in fact, reflects one's positive total worldview, one is then able to recognize that whatever wealth he has been granted is sufficient for him. He will, furthermore, easily understand how much and what type of built environment he needs so that the execution of his divinely inspired life engagements is supported and facilitated. Hence, a believer will always be content with unassuming buildings, above all if they are private ones, thus allowing him to make use of his wealth for some other wholesome purposes, both personal and communal. This way, restraining the tendencies towards the crimes of wastefulness, greed, jealousy, ill feeling, haughtiness, and so forth, in a person will become a much easier proposition. It goes without saying, therefore, that the biggest fault, as well loss, is that one exhausts all the resources and amenities that Allah has bestowed upon him for the momentary joy and pleasures of this world, while procuring nothing, or very little, for the Hereafter. Definitely, true believers are immune to this agonizing scenario.

Moreover, if superficially studied and wrongly understood, the implications of some of the mentioned traditions plainly contradict the mainstream practices of the Prophet (pbuh) and the practices of his companions and those who came afterwards. As they contradict the total body of the Islamic value system, which is unacceptable. This is an important thing because it is commonly accepted as an Islamic tenet that the Muslim community shall under no circumstances agree on an error. One of the Prophet's companions, 'Abdullah b. Mas'ud, is reported to have said: "What Muslims end up regarding as a

⁵⁶ Ibid., Kitab al-Wahy, Hadith No. 1.

propriety, Allah too regards it that way; likewise, what they end up regarding as a sin, Allah too regards it as such.”⁵⁷

Without doubt, no Muslim, including the Prophet (pbuh), ever viewed building as an inherently wicked domain. On the contrary, every true Muslim, including the Prophet (pbuh), regarded building as an inevitable and if properly construed and applied a potentially useful thing. No civilized life on earth can be imagined without a built environment, and no fulfillment of man’s most noble purpose on earth without it would ever be possible. Just like many other life’s pursuits should building be regarded: challenging and tricky but innately innocent and susceptible to becoming either bad or good depending on how and for what reasons they are taken up. Hence, the mentioned traditions are to be examined against the backdrop of the contexts in which they have been presented, of the person or the persons who were the main protagonists in those contexts, of the Prophet’s linguistic styles, of the Prophet’s specific intentions and objectives, if it is possible to be ascertained, due to which he might have wanted to say something particular for a particular person and in a particular situation, and most importantly, against the backdrop of the general and universally agreed upon body of Islamic teachings and values and the words and deeds of the Prophet (pbuh).

In his book “*Deterrents from Committing Big Sins*”, Abu al-‘Abbas Ahmad b. Hajar al-Haythami categorized building beyond one’s needs and in response to some other serious transgressions as the two hundred and eleventh (211th) big sin (*kabirah*). His argument is that although creating needed buildings is necessary and invited, the building activity can be adulterated with a number of major vices which renders it a big sin itself. The Prophet’s well-recorded reactions to such acts unequivocally indicate that he viewed them on a par with the other big sins. As a support for his thesis, Abu al-‘Abbas Ahmad b. Hajar al-Haythami quotes most of the Prophet’s traditions mentioned above.⁵⁸

The Prophet’s houses were an example of the simplicity of the form. A partial description of the Prophet’s houses is given by Ibn Sa’d in his *al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, due to a narrator named ‘Abd Allah b. Yazid, who saw them just before they were knocked down by the

⁵⁷ Ahmad ibn Hanbal, *Musnad Ahmad ibn Hanbal*, Kitab Musnad al-Mukaththirin min al-Sahabah, Hadith No. 3418.

⁵⁸ Abu al-‘Abbas Ahmad b. Hajar al-Haythami, *Al-Zawajir ‘an Iqtiraf al-Kaba’ir*, <http://www.al-islam.com>.

order of caliph al-Walid b. 'Abd al-Malik from Syria in the year 88 AH / 707 AC who wanted to enlarge the Prophet's mosque. "There were four houses of mud brick, with apartments partitioned off by palm branches plastered with mud, and five houses made of palm branches plastered with mud and not divided into rooms. Over the doors were curtains of black hair-cloth. Each curtain measured 3 by 3 cubits (1.5 m). One could touch the roof with the hand."⁵⁹ Several other eyewitnesses have given similar accounts on the matter, which are recorded elsewhere.⁶⁰

Umar b. al-Khattab while once visiting the Prophet (pbuh) at home gave the following account on the simplicity of the Prophet's houses, as well as on what was the Prophet's attitude towards the matter. Umar said: "I visited Allah's Messenger (pbuh) and he was lying on a mat. I sat down and he drew up his lower garment over him and he had nothing (else) over him, and that the mat had left its marks on his sides. I looked with my eyes in the store room of Allah's Messenger (pbuh). I found only a handful of barley equal to one *sa'* and an equal quantity of the leaves of *Mimosa Flava* placed in the nook of the cell, and a semi-tanned leather bag hanging (in one side), and I was moved to tears (on seeing this extremely austere living of the Holy Prophet), and he said: "Ibn al-Khattab, what makes you weep?" I said: "Apostle of Allah, why should I not shed tears? This mat has left its marks on your sides and I do not see in your store room (except these few things) that I have seen. Persian and Byzantine sovereigns are leading their lives in plenty, whereas you are Allah's Messenger, His chosen one, and that is your store!" He said: "Ibn al-Khattab, aren't you satisfied that for us (there should be the prosperity) of the Hereafter, and for them (there should be the prosperity of) this world?" I said: "Yes".⁶¹

Nevertheless, the houses of the Prophet (pbuh) -- many of them if not all -- were far bigger and roomy than what appears to many people who erroneously perceive them as small huts or no more than mere tiny rooms rather than adequate houses, for most of such houses must have had -- at least and in accordance with the standards and norms of the day, of course -- a bathroom, a kitchen, a sleeping room, a room (place) for visitors, a storage, etc. All these are necessities, indeed, not only desirable for a normal and decent living,

⁵⁹ K.A.C. Creswell, *A Short Account of Early Muslim Architecture*, p. 4.

⁶⁰ Al-Samahudi, *Wafa' al-Wafa'*, vol. 1 p. 516 - 517.

⁶¹ Muslim, *Sahih Muslim*, Book 009, Number 3507, 3508.

but also necessitated by some religious tenets, such as privacy protection, orderliness and hygiene.

There is nothing wrong in making a spacious and comfortable house for the sake of facilitating the attainment of some noble goals in it, while at the same time staying away from the influences of vice and sin. Admittedly, a big house can function better than a small one. The former's potential is a lot greater. The functions of a big house can easily be increased and diversified, something that is very difficult to achieve with a small house. It stands to reason that an excessive and unnecessary asceticism in housing, whereby the required performances of the house institution might be severely affected, is not recommended. Hence, the Prophet (pbuh) once said that of man's happiness are a good wife, a spacious house, a good neighbor, and a good mount.⁶² Similarly, he also said that the house is where potentially both fortune and misfortune lie. Fortune lies inside the house when, along with a few other factors, it is spacious, and misfortune comes to the house when it is narrow.⁶³

The Prophet (pbuh) himself prayed to Allah to forgive him, make his house more spacious and bless his sustenance.⁶⁴

Once a companion Khalid b. al-Walid complained to the Prophet (pbuh) that his house was too small to accommodate his family. At this, the Prophet (pbuh) asked him to build more rooms on the roof of the existing house and to ask Allah for abundance.⁶⁵

Besides, when Umar b. al-Khattab visited the Prophet (pbuh), as in the aforementioned *hadith* (tradition), though he was moved to tears by the simplicity of the Prophet's living and the state of his houses, yet he reported that he found the Prophet (pbuh) in one of his houses in his attic to which one must climb by means of a ladder made of date-palm. At the end of the ladder, the Prophet's servant, Rabah, through whom Umar had beforehand obtained the Prophet's permission to enter, was sitting. After the visit, Umar climbed down with the Prophet (pbuh). While Umar had to do so catching hold of the wood of the palm-tree, the Prophet (pbuh) did the same with such ease that he seemed as though he was walking on the ground; he needed not hold anything for support.

⁶² Ahmad b. Hanbal, *Musnad Ahmad b. Hanbal*, Kitab Musnad al-Makkiyyin, Hadith No. 14830.

⁶³ Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*, translated into English by Fazlul Karim, (New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 1982), vol. 2 p. 164.

⁶⁴ Al-Tirmidhi, *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, Kitab al- Da'wat, Hadith No. 3422.

⁶⁵ Muhammad Uthman 'Abd al-Sattar, *al-Madinah al-Islamiyyah*, (Kuwait: 'Alam al-Ma'rifah, 1988), p. 333.

If truth be told, had the Prophet's houses been as small and inconvenient as alleged by some people, his life and that of his household would have been seriously disturbed and interrupted, as there were always those coming to him for various purposes: to serve him, to visit him and his family, to learn from him, to ask questions, to seek counsel from him, etc. It would have been especially so during the early years when scores of hospitality manners, plus general rules of cultured social ethics, were yet to be consolidated in the hearts and minds of many individuals. In reality, every period of the Prophet's mission was pretty much susceptible to this kind of discomfort for him, sometimes more and sometimes less, because scores of people from different places in the Arabian Peninsula never ceased to throng Madinah (the trend actually kept intensifying as time was passing by) accepting Islam and offering their allegiance to the Prophet (pbuh). Before the doors of the Hijrah became closed after the conquest of Makkah, some people would habitually seek to settle themselves in Madinah having embraced Islam and pledged their allegiance, whereas the others, after spending some time as the Prophet's guests and the guests of the state, would return to their respective tribes and communities henceforth maintaining strong relationship with the center.

In his book "History of Madinah Munawwarah", Muhammad Ilyas asserted that each of the Prophet's houses had a residential part as well as a tiny backyard: "The backyard was enclosed by the branches of palm trees and unbaked bricks. Blankets of hair were thrown on them to ensure privacy in the yard. The door of each Hujrah (apartment) was not built from an expensive wood. Each door had a rough blanket hanging there for privacy. Hence each Hujrah reflected humbleness and modesty. The dimension of each Hujrah was approximately 5 meters by 4 meters and the backyard was 5 meters by 3.5 meters. A person standing in a Hujrah could touch the ceiling with his hand. Hasan Basri said, 'I had not yet come of age and I used to visit the Hujrah. I could touch the ceiling with my hand when I was standing in a Hujrah'."⁶⁶

On average, Madinah houses during the Prophet's time were divided into several sections, each section functioning differently.⁶⁷ A typical house was big enough to have a bathroom, a kitchen, a

⁶⁶ Muhammad Ilyas Abd al-Ghani, *History of Madinah Munawwarah*, (Madinah: al-Rasheed Printers, 2003), p. 93.

⁶⁷ Spahic Omer, *The Origins and Functions of Islamic Domestic Courtyards*, p. 108-114.

bedroom, a room for visitors, a storage for food, weapons, firewood, and other necessary items, a stable for some domestic animals (horses, donkeys, or camels) serving as a mode of transportation as well as a source of sustenance. The houses that belonged to extremely poor families, or to those who were bent on out-and-out asceticism, had fewer rooms and, as such, had to be multi-functional. The Prophet's storage had to be big enough to accommodate as many dates as would cover the needs of his family for a whole year, in addition to other food articles which had to be stored therein sporadically, such as cereal, meat, etc.⁶⁸

Some households had their own wells, while others had to share bigger public ones. Some small-scale production and business activities were conducted in a number of houses. Virtually all houses had some adjoining unroofed spaces which functioned differently. Many had inner courtyards for the reasons relating to various environmental factors, privacy protection, recreation, etc. However, there were some houses which were very large and their courtyards so airy containing date-palm trees. The stables of some of such houses contained many horses and even camels. Some large houses even functioned as guesthouses. In them, the Prophet (pbuh) used to accommodate the members of some of his delegations which came from outside Madinah.⁶⁹ Following the migration from Makkah to Madinah, and prior to the completion of the Prophet's mosque, which was the Prophet's and the people's top priority, and which later served as a lively community center, some of the big houses in Madinah were intermittently used for some urgent mass social and educational gatherings and purposes.⁷⁰

The external walls of Madinah houses were generally built of mud bricks. Rooms were partitioned of by palm branches plastered with mud. Mud bricks may have been used for this purpose as well. The ground was covered with mats made of date-palm branches. In some instances, rare though, carpets were used. It was not odd if some portions of a house were bare or strewn with pebbles. Stone must have been used as a building material in various situations and in different measures, as it was plentiful and had some desirable technical advantages, such as resisting weathering, firmness and durability.

⁶⁸ Al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 7, Book 64, Hadith No. 270.

⁶⁹ Al-Kattani, *Al-Taratib al-Idariyyah*, vol. 1 p. 445-446.

⁷⁰ *Mukhtasar Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, vol. 3 p. 489.

By and large, roofs were made of palm-leaves. Mud must have been added so as to mitigate rain dripping onto the ground, something that could be a hazardous disturbance during the cold rainy season. Some roofs might have been made even of timber or any other strong and permanent material, and were designed in such a way as to be utilized for other benefits, such as sleeping during hot nights, drying dates, etc. It seems, in part, as though towards this end is the Prophet's counsel against sleeping on an exposed and unsafe surface, alluding thereby to the significance of both privacy and safety.⁷¹ Some houses have been surmounted even by domes.⁷² Even the roofs of some houses of the Prophet (pbuh) might have been made of something stronger than just palm-leaves.⁷³

Once it rained in Madinah for a week, which was an unusual weather condition. Since the main building materials for the framework of many houses were mud bricks and date palm leaves and timber, the prolonged raining spell had some devastating effects on such houses. Some of them in the end started to fall apart. The people then pleaded with the Prophet (pbuh) to pray to Allah and ask for the situation to come to an end.⁷⁴

The most common furnishing components found in Madinah houses were: cupboards, leather dining sheets, leather mats, mats made of palm leaves, leather bags, pillows and cushions made of leather or any other suitable material which on occasions was decorated, trays, plates, jugs, vessels, utensils, baskets, beds some of which were very strong and raised of the ground, covering sheets or blankets, benches and even dining tables, although less regularly, lamps (even though many a house for quite sometime might have been illuminated by burning up fronds), a kind of cooking stoves, hooks on the walls for hanging different objects, etc. Having carpets could have been a normal thing in rich families, because when a companion Jabir b. Abdullah got married, the Prophet (pbuh) asked him whether he had gotten one. Jabir replied that he was so poor that he could not afford it. At this, the Prophet (pbuh) said: "You shall soon possess them."⁷⁵

⁷¹ Al-Tirmidhi, *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, Kitab al-Adab, Hadith No. 2781.

⁷² Abu Dawud, *Sunan Abi Dawud*, Kitab al-Adab, Hadith No. 4559.

⁷³ Al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Kitab al-Wudu', Hadith No. 150.

⁷⁴ Ahmad b. Hanbal, *Musnad Ahmad b. Hanbal*, Baqi Musnad al-Mukaththarin, Hadith No. 12481.

⁷⁵ Muslim, *Sahih Muslim*, Kitab al-Libas wa al-Zinah, Hadith No. 5188.

In conclusion, most Muslims during the initial phases of the Prophet's mission, with the Prophet (pbuh) leading the way, were neither interested in, nor capable of, erecting bigger and more elaborate houses than what they actually possessed. That is fairly understandable though, if we take into account the climate, environment and geography of Arabia, as well as the lifestyle of the first Arabs. Creswell wrote: "Arabia, at the rise of Islam, does not appear to have possessed anything worthy of the name of architecture. Only a small proportion of the population was settled, and these lived in dwellings which were scarcely more than hovels. Those who lived in mud brick houses were called *ahl al-madar*, and the Bedawin, from their tents of camel's-hair cloth, *ahl al-wabar*."⁷⁶

In terms of architectural profound knowledge and building technology, the same trend, by and large, continued, showing little improvement, subsequent to the migration of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and the first Muslims from Makkah to Madinah where they embarked on the creation and development of the city-state of Madinah and sowed the first seeds of an impending marvel called Islamic civilization. However, despite their civilizational commitments, the first Muslims could have neither time nor interest to set out on mastering some more sophisticated styles of building. They were engrossed in two by far more pertinent tasks: the task of spreading the message of Islam to people, and the task of cultivating the more urgent and desired aspects of civilization than those relating to building. Certainly, advancing the existing building styles was at the outset an important, but not the most important, undertaking of the Muslims. Additionally, according to some principles with reference to the growth of civilizations, it was natural for Islam as is for any other religion or ideology that a certain amount of time was required in order for the purest forms of its art and architecture to manifest themselves.⁷⁷ It follows, due to this rule, that even if the Muslims from the very beginning had committed themselves to gaining mastery of sophisticated architectural styles and to evolving some purest forms of Islamic architecture, the same would have been considerably delayed.

When we say that the earliest examples of Islamic residential architecture were extremely simple and that the early Muslim

⁷⁶ K.A.C. Creswell, *A Short Account of Early Muslim Architecture*, p. 3.

⁷⁷ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Art and Spirituality*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), p. 14.

mentality was not much inclined towards cultivating some refined building styles, that does not mean that the first Muslims, under the aegis of the Prophet (pbuh) and revelation, were adhering to certain religious norms and that those who came after them plainly violated them by erecting some relatively stylish and elaborate houses and other buildings. Nurturing an exclusive identity of Islamic architecture was evolving proportionately to the development and expansion of Islamic culture and civilization. Since it would not have been on even terms with the growth and competency of other civilizational constituents generated by the community, nurturing an exclusive identity of Islamic residential architecture, and architecture in general, was not at all feasible during the early days of Islam. As such, seldom did the first generation of Muslims give a serious thought to it. They aptly looked at it as both a superfluous thing and a possible hindrance to the current mission that was engrossing the whole community. Later, however, things changed and the matter asserted its utility as well as pertinence to the life of Muslims, and it was not long before Islamic architecture, in particular Islamic residential architecture, evolved as one of the most discernible features of Islamic civilization securing the endorsement of both the religious and intellectual leaderships in the process.

Finally, evolving some intricate housing styles at the early stages of Islam's existence was not at all a priority. This, coupled with both the Arabs' relative incompetence and indifference to doing so, should by no means be viewed as an impediment and a stain in the history of early Islamic civilization. Rather, such was a very natural thing. The whole issue ought to be observed against the backdrop of the total message of Islam, as well as against the backdrop of the socio-political and economic laws that govern the birth and evolution of human civilization in general and those laws that governed the birth and evolution of Islamic civilization inspired by Allah's last revelation to mankind through the seal of prophets, Muhammad (pbuh), in particular.

Housing and the importance of neighbors⁷⁸

If people are social beings who must interact and depend on each other for survival, the houses which serve as the framework for most

⁷⁸ Spahic Omer, *The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and Urbanization of Madinah*, 170-182.

of people's life activities are likewise destined to interact and connect with each other, sometimes more and in a more densely populated residential networks and sometimes less and in a less densely populated residential networks. Thus, neighborhoods, villages, towns and cities are essential for the survival of the human race, as well as for the creation and sustaining of human culture and civilization. The ways in which the existence of people has been organized, mirror themselves in the ways in which human settlements, and with them human systems of living, have been organized and managed. The mutual dependency and reliance among humans for mere survival reflects itself in the mutual dependency and reliance among the key components of human settlements and their built environments. Reciprocal reliance, understanding and cooperation bring a community strength, progress and prosperity. The opposite brings weakness, depression and downfall to it.

When the Prophet (pbuh) embarked on building the Muslim community in Madinah, following the migration (*Hijrah*) from Makkah, the notion of the neighborhood and the sound neighborly relationships preoccupied much of his attention. The lessons of the Prophet (pbuh) had more than a few implications for the ways Muslims planned, built and used their houses, not only during the early days of the Madinah community but also ever after.

Those lessons could be summarized in the following considerations. Although a person enjoys his absolute privacy and freedom inside the parameters of his house, he must remember that he lives in the midst of a neighborhood or a community. He cannot enjoy his rights in such a way that he infringes upon the rights of others, in particular of those next to him, his neighbors who live in adjoining houses. Doing such a thing would denote a form of injustice and human rights violation anchored in one's selfishness and total disregard for other people and their feelings, for which the perpetrators must be held accountable in both worlds. Establishing healthy and sound neighborly relations is a perfect recipe for the creation of correspondingly healthy and sound total human relations in a community, in that each and every community is made up of such basic units and elements as individuals who make up families or households which, in turn, constitute neighborhoods. Each and every community can be fragmented into, and viewed through the lens of, neighborhoods, families and even individuals. On the other hand, establishing tense, hostile and, at best, indifferent and uncaring

neighborly relations spells a perfect recipe for the creation of correspondingly indifferent, uncaring, tense and even hostile total human relations in a community.

The Prophet (pbuh) clearly demonstrated that people's houses, through the ways they are conceived, planned, constructed and used, are instrumental in forging either strong and brotherly, or upsetting and heartless, neighborly relations. Thus, all the aspects of the morphology, purpose and function of the house must be meticulously studied, observed and put into practice. People can handle their neighborly issues and disputes either on their own or with the help of the appointed authority. Undoubtedly, Muslim neighborhoods are the avenues for the implementation of the core Islamic social values, such as brotherhood, love, care, tolerance, fairness, generosity, modesty, honesty and trust. When one walks through a neighborhood where those values are duly observed, one is bound to be able to feel them in the air, to sense them in the ways both the houses and neighborhoods have been conceived, designed and built, and in the ways they operate satisfying the needs of their people. Finally, one will be able to recognize those values in the ways the members of neighborhoods interact with each other, as well as with others, while striving to fulfill the objectives of their earthly existence.

When adding a house to a neighborhood, the responsible persons, such as planners, architects, engineers and the users, must thoroughly scrutinize and assess the implications of their actions. They must be concerned about how the end result of their efforts will stand out when juxtaposed with the existing setting and overall conditions, in terms of both the function and outward appearance of a neighborhoods and its houses: will it complement or contrast with them; will it go well with them, or will it appear as if something of a misfit, oddity, or even offensiveness? Then, the responsible persons must act accordingly. This principle likewise applies to significantly altering the physical condition of one's house. The same will be the case whenever a person, and by whatever means, finds himself in a position to make any impact on the existing configuration and backdrop of a neighborhood, especially in an area where his house is located. Newly built houses in a neighborhood must be "partners" and "allies", as it were, with the existing ones, and not "rivals" and "foes". They must be in harmony, with reference to the values, principles, purpose and objectives for which they exist, and not in disagreement and conflict.

In the Holy Qur'an, Allah orders that kindness be done to "neighbors who are kin and neighbors who are strangers." (Al-Nisa', 36)

The Prophet (pbuh) spoke of neighbors and neighborly relations in many contexts. He said, for example: "On the Day of Judgment, the first adversaries will be two neighbors."⁷⁹

"He whose neighbor is not safe from his misconduct shall not enter Paradise."⁸⁰

"He who believes in Allah and the Day of Judgment should not disturb his neighbor."⁸¹

"To Allah, the best neighbors are those who are good to each other."⁸²

"By Him in Whose hands is my life, none of you will believe (be a perfect believer) until he wished for his neighbor (or his brother -- the narrator is unsure) what he wishes for himself."⁸³

"To commit adultery with ten women, one is in a better position than doing it with the wife of his neighbor; to steal from ten houses, one is again in a better position than doing it from his neighbor's house."⁸⁴ The Prophet (pbuh) in another *hadith* (tradition) warned that committing illegal sexual intercourse with the wife of a neighbor is categorized as one of the biggest sins in the sight of Allah.⁸⁵

The Islamic emphasis on respecting the rights and property of neighbors is comprehensively encapsulated in the following Prophet's words: "The angel *Jibril* (Gabriel) kept exhorting me about the neighbor, so much so that I thought that one day he would come granting him the right of inheritance."⁸⁶

In light of the Prophet's proclamation, according to which there can be neither injury nor return of injury in anything that people may do, including the matters pertaining to the built environment,⁸⁷ one is not to usurp unjustly anything from his neighbors; nor is one allowed to deny his neighbors any of their rights; nor is one allowed to depreciate the value of his neighbors' property by any unauthorized

⁷⁹ Ahmad b. Hanbal, *Musnad Ahmad b. Hanbal*, Kitab Musnad al-Shamiyyin, Hadith No. 16732.

⁸⁰ Muslim, *Sahih Muslim*, Kitab al-Iman, Hadith No. 66.

⁸¹ Al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Kitab al-Nikah, Hadith No. 4787.

⁸² Al-Tirmidhi, *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, Kitab al-Birr wa al-Silah, Hadith No. 1867.

⁸³ Muslim, *Sahih Muslim*, Kitab al-Iman, Hadith No. 65.

⁸⁴ Ahmad b. Hanbal, *Musnad Ahmad b. Hanbal*, Kitab Baqi Musnad al-Ansar, Hadith No. 22734.

⁸⁵ Al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Kitab Tafsir al-Qur'an, Hadith No. 284.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, Kitab al-Adab, Hadith No. 5555.

⁸⁷ Ibn Majah, *Sunan Ibn Majah*, Kitab al-Ahkam, Hadith No. 2331.

building activity of his. Among the actions which can cause the value of the neighbor's property to depreciate are: exclusion of air and sun by unscrupulous building higher within one's own air space; disrupting water supply and drainage system; affecting the access to one's property; generating intolerable noise and unpleasant smell, especially if their sources are located adjacent to, or near, a wall separating two neighbors, and the like.

The Prophet (pbuh) said: "Those people who constrict (people's) houses (by building excessively and gratuitously for themselves) and encroach on the road, will not be credited with *jihad* (holy war)."⁸⁸ This, the Prophet (pbuh) said during one of his military expeditions. By the words "...will not be credited with *jihad*", the Prophet (pbuh) wanted his companions to be aware of the seriousness of such issues as house inviolability, people's privacy, freedom of movement, and other basic human rights within the realm of the built environment, especially housing.

In order to encourage a better interaction between neighbors, the Prophet (pbuh) has recommended: "A neighbor is not to prevent his neighbor from inserting a wooden beam in his wall." The narrator of this *hadith*, Abu Hurayrah, said, after disclosing these Prophet's words to some residents of Madinah from the second generation of Muslims (*tabi'un*), who were ignorant of and thus careless towards them, that if they do not start implementing this meritorious advice of the Prophet (pbuh), he would then coerce them to do so.⁸⁹ At the time of uttering these words, Abu Hurayrah, in all likelihood, was the governor of Madinah to the Umayyad caliph Mu'awiyah b. Abi Sufyan.

Furthermore, taking into consideration how much emphasis Islam places on the importance of the house and family institutions, the rights of individuals, socialization and mutual understanding and collaboration, as well as the concept of *al-amr bi al-ma'ruf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar* (enjoining good and forbidding evil) - it would not be difficult to comprehend why the nearest neighbors, solely on account of their nearness, enjoy more rights than anyone else, as advocated by the Prophet (pbuh).⁹⁰

The wife of the Prophet (pbuh), A'ishah, asked one day the Prophet (pbuh): "O Allah's Apostle! I have two neighbors and would

⁸⁸ Abu Dawud, *Sunan Abi Dawud*, Kitab al-Jihad, Hadith No. 2260.

⁸⁹ Al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Kitab al-Mazalim wa al-Ghasb, Hadith No. 2283.

⁹⁰ Ibid., vol. 3, Book 35, Hadith No. 459.

like to know to which of them I should give presents.” He replied: “To the one whose door (gate) is nearer to you.”⁹¹

As regards the neighbor who receives gifts, the Prophet (pbuh) stated: “O Muslim ladies! A (female) neighbor should not look down upon the present of her (female) neighbor even if it were the hooves of a sheep.”⁹²

Nearness is a decisive factor in making distinction between neighbors because no matter how sound, functional and healthy a neighborhood -- or any form of urban settlement -- may be, its worth rests primarily in the worth of its single units and the strength of the bonds that bind them. It follows that if a single unit fails to perform, breaking away from the adjoining units, the coherence and concord of the whole organization will be affected and if not promptly remedied, the problem can only consolidate itself looking for a chance to expand and threaten the other units. Thus the similitude of a neighborhood is like that of a chain whose strength lies not as much in the power and firmness of its individual units as in the strength of their mutual relationships and cooperation.

It is for this reason that differences between two brothers (two neighbors) must be patched up immediately. There should be no delay in settling disputes. The more the delay, the greater is the degree of animosity and ill-will. The longer period that two brothers (neighbors) can stay away from each other is three days. While settling disputes, showing forbearance is of the best things one can do. The Prophet (pbuh) said: “A Muslim who refuses to accept pardon from his brother is equal in sin to a collector of illegal taxes.”⁹³

All Muslims have got scores of rights over one another, which nevertheless vary in proportion to kinship, proximity and acquaintance. In other words, the entire Muslim community -- in fact, the whole of humankind -- is but a big neighborhood (family) with one and the same origin, vision, mission and purpose. People have been divided into nations and tribes only to know each other, learn from each other, and cooperate at various scales in righteousness and piety -- not that they may despise each other: “...Verily the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous

⁹¹ Ibid., vol. 3, Book 35, Hadith No. 460.

⁹² Ibid., Kitab al-Adab, Hadith No. 46.

⁹³ S.M. Madni Abbasi, *Islamic Manners*, (Karachi: International Islamic Publishers, 1987), p. 154-155.

of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things).” (Al-Hujurat, 13)

It is true that all Muslims are brothers to one another and every Muslim must love for his brother (sister) only that which he loves for himself, but the hierarchy of one’s duties towards his brothers and sisters -- who are not of his kith and kin -- starts with his neighbors as the highest point. It then unfolds downward on the basis of proximity as well as the extent of acquaintance and communication. Of the neighbors that one may have, the most important one will always be the one whose door is nearest, i.e., the one with whom he has most contact, both intentionally and unintentionally.

As for the *hadith* (tradition) in which the Prophet (pbuh) instructed that forty surrounding houses be proclaimed as the houses of one’s neighbors, it -- on condition that it is authentic (*sahih*) -- should not be taken literally. The message of the *hadith* on no account denotes that no sooner does one buy, build or rent a house than one is required to count the surrounding houses, the first forty of which will receive his unfeigned neighborly treatment. Rather, what should be seen in the said *hadith* is that it highlights and further buttresses the established Islamic concepts of the neighbor, neighborhood, community and brotherhood -- as both unprecedented concepts and actual realities hitherto unknown -- albeit somewhat in a different mode, style and language.

Limiting the number of one’s neighbors and their houses to as many as forty -- as narrated in the *hadith* -- may well imply that although one’s neighborly (brotherly) treatment should not extend only to his immediate neighbors (brothers) but also to the rest of the community members, yet the prioritization on the basis of proximity and the intensity, as well as frequency, of communication is as pertinent and so must be duly respected. Having said this, even the likelihood that the number forty the Prophet (pbuh) chose in a random fashion appears, to some extent, reasonable and should not be completely ruled out.

What’s more, it could be argued that the content of the said *hadith* may have been fairly interpolated, at most, or rendered inaccurate and ambiguous by the narrators, at least, on account of more than a few weaknesses found mainly in its chain of narrators. Our thesis can be corroborated by the fact that the ample accounts in which the rights and duties of neighbors are exhibited in a clear and striking fashion -- without restricting the amount of one’s neighbors,

though -- are unanimously authentic, whereas the authenticity of those few accounts which contain the notion of forty houses as a perimeter of one's neighborhood are frequently seriously questioned, but practically never completely rejected, by many a scholar. Therefore, the latter set of *hadiths* (traditions) is regularly branded as weak (*da'if*) or very weak (*da'if jiddan*) traditions.⁹⁴

This is not all, however. The content of the *hadiths* which limit neighbors and their houses to forty is not always consistent. It sometimes denotes forty houses (neighbors) from every side, in which case one's neighbors will amount to 160 or so, and at other times it denotes 40 in total, that is, ten houses (neighbors) from each side. In his concluding remarks on the *hadiths* which contain the idea of forty houses as the range of one's neighbors (neighborhood), Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani wrote: "Everything attributed to the Prophet (pbuh) as regards limiting the neighborhood to forty (houses) is weak (*da'if*) and erroneous. Thus, it is evident that such a limitation is rather on the basis of certain customs (*'urf*)."⁹⁵

That the number forty was not meant to lay any *de facto* restriction to the question of one's neighbors and their houses could additionally be substantiated by the verity that there exist different views on the same matter held by different people, who by no means were ignorant of the Prophet's traditions. According to some of such views, all the people who pray the *Fajr* (dawn) prayer in a mosque are considered neighbors; and according to others, the citizens of a city (*madinah*) are all neighbors, etc.⁹⁶

All in all, the substance of the *hadiths* touching on the number of neighbors and their houses should not be taken in literally. It stands to reason that if the same were understood correctly, then it would not be difficult for its implications to be digested and put successfully into operation in some unprecedented and atypical contexts that may be imposed by the volatile space-time factors. Some of such contexts are, for instance, small villages/settlements where the households do not number forty or 160, big but vastly dispersed forms of the urban settlement, modern high-rise residential buildings, poor and highly dense settlements where several households may share a house, etc.

⁹⁴ *Nasb al-Rayah fi Takhrij Ahadith al-Hidayah*, Kitab al-Wasaya, <http://feqh.al-islam.com>.

⁹⁵ Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani, *Silsilah al-Ahadith al-Da'ifah wa al-Mawdu'ah*, (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islami, 1985), vol. 1 p. 296.

⁹⁶ *Nasb al-Rayah fi Takhrij Ahadith al-Hidayah*, Kitab al-Wasaya, <http://feqh.al-islam.com>.

The Islamic notion of neighbor applies to non-Muslim neighbors as well. The Prophet (pbuh) has said that there are three kinds of neighbors. The first kind has got one right, the second two, and the third three rights. The one who has got one right is a non-Muslim neighbor. His right is the right of being a neighbor. The second one with two rights is a Muslim neighbor. His rights are the right of being a neighbor, as well as a Muslim. And the third kind of neighbors enjoying three rights is a family member Muslim neighbor. His has got three rights because he is a neighbor, a Muslim and a family member.⁹⁷ This and other similar *hadiths* have had some significant implications for the life in Madinah since all of its Arab citizens did not immediately enter the fold of Islam, and its Jewish community was not entirely driven out until the fifth year following the migration (*Hijrah*).

Because of both the regularity and intensity of people's interaction in them, neighborhoods could be rightly portrayed as a ground in whose domain either happiness or desolation in this world and in the Hereafter can be achieved. The Prophet (pbuh) once was informed of a man who fasts all day and prays all night, but he gives trouble to his neighbor. The Prophet (pbuh) replied: "He is in Hell."⁹⁸ According to yet another *hadith*, the house is one of the things where both fortune and misfortune lie. Fortune occurs when it is spacious and its neighbor is good, and misfortune comes when it is narrow and its neighbor is bad.⁹⁹

In one *hadith* (tradition) reported by Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, the Prophet (pbuh) summarized the rights and duties of neighbors: "Do you know about your duties towards your neighbor? Help him if he seeks your help, give him loan if he wants it, remove his wants if he is in wants, follow his bier if he is dead, join him in joy if he gets good news, show him sympathy and express sorrow if he is in danger, don't raise up your building so high without his permission so as to obstruct his air, don't give him trouble. If you purchase some fruits, give him something. If you do not do it, take them secretly to your house. Don't allow your children to come out with them as it may cause displeasure of his children. Don't give him trouble by the

⁹⁷ *Mukhtasar Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, vol. 1 p. 388.

⁹⁸ Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*, vol. 2 p. 164.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. 2 p. 164.

smoke of your cook-shed. There is no harm in sending food cooked in your cook-shed to your neighbor's house."¹⁰⁰

Abu Hamid al-Ghazali recapitulated on the rights of neighbors: "In short, the rights of a neighbor on you are the following: salute him first, don't talk with him for long, don't ask about his condition long. Call on him when he is ill, show sympathy in his distress, be sorry in his sorrows, be happy in his happiness, share enjoyment in his happiness, pardon his faults, don't look at the inner side of his house from the top of your roof, don't trouble him by replacing your rafters on his wall, don't let water flow down his courtyard, don't shut up the outflow of water of his house through your boundary, don't make the path to his house narrow, cover his fault if it is out, try to remove his distress as soon as possible, take care of his house in his absence, don't hear his backbiting, talk with his sons and daughters with affection and read out to him what he is ignorant about of the worldly and religious matters."¹⁰¹

Housing and the social integration

Islam teaches that people are vicegerents on earth entrusted with the honorable task of inhabiting it in accordance with the divine guidance presented to them. This terrestrial life serves to people as a platform either for elevating their status over that of angels, should they abide by the divinely prescribed guiding instructions and commands, or for degrading their selves to a rank lower than that of animals, should they turn away from the rays of the truth and dazed and lost start wandering aimlessly amid the innumerable and awesome wonders of creation.

Man is created as a social being endowed with a free will, intense passion, congenial and gripping emotions, as well as with an enormous intellectual prowess. If these qualities are correctly cultivated and used, they are bound to lead man to the highest level of honor and distinction. However, if they are misused or abused, they are bound to lead man to some of the most disgraceful levels of self-ruin and humiliation. Allah says in the Qur'an: "Corruption has appeared in the land and the sea on account of what the hands of

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., vol. 2 p. 165.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., vol. 2 p. 164.

men have wrought, that He may make them taste a part of that which they have done, so that they may return.” (al-Rum, 41)

Islam also teaches that humanity is a big family with one and the same origins, mission and purpose. People have been divided into various communities and tribes only to know and learn from each other and cooperate with each other in righteousness and piety, not that they may abhor, look down at and conspire against each other. The best of people are those who are most submissive to Allah. Allah says on this: “O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other (not that you may despise (each other)). Verily the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things).” (al-Hujurat, 13)

“...And help one another in goodness and piety, and do not help one another in sin and aggression; and be careful of (your duty to) Allah; surely Allah is severe in requiting (evil).” (al-Ma'idah, 2)

Moreover, Islam with its unique *tawhidic* (the idea of Allah's Oneness) worldview champions that all the believing men and women are brothers and sisters to each other. Their example is like a fortified building whose bricks enforce and rely on each other. They hold together in unity and strength, each part contributing strength in its own way.¹⁰²

The believers are like one person, or like one body; if a single organ is in pain, the whole body feels it and cannot rest in peace until the pain is cured. Allah says about this: “The Believers are but a single Brotherhood, so make peace and reconciliation between your two (contending) brothers; and fear Allah, that you may receive Mercy. O you who believe! Let not some men among you laugh at others. It may be that the (latter) are better than the (former). Nor let some women laugh at others. It may be that the (latter are better than the (former). Nor defame nor be sarcastic to each other, nor call each other by (offensive) nicknames. Ill-seeming is a name connoting wickedness, (to be used of one) after he has believed. And those who do not desist are (indeed) doing wrong.” (al-Hujurat, 10, 11)

“The Believers, men and women, are protectors one of another. They enjoin what is just, and forbid what is evil. They observe regular

¹⁰² *The Holy Qur'an*, English Translation of the Meanings and Commentary; see the commentary of the verse 4 from the *al-Saff* chapter.

prayers, practice regular charity, and obey Allah and His Messenger. On them will Allah pour His mercy, for Allah is Exalted in power, Wise.” (al-Tawbah, 71)

The Prophet (pbuh) said about this: “A believer is like a brick for another believer, the one supporting the other.”¹⁰³

“The similitude of believers in regard to mutual love, affection, fellow-feeling is that of one body; when any limb of it aches, the whole body aches, because of sleeplessness and fever.”¹⁰⁴

“A Muslim is the brother of a Muslim. He neither oppresses him nor humiliates him nor looks down upon him. It is a serious evil for a Muslim that he should look down upon his brother Muslim. All things of a Muslim are inviolable for his brother in faith: his blood, his wealth and his honor.”¹⁰⁵

Surely, it was because of these Islamic values and teachings that no sooner had Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) migrated to Madinah and had embarked on transforming and developing the area of Yathrib into a lively, compact and vibrant city-state of Madinah, than the Islamic scheme of personality and community building, which was based on and infused with the power and zeal of the Islamic worldview and *shari’ah* (law), got into full swing. The undertaking reached its pinnacle when the Prophet (pbuh) legislated the system of *mu’akhah* (brotherly association) among the Migrants (*Muhajirs*) from Makkah and Helpers (*Ansar*) from Madinah. The *mu’akhah* included 90 men, 45 from either side. So binding was the treaty that the Migrants for sometimes were the heirs of the Helpers, and *vice versa*, instead of their own kindred by blood. Later, however, the verse 33 from the Qur’anic chapter *al-Nisa’* was revealed and the matter of the Migrants and Helpers inheriting one another was cancelled.

Also, shortly after arriving in Madinah, the Prophet (pbuh) also organized the just relationships between the various inhabitants of Madinah, including the Jews, and recorded them in a document called the Constitution of Madinah. The commitments of each group within Madinah and its rights and duties were comprehensively enshrined in the document.

Immediately following his arrival in Madinah, the Prophet (pbuh), for the similar reasons, disclosed to the keen and excited

¹⁰³ Muslim, *Sahih Muslim*, Book 032, Hadith No. 6257.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., Book 032, Hadith No. 6254.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., Book 032, Hadith No. 6219.

assembled crowd some of the paths which invariably lead towards *Jannah* (Paradise) in the Hereafter, as well as towards the individual and collective happiness in this world. Such paths, which are as much individual as community oriented, are: implementing and spreading peace and concord wherever possible and by whatever lawful means, sharing and compassion, maintaining good relations with relatives (as well as with others), and praying at night when everybody else is asleep. A companion Abdullah b. Salam is reported to have said that these were the first words he had heard from the Prophet (pbuh).¹⁰⁶ Undeniably, furthermore, these were among the very first words and advices which the Prophet (pbuh) had uttered following his *Hijrah* (migration), because Abdullah b. Salam was among the first to see, meet and hear the Prophet (pbuh) when he arrived in Madinah. After he had done so, Abdullah b. Salam instantly embraced Islam as he had realized that the Prophet's face "seemed by no means like the face of an imposter."¹⁰⁷

In the same vein, aiming at an effective and speedy realization of the personality and community building mission in Madinah, the contents of the Prophet's sermon during the first Friday prayer (*Jum'ah*) -- as well as the contents of the other sermons of his at this particular juncture -- emphasized the importance of such issues as faith (*iman*), taking hold of the good and leaving the evil, brotherhood, sincerity, steadfastness, gratefulness for the blessing of Islam, the significance of helping one another in virtue and goodness and not in malevolence and mischief, the common causes of Muslims, and the like.¹⁰⁸

Islamic built environment must promote and, at the same time, must be a field for equitable social interactions. In this way, applying some of the most important Islamic values and principles in relation to the development of society will be greatly aided, and some of the most devastating social ailments will be successfully warded off. In this regard too is the Prophet (pbuh) our best example to get inspiration from and strive to emulate.

Strengthening fraternity among the Migrants (*Muhajirs*) from Makkah and Helpers (*Ansar*, the natives of Medina) was at all times

¹⁰⁶ Ibn Kathir, *al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah*, (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1985), vol. 3 p. 208. Al-Tirmidhi, *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, Kitab Sifah al-Qiyamah wa al-Raqa'iq wa al-Wara' 'an Rasulillah, Hadith No. 2409.

¹⁰⁷ Ibn Kathir, *al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah*, vol. 3 p. 208.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, vol. 3 p. 211. Al-Tabari, *The History of Prophets and Kings*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), vol. 7 p. 2.

one of the major goals of the Prophet's actions, fully knowing that the future of Islam and the Muslim society in Madinah depended on the strength of the relationships between the two sides. Therefore, his planning, building and development pursuits in Madinah, with the erection of his mosque and people's houses around it, aimed to foster constructive and fair social interactions among the Muslims.

To begin with, while building first and foremost his mosque, the principal mosque in Madinah, following the migration from Makkah, building the houses for the Migrants, including the houses of the Prophet (pbuh), was consequentially for some time deferred. During that period -- approximately six or seven months -- the Migrants stayed together with the Helpers sharing not only their houses but virtually everything else with them. While staying together in same houses, the two sides developed some strong and warm relationships, which later, time and gain, proved its incredible worth when the people had to face and overcome the challenges posed by the painstaking community building assignments. The Prophet (pbuh) himself stayed with a companion Abu Ayyub al-Ansari sharing with him his house till the mosque was completed.

While building the mosque, the Prophet (pbuh) and the people used to chant, as an immediate result of the integration efforts: "O God, no good except the good of the Hereafter, so have mercy upon the Migrants and Helpers!"¹⁰⁹

When the building of the mosque was completed, people, including the Prophet (pbuh), started building their houses around it. The houses of the Prophet (pbuh) adjoined the mosque, on its eastern side, opening into it. The area shortly was changed into the nerve-centre of the new Madinah community. The people's houses clustered around the Prophet's mosque and his houses, making eventually the core of the city to look like ring-shaped.

The mosque and with it the midpoint of Madinah where a majority of the people's houses later were concentrated, was positioned in an area between the old settlements -- virtually in the middle of them -- rather than either too far away from them or within the ambit of any of them. Thus, the message which was disseminated to the people through the city's focal point which contained the Prophet's mosque and a majority of Madinah houses which were newly planned and built, was that Islam favors no person and no

¹⁰⁹ Al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Kitab al-Salah, Hadith No. 420.

group on account of sheer history, culture or socio-political and economic status and affiliation. Everyone will be treated equally and will have a place in the forthcoming Madinah urbanization scheme. Everyone will be given an opportunity to make a contribution and shine. Everyone will be allowed to freely enjoy his or her rights, and, in turn, will be expected to responsibly discharge his or her duties and responsibilities. Credits will be given only on the basis of people's merit, piety, efforts made and righteous contributions to society.

Since the mosque – around which the people's houses later clustered -- was established on a relatively uninhibited land, a majority of the Migrants were honored to be able to build houses and settle near it. This way, justice was done to them for all the services they had rendered earlier to the Islamic cause while in Makkah. As this also meant that the Migrants, at the same time, were encouraged to work hard and become self-reliant and start a life on their own as soon as they could, thus becoming an asset to the modest and nascent community rather than a liability. Had the mosque been constructed somewhere within the ambit of any of the existing settlements and the Migrants had to build their houses and settle elsewhere, there would have existed a real possibility of marginalizing some of them in certain aspects, making thereby their plight all the more difficult and with it the solicited integration and adaptation in Madinah an intricate task. In this case, their initial stay with the Helpers would have been undeniably prolonged as well and both their self-sufficiency and contributions to satisfying the socio-political and economic needs of the city-state would have been somewhat forestalled for sometime.

Nor were the Helpers held in contempt by not selecting the location of the mosque, and with it the residential center of Madinah, in any of their established settlements. The arrival of Islam and the Prophet (pbuh) in Madinah meant that each and every avenue to reviving the centuries-old and all-encompassing antagonism between the two major Arab tribes in Madinah: *Aws* and *Khazraj*, had to be forever obstructed. Doing a favor to either *Aws* or *Khazraj*, by positioning the mosque and the city's residential midpoint in the settlement of either tribe, for example, while neglecting the other tribe, could have been one of such avenues, given the fact that the faith (*iman*) was yet to conquer the hearts of many individuals from each of the *Aws* and *Khazraj* tribes. Certainly, not positioning the Prophet's mosque with its surrounding residential center in the ambit

of either *Aws* or *Khazraj* was one of the wisest and most constructive moves that could have been made under the circumstances.¹¹⁰

When the Prophet (pbuh) set out to plan and distribute the land to the people around his mosque,¹¹¹ and while he was watching them plan and build their houses -- the process in which he himself sometimes actively participated -- the Prophet (pbuh) demonstrated that the most decisive factors that shaped the strategies and motives according to which he was discharging his development and urbanization tasks were the ones related to the Islamic spirituality, the total wellbeing of the people, as well as the social integration, justice and unity among all the sectors of society. There might have been some other factors at play as well, but, without doubt, they were secondary in nature and must have been correlated with those major three factors. This assertion of ours can be corroborated by the following.

In order to avoid unwanted crowding in the nerve-center of the city of Madinah, which consisted of the Prophet's mosque and its surrounding residential area, as well as to avoid the development of certain areas at the expense of the others in the city, the Prophet (pbuh) prevented the people of the Banu Salamah clan from moving there. The Banu Salamah clan was staying near the *Sal'* hill, which was about one mile from the Prophet's mosque. On hearing that there still were some empty land lots available there, they wanted to shift to the place. The Prophet (pbuh) rejected the idea though by saying: "O Banu Salamah! Don't you think that for every step of yours (that you take towards the mosque for prayers) there is a reward?"¹¹²

In other words, the Prophet (pbuh) told Banu Salamah that if they moved closer to the mosque, they would gain nothing in terms of the intensity and extent of their participation in, and benefiting from, the on-going scheme of the development of the city-state of Madinah, because such a scheme was so universally just, integrative and all-inclusive that nobody, wherever he or she stayed, and whoever he or she was, could be left behind and thus become a loser. Everyone, the Prophet (pbuh) further implied, will be given an equal opportunity to express himself, make a contribution and then reap the rewards of his or her efforts. Similarly, everything that could hold back and cancel the realizing of those objectives will be sternly dealt with. Indeed,

¹¹⁰ Spahic Omer, *The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and Urbanization of Madinah*, p. 151-154.

¹¹¹ Al-Samhudi, *Wafa' al-Wafa*, vol. 2 p. 717-734.

¹¹² Al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Kitab al-Adhan, Hadith No. 625.

imprudent, flawed, discriminatory and myopic urbanization and general development systems are one of the causes that not only slow down, but also are very much capable of completely inhibiting the attainment of a society's noble objectives.

However, in terms of their spiritual benefits, the Banu Salamah clan was told that they would lose a lot by moving closer to the mosque and by building their houses there, owing to the ways Islam generally sees and appreciates people, their lives and efforts, and their participations in and contributions to the intricate society building processes. Certainly, there is much more to a successful social integration than mere slogans, superficial display and ceremonies, and people's and their houses' physical proximity and interaction.

The commentators of the Qur'an are of the view that the mentioned incident was behind the revelation of the following verse in the *Ya Sin* chapter in the Qur'an: "Verily We shall give life to the dead, and We record that which they send before and that which they leave behind, and of all things have We taken account in a clear Book (of evidence)." (Ya Sin, 12) It should be noted, however, that the whole chapter *Ya Sin*, with the exception of this verse, was revealed in Makkah.¹¹³ The referred to verse alone was revealed in Madinah. A companion Abdullah b. 'Abbas said that it was not only the clan of Banu Salamah that wanted to move closer to the Prophet's mosque. There were many more families and clans of the Helpers (*Ansar* or the natives of Madinah) who wanted to do the same. However, following the revelation of the said verse, they all gave up their plans and stayed where they initially lived.¹¹⁴

Surely, it was due to this that many people, though wanted very much, were not disappointed if they were unable to build their houses and live in the immediate vicinity of the Prophet's mosque and his own houses. They still felt that they and their contributions were very much important, needed and greatly appreciated. They felt that even though they lived somewhat away from the focal point of the Madinah city in terms of the physical closeness to it, yet they stood at the core of its integration, urbanization and general development plans and efforts.

Social integration that the Prophet (pbuh) and Islam were promoting was much more comprehensive, thorough, profound and

¹¹³ Jalal al-Din Al-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an*, (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1979), vol. 1 p. 16.

¹¹⁴ *Mukhtasar Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, vol. 3 p. 157.

divine than what a few physical aspects thereof were able to suggest. Just like everything else, social integration in Islam too transcends its mere physical and often shallow and artificial dimensions, embracing and dealing with all the corporal and spiritual tiers of human existence. Social justice, unity and integration are the end at which virtually all Islamic teachings and values point and towards which they all jointly lead.

Hence, if we look at the houses of the early Muslims in Madinah that adjoined, or were positioned in close proximity to the Prophet's mosque and his houses, we could see that there were many houses which were very close to, and even abutted, each other. However, there were some houses which stood away from each other and were separated by gardens, meadows or by some empty open spaces. Furthermore, some of the greatest companions of the Prophet (pbuh) lived near the Prophet's mosque and his houses, but there also were some other great companions who lived quite far from the same area. In the same way, there were some relatively unknown companions of the Prophet (pbuh) who were given to build their houses and live near the Prophet's mosque, although they were not as "distinguished" as some other people.¹¹⁵ And finally, as mentioned earlier in the case of the Banu Salamah clan, many people were asked to remain relatively far from the Prophet's mosque at their original locations, without jeopardizing their social standing, participation and commitment, although a sufficient space for their houses, especially during the early stages of the Madinah development enterprise, could somehow have been procured in the much loved and sought after area surrounding the mosque.

The Prophet's housing scheme which aimed at ensuring a solid social integration between all the residents in Madinah, was beneficial even for those who were the poorest and, hence, were forced to face many difficulties in securing a home. Apart from responding to a great many religious injunctions in Islam meant for ensuring a required minimum wellbeing for the destitute and needy in the community, the Prophet (pbuh) also was much aware that the consequences of neglecting the hardship of that category of people would have been such that they could defeat the whole purpose of his integration

¹¹⁵ Al-Samhudi, *Wafa' al-Wafa*, vol. 2 p. 717-734. Muhammad Ilyas Abd al-Ganiyy, *Buyut al-Sahabah hawl al-Masjid al-Nabawi al-Sharif*, (Madinah: Matabi' al-Rashid, 2003), p. 61-151.

efforts. Moreover, the whole process of society building in Madinah would have been badly affected too.

The Prophet (pbuh) and his policies had everyone on record. He knew that the success of the Madinah community depended as much on everyone's accomplishment of his or her duties and responsibilities as on their enjoyment of their basic human rights. Enjoying the warmth of home and the family Islam sees as one of such basic rights. Islam also preaches that just as no one who possesses a lot is to regard himself as extremely lucky and fortunate, likewise no one who possesses little is to regard himself as extremely unlucky and unfortunate. Indeed, both groups of people have been tested with different tests and have been given dissimilar situations and means either to succeed or fail in their earthly mission. In principle, no one is rich or deprived on merit.

In Islam, the actual owner of everything on earth, including man, is Allah. Allah gives whomever He wants, and takes away from whomever He wants, in line with the dictates of His infinite wisdom, mercy, compassion and justice. One is not to get carried away when he has and when he achieves, and not to feel totally disheartened when he does not have and when he fails to achieve. One is to be pragmatic, come to terms with his own situation and then try to get the best out of it. He must remember that Allah does everything due to a purpose which, sometimes, is beyond our grasp. As His creation, Allah loves us, cares for us and always does only that which is best for us. He knows what is best for us because He knows us better than even us knowing ourselves.

Surely, having a different understanding than this is tantamount to doing injustice to ourselves and to try to undermine our spiritual wellbeing. For example, due to some flawed perceptions concerning the constant and preordained life fluctuations, there are people who succeed when they achieve a lot in life, but fail when they possess and achieve little, as they eventually fall prey to impatience, anxiety, jealousy, resentment, meanness, etc. Also, on the other hand, there are people who make it when they possess and achieve little in life, but fail when they achieve a lot, as they too eventually fall prey to greed, haughtiness, extravagance, ingratitude, rivalry, etc. No condition of man in which Allah as his Creator and Lord places him is the guarantee of man's ultimate triumph. The guarantee of man's triumph in both worlds is how he reacts to and copes with whatever condition in which Allah places him. Allah says: "No misfortune can

happen on earth or in your souls but is recorded in a decree before We bring it into existence. That is truly easy for Allah, in order that you may not despair over matters that pass you by, nor exult over favors bestowed upon you. For Allah loves not any vainglorious boaster.” (al-Hadid, 22, 23)

It is right here that the Islamic notions of brotherhood and unreserved cooperation between people come into force. The rich help the poor overcome their worldly but in essence temporary setbacks with which they have been tested, relieving them from some potentially dangerous spiritual impediments often associated with destitution. Whereas the poor, on the other hand, help the rich keep their feet on the ground and purify themselves and their in essence temporary prosperity with which they too have been tested, guarding them against some potentially perilous spiritual impediments often associated with wealth and prosperity. In other words, the two parties: the rich and the poor, need and depend on each other in relation to some of the most fundamental matters of this world and the Hereafter. Both of neglecting the poor and giving excessive preferentiality to the rich spells their respective ill-treatment and is a step in a wrong direction. The society needs the active participations of both the rich and poor for its self-realization. No society is successful where the rights and responsibilities of the rich and poor, and the balanced relationships between them, have not been duly attended to. Taking care only of the rich, while overlooking and marginalizing the poor, is not the way. Similarly, taking care only of the poor, while ignoring the requirements and disrespecting the rights of the rich, is not the answer either.

Due to all this, in the process of solving the housing issues in Madinah, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) did not neglect those people, an overwhelming majority of whom were Migrants (*muhajirs*) from Makkah, who have been so poor that they could not afford even their daily sustenance, let alone the shelter. They were called the “People of the *suffah*” (*suffah*, meaning a “raised platform or bench”). The Prophet (pbuh) set up for them a shaded structure in a corner of the northern side of his mosque which served as a hostel, so to speak, to them where they used to stay. The *suffah* could house between seventy and one hundred individuals, and the actual number of tenants was subject to how fast their overall condition was improving. The “People of the *suffah*” would frequently go out to perform whatever work they could find in order to procure as much of their

sustenance as they could. They actively participated in wars against polytheists and some of them died as martyrs on different battlefields. There were actually two *suffahs*: one for men and the other for women, the former seemingly outnumbering the latter.

Although the “People of the *suffah*” tried really hard to live on their own, yet they found it impossible to make ends meet. So the community had to help them in the short term by providing necessities almost on a daily basis, and in the long term by providing some permanent work opportunities for them, thus encouraging them to stand on their own feet as soon as it was possible and become the community’s asset. Inviting the *suffah* dwellers for a meal, or bringing food into the Prophet’s mosque where they stayed and eating with them in groups was a regular occurrence. The number of the *suffah*’s occupants was always erratic and unstable. There were always those who were leaving it and those who were coming in. However, seldom were these alterations in a commensurate mode, resulting in the place to be sometimes overcrowded and at other times to be to a degree vacant.

Even though the Islamic state was not so affluent financially, in particular for the duration of the first few years after the *Hijrah* (migration from Makkah to Madinah, the poor and needy of the state were not to worry about it at all. Not only to the housing problem did this rule apply, but also to all the other exigencies needed for living a respectable and normal life. It was for this reason, therefore, that the prescription of *Zakah* (the alms) and *Sadaqah al-fitr* (charity of fast-breaking) came about during the earliest Madinah period, aiming at creating the responsible, ethical and caring individuals who, in turn, will make up a sound, principled and caring society. So critical in Islam is the injunction of caring for the less fortunate ones and those tried with destitution that an underlying trait of a real believer is to wish to his fellow believers -- whoever and wherever they may be -- only that which he wishes to himself. In Islam, charity and kindness to others, as a noble form of virtue, are to be preached, acted upon, encouraged and even commanded if the need arises. According to the Qur’an, one of the chief reasons for which the inhabitants of Hellfire shall undergo such a painful and agonizing chastisement will be their deliberate refusal to feed the indigent. Allah says: “And (ask) of the Sinners: ‘What led you into Hell Fire?’ They will say: ‘We were not of those who prayed; nor were we of those who fed the indigent.” (al-Muddaththir, 41-44)

Placing the poor and homeless “People of the *suffah*” within the domain of the Prophet’s mosque, a community development center and the nerve-center of the vibrant city-state of Madinah, clearly implied that the Islamic notions of sympathizing, caring and sharing with others have been put into practice in some of the most comprehensive and spirited terms at the hands of the Prophet (pbuh) and the early Muslims. By staying in the mosque, the message disseminated to the “People of the *suffah*” was that they were still regarded as an integral part of the community, and that their brethren will not have a rest till their testing socio-economic predicament is solved once and for all and they become completely integrated into the community. They were not left alone and their problem was shared by the whole of the community. Their problem was always seen as such, i.e., as a problem that required a solution, and so a solution was constantly pursued. Certainly, this was a powerful source of endless contentment, confidence, hope and loyalty for those affected.

On the contrary, placing – hypothetically -- the “People of the *suffah*” in an isolated place, away from both the developments and concerns of the community, would surely have implied to them the opposite of what has been mentioned earlier, and could only dangerously aggravate their condition and, in the long run, the condition of the whole community. Their problem would not have been viewed as the problem of the community that required the community’s unreserved and joint effort. The problem they would have had no choice but to see as solely theirs, and, as such, a prolonged and virtually unsolvable one. However, not only the misery and relative failure of the “People of the *suffah*” would such a scenario signify, but also the complete failure and misery of the whole community. Each and every member of the community would then be held responsible. As the Prophet (pbuh) has said – as mentioned earlier – the community of believing men and women are like one body. If one of its limbs is in pain, the whole body is in pain because of restlessness, sleeplessness and fever that it feels till the affected limb is cured.¹¹⁶

The house and the subject of privacy¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Muslim, *Sahih Muslim*, Book 032, Hadith No. 6254.

¹¹⁷ Spahic Omer, *The Origins and Functions of Islamic Domestic Courtyards*, p. 228-248.

In Islam, the issue of privacy is of paramount importance, as touched on in the previous chapter when we analyzed the verses of the Qur'an that deal with it. In this section, some more light will be shed on the same issue.

Privacy is one of the factors that influence most the ways Muslims perceive, plan, build and use their houses. As a person's shelter and private sanctuary, as his place of delight as well as a microcosm of human culture and civilization, the house phenomenon is a person's fortress where he easily can retire from the hassle of the outside world and then unobstructed enjoy a world of his home that he freely crafted for himself. One's home, which one's house must stand for, Islam teaches, is thus one of the greatest blessings of Allah upon man. It is also one of the most essential means by which man can make his stay on earth a pleasant, comfortable, consequential and purposeful one, and on which man's implementation of his earthly *khilafah* (vicegerency) mission largely depends. Painstakingly guarding one's privacy both at one's personal and family levels, with neighbors, friends, visitors and between the family members right inside the house, as well as in the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual spheres of one's total being, is vital in ensuring that the house as a comprehensive family education and development center functions properly and helps, rather than impedes, people in their discharging of their life assignments. A companion of the Prophet (pbuh), Abdullah b. Umar, reported that the Prophet (pbuh) prayed every morning and every night to Allah asking Him to cover his 'awrah, that is to say, to help him conceal, apart from the private parts of his body, all his flaws and everything else in his life that he could possibly be ashamed of.¹¹⁸

Indeed, a house which supports and helps its occupants to successfully and peacefully do what they have been created to do, with its philosophy, purpose and mission mirroring and hence promoting the philosophy, purpose and mission of its occupants' lives, is a house which functions properly. But a house which contradicts and hampers its occupants to successfully and peacefully do what they have been created to do, with its philosophy, purpose

¹¹⁸ Abu Dawud, *Sunan Abi Dawud*, Kitab al-Adab, Hadith No. 4412.

The Prophet (pbuh) was infallible, however, he used to constantly ask Allah's mercy and forgiveness not because he sinned but because he possessed an exceptional sense of humility, appreciation and shyness. He used to say: "I love to be a thankful and appreciative servant".

and mission not mirroring and hence not promoting the philosophy, purpose and mission of its occupants' lives, is a house which functions incorrectly. The latter house is a liability, rather than an asset, to its people. Its negative aspects and their equally negative effects, in the long run, are more detrimental for the complete wellbeing of its people than what may appear to a casual and heedless observer. It is thus very natural and logical that a solid compatibility between the principles and values which Muslims exemplify in their daily dealings, and the principles and values which their houses exemplify, is fervently encouraged and advocated, and the opposite, that is, the incompatibility between the two, in equal measure, opposed and rescinded.

Having said this, a house that strongly promotes and facilitates the total enjoying and safeguarding of the privacy of the family is a house which, by and large, functions properly. However, a house which compromises this matter, with which more than a few foremost Islamic teachings and values are linked up, is a house which, by and large, does not function properly. There is something seriously wrong with such a house. Therefore, some corrective measures are advised to be taken, not only to correct the existing flaws, but also to prevent the same and other similar flaws from recurring in housing. Nonetheless, the lack of privacy protection in people's houses must be firstly seen and understood as a serious problem, which will result from properly and continuously educating both the professionals and the ordinary people. Only then will a solution for the stated and disturbing problem be genuinely sought. No solution can ever be found for something which is not clearly identified as a problem in the first place.

Thus, Islam forbids such wrongdoings as invading one's privacy, seeking people's failings and faults, peeping into one's house without his permission, entering one's house without seeking permissions to enter, and the like. The ways houses are planned, designed and built must aim to prevent people from perpetrating such unethical acts. Conversely, houses must invite and encourage people to perform the virtues that stand at the diametrically opposite sides of those denounced acts.

Allah says: "O you who believe! Enter not houses other than your own, until you have asked permission and saluted those in them: that is best for you, in order that you may heed (what is seemly). If you find no one in the house, enter not until permission is given to

you: if you are asked to go back, go back: that makes for greater purity for yourselves: and Allah knows well all that you do” (al-Nur 27-28).

“O you who believe! Let those whom your right hands possess and those of you who have not attained to puberty ask permission of you three times; before the morning prayer, and when you put off your clothes at midday in summer, and after the prayer of the nightfall; these are three times of privacy for you; neither is it a sin for you nor for them besides these, some of you must go round about (waiting) upon others; thus does Allah make clear to you the communications, and Allah is Knowing, Wise. And when the children among you have attained to puberty, let them seek permission as those before them sought permission; thus does Allah make clear to you His communications, and Allah is knowing, Wise.” (al-Nur, 58-59)

The Prophet (pbuh) also said: “...Do not trouble or gibe your Muslim brothers; do not pursue their faults, for he who pursues his brother’s faults, his faults will be pursued by Allah ...”¹¹⁹

“He who encroaches on a dwelling without the permission of its occupants, he allows them to puncture his eye.”¹²⁰

“If someone is peeping (looking secretly) into your house without your permission, and you throw a stone at him and destroy his eyes, there will be no blame on you.”¹²¹

It has been reported that a man peeped into a house of the Prophet (pbuh) through a hole while the Prophet (pbuh) was scratching his head with a *Midrai* (a certain kind of comb). On that the Prophet (pbuh) said (to him), “If I had known you had been looking, then I would have pierced your eye with that instrument, because the asking of permission has been ordained so that one would not see things unlawfully.”¹²²

Covering and safeguarding the ‘*awrah*, or private and secret parts and dimensions, of the human body as well as the whole of the human life, the Prophet (pbuh) regarded as a serious religious, safety and security matter. Thus, in several of his traditions, the Prophet (pbuh) referred to the concealing and guarding of the human ‘*awrah* alongside a number of other safety and security issues which are

¹¹⁹ Al-Tirmidhi, *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, Kitab al-Birr wa al-Silah, Hadith No. 1955.

¹²⁰ Muslim, *Sahih Muslim*, Kitab al-Adab, Hadith No. 4016.

¹²¹ Al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Kitab al-Diyat, Hadith No. 26.

¹²² Ibid., Kitab al-Libas, Hadith No. 807.

central to a happy living.¹²³ The ‘*awrah*’ protection in the life of a believer, in the most comprehensive sense of the term, is thus on a par with all the other requirements needed for ensuring the wellbeing of people and society. It even supersedes in importance many of them.

A companion of the Prophet (pbuh), Abdullah b. ‘Abbas, said that Allah screens, i.e., hides away people’s failings and forgives them (*satir*), and He loves screen(ing) (*sitr*).¹²⁴ It is only appropriate that people strive to do the same while living together and interacting with each other.

The Prophet (pbuh) said that whoever sees or comes across an ‘*awrah*’ (a fault, shortcoming, or a shameful deed, aspect or a feature of another man and his life) and then covers or conceals it, such an act is tantamount to bringing a killed female child, which was killed by means of being buried alive in the sand, back to life.¹²⁵ In other words, such is one of the noblest acts that are abundantly rewarded by Allah.

The house and all that is happening inside it is so private that even those who exercise the chore of enjoining good and forbidding evil (*al-amr bi al-ma’ruf wa al-nahy ‘an al-munkar*) cannot trespass on its domain by means of spying and without seeking permission. Both Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazali and Ibn Taymiyah are of the view that prying into the secrets of a sinner is prohibited. One should not enquire what is occurring in a house. Only when a sinner’s unlawful acts that he commits in his house become known, should an action based on wisdom and beautiful counsel be taken.¹²⁶ This approach is regarded as one of the major principles of the task of enjoining good and forbidding evil (*al-amr bi al-ma’ruf wa al-nahy ‘an al-munkar*).

The Prophet (pbuh) warned the people not to back-bite one another, and that they do not search for the faults of one another, for if anyone searches for the faults of his fellow Muslims, “Allah will search for his fault, and if Allah searches for the fault of anyone, He disgraces him in his house.”¹²⁷

¹²³ Ahmad b. Hanbal, *Musnad Ahmad b. Hanbal*, Musnad al-Mukaththirin min al-Sahabah, Hadith No. 4554.

¹²⁴ *Mukhtasar Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, vol. 2 p. 618.

¹²⁵ Abu Dawud, *Sunan Abi Dawud*, Kitab al-Adab, Hadith No. 4247.

¹²⁶ Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, *Ihya’ ‘Ulum al-Din*, vol. 2 p. 238. Ibn Taymiya, *Al-Amr bi al-Ma’ruf wa al-Nahy ‘an al-Munkar*, (Beirut, Dar Ibn Hazm, 2002), p. 26.

¹²⁷ Abu Dawud, *Sunan Abi Dawud*, Kitab al-Adab, Hadith No. 4862.

Once caliph Umar b. al-Khattab, while going at night in the city, heard sounds of songs in a house. He got over the wall and found that there was a woman singing and a pot of wine near a man. Umar said: "O enemy of Allah, have you thought that Allah will keep your sin concealed? The man said: "O Commander of the faithful, you have come yourself. Don't be hasty in judgment. I committed one sin this time, but you have committed three sins. Allah said: 'Don't spy.' You have committed spying and therefore committed one sin. Allah says: 'It is not righteousness that you should come to the houses by their back-doors.' You have come overstepping the wall and so you have committed another sin. Allah says: 'Don't enter a house other than your own houses till you seek permission and greet their inmates'. You have entered my house without permission and greeting". Umar said: "If I pardon you, will it do any good to you"? The man said: "By Allah, o Commander of the faithful, it will do me good. If you pardon me, I will never do it again." Then Umar pardoned him and went away.¹²⁸

On another occasion, while secretly traversing the city of Madinah in the grim midnight, the caliph Umar b. al-Khattab saw a light in a house. He then proceeded towards it. When he came near, he found that a man was intoxicated with drinking wine. Umar then was reminded by one of his companions that he was about to commit spying, so Umar withdrew and went away.¹²⁹

Ahmad b. Hanbal in his *Musnad* reported that a companion of the Prophet (pbuh), Uqbah b. Amir, during the reign of one of the early caliphs, prevented a man from calling the police to investigate, convict and punish some of his neighbors who, as he believed, were consuming alcohol inside their houses. Uqbah b. Amir told the man that he rather should conceal the actions of his neighbors, because he had heard the Prophet (pbuh) as saying that the act of concealing the faults of a fellow man, in terms of goodness and reward, is practically the same as bringing a killed female child, which was killed by means of being buried alive in the sand, back to life.¹³⁰

Certainly, seeing the house institution as a guarded earthly heaven helps the outside world to stay unaffected by the sins committed inside it by its inhabitants. Only when the effects of such sins become obvious, threatening to transcend the frontiers of the

¹²⁸ Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*, vol. 2 p.153.

¹²⁹ Ibid., vol. 2 p. 152.

¹³⁰ Ahmad b. Hanbal, *Musnad Ahmad b. Hanbal*, Musnad al-Shamiyyin, Hadith No. 16805.

house and have an impact on the outer realm, does it become obligatory upon society to act and cancel them. It is extremely wise that in doing so the zeal and urgency of society be proportionate to how damaging the influence of the sins committed is.

By the same token, seeing the house as a guarded earthly heaven helps its inhabitants to stay away somewhat effectively from the impacts of the wrongdoings that are intermittently endemic to the outside world. Its inward-looking form and its blank outer walls with minimal openings symbolically signify the house's isolation from the outside world, as well as its immunity to all the bad influences that it may contain. It appears as if such houses with their unique form and function give the cold shoulder, so to speak, to the negative influences of the outside, vowing that their role as a family development center can withstand the onslaught and can present their inhabitants with other better alternatives. It is for this that our understanding of the house is a broad one making it rather a family education and development center which is capable, in concert with other societal establishments, of transforming entire communities. And if need be, the house institution, to a large extent, can function on its own in furnishing its occupants with guidance, ability and audacity to act properly and eventually succeed in life.

Surely, it is because of this that the Prophet (pbuh) advised that during unprecedented commotion(s) (*fitnah*), the people, among other things, keep to their houses. Narrated Abdullah b. 'Amr b. al-'As: "When we were around Allah's Prophet (pbuh), he mentioned the period of commotion (*fitnah*) saying: "When you see the people that their covenants have been impaired, (the fulfilling of) the guarantees becomes rare, and they become thus (intertwining his fingers)." I then got up and said: "What should I do at that time, may Allah make me ransom for you?" He replied: "Keep to your house, control your tongue, accept what you approve, abandon what you disapprove, attend to your own affairs, and leave alone the affairs of the generality."¹³¹

Sufyan al-Thawri, who died in 161 AH / 777 AC, described his time as the time of loneliness and staying in a corner of the house, lest one might become infected with some social ailments of the day.¹³² For the same reason, another sage said that one's assembly

¹³¹ Abu Dawud, *Sunan Abi Dawud*, Kitab al-Malahim, Hadith No. 4329.

¹³² Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*, vol. 2 p. 174.

within one's house is the best assembly because "you will not find anybody there and nobody will find you there."¹³³

So private a realm is the house that even Satan who had vowed that he will try everything possible, everywhere and on every occasion to perturb and mislead man, could be kept at bay from it. Jabir b. 'Abdullah reported Allah's Prophet (pbuh) as saying: "When a person enters his house and mentions the name of Allah at the time of entering it and while eating the food, Satan says (addressing himself): You have no place to spend the night and no evening meal; but when he enters without mentioning the name of Allah, the Satan says: You have found a place to spend the night, and when he does not mention the name of Allah while eating food, he (the Satan) says: You have found a place to spend the night and evening meal."¹³⁴

Abu Malik al-Ash'ari narrated: "The Prophet (pbuh) said: "When a man goes into his house, he should say: "O Allah! I ask You for good both when entering and when going out; in the name of Allah we have entered, and in the name of Allah we have gone out, and in Allah or Lord do we trust." He should then greet his family."¹³⁵

The Prophet (pbuh) also said: "Do not make your houses as graveyards. Satan runs away from the house in which the Qur'anic chapter *al-Baqarah* is recited."¹³⁶

"In the Qur'anic chapter *al-Baqarah* there is a verse which is superior to all the other verses in the Qur'an. If it is read in a house where there is Satan, Satan will run away from that house. That verse is the *Ayah al-Kursi* (the Verse of the Throne)."¹³⁷

Without a doubt, the house is a private realm where its inhabitants alone are in charge. They and nobody else dictate who can enter and who cannot, what should take place inside and what should not. Not even the angels are excluded from this rule. No matter how much the inhabitants of a house wanted angels to patronize their house, yet it is their actions and the function of the house that either attract the angels to, or hold them off, the house. The Prophet (pbuh) said that the angels do not enter a house which contains a picture or an image, a dog, or a man who is impure by sexual defilement.¹³⁸

¹³³ Ibid., vol. 2 p. 174.

¹³⁴ Muslim, *Sahih Muslim*, Kitab al-Ashribah, Hadith No. 5006.

¹³⁵ Abu Dawud, *Sunan Abi Dawud*, Kitab al-Adab, Hadith No. 5077.

¹³⁶ Muslim, *Sahih Muslim*, Kitab al-Salah, Hadith No. 1707.

¹³⁷ *Mukhtasar Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, vol. 1 p. 229.

¹³⁸ Abu Dawud, *Sunan Abi Dawud*, Kitab al-Libas, Hadith No. 4140.

Moreover, Abu Musa, a companion of the Prophet (pbuh), reported the Prophet (pbuh) as saying: “The house in which remembrance of Allah is made and the house in which Allah is not remembered are like the living and the dead.”¹³⁹

Even the house residents when entering their house do so with some ethical guidelines, thereby showing their respect for the inviolability of the house institution and the standards and values upon which the same rests. This applies not only when there is someone in the house, but also when the house is empty. Hence, if one enters his house when it is empty, or any other unoccupied house, one should say: “Peace be upon us and on the righteous servants of Allah.”¹⁴⁰

The Prophet (pbuh) also advised: “When anyone of you is away from his house for a long time, he should not return to his family at night.”¹⁴¹ The reason for this is that if one returns at night unannounced, his return might take his wife and other family members by surprise. They may be thus found in a condition which they are not happy about. The wife will have no enough time to beautify herself and get ready to welcome her husband.¹⁴²

Allah says in the Qur’an: “...It is no virtue if ye enter your houses from the back: it is virtue if ye fear Allah. Enter houses through the proper doors: and fear Allah: that ye may prosper” (al-Baqarah, 189).

Not only when entering their houses should the people observe a proper course of action, but also when leaving them, thus signifying a transit from an inner world to an outer one. This transit entails a lot of implications for one’s demeanor and spiritual concentration. Umm Salamah, one of the Prophet’s wives narrated that the Prophet (pbuh) never went out of her house without raising his eye to the sky and saying: “O Allah! I seek refuge in You lest I stray or be led astray, or slip or made to slip, or cause injustice, or suffer injustice, or do wrong, or have wrong done to me.”¹⁴³

The Prophet (pbuh) also said, as narrated by Anas b. Malik: “When a man goes out of his house and says: ‘In the name of Allah, I trust in Allah; there is no might and no power but in Allah,’ the

¹³⁹ Muslim, *Sahih Muslim*, Kitab al-Salah, Hadith No. 1706.

¹⁴⁰ Malik b. Anas, *al-Muwatta’*, Book 53, No. 53.3.8.

¹⁴¹ Al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Kitab al-Nikah, Hadith No. 171.

¹⁴² Ibid., Kitab al-Nikah, Hadith No. 173.

¹⁴³ Abu Dawud, *Sunan Abi Dawud*, Kitab al-Adab, Hadith No. 5075.

following will be said to him at that time: ‘You are guided, defended and protected.’ The devils will go far from him and another devil will say: ‘How can you deal with a man who has been guided, defended and protected?’¹⁴⁴

Before entering other people’s houses, seeking permission from, and giving *salam* to, their occupants is required. Permission is to be sought three times¹⁴⁵ by saying: “Peace be upon you. May I enter?”¹⁴⁶ If after a third time permission was not granted, the visitor is to go back, even if he knew that there was someone in the house. Abu Musa, a companion of the Prophet (pbuh), once sought permission to enter the house of Umar b. al-Khattab. Having done so three times without receiving any reply, Abu Musa returned. Thereupon, Umar asked someone from his household to let Abu Musa in, but he was no longer in front of the door. Umar later asked Abu Musa why he left, and the latter replied that he had heard the Prophet (pbuh) saying: “If one of you seeks permission to enter three times and does not receive it, one is to go back.”¹⁴⁷

The Prophet (pbuh) once wanted to visit Sa’d b. ‘Ubadah. At the entrance to Sa’d’s house the Prophet (pbuh) sought permission by saying: “Peace and Allah’s mercy be upon you.” Sa’d b. ‘Ubadah was in the house and he replied: “Peace and Allah’s mercy be upon you too.” However, the Prophet (pbuh) did not hear the reply so he uttered the same two more times, to which Sa’d b. ‘Ubadah replied, but again the Prophet (pbuh) did not hear. Thereupon, the Prophet (pbuh) returned. Sa’d b. ‘Ubadah hastened after him, and when he reached him, Sa’d b. ‘Ubadah told the Prophet (pbuh) that he had heard all his greetings and duly replied all of them. However, he deliberately replied inaudibly so that the Prophet (pbuh) would not hear them and so multiply his greetings (supplications) for Sa’d, knowing that the Prophet’s supplications are accepted by Allah. Then, Sa’d b. ‘Ubadah took the Prophet (pbuh) to his house and offered him raisins.¹⁴⁸

When seeking permission to enter someone’s house, the Prophet (pbuh) did not face the door of the house squarely. He faced its right or left corner saying: “Peace be upon you; peace be upon

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., Kitab al-Adab, Hadith No. 5076.

¹⁴⁵ *Mukhtasar Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, vol. 2 p. 596.

¹⁴⁶ Abu Dawud, *Sunan Abi Dawud*, Kitab al-Adab, Hadith No. 5158.

¹⁴⁷ *Mukhtasar Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, vol. 2 p. 596.

¹⁴⁸ Abu Dawud, *Sunan Abi Dawud*, Kitab al-Adab, Hadith No. 5166a.

you!”¹⁴⁹ That was because the Prophet (pbuh) did not want to catch sight of the inside of the house once the door is opened, as most houses at that time were simple in terms of their form and arrangement of inner spaces.

It has also been suggested that the Prophet (pbuh) thus behaved because there were no curtains on the doors of many houses at that time.¹⁵⁰ Before Islam, entrances on the houses in Arabia often had no doors. There were only curtains hanging. Despite this, however, seeking permission before entering a house was nonexistent. Seldom was somebody concerned about the subject of privacy, as a result of which running into a husband and wife finding them indulged in some intimate affairs was frequent. The most that one was expected to say upon entering was “I am in”, or “Here I am”, and the like.¹⁵¹

So therefore, we may infer, the houses in Arabia following the commencement of the Prophet’s mission had four types of entrances: (1) entrances with doors which had supplementary curtains for screening the house interior when doors are opened; (2) entrances with doors which had no supplementary curtains; (3) entrances without doors but with curtains; and (4) entrances with neither doors nor curtains, which, to all intents and purposes, must have been a rarity. However, after Islam had introduced the concept of privacy protection, the situation started to change gradually so that the requirements of the new Islamic lifestyles were duly met.

It goes without saying that any act of building, which could endanger the privacy of a neighbor, one way or another, was always deemed so offensive that it as a rule would not be given a go-ahead until the potential danger was done away with and the affected party had expressed satisfaction.¹⁵² While discoursing on the rights of neighbors, Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazali stated that one of such rights is: “...Don’t look at the inner side of his house from the top of your roof.”¹⁵³

It has been reported to this effect that a man from al-Fustat in Egypt complained to caliph Umar b. al-Khattab that one of his

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., Kitab al-Adab, Hadith No. 5167.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., Kitab al-Adab, Hadith No. 5167.

¹⁵¹ *Mukhtasar Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, vol. 2 p. 597.

¹⁵² For details see: Abu Abdullah Muhammad b. al-Rami, *al-I’lam bi Ahkam al-Bunyan*, (Tunis: Markaz al-Nashr al-Jami’i, 1999), p. 33-101. Saleh al-Hathloul, *The Arab-Muslim City*, (Riyadh: Dar al-Sahan, 1996), p. 102-113.

¹⁵³ Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, *Ihya’ ‘Ulum al-Din*, vol. 2 p. 164.

neighbors had erected an (additional) room with such a design and plan that it enabled him to encroach through a window on the privacy of the former's household. The caliph then instructed 'Amr b. al-'As, his governor in Egypt, to investigate the matter: if the room owner really meant to disturb his neighbor by means of building the room, the same must be destroyed. However, if he meant no harm, a bed is to be placed beneath the problematic window, and if a man with average height standing on it could not see through, the window is to remain as it is. But if he could see through, the window must be shut.¹⁵⁴

Sahnun, the *qadi* of Qayrawan in Tunis from 234 AH / 848 AC until 240 AH / 854 AC, on one occasion was asked about a man who wished to construct on top of his shops a *masjid* (mosque) with a terrace from which the surrounding houses could be easily overlooked. Sahnun's answer was that a screening parapet must be added to the terrace, and unless that was done, no prayer shall be allowed to be conducted in the *masjid*.¹⁵⁵

When Umayyad caliph, Walid b. 'Abd al-Malik, decided in the year 88 AH / 707 AC to rebuild and enlarge the mosque of the Prophet (pbuh) in Madinah, he introduced the idea of the minaret for the first time to it. Four minarets stood at the mosque's four corners. One of the minarets was directly and clearly overlooking the house of Marwan b. al-Hakam, one of the late Umayyad caliphs, which was positioned within a short distance of the mosque. When another Umayyad caliph, Sulayman b. 'Abd al-Malik, while performing the pilgrimage from Syria, visited the house, it happened that a *mu'adhdhin* (he who calls for prayers) called for a prayer but overlooked the caliph who was somewhere in the house proper. For obvious reasons, the caliph promptly ordered the minaret to be demolished.¹⁵⁶

Therefore, the doctors of the *shari'ah* always insisted that the platform of minarets, or the roofs of mosques if there are no minarets, be surrounded by adequately high parapets, lest the *mu'adhdhin* should see some people in their houses. Some go so far as to assert that sometimes and in particular areas the *mu'adhdhin* in order to climb the minaret must be blind. An example is Kufah where its officer in charge of maintaining public law and order (*al-muhtasib*) once

¹⁵⁴Muhammad Uthman 'Abd al-Sattar, *al-Madinah al-Islamiyyah*, p. 335.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 335.

¹⁵⁶Al-Samhudi, *Wafa' al-Wafa*, vol. 2 p. 526.

insisted that blindness be added to the list of the necessary conditions for becoming the *mu'adhdhin*.¹⁵⁷ The scholars generally do not specify blindness as a condition, but do not view it as a snag either, provided a trustworthy person always notify such a *mu'adhdhin* of prayer time, as they do with regard to many other chores that an individual or group must discharge on behalf of others.¹⁵⁸ By the way, one of the Prophet's *mu'adhdhins* was Abdullah b. Ummi Maktum, who was blind.

Also, some scholars suggest that the *mu'adhdhin* be blindfolded whenever climbing minarets so that he could not see people in nearby houses, thus inflicting damage on them. Some others, however, would just insist that the *mu'adhdhin* lowers his gaze, as a result of his piety which, among other things, qualified him to be the *mu'adhdhin*. The *mu'adhdhin* is not to allow anybody else to accompany him to the mosque's minaret.¹⁵⁹

Saleh al-Hathloul said on the subject of privacy that generally in Islamic cities throughout Muslim history "limits were placed on the physical forms of buildings in order to protect privacy. For instance, in the case of doors and windows that looked upon neighboring houses, two types were recognized in convention: new (*hadith*) openings, which were to be sealed, and preexisting ones (*qadim*), which were left as is. However, even if the opening was not sealed, one would not be allowed to use it to look upon his neighbors, and was to be prevented and penalized if he did not respect the privacy of his neighbors."¹⁶⁰

Saleh al-Hathloul continued by saying that, for example, "in Tunis, many cases regarding the invasion of privacy were brought to court. Sources show that judges would order openings that invaded the privacy of neighbors to be sealed. In a related case from Medina in 981 AH / 1573 AC, a man complained to the court about his neighbor who had opened windows in his upper chamber on the grounds that these windows caused him damage by denying him privacy in his house. After examining the case and confirming the damage, the judge ordered that the windows be closed. The house owner, however, appealed to the judge, stating that intrusion on his

¹⁵⁷Muhammad Uthman 'Abd al-Sattar, *al-Madinah al-Islamiyyah*, p. 334.

¹⁵⁸Al-Zuhayli, *al-Fiqh al-Islami wa Adillatuh*, (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 1989), vol. 1 p. 547.

¹⁵⁹Saleh al-Hathloul, *The Arab-Muslim City*, p. 102-108.

¹⁶⁰ Saleh al-Hathloul, *Legislation and the Built Environment in the Arab-Muslim City*.
http://www.csbe.org/e_publications/arab-muslim_city/index.htm.

neighbor's privacy was not his intention when placing the windows, but rather that he needed them to bring in the sun and ventilate his chamber. The judge, consequently, appointed a group of experts to search for a solution. They recommended that the man raise his windows to about 220 cm above floor level, so that the inhabitants of that house could not look into the neighbor's house, even if standing on top of a chair."¹⁶¹

The house and the subject of recreation¹⁶²

In Islam, people are not allowed to overtax their bodies. Since bodily energy has a limit, it cannot endure long excessive pressure. Even excessive '*ibadah* (worship) has been shunned for the same reasons. Whenever one gets exhausted because of his work, study, or any other occupation aimed at fulfilling his own needs or the needs of his family as well as the community, one is to take a break and relax. The Prophet (pbuh) has said: "...Your body too has its rights on you; your eyes too have their rights on you."¹⁶³

In Islam, innocent recreation and leisure are permitted, and in certain cases even encouraged. The best recreation, however, is that which is a family affair, where one would spend his free time talking, joking, sporting and playing around with his household members. Hence, the house in Islam is to function as a place for diverse family recreational activities as well. In every house, there should be enough legitimate avenues, means and facilities to satisfy the requirements of this important human instinct. Such avenues, means and facilities are to be regarded not as dubious, superfluous and obstructing, but rather as constructive, helpful and indispensable ingredients that help the house, and with it the family, institution function as required. Indeed, this is one of the reasons why the house in Islam is recommended to be as spacious and comfortable as considered necessary for meeting all the family needs.

Again, the best model to us in this regard is the Prophet (pbuh) who, whenever he could and it was appropriate, entertained himself with different sorts of play with his household members. Abu Hamid al-Ghazali wrote about the Prophet's character and conduct: "He held innocent sports and plays as lawful, played with his wives and held

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Spahic Omer, *The Origins and Functions of Islamic Domestic Courtyards*, p. 275-281.

¹⁶³ Al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Kitab al-Sawm, Hadith No. 1839.

paces with them...He used to walk in the gardens of his companions for recreation...”¹⁶⁴

The Prophet (pbuh) would regularly gather all his wives in the house of a wife where his turn was to sleep, based on his fair rotational policy with them. He would often have a meal with all of them in the same house. After performing the ‘*Isha*’ (night) Prayer, he also used to spend some time with his household conversing and sharing some joyful moments with them. Only then would he go to sleep. He thus said, echoing the importance of this tradition: “The best among you is he who is the best with his family. Verily, I am the best one among you with my family.”¹⁶⁵

A’ishah, one of the Prophet’s wives, narrated: “Once, Sawdah – another wife of the Prophet (pbuh) -- visited us and the Prophet (pbuh) sat down between me and her, putting one leg in her lap and the other in mine. I made then *Khazira* (a kind of food) and told Sawdah to eat, but she refused. I said to her: “If you don't eat I will stain your face with *Khazira*,” but she insisted not to eat. Therefore, I put my hand in *Khazira* and stained her face with it. Seeing that, the Prophet (pbuh) laughed and gave his share of *Khazira* to Sawdah and then told her to stain my (A’ishah’s) face. So, Sawdah stained my face and the Prophet (pbuh) laughed.”¹⁶⁶

The houses of the Prophet (pbuh) were the centers of delight, contentment and happiness. The Prophet (pbuh) was the happiest and most contented and confident person on earth, something that never failed to show itself on his face, in his words and in his demeanor and character. Hence, one of the striking traits of his is that he was always fresh and smiling, displaying his gentle manners and soft nature.¹⁶⁷ Just like his remarkable personality and character, the Prophet’s houses too oozed an aura of endless joy, gratification, liveliness, charisma and enthusiasm.

It follows that Islam aims to create a society the members of which will be characterized with the same characteristics as their Prophet (pbuh), their life inspiration and role model. It is not thus an exaggeration to assert that one of the key features of an Islamic settlement would be the happy, friendly, smiling, exciting, confident and radiant faces of a majority of its people. This, in turn, will lead to

¹⁶⁴ Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, *Ihya’ ‘Ulum al-Din*, vol. 2 p. 264.

¹⁶⁵ *Mukhtasar Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, vol. 1 p. 369.

¹⁶⁶ *The Prophet’s Emotions toward His Wives*, <http://www.rasoulallah.net>.

¹⁶⁷ *Description of the Prophet (pbuh)*, <http://www.rasoulallah.net>.

the creation of an overall air and atmosphere of joy, happiness, fulfillment, friendliness, dynamism and wellbeing that will permeate each and every tier of society's existence. Indeed, this is the quintessence of Islamic culture; the opposite would be a culture completely alien to Islam and the goals of its divine message.

Every believer, in his honored capacity as Allah's vicegerent on earth, who lives in this fleeting world in the shades of Allah's guidance, protection and help before returning to Him to dwell eternally in the bliss of Allah's Paradise as a reward for his earthly efforts, has no reason whatsoever to be pessimistic, to despair and develop a culture of enduring gloom, misery and sadness under any circumstances. It is true that life is not simple and straightforward an affair. It is much more complicated, overflowing with myriad challenges, volatilities, hazards and constant ups and downs. However, thanks to his *tawhidic* (Allah's Oneness) faith, a believer is well equipped to face all that confidently and stoically. He is capable of successfully dealing with whatever comes his way, weathering every possible storm and crisis.

Throughout his life, a believer is always in full control, staying his course. There is no worldly issue, or a matter, that can seriously and protractedly distract and sway, or that it can control, him. Such phenomena as stress, depression, sorrow and anxiety, though able to occasionally materialize and temporarily have an effect on him, will never metamorphose into a permanent feature of the life of a believer. Those problems will normally be regarded as just minor obstacles and brief setbacks in a believer's discharging of his vicegerency mission from which he will always emerge stronger, more diligent, focused and determined. Besides, life as man's only chance is so short, yet so dynamic and purposeful, to be wasted on side-issues. Man's abilities, moreover, are so few and so limited to be strained and dissipated by constantly tackling the same irrelevant life issues.

On this Allah says, for example: "...And for those who fear Allah, He (ever) prepares a way out, and He provides for him from (sources) he never could imagine. And if any one puts his trust in Allah, sufficient is (Allah) for him. For Allah will surely accomplish his purpose: verily, for all things has Allah appointed a due proportion." (al-Talaq, 2-3)

"...And for those who fear Allah, He will make their path easy." (al-Talaq, 4)

“So, verily, with every difficulty, there is relief. Verily, with every difficulty there is relief.” (al-Inshirah, 5-6)

“...Allah desires ease for you, and He does not desire for you difficulty...” (al-Baqarah, 185)

“...Allah does not desire to put on you any difficulty, but He wishes to purify you and that He may complete His favor on you, so that you may be grateful.” (al-Ma'idah, 6)

The Prophet (pbuh) instructed that children be taught swimming, archery and horse-riding. He also said that “everything with which a man amuses himself is vain except three (things): a man's training of his horse, his playing with his wife, and his shooting with his bow and arrow.”¹⁶⁸ This direct call to practice sports shows the great importance Islam places on sports in training Muslims and making their bodies healthy and sound. Hence, there is a saying: “A sound mind is in a sound body,” which corresponds very much with the Islamic approach. No wonder then that the Prophet (pbuh) said that a strong believer is better and dearer to Allah than a weak one,¹⁶⁹ as the former is a greater asset to the community than the latter one.

It goes without saying, therefore, that living a healthy lifestyle, thereby harboring positive outlooks on all things, is an obligation upon every Muslim, male or female, whereas lifestyles that lead to wasting one's time, youth, health, and any other physical, mental and spiritual resources are forbidden. The Prophet (pbuh) said: “Observe five things before five others: your life before your death, your good health before your illness, your leisure before your busy times, your youth before your old age, your days of wealth before you become poor.”¹⁷⁰

A team of IOL (www.islamonline.net) Islamic researchers wrote: “The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) understood the importance of fun and games. He would race with his wife A'ishah who used to outpace him most of the time (may Allah be pleased with her). He would swim and wrestle with his Companions. He would joke with them too. He played with and loved children. Muslims mustn't forget this aspect of his life. Race with your spouse in your backyard; set up a swimming pool for the kids; enroll the kids in an archery class.”¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁸ Abu Dawud, *Sunan Abi Dawud*, Kitab al-Jihad, Hadith No. 2507.

¹⁶⁹ Muslim, *Sahih Muslim*, Kitab al-Qadr, Hadith No. 4816.

¹⁷⁰ *Time: Lessons for the Faithful Ones*, <http://www.netcomuk.co.uk>.

¹⁷¹ *Tips to Instill the Prophet's Love into Our Kids*, www.islamonline.net

During the time of the Prophet (pbuh), the Muslims used to spend their leisure time primarily at home, and at times in private gardens, in mosques, and in some open and public areas in the city of Madinah. At home, they used to see to their favorite legitimate pastimes, play and sing during the two 'Ids (Festivals), have wedding celebrations, celebrate births, rejoice at the return of a traveler, etc. An atmosphere of joy and happiness was always intended to be thus generated -- and very often by means of singing and playing -- so as to comfort the soul, please the heart and refresh the ear. Their favorite pastime, spinning (*gazzl*), i.e., forming thread by drawing out and twisting wool or cotton, was carried out by Muslim women mainly in their houses.

Once a man called Aqra b. Habis presented himself before the Prophet (pbuh) who was playing with and kissing his grandson Hasan. The man was astonished to see this and said: "O Messenger of Allah, you also cuddle children. I have ten children, yet I have never shown any affection to them." The Prophet (pbuh) replied: "What can I do if Allah has deprived you of love and compassion."¹⁷² The Prophet (pbuh) also said that a man's playing with his wife is one of the best forms of amusement.¹⁷³

A'ishah, the Prophet's wife, said that the Prophet (pbuh) came to her apartment during the 'Id Festival while two girls were singing beside her about a war which had taken place between the tribes *Aws* and *Khazraj* before Islam. On entering, the Prophet (pbuh) laid down and turned his face to the other side. Then Abu Bakr, A'isha's father, came and spoke to A'ishah harshly saying: "Musical instruments of Satan near the Prophet (pbuh)?" The Prophet (pbuh) turned his face towards him and said to leave them because it was a festive occasion ('Id).¹⁷⁴

A'ishah also narrated that she once prepared a lady for a man from the Helpers as his bride and the Prophet (pbuh) said: "Haven't you got any amusement (during the wedding ceremony) as the Helpers like amusement?"¹⁷⁵

When the Prophet (pbuh) returned from one of his military expeditions, a black slave-girl came to him telling him that she had made a vow if he returned safe and sound she would play a

¹⁷² S.M. Madni Abbasi, *Islamic Manners*, p. 135.

¹⁷³ Abu Dawud, *Sunan Abi Dawud*, Kitab al-Jihad, Hadith No. 2507.

¹⁷⁴ Al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Kitab al-'Idayn, Hadith No. 70.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., Kitab al-Nikah, Hadith No. 92.

tambourine (*daff*) and sing in front of him. The Prophet (pbuh) replied: "If you had done so than go ahead (play and sing), otherwise I would not let you do it." So, the woman played and sung until all of Abu Bakr, Ali b. Abi Talib, Uthman b. 'Affan and Umar b. al-Khattab entered the house. Umar b. al-Khattab was the last to enter and when he did the woman stopped playing and singing. Thereupon, the Prophet (pbuh) disclosed that even Satan is afraid of Umar, and that was the reason why the woman did not stop until he entered.¹⁷⁶

Some people would have cats or even birds as pets at home mainly for leisure and entertainment purposes. The companion Abu Hurayrah ("the kitten man", literally "the father of a kitten") was so called because he was very fond of cats and often had a kitten to play with. The Prophet (pbuh) loved cats too. There was a boy in Madinah called Abu Umayr, the brother of Anas b. Malik, who had a sparrow or bulbul (*nugar*) which he used to cherish and play with. However, one day the bird died and the boy became very sad. When the Prophet (pbuh) met him in such a state, he tried to console him by saying in a rhythmical style: "O Aby Umayr, what did the small sparrow do (*Ya Aba Umayr ma Fa'ala al-Nugayr*)?"¹⁷⁷ It follows that hunting birds and then keeping them was governed by a set of strict Islamic rules and regulations pertaining to the treatment of animals. Besides, in the seventh year after Madinah had been designated as a sanctuary, hunting and then keeping any animal species within its precincts became completely forbidden.

Some amusement and sports activities were held in the courtyard of the Prophet's Mosque too into which the houses of the Prophet (pbuh) opened. A'ishah reported that one day during the 'Id she saw the Prophet (pbuh) at the door of their house watching some Ethiopians who were playing in the courtyard of the Mosque displaying their skill with spears. The Prophet (pbuh) told them: "Carry on, o Bani Arfidah!" Thereupon, A'ishah joined the Prophet (pbuh) and watched the play until she "got tired".¹⁷⁸ The same or another group of Ethiopians was scolded by 'Umar b. al-Khattab, but the Prophet (pbuh) asked him to leave them alone. He said that they are safe and should carry on.¹⁷⁹ It was the practice of Ethiopians to play with their spears at almost every joyful event, sometimes in the

¹⁷⁶ Al-Tirmidhi, *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, Kitab al-Manaqib 'an Rasulillah, Hadith No. 3623.

¹⁷⁷ Al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Kitab al-Adab, Hadith No. 5735.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., Kitab al-Salah, Hadith No. 445.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., Kitab al-'Idayn, Hadith No. 103.

Mosque and at other times on the streets or elsewhere. When the Prophet (pbuh) arrived from Makkah to Madinah as a migrant, while warmly welcoming him, they also performed this distinctive play.¹⁸⁰

Moreover, immediately after the sunset Prayer (*maghrib*) the companions would sometimes compete in archery inside or just outside the Prophet's Mosque in the Prophet's presence till full darkness descends and the targets became no longer visible.¹⁸¹

When the Prophet (pbuh) got married with one of his wives, the mother of the companion Anas b. Malik prepared some food and sent it to the Prophet (pbuh). The number of his guests was about three hundred all of whom had come upon invitation. As they could not enter the house at one time, they stayed in the Prophet's Mosque waiting for their turn to go in the house and eat.¹⁸²

The following account shows the extent the companions of the Prophet (pbuh) were inclined to relax and keep themselves amused at home. Hanzala, a companion of the Prophet (pbuh), is reported to have said to the effect that when the companions of the Prophet (pbuh) were in his company, they pondered over Hell-Fire and Paradise as if they were seeing them with their very eyes. But when they were away from the Prophet (pbuh), they attended to their wives and children, laughing and sporting with them, resulting in most of the things pertaining to the Hereafter to slip out of their minds. So concerned were some people about the matter that they thought that such was of the signs of hypocrisy. However, when they informed the Prophet (pbuh) about it, he said: "By Him in Whose Hand is my life, if your state of mind remains the same as it is in my presence and you are always busy in remembrance (of Allah), the Angels will shake hands with you in your beds and in your paths. But time should be devoted (to the worldly affairs) and time (should be devoted to prayer and meditation)." The Prophet (pbuh) said this thrice.¹⁸³

Yusuf al-Qaradawi in one of his legal verdicts (*fatwa*) wrote: "Laughter or joy is part of the instinctive feelings created in humans, and Islam, being a religion that calls man to the natural phenomenon of monotheism, is not expected to forbid humanity from expressing such natural feelings. On the contrary, it welcomes pleasure. A Muslim should develop a positive and optimistic personality, and not

¹⁸⁰ Al-Kattani, *Al-Taratib al-Idariyyah*, vol. 2 p. 139.

¹⁸¹ Al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Kitab Mawaqit al-Salah, Hadith No. 534.

¹⁸² Muslim, *Sahih Muslim*, Kitab al-Nikah, Hadith No. 2572.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, Book 037, Hadith No. 6623, 6624.

a gloomy and pessimistic one that is negative towards life. One must try to follow the good example set by the Prophet (pbuh) on this aspect. Despite his enormous responsibilities, he always had time for jokes; however, he never lied when joking. On many occasions the Prophet (pbuh) shared in the good cheer of his Companions; he'd joke with them and have fun. But as he shared in their joy, he shared in their sorrow. The Prophet (pbuh) found time to share good feelings with his wives, and was not carried away with the burdens of Prophethood to the extent that he neglected showing affection to his family.”¹⁸⁴

The Prophet (pbuh) once directed his companions to avoid sitting (interacting and spending their free time) on main roads. When they replied that it is difficult to desist, the Prophet (pbuh) said that in that case they must respect the rights of main roads, as they belong to the public and everyone is entitled to their free and unhindered use. Asked about the rights of main roads, the Prophet (pbuh) answered: “Avoid staring, do not create harm, salute back to those who salute you, enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil.”¹⁸⁵

By directing his companions to avoid interacting and spending their free time on main roads, the Prophet (pbuh) implied that the house institution -- more than anything else -- be reserved for the purpose. This way, relations between family members, relatives, friends and neighbors were bound to become strengthened, more earnest, sincere and fruitful, because if houses serve as a meeting point between people for different purposes, then such meetings require attentiveness, commitment and sacrifices on all sides.

About the positive and pragmatic relations of Muslims with this world, Isma'il Raji al-Faruqi wrote: “The Prophet (pbuh) has directed his followers against overextending rituals of worship, against celibacy, against exaggerated fasting, against pessimism and the morose mood. He ordered them to break the fast before performing the sunset prayer, to keep their bodies clean and their teeth brushed, to groom and perfume themselves and wear their best clothes when they congregate for prayer, to marry, to take their time to rest and to sleep and recreate themselves with sports and the arts. Naturally, Islam ordered its adherents to cultivate their faculties; to understand themselves, nature, and the world in which they live; to satisfy their

¹⁸⁴ Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *Does Islam Go against laughter?* www.islamonline.net.

¹⁸⁵ Muslim, *Sahih Muslim*, Kitab al-Libas wa al-Zinah, Hadith No. 3960.

innate craving for food, shelter, comfort, sex and reproduction; to realize balance and harmony in their relations with men and nature; to transform the earth into a producing orchard, a fertile farm and a beautiful garden, to express their understanding, craving, doing and realizing in works of aesthetic beauty.”¹⁸⁶

Housing and comprehensive excellence

Comprehensive excellence (*ihsan* or *itqan*) is one of the most important Islamic values. It saturates every aspect of the Islamic message. Since Islam is a complete way of life, it follows that the effects of excellence are to be felt in all life's spheres. It must inspire, guide and be applied at all times and in all human acts. Excellence is to be a culture. It must be a lifestyle. Excellence is not to be reduced to a mere slogan. It is to be practiced and seen, not just talked.

Striving for excellence is what Allah loves and what Islamic cultures and civilization ought to be famous for. However, deliberate mediocrity, or that which stems from routine negligence or indolence, is what Allah loathes and what ought to be alien to genuine Islamic cultures and civilization. Such an action, or a practice, is to be viewed as a wrongdoing and sin.

However, even though people make their utmost effort to attain and demonstrate it, throughout the long and delicate process of perceiving, planning, designing, building and using houses, excellence still tends to express itself differently in different times and under different natural and man-generated conditions. Excellence in Islam, by and large, is a pursuit of answers and solutions to the requirements of the Islamic immutable and permanent values and the requirements imposed by the often volatile space-time factors, such as the climate, environment, culture, talents, experience and technology, blending then those answers and solutions into a workable, dynamic and righteous set of systems of living. Housing is very much seen as an integral part of, a facility and means for such systems. Thus, this particular principle or lesson, in terms of housing, the Prophet (pbuh) taught Muslims rather implicitly and in some broad and general terms.

When the angel *Jibril* (Gabriel) asked the Prophet (pbuh) what excellence is, the Prophet's reply was: "Excellence is to worship Allah

¹⁸⁶ Al-Faruqi Isma'il Raji, *Al-Tawhid: its Implications for Thought and Life*, p. 82.

as if you see him, for if you do not see Him, He sees you.” In Islam, life is worship, i.e., submission to Allah, and worship is life. Allah says: “I have only created *Jinns* and men, that they may serve and worship Me.” (Al-Dhariyat, 56)

Excellence is prescribed (*kataba*) to Muslims as explicitly as the other fundamental obligations, such as praying (*salah*), fast (*siyam*) and struggle for the holy Islamic cause (*jihad*).

The Prophet (pbuh) once said: “Indeed, Allah loves when one of you does something that he does it to perfection.” It is interesting to call to mind the context in which these words of the Prophet (pbuh) were uttered, thus drawing attention to the seriousness of the matter. When the Prophet’s son Ibrahim died and was buried, some unevenness had been left in the earth on his grave. The unevenness must have been minor in that the people were able to overlook it. It was such a sad occasion, so it was unthinkable for anyone to say or do anything, no matter how trivial, that could aggravate the people’s feeling, in general, and that of the Prophet (pbuh), in particular. Noticing the unevenness, the Prophet (pbuh) leveled the earth by his hand and made the above statement.¹⁸⁷

Due to its both conceptual and practical connotations, the significance of the concept of comprehensive excellence had to be advocated during the earliest stages of the process of the Madinah development and community building. And that was exactly what came to pass. While building his mosque as the first urban element, in the course of urbanizing the city of Madinah, which was immediately followed by building houses around the mosque for both the Prophet (pbuh) and the people, the Prophet (pbuh) used that opportunity to educate the Muslims on many issues including that of comprehensive excellence, not only in building but also in everything else.

It is reported that a man from *Hadramaut* in the southern Arabian Peninsula in course of building the mosque was expertly treading clay for making bricks of which the mosque was built. On seeing him, the Prophet (pbuh) said: “May Allah have mercy upon him who excels in his profession.” And to the man he said: “Keep doing this job for I see that you excel in it.”¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷Martin Lings (Abu Bakr Siraj al-Din), *Muhammad*, (Kuala Lumpur: A.S. Noordeen, 1983), p. 325.

¹⁸⁸ Al-Samhudi, *Wafa' al-Wafa*, vol. 1 p. 333.

Another man from *al-Yamamah* in the eastern Arabian Peninsula reported that he came to the Prophet (pbuh) when he was building his mosque with his companions. However, he realized that the Prophet (pbuh) did not really like how the people worked. The man said that he then took a shovel to tread the clay and the Prophet (pbuh) seemed to have liked how he was doing the job. The Prophet (pbuh) then said: “Leave *al-Hanafi* (the man’s name) and the clay alone, for I see that he is the most competent among you to handle the clay.”¹⁸⁹ In another account, the Prophet (pbuh) said: “Bring *al-Yamami* (another name for the man) closer to the clay because he is the most excellent among you in handling it.”¹⁹⁰ The Prophet (pbuh) is also said to have called the man “the proprietor or lord of the clay, *sahib al-tin*”.¹⁹¹

Therefore, Islam is a religion of excellence. Muslims are to strive for excellence in all that they do, in both religious rituals and pure worldly affairs. All forms of deliberate mediocrity, which is the opposite of excellence, are deemed against the spirit of Islam and are thus disapproved of. Human actions, if executed in the spirit of deliberate mediocrity, are likely to be repudiated by Allah. So important in Islam is integrating excellence into human actions that it represents a condition for such actions to be accepted by Allah.¹⁹²

The Prophet (pbuh) is reported to have regularly prayed to Allah to protect him against the evil of mediocrity, failure, helplessness, hopelessness, laziness and procrastination. He used to say: “O Allah! I seek refuge with You from worry and grief, from incapacity and laziness, from cowardice and miserliness, from being heavily in debt and from being overpowered by (other) men.”¹⁹³

He also prayed: “O Allah! I seek refuge with You from laziness and geriatric old age, from all kinds of sins and from being in debt; from the affliction of the Fire and from the punishment of the Fire and from the evil of the affliction of wealth; and I seek refuge with You from the affliction of poverty, and I seek refuge with You from the affliction of al-Mesiah al-Dajjal.”¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., vol. 1 p. 334.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., vol. 1 p. 334.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., vol. 1 p. 334.

¹⁹² Spahic Omer, *Islamic Architecture: its Philosophy, Spiritual Significance and Some Early Developments*, (Kuala Lumpur: A.S. Noordeen, 2009) p. 183-184.

¹⁹³ Al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 8, Book 75, Hadith No. 380.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., Vol. 8, Book 75, Hadith No. 379.

The Islamic notion of excellence necessitates that Islamic housing, in particular, and Islamic architecture, in general, be renowned for their sophistication in relation to their delicate form-function relationship, their unambiguous communication of their profound aesthetic purposes and goals, their embracing and delicate balancing of both the utilitarian and artistic ends, and their clear and focused spiritual orientation and mission. Based on the implications of comprehensive excellence and its pertinence to the Islamic presence, Islamic houses are to be perceived as built for the sake of Allah alone, in that all the acts that are bound to be repeatedly executed therein stand for modes of worship (*'ibadah*), as mentioned earlier. As such, Islamic houses should contain as many and as diverse spiritual components as possible, so that whenever observed, interacted with, or made use of, such houses easily become redolent of their divine qualities.

Comprehensive excellence calls for creating perfectly clean, safe and pleasant houses which use the latest and most beneficial technological and engineering advancements. Such houses must aim to create safe, conducive and enjoyable environments for people to live in. They must facilitate the family education and development tasks and responsibilities of those people who occupy them. There must be a perfect match between what people need and want, and what they actually get. Harmony between people's requirements and what their houses offer is a sign of excellent residential architecture. A conflict between the two is a sign of mediocrity, incompetence and failure.

Islamic houses, furthermore, must be perfectly environment conscious and friendly, due to the unprecedented view of Islam on respecting and peacefully coexisting with the environment and its resources, as explained in the first chapter. Islamic houses must be energy efficient, especially today when people face more and more problems relating to energy generation, distribution and consumption. Failing to produce energy efficient houses could be seen as a form of wasting which Islam abhors calling spendthrifts the brothers of Satan (*ikhwan ash-shayatin*). (al-Isra', 27)

Islamic houses must be sustainable too, because the core of the idea of sustainability and sustainable development, i.e., the preservation of the interests and wellbeing of the present and future generations, as well as the preservation of the personal, societal and natural wealth and resources, represents a major portion of the

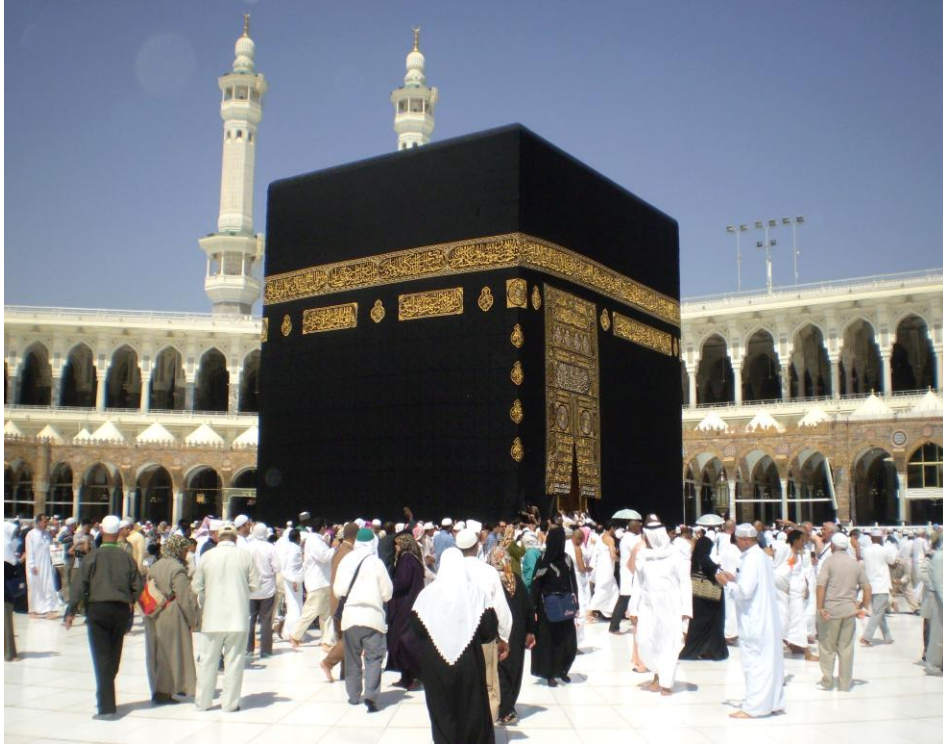
mission and objectives (*maqasid*) of Islam. Those objectives (*maqasid*) are the preservation and sustaining of religion, life, intellect, wealth and the wellbeing of future generations.

Comprehensive excellence also calls for establishing an intricate balance between sophistication in housing and avoiding the major transgressions often associated with built environment. It is true that Islam not only regards architecture and built environment as the inevitable pursuits, but also calls for the idea of excellence to pervade all their aspects, however, one must not be so obsessed with the matter of planning and building that some of the serious transgressions, such as squandering, exercising and promoting arrogance, mutual envy, corruption, rivalry in building and destroying nature, may possibly be committed, even moderately. People must observe moderation, their limitations, personal and societal needs, and of course the utility of whatever they erect. Via its status, function and maintenance, built environment is to be an asset to the community, and not a liability.

As a final point, Sinan, the chief architect of the Ottoman golden age, perceived an excellent architecture as one that blends the strong Islamic spirituality and ethics with mastering the necessary building technology and engineering skills and techniques. The net result of this approach, it seems to be Sinan's suggestion, would always be a safe, functional, durable, sustainable, cost-effective and aesthetically gratifying architecture. It goes without saying, however, that all these traits of an excellent architecture are implied in just two of the many Prophet's traditions which contain some wide-ranging meanings and messages: firstly, that Allah loves whenever His servants do something to do it excellently, and secondly, that whatever they do to do it in such a way that no even slightest harm is inflicted on people, flora and fauna.

Sinan thus offered some of his advices to those engaged in architecture: "There is no art more difficult than architecture, and whosoever is engaged in this estimable calling must, to begin with, be righteous and pious. He should not begin to lay the foundations if the building site is not firm, and when he sets out to lay the foundations he should take great care that his work be free from defect and he reach the firm ground. And, in proportion to the abundance or paucity of piers, columns and buttresses, he should close up the domes and half domes that are on top of them, and bind the arches together in an agreeable manner, without carelessness. And he should not hurry

in important matters but should endure in accord with the import of the saying “Patience brings one victory!” in order that, with God’s help, he finds divine guidance for the immortality of his work. And in this there is no doubt.”¹⁹⁵



The Ka'bah, the first and holiest mosque, or *Baytullah* (the House of Allah) on earth, in Makkah, Saudi Arabia.

¹⁹⁵ *Sinan's Autobiographies, Five Sixteenth-Century Texts*, introductory notes, critical editions and translations by Howard Crane and Esra Akin, edited by Gulru Necipoglu, (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2006), p. 66.



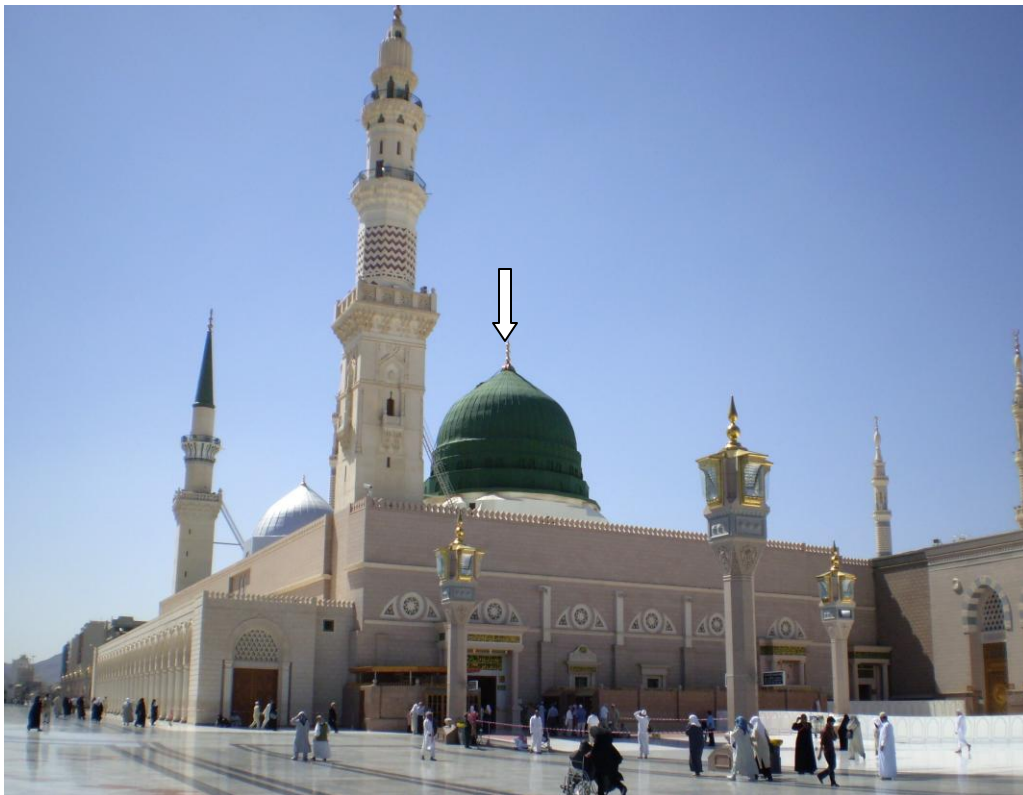
The Prophet's Mosque in Madinah, Saudi Arabia, seen from a nearby building.



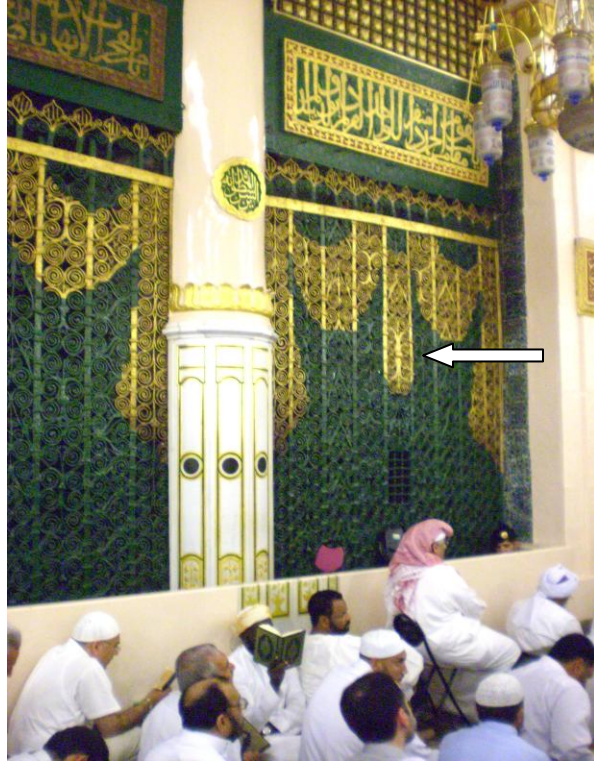
The northern side of the Prophet's Mosque in Madinah.



The interior of the Prophet's Mosque.



The eastern side of the Prophet's Mosque, where most, if not all, of the Prophet's houses were located. The green dome indicates the location of the house of A'ishah, one of the Prophet's wives, wherein the Prophet (pbuh) had died and was subsequently buried.



A section of the eastern side of the Prophet's Mosque, seen from inside the Mosque. The location of A'ishah's house, with the Prophet's grave inside it, is pointed out.



This entrance on the western side of the Prophet's Mosque indicates approximately where the location of Abu Bakr's house once was. One of the doors of the house, just like the doors of many other houses that abutted the Mosque, used to open into the Mosque proper. When the Prophet (pbuh) ordered that all the house doors that opened directly into the mosque proper be closed, he exempted the doors of Abu Bakr and Ali b. Abi Talib from the ruling.



The section of the Prophet's Mosque today which was the Mosque's original site during the Prophet's time. The Mosque's eastern side is pointed out.



Residential areas in Madinah, Saudi Arabia, today.



Another residential areas in Madinah.



The Prophet's Mosque today and some of its surrounding areas, seen from a nearby building. The size of today's Prophet's Mosque, with all of its adjoining facilities and infrastructure, is approximately the size of what the core of the city of Madinah during the Prophet's time was.