

The Guiding Light: Qur'ānic Wisdom and Prophetic Examples in Chaplaincy

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Abstract

During much of human history, wisdom has been a topic of interest in religion, philosophy, and, lately, psychology and the social sciences. Over the past three decades, this term's very definition has been debated among scholars who study human behavior. Psychologists actively explore it and increasingly focus on practical wisdom, recognizing it is a complex trait that contains cognitive, reflective, and compassionate components. They are finding that people who possess practical wisdom have better mental states and lead more purposeful lives. However, there is a growing concern about its potential decline, particularly in the context of navigating increasingly complex global challenges which require collective and collaborative wise responses. This perception is linked to various factors, among them the rapid pace of technological change, the rise of individualism, and shifts in human values (Maxwell 2007).

A lack of wisdom implies an inability to discern the best course of action, understand the consequences of choices, and apply knowledge effectively. Cultivating collective wisdom requires a shift in how knowledge is acquired, understood, and applied so that one can move beyond isolated facts to formulate an integrated and holistic understanding that considers spiritual, intellectual, ethical, and societal implications. Cultivating wisdom is essential for everyone, especially for those responsible for serving and guiding others and fostering spiritual growth, moral integrity, and a thriving society. Indeed, it is an important quality for Muslims in any leadership role, especially for those who serve as chaplains.

This article explores the concept of hikma (wisdom) within the Qur'ān and its prophetic application for Muslim chaplains providing holistic spiritual care. The article argues that by re-centering chaplaincy on this Qur'ānic-Prophetic model of wisdom, chaplains can offer spiritual care and enhance pastoral counseling that is both authentically Islamic and profoundly relevant to the complex psycho-spiritual needs of Muslims today. It concludes by briefly discussing the implications for chaplaincy training and practice, suggesting that integrating this wisdom-centric approach can foster greater spiritual resilience in individuals and communities, as well as strengthen the overall development of the Muslim chaplaincy profession and beyond.

Keywords: *chaplain, chaplaincy, wisdom, counseling, knowledge, spiritual growth, self-accountability*

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Introduction

A Muslim chaplain's primary job is to provide guidance and support, and to foster a sense of belonging and understanding in individuals (regardless of their religion or lack thereof), institutions (e.g., hospitals, universities, prisons, and the military), and communities. A Muslim chaplain provides spiritual and pastoral care in the form of religious guidance, conducting prayers, providing counseling, and offering support during times of crisis. Wisdom enables them to approach these sensitive situations with patience and insight, based on Islam's core principles.

Muslims believe that Allah, the All-Wise, created and entrusted humanity to serve as his *khalīfa* (stewards or trustees) on earth (Qur'ān 2:30). A key aspect of this trust is free will and the ability to choose. This entails being tested and held accountable in this world and on the Day of Judgment. Allah—the Creator, the Wise—knows humans' inherent nature and guides them accordingly, so they can achieve their mission to establish *islāḥ* (improvement) and *ihsān* (goodness or excellence) for the benefit of all creation. They do so by promoting ethical virtues, enacting justice, and striving for harmony. In short, Allah entrusted humanity with cultivating and maintaining *'umrān* (Qur'ān 11:61), defined as Earth's balance, peace, tranquility, fairness, justice, and sustainability.

Given this reality, cultivating wisdom is crucial because people's personal and communal decisions lead to actions that either improve or corrupt societies (Qur'ān 7:56). Wisdom, a common trait of all prophets (peace be upon them all), constitutes one of Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) missions: "Since We have sent you a messenger from among yourselves—reciting to you Our revelations, causing you to grow in purity, teaching you the Book and wisdom, and teaching you what you never knew" (2:151) and "We have sent you [O Prophet] only as a mercy for the whole world" (21:107). These Qur'ānic verses, and others, show us a deep connection between wisdom and compassion within his message, and that this is a connection we should implement in our own lives: "Indeed, in the Messenger of Allah you have an excellent example for whoever has hope in Allah and the Last Day, and remembers Allah often" (33:21). His life and teachings exemplified mercy, for Allah told him to "Call [people] to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good teaching. Argue with them in the most courteous way, for your Lord knows best who has strayed from His way and who is rightly guided" (16:125). All Muslims are expected to follow his example.

How can chaplains draw inspiration from the Prophet's (peace be upon him) life and apply it to our current reality? How do chaplains cultivate wisdom? How do chaplains embody compassion, justice, mercy, and patient practices?

Wisdom touches knowledge, emotions, self-regulation, and ethics. We use it to make informed decisions, build strong relationships, and live a more meaningful life. Al-Ghazālī (c. 1058–1111) defines wisdom primarily through the lens of knowledge and its application, emphasizing its role in attaining spiritual understanding and closeness to Allah

(Al-Ghazālī 1982).¹ Ibn al-Qayyim (1292–1350) defines this term as “doing the correct thing in the correct manner at the correct time” (Ibn al-Qayyim 1996).² The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it as the “capacity of judging rightly in matters relating to life and conduct; soundness of judgement in the choice of means and ends” (*Oxford English Dictionary* 1926). Given these definitions, wisdom can be seen as a reflection of one’s wise decision, of putting everything in its proper place at the proper time. While knowledge is the acquisition of facts, information, and understanding, wisdom is the ability to apply that knowledge and experience in practical ways in order to make sound judgments and navigate life’s complexities.

This article analyzes wisdom from the Qur’ānic-Prophetic framework and uses the compare-contrast method to reveal the impact of its presence or absence on one’s actions, behaviors, and relationships in this world and the hereafter. This analysis demonstrates how a thorough open-hearted and open-minded reading can lead to a deeper connection with the Qur’ān’s wisdom, as well as a better understanding of its transformative teachings as they relate to Muslim chaplaincy. Wisdom often comes with self-awareness and a continuous pursuit of self-improvement, which can lead to a more fulfilling and meaningful life.

The following questions are explored: What does the Qur’ān say about wisdom and how to embody it? What are the characteristics of wise and unwise people? How does wisdom relate to chaplaincy? How do we evaluate our decisions based on the Qur’ānic-Prophetic model? And perhaps most importantly: **What is the Qur’ānic guidance for correcting a wrong action, custom, or culture?**

This article applies three methodologies: (1) *al-waḥda al-binā’iyya li-l-Qur’ān* (the Qur’ān’s structural unity); (2) combining the “Two Readings” (the revelation and the universe); and (3) the Qur’ān’s higher objectives (*al-maqāṣid al-Qur’āniyya: tawḥīd, tazkiyya, and ‘umrān*).

The holistic exegetical (*tafsīr*) method of *al-waḥda al-binā’iyya li-l-Qur’ān* reads the Qur’ān as a unified and integrated text through its linguistic, structural, and conceptual elements. This approach also highlights how the meaning of a specific term changes throughout the text of the Qur’ān, but never to the extent of violating its original meaning; but instead, adding depth to our understanding of the word. Tracing how the relevant terms are derived from their root leads to constructing the Islamic framework for any issue.³

¹ This definition is found in his influential work, “The Book of Knowledge” (*Kitāb al-‘Ilm*), which is the first book of his magnum opus, “Revival of the Religious Sciences” (*Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*). In “The Book of Knowledge,” Al-Ghazālī explores the nature of knowledge and its relationship to faith, theology, and jurisprudence. He delves into the virtues of knowledge, both from rational and traditional perspectives, and discusses the different types of knowledge and the obligation to seek it. He also distinguishes between praiseworthy and blameworthy forms of knowledge and warns against the perils of excessive debate and disputation.

² Ibn al-Qayyim’s definition of wisdom in his work *Madārij al-Sālikīn* (The Steps of the Seekers) is “to do what is appropriate, in the manner that is appropriate, and at the appropriate time” (pp. 448–449). He places this station of wisdom among the higher spiritual states that a believer can attain on their journey to Allah.

³ See the following articles for more information on this exegetical methodology: Zainab Alwani, “*Al-waḥda al-binā’iyya li-l-Qur’ān*: A Methodology for Understanding the Qur’ān in the Modern Day,” *Journal of*

Combining the “Two Readings”—that of the divine revelation (i.e., the Qur’ān) and the universe—is critical to exploring wisdom, for this method underscores the Qur’ān’s call to reflect on both the signs within its verses and those in the natural and social worlds and within ourselves (Qur’ān 51:20–23). This technique encourages holistic engagement by drawing parallels between divine revelation and the physical world, while understanding the sociocultural dynamics of past and present societies. The Qur’ān encourages reflection on past communities and their actions’ consequences, as a source of learning to seek answers for our current societal issues. Its profound framework for human existence is encapsulated in its higher objectives: *tawhīd* (believing in and affirming Allah’s Oneness), *tazkiyya* (holistic purification; purifying oneself should lead to purifying one’s surroundings), and *‘umrān* (developing a values-based civilization to achieve good and harmony among the human family).

These principles define humanity’s role as trustees of Allah’s creation, shaping how we engage with our faith, the environment, and other people. This mission requires possessing both knowledge and wisdom. Viewing wisdom as compassion toward all creation while holding firm to the truth, the Qur’ān defines it as inspiring acts of kindness, charity, and empathy. Such an orientation is critical to effective chaplaincy. In addition, it advocates a balanced approach toward fulfilling worldly responsibilities while maintaining a strong connection with the Divine. This article concludes with a set of questions that may help chaplains identify the significant decisions in their lives and evaluate their impact at the personal, familial, communal, societal, and global levels.

PART ONE: A QUR’ĀNIC-PROPHETIC FRAMEWORK FOR WISDOM

I. Definition

The Qur’ānic concept of wisdom (*hikma*), derived from the Arabic root *ḥ-k-m*, is profound and comprehensive. Ibn Manẓūr writes in his *Lisān al-‘Arab* (The Tongue of the Arabs) that *ḥakama*, derived from *ḥ-k-m*, refers to an iron rein piece used in a horse’s bridle to restrain and prevent it from going wild. This connection highlights the root’s inherent concept of control, restraint, and judicious guidance. The root broadly carries meanings of judging, being wise, passing a verdict, and preventing or restraining people from wrongdoing (Ibn Manẓūr 1955).⁴ In short, wisdom can restrain or control negative

Islamic Faith and Practice 1, no. 1 (2018): 7–25; Zainab Alwani, “Transformational Teaching: Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) as a Teacher and Murabbī,” *Journal of Islamic Faith and Practice* 2, no. 1 (2019): 91–119; Zainab Alwani, “*Kafāla*: The Qur’anic-Prophetic Model of Orphan Care,” *Journal of Islamic Faith and Practice* 3, no. 1 (2020): 4–31; Zainab Alwani, “Transforming the Self, Family and Society through a Qur’anic Ethos,” *Journal of Islamic Faith and Practice* 4, no. 1 (2022): 10–33; Zainab Alwani, “Travelers on the Straight Path: Truth Seekers,” *Journal of Islamic Faith and Practice* 5, no. 1 (2024): 7–30.

⁴ Muḥammad ibn Mukarram ibn Manẓūr (1233–1311) was an Arab lexicographer, who completed *Lisān al-‘Arab* in 1290. It is the best-known dictionary of the Arabic language, as well as one of the most comprehensive. This detail highlights the importance of the Ibn Manẓūr dictionary as a valuable source not only for the comprehensive understanding of Arabic words but also for its cultural and historical information, including insights into equestrian practices of the time.

impulses, for it is a force that allows one to master situations and avoid corruption or deviation from the desired outcomes.

Hikma and its derivatives are mentioned in the Qur’ān in 242 places, eighty-two places as a verb (e.g., “So Allah will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection” [2:113]) and 160 places as a noun. The verbal noun *ihkām* implies perfection and completion: “Alif, Lām, Rā. [This is] a Book whose verses are well perfected and then fully explained. [It is] from the One [Who is] All-Wise, All-Aware” (11:1). In his *tafsīr* (commentary on the Qur’ān), Abdul-Rahman al-Sa’di (1889–1957) describes the Qur’ān as a perfect and detailed book:

This is a great Book and a noble revelation. Its verses are perfected, its messages are truthful, its commands and prohibitions are just, its words are eloquent, and its meanings are beautiful. Then it is explained in detail, from the One Who puts things in their proper places and assigns them their proper positions. He does not command or forbid except in accordance with His wisdom. He is All-Aware of all things, both outward and inward. (Al-Sa’di 2022)⁵

The Qur’ān emphasizes wisdom in a broader way as well, as a profound gift from Allah available to those who diligently strive for it: “He gives wisdom to whom He wills, and whoever has been given wisdom has certainly been given much good” (2:269). This gift enables discernment between right and wrong as well as truth and falsehood and, ultimately, allows one to make choices that lead to success in this world and the hereafter. Believers are encouraged to strive for it through sincere intention, righteous action, and connecting with the Qur’ān. Abū Hurayra reported: “The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, ‘The word of wisdom (*al-kalima al-hikma*) is the lost property of the believer. Wherever he finds it, he is most deserving of it’” (*Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, no. 2687).

Contemplating the root word and its derivatives provides a deeper understanding of this concept and how to apply it in one’s life. The Qur’ān often associates *hikma* with sound judgment, deep understanding, appropriate action at the right time, and alignment with the divine will. Being honest with oneself and others, along with a high degree of self-awareness, is crucial for developing wisdom, for this concept is all about understanding the consequences of actions and applying that understanding to real-world situations. Wisdom often involves emotional intelligence (a chaplaincy necessity), empathy, and the ability to see the bigger picture. Being wise means that one is responsible for pursuing righteous purposes. For example, *taḥkīm*, which refers to both arbitration and reconciliation (*iṣlāḥ*) in marital conflicts, can be understood as a manifestation of *hikma*, as it involves setting things right or reforming—hence its derivation from the same root word. Verse 4:35 of the Qur’ān emphasizes the appointment of arbiters (*ḥakam*) from both families so that “if they both desire reconciliation, Allah will cause it between them.” In this case, the arbiters would seek to understand the conflict’s root causes, consider all relevant factors,

⁵ Al-Sa’di is known for his straightforward and easy-to-understand explanations of the Qur’ān. His *tafsīr* is widely regarded for its clarity and accessibility, making it suitable for both those new to the Qur’ān and seasoned scholars.

and propose just and conducive solutions. Another example is *taḥkum* (judging or governing), as seen specifically in Qur'ān 4:58. This manifests *ḥikma* in terms of trusts (e.g., fulfilling responsibilities and upholding rights), a prerequisite for establishing a just and equitable society.

The most frequently repeated derivative of this root in the Qur'ān is *ḥakīm* (the wise), mentioned in eighty-one places. Al-Ḥakīm is one of the names of Allah: “The All-Wise” (4:17; 4:26; 6:18; 6:73). The Qur'ān itself is referred to as the “Book of Wisdom,” implying that wisdom is an integral component of divine revelation and guidance. When paired together, the names Al-‘Azīz Al-Ḥakīm refer to Allah: “The Almighty, the All-Wise.” This combination appears forty-seven times in the Qur'ān, thereby emphasizing that Allah’s immense power is always exercised with perfect wisdom and knowledge and that His actions are always purposeful and beneficial (Yaqeen Institute 2024). This illustrates that even when faced with hardship, believers should trust in Allah’s wisdom and know that His plans, although sometimes difficult to understand, are ultimately for their benefit. Sūra Yūsuf (Chapter 12) provides a powerful illustration of these attributes via its repeated mentions of “Knowing and Wise,” emphasizing through this that all the difficult events in Prophet Yūsuf’s life ultimately led to good outcomes because of Allah’s knowledge and wisdom.

The root of *ḥakīm* also carries the meaning of restraining or preventing something, highlighting that Allah’s wisdom prevents injustice, guiding instead toward righteousness. Two other names and attributes of Allah stem from the same root: Al-Hakam and Aḥkam al-Ḥakīmīn. Al-Hakam means “The Judge” and “The Giver of Justice,” thereby signifying Allah’s role as the Ultimate Judge, the One who establishes justice and truth, possessing the power to judge and arbitrate with perfect justice and wisdom, ensuring that nothing occurs without His decree and that His decree cannot be overturned.

The third attribute, Aḥkam al-Ḥakīmīn, appears twice in the Qur'ān and combines two aspects: The Ultimate Judge who dispenses justice (11:45) and the Most Just of all judges (95:8). The first aspect of this attribute—that Allah is the Ultimate Judge—means that His judgments are always correct, and all His creations and commands are based on perfect wisdom. The Qur'ān assures and emphasizes that His reckoning on the Day of Judgment will be most fair and accurate. Every action, no matter how small, shall be taken into account and judged justly (as demonstrated in 2:281 and 16:111). Believing in Al-Ḥakam and Aḥkam al-Ḥakīmīn encourages one to strive for justice in his/her personal affairs and interactions, as well as reminds people to trust in Allah’s wisdom and judgment even when the underlying reasons are not fully understood.

II. Connections Between the Qur'ānic Terms Related to Wisdom

It is important to emphasize the relational nature of Qur'ānic words, particularly wisdom (*ḥikma*) and the foundational related terms, such as *taqwā*, *al-‘ilm*, *al-rushd*, *al-qawl al-sadīd*, and *iṣlāḥ*. Examining how a word is used in different Qur'ānic contexts gives scholars an insight into the Qur'ān’s conceptual understanding of the term and its broader meaning. For instance, *taqwā* is a fundamental concept associated with making sound decisions based on consciousness of Allah, fostering deep understanding, and leading to right actions. Thus, combined with *ḥikma*, it can be understood as being able to discern the

true nature of things, to put things in their proper context, and to act in accordance with righteous principles. *Hikma* provides the insight needed to use *ilm* ethically. *Al-qawl al-sadīd* (speaking justly), a practical expression of *hikma*, requires both knowledge and wisdom. *Al-rushd* can be seen as a facet or manifestation of wisdom, particularly in terms of being guided toward the correct path and having sound judgment in practical matters. The sections below will expand on each of these related terms.

Taqwā

Taqwā, derived from *waqā* (lit. to preserve, protect, safeguard, shield from, and keep safe from [Al-Iṣfahānī 2014, 530; Badawi and Abdel Haleem 2008, 1069]), means:

“forbearance, fear, abstinence, and piety” (Esposito 2003, 314), as well as “being careful, knowing your place in the cosmos.” This characteristic is seen when one experiences the awe of God, which “inspires a person to be on guard against wrong feeling and action, and eager to do the things which please God” (Zanaty 2006, 221). (Alwani 2022, 14; in-text citations added)

A state of the heart, it keeps one always conscious and mindful of Allah’s presence. As *taqwā* inhabits the heart and only Allah knows what it conceals, no one can judge another person’s level of *taqwā*.

This divine consciousness serves as a moral compass, guiding believers to navigate their feelings, decisions, actions, and interactions in alignment with Allah’s guidance. Self-awareness and knowing is the first step toward personal development and spiritual growth. The relationship between *taqwā* and wisdom is critical, for the former helps people maintain self-evaluation: defined as the ability to examine oneself internally and delve deeply into their own thoughts, feelings, and actions to foster self-reflection and introspection. This critical self-evaluation enables people to filter and cleanse their inner self, based on their level of *taqwā*. Constantly evaluating one’s thoughts, words, and deeds helps one identify those areas that require improvement, strive to overcome shortcomings, and ensure continuous spiritual growth through holding oneself accountable. This self-accountability motivates individuals to pursue their own development and seek opportunities to enhance their actions and knowledge. This recognition also cultivates a sense of humility, encouraging believers to seek forgiveness and remain grateful for Allah’s blessings.

Moreover, *taqwā* serves as a unifying force within the community, as those striving for it encourage better behavior, offer support, and remind others to stay on the right path. In short, it transcends cultural, social, and economic differences, binding believers together through a shared commitment to uphold Allah’s commands. This collective consciousness nurtures a sense of solidarity, mutual respect, and compassion among believers, thereby fostering an environment of support and cooperation. Those engaged in this transformative journey inspire and challenge others and actively seek feedback to identify areas for improvement. This process entails understanding one’s strengths and weaknesses, setting clear and measurable ambitious goals, and striving for continuous improvement—all of which are pivotal for personal and collective growth and for embodying wisdom. It is obvious that such a practice enhances chaplaincy work.

Al-Muttaqūn (truth seekers cultivating *taqwā*) are constantly mindful of Allah's presence, practicing self-awareness and searching for the truth even if it is against oneself (Alwani 2022, 16). Identified as patient, true, and obedient in worshiping Allah, they spend (in the way of Allah) and seek forgiveness in the last hours of the night (3:17), control their anger, manage their negative feelings, practice forgiveness, and are grateful (2:177). Aware of the source of sin (i.e., Satan), they remember Allah, seek refuge in Him, and turn to Him quickly, after which they remain steadfast and correct their mistakes: "In Allah's eyes, the most honored of you are the ones most mindful of Him (*atqākum*): Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware" (49:13).

ʿIlm

Interconnected with *ḥikma*, the broad concept of *ʿilm* emphasizes the importance of understanding, righteousness, and responsible action. Allah's names Al-ʿAlīm ("The All-Knowing") and Al-Ḥakīm ("The All-Wise") appear together thirty-seven times within the Qur'ān. The word "*ʿilm*" (knowledge) is mentioned frequently, along with its various derived forms, and is considered a prerequisite for good deeds. In fact, seeking it is an act of worship, whereas *ḥikma* focuses on its proper application. Prioritizing knowledge that leads to wisdom and practical application is crucial for personal growth, societal development, and fulfilling one's purpose.

This article focuses on explaining the purpose of gaining the kind of knowledge that leads to cultivating *ḥikma*, in order to produce qualified trustees on Earth (2:30). Allah The All-Wise, the One who owns all knowledge and wisdom, details humanity's mission throughout the Qur'ān. Obtaining knowledge via understanding *al-maqāṣid al-Qur'āniyya* (the Qur'ān's higher objectives; namely: *tawḥīd*, *tazkiyya*, and *ʿumrān*) can provide a valuable roadmap for navigating human existence, discovering life's purpose, and being an effective chaplain.

In applying *ʿilm* with the goal of reaching *ḥikma*, one must ask oneself: How does a particular thought lead to a wise decision? How do I know it was a wise choice?

Rushd

This term signifies right guidance or sound judgment. In the Qur'ān, Al-Rashīd ("The Guide" or "The Rightly Guided") denotes the One who guides and directs individuals to the right path and to belief. While *ḥikma* is the broad term for wisdom, *rushd* can be seen as one aspect of that wisdom. These two terms are closely linked, for they represent interconnected concepts for navigating life, making sound judgments, possessing right-mindedness, and being on the correct path, all of which imply having discernment (11:78). Examples from Sūra Hūd demonstrate that individuals can be characterized by *rushd* through adhering to divine guidance and promoting righteousness within their communities. In fact, the root *r-sh-d* has the following classical Arabic connotations: to be directed aright, caused to follow the right course, directed to take the right way, caused to hold a right belief, and to adopt the right path (Al-Fayrūzābādī 1993).

Within its Qur'ānic usage, this term also signifies sound judgment, guidance, or being on the right path: "There is no compulsion in religion: true guidance (*al-rushd*) has

become distinct from error (*al-ghayy*), so whoever rejects false deities and believes in Allah has grasped the firmest hand-hold, one that will never break. Allah is All-Hearing and All-Knowing” (2:256). Notice here the connection between knowledge (in the mention of Allah’s name Al-‘Alīm, in the adjectival form *‘alīmun*) and *rushd*: for *rushd* (guidance, sound judgment), just like *ḥikma* (wisdom in a broader sense), relies on sound knowledge (*‘ilm*).

Another verse proclaims: “[O Prophet], if My servants ask you about Me, I am near. I respond to those who call Me, so let them respond to Me, and believe in Me, so that they may be guided (*yarshudūn*)” (2:186). Verse 18:10 of the Qur’ān states: “Our Lord, grant us mercy from Yourself and facilitate for us our affair with right guidance (*hayyi’ lanā min amrinā rashadā*)” (see also 72:2, 10, 14; 18:24; and 21:51).

As for righteousness, Allah says about the unjust and arrogant: “And if they see the path of right conduct (*sabīl al-rushd*), they will not take it as a path; but if they see the path of error, they will take it as a path” (7:146). What is meant here by implying that the path of right conduct is the path of righteousness? The Qur’ān frequently describes the arrogant and the unjust as lacking righteousness and being deserving of punishment and further misguidance, due to their denial of the truth (e.g., “This is because they denied Our signs and were heedless of them,” [7:146]). Therefore, those who wish to follow the path of righteousness will be wise to follow the first path (i.e., the path of right conduct), unlike those being condemned in this verse.

The connection between knowledge (*‘ilm*) and sound judgment (*rushd*, and more broadly *ḥikma*) is summed up in the verse, “Moses said to him, ‘Shall I follow you so that you may teach me (*tu‘allimani*) from what you have been taught (*‘ullimta*) of sound judgment (*rushdā*)?’” (18:66). The connection between *rushd* and benefit is made apparent in, “Say, ‘Indeed, I have no power to harm you or to bring you to sound judgment (*rashadā*; translated by some scholars as “benefit you”)’” (72:21).

Who is the Person Described As “Rashīd” in the Qur’ān?

Rashīd, a person who is rightly-guided and possesses wisdom as well as sound judgment, is mentioned three times in the Qur’ān. When Prophet Lūṭ’s (Lot) people approached him with evil intentions, he asked them: “Is there not among you a single right-minded man (*rajulun rashīdun*)?” (11:78). This highlights that a *rashīd* can recognize wrong and instead act in a righteous and sensible way. Prophet Shu‘ayb’s people sarcastically questioned his message: “Indeed you are the forbearer, right-minded (*al-ḥalīm al-rashīd*)” (11:87), indicating the qualities they associated with him—namely, forbearance and right-mindedness—even though they rejected his guidance. Referring to Pharaoh’s actions and his followers’ obedience, the Qur’ān states: “And Pharaoh’s command was not well guided (*wa mā amru fir‘awna bi-rashīd*)” (11:97). These verses collectively illustrate that a *rashīd* person is guided to the right path and possesses the good understanding and wisdom necessary for making sound and just decisions. Verse 11:78 above underscores the lament over the lack of such individuals in a society that had embraced evil deeds.

Murshid and the Practical Application of *Rushd*: Guidance, Truth, and Faith

Sūrat al-Kahf mentions *rushd* four times (18:10, 17, 24, 66). The term *murshid* is derived from the same root of *r-sh-d* to describe a teacher. Verse 18:17 uses *walīyyan murshidā* for a guiding friend or a righteous mentor. Understanding and reflecting upon such a person can offer valuable insights for chaplains, as well as others. Parents embody this quality by nurturing their children's development and guiding them toward uprightness and sound decision-making. This role encourages chaplains, parents, and other mentors to provide clear instruction and lead by example, thereby fostering a supportive environment for learning and growth.

Sūrat al-Kahf—specifically 18:17 and the surrounding verses—offers valuable and highly relevant lessons on raising and nurturing children, youth, and new Muslims with the qualities of faith, patience, trusting in Allah, and seeking guidance; all while the teacher embodies these same qualities themselves. The teachers highlighted in these verses remained firm in their faith, despite persecution, thereby exemplifying the importance of standing by one's principles and values when guiding others. Role models can instill patience in those they guide, demonstrating how to navigate difficulties with reliance on Allah and belief in His ultimate wisdom. These stories also offer a broader lesson about the transient nature of worldly life. In the story of the cave, the youth sought refuge together, indicating the strength that can be found in community support and collaboration. This perspective can inform guidance, help others prioritize spiritual growth, and encourage them to not be overly attached to material possessions or fleeting desires.

The Qur'ān emphasizes that *rushd*, defined by mental and spiritual maturity, is equally as important as physical maturity when it comes to handling responsibilities: “Test orphans until they reach marriageable age; then, if you find they have sound judgment (*rushdan*), hand over their property to them” (4:6). Adults should implement this understanding of wisdom as a comprehensive educational and training system. The general framework that defines this concept of maturity, both linguistically and in the Qur'ān, are the boundaries established by guidance, truth, correctness, righteousness, benefit, knowledge, mental maturity, and sound conscience—all essential elements and fundamental components of one entrusted with the responsibilities given to them by Allah.

Sound, Upright Speech (Qawl Sadīd)

The Arabic phrase “*tasdīd al-sahm*” means to throw the arrow straight enough to hit the bullseye (Ibn Manzūr 1955). *Qawl sadīd* refers to speech that is clear, unambiguous, appropriate, straight, accurate, to the point, and devoid of ambiguity, exaggeration, or falsehood (Al-Qurṭubī 2019; Shafī 1995).⁶ The Qur'ān uses it in the context of inheritance, emphasizing the importance of speaking justly when dealing with vulnerable individuals like orphans: “Let those who would fear for the future of their own helpless children, if

⁶ In his *Tafsīr al-Jāmi' li-Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, Al-Qurṭubī interprets the meaning of *qawl sadīd* (a straight, sound, or just word) in the context of Sūrat Al-Nisā' (4:9). In *Ma'arif al-Qur'an*, Mufti Muhammad Shafī interprets *sadīd* as a comprehensive term that encompasses ideal speech. It can mean speech that is truthful (*ṣadīq*), correct, and free from error, exaggeration, or falsehood. It is sincere and not for show and is spoken politely and not harshly.

they were to die, show the same concern [for orphans]. Let them be mindful of Allah and speak out for justice (*yaqūlū qawlan sadīdan*)” (4:9). This involves not only speaking to them justly and in the best way, but also being mindful of their welfare and treating them appropriately.

The Relationship Between *Qawl Sadīd* and *Hikma*

Hikma is crucial for speaking in this manner, for wisdom guides one to speak the truth in a pertinent and appropriate way. In the Qur’ānic worldview, wisdom is deeply intertwined with the purpose of human life, a divine gift that guides individuals to understand and fulfill their intended purpose. Reflecting on the concept of *qawl sadīd* is highly significant in understanding how good and truthful speech, guided by wisdom, can lead to positive actions and strengthen relationships: “O you who have believed, fear Allah and speak words of appropriate justice. He will [then] amend your deeds and forgive your sins” (33:70–71). This principle extends to broader interpersonal interactions, advocating for respectful and clear communication and refraining from negative speech (e.g., gossip, slander, and harmful assumptions), all of which the Qur’ān explicitly condemns (49:10–13). Investing in people requires wisdom, and this approach to communication is presented as a fundamental aspect of Islamic teachings. A good Muslim chaplain will be aware of this Qur’ānic approach and implement it on a daily basis.

Iṣlāḥ: The Outcome of Hikma

Iṣlāḥ comes from the root word *ṣ-l-ḥ* (the same root from which *ṣāliḥ*, commonly translated as “righteous” or “pious” is derived) and occurs in forty verses, among them 49:10, 4:114, 4:128, and 11:88. It means “to do good, proper, right, flourishing, useful, restore oneself or to reconcile people with one another, to make peace” (Kamali 2013). Other meanings are “to make something good, put something where it belongs, settle differences, reconciliation, peace, and to renew whatever is needed” (Kamali 2013). In his *Lisān al-‘Arab* (1990, p. 517), Ibn Manẓūr defines it as the opposite of destruction: to prevent destruction or repair something that has been damaged. *Iṣlāḥ* (reform, improvement, or reconciliation) therefore refers to the effort needed to improve a situation, rectify errors, eliminate rivalry, and promote harmony. It also encompasses a wide range of actions and intentions, including self-improvement, seeking repentance, reconciling disputes, promoting justice, forbidding evil, and striving to prevent corruption and destruction. When guided by wisdom, *iṣlāḥ* encompasses both outward changes and inner transformations, all to foster a deeper connection to spiritual principles (2:220; 4:35 and 114; 7:170; 28:18–22). In the Qur’ān, Allah tells humanity, “And your Lord [O Prophet] would never destroy a society unjustly while its people were acting rightly” (11:117). This is a powerful call for collective action toward betterment: encouraging communities to reflect on their actions, identify areas of injustice or moral decline, and work toward positive change.

All of the prophets were sent to establish *iṣlāḥ* and maintain it in their communities. As Prophet Shu‘ayb affirmed: “My people, can you not see? What if I am acting on clear evidence from my Lord? He Himself has given me good provision: I do not want to do

what I am forbidding you to do, I only want to put things right (*al-iṣlāḥ*) as far as I can. I cannot succeed without Allah's help: I trust in Him, and always turn to Him" (11:88) and "Give full measure and weight and do not undervalue people's goods; do not cause corruption in the land after it has been set in order (*iṣlāḥihā*): this is better for you, if you are believers" (7:85). He critically assessed existing situations and recognized and advised against areas of potential corruption.

Iṣlāḥ is considered the ideal outcome of wisdom, as the latter equips individuals with the necessary knowledge and understanding to identify areas needing improvement, determine the right course of action, and implement change based on sound principles. *Ḥikma* guides the process of *iṣlāḥ* by providing the foundation for discerning what needs to be reformed and how to approach it, and for implementing positive changes. True belief inspires and motivates individuals to pursue *iṣlāḥ* both within themselves and in their communities, as well as to rectify errors, strive for personal growth, and work to eliminate negative traits.

The Qur'ān showcases the wisdom of the prophets by detailing their words, experiences, and actions, thereby offering timeless guidance. All prophets embodied wisdom and served as exemplars of being Allah's trustees in building *iṣlāḥ*, preventing and removing any corruption and mischief. Again, this type of rectification inspired by *iṣlāḥ* is a valuable tool for the Muslim chaplain.

III. The Prophetic Embodiment and Teaching of Wisdom

Ḥikma is mentioned together with "the Book" (i.e., *al-Kitāb wa-l-Ḥikma*) in nine places within the Qur'ān (2:129, 151, and 231; 3:48 and 164; 4:54 and 113; 5:110; 62:2), all of which emphasize that all of the prophets were sent with the same message and that they embodied wisdom. In Sūrat al-An'ām, Allah mentioned eighteen prophets from Nūḥ (Noah) to 'Īsā (Jesus), peace be upon them: "And from their fathers and their descendants and their brothers—and We chose them and guided them to a straight path" (6:87). The accounts of all prophets highlight the unwavering faith, perseverance, and commitment to justice that characterize righteous (*ṣāliḥūn*) and wise (*ḥukamā'* and *rāshidūn*) individuals.

Indeed, Prophet Muhammad's mission as the seal of prophethood is to teach the Book and wisdom (2:129; 3:164; 62:2). As Sūrat al-Nisā' states: "Allah has revealed to you the Book and wisdom and taught you what you never knew. Great [indeed] is Allah's favor upon you" (4:113). In addition: "Since We have sent you a messenger from among yourselves—reciting to you Our revelations, and to cause you to grow in purity, teaching you the Book and wisdom, and teaching you what you never knew. So remember Me; I will remember you. And thank Me, and never be ungrateful. O believers! Seek comfort in patience and prayer. Allah is truly with those who are patient" (2:151–54). This signifies not just that seeking knowledge is important, but that equally as essential is the ability to apply that knowledge wisely and practically in one's life, in order to make sound judgments and live in accordance with Allah's truth. Thus, through articulating the mission of Prophet Muhammad, a connection is made between *ilm*, *rushd*, *ḥikma*, and *iṣlāḥ*: *ilm* is the foundation, which requires *rushd* and *ḥikma* to properly implement, and the result is *iṣlāḥ*.

The following sections will briefly highlight some key concepts related to wisdom, as taught by the Qur'ān through the examples of the prophets.

Tawhīd and Tawakkul

The Qur'ān highlights Prophet Ibrāhīm's (Abraham) pursuit of conviction in faith through logical observation of the natural world, leading him to conclude that only the One who created the heavens and Earth could be his Lord (i.e., *tawhīd*) (6:75–82). His life was a testament to his complete trust in God (*tawakkul*), regardless of the situation he was facing (21:51–71; 37:94–111). Standing firm against the social norm of idolatry required immense courage (19:41–50). The instances within his life that are presented in the Qur'ān, many of which involved great hardship and sacrifice, exemplify his unwavering submission to the divine will, as well as demonstrate the wisdom of putting one's trust in Allah's wisdom and plan, even when it surpasses human understanding.

Mercy

The Qur'ān describes Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) as “a mercy to the worlds” (21:107) and emphasizes that “The Messenger of Allah is an excellent model for those of you who put your hope in Allah and the Last Day and remember Him often” (33:21). As his wife ‘Ā'isha, one of the Mothers of the Believers, stated, “[His] character was the Qur'ān” (*Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 746), thereby indicating that his actions, conduct, and way of life were a living embodiment of its teachings. For example, when he and his companions faced intense opposition and violence in Mecca, he displayed remarkable patience and forgiveness. After years of persecution and exile, he returned peacefully, pardoned his former enemies, and offered a general amnesty. Even when wronged, Prophet Muhammad prioritized justice for others: “By an act of mercy from Allah, you [O Prophet] were gentle in your dealings with them. Had you been harsh, or hard-hearted, they would have dispersed and left you. So pardon them and ask forgiveness for them. Consult with them about matters, then, when you have decided on a course of action, put your trust in Allah: Allah loves those who put their trust in Him” (3:159). The Prophet would regularly console his companions, along with family members, the needy, and children in their times of suffering and misery (9:128). The Qur'ān presents him as “a mercy to the worlds,” for his wisdom was intrinsically linked to mercy and compassion. Similarly, chaplains, as well as anyone else trying to cultivate wisdom, should understand that their own interactions with others should be grounded in mercy and compassion.

Gratitude

Prophets Sulaymān (Solomon) and Dāwūd (David) are presented as examples of wisdom, a trait gifted to the both of them due to their profound gratitude to Allah. Allah granted David, who was a just and wise ruler, a strong kingdom and wisdom, taught him what He willed, and commanded him and his family to: “Work, O family of David, in thankfulness to Me” (34:13). Both prophets are portrayed as deeply grateful for Allah's blessings and the wisdom which He bestowed upon them. The Qur'ān states that they both acknowledged Allah's favor by saying, “Praise be to Allah Who has favored us above many of His believing servants” (27:15). Their gratitude is a key aspect of their wisdom and exemplary

character. From this, one can conclude that part of the process of gaining wisdom is acknowledging and showing gratitude to Allah for the blessings which He has given.

Patience

The accounts of prophets Nūḥ (Noah) and Ayyūb (Job) highlight immense patience. Nūḥ tirelessly conveyed Allah's message for centuries, while Ayyūb endured severe trials with unyielding faith and patience. These examples serve as powerful lessons in enduring difficulties with unwavering trust in Allah. Patience does not mean always being passive, but actively enduring something while maintaining a positive and hopeful attitude, taking the necessary steps to deal with the situation or person, and strategically preparing for what lies ahead—all of which are manifestations of wisdom.

Supplication (Du‘ā’)

The Qur’ān strongly emphasizes the significance of *du‘ā’* (supplication) as a way of connecting with Allah, presenting it as a form of worship that embodies humility, dependence, and trust in Allah's mercy and wisdom. Muslims are encouraged to use this method to seek guidance, protection, and blessings in all circumstances. Prophet Yūnus's (Jonah) supplication in the whale's belly is a powerful example of seeking refuge in Allah during a time of great distress. Allah has promised to respond to those who call upon Him. Although His response may not always be immediate or what is specifically requested, Allah's wisdom and mercy ensure that the supplication is answered in the best possible way. *Du‘ā’* fosters hope and positivity, reminding believers that Allah is always listening and knows what is best for them.

IV. Prophet Ibrāhīm's Wisdom: A Role Model in Building Future Generations

Prophet Ibrāhīm's prayer for righteous offspring is a great example of envisioning the future with wisdom: “O my Sustainer! Endow me with the ability to judge [between right and wrong], and make me one with the righteous. Grant me the power to convey the truth unto those who will come after me” or in another translation, “My Lord! Grant me wisdom and join me with the righteous. Bless me with honorable mention among later generations” (26:83–84).

The Qur’ān highlights Prophet Ibrāhīm's wisdom in his concern and prayers for future generations, serving as a role model for believers when it says, “Indeed, Allah chose Adam, Nūḥ, the family of Ibrāhīm, and the family of ‘Imrān above all people [of their time]. They are descendants of one another. And Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing” (3:33–34). Prophet Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him) is a pivotal figure who exemplified a profound vision for the future, not just for his immediate family, but for his descendants and humanity as a whole. The question is how he demonstrated this vision.

Prayers for Future Generations

The Qur’ān illustrates his wise vision through Prophet Ibrāhīm's frequent supplications and prayers for his offspring. This encourages persistence in prayers for children's well-being and guidance, remembering that Allah hears all supplications. Ibrāhīm's prayer, “My

Lord! Bless me with righteous offspring” (37:100), emphasizes his wish for virtuous children who will make positive contributions to the world. This highlights his foresight and desire for his children to inherit and continue his legacy of devotion to worshipping the One True Creator.

Ibrāhīm’s prayers also reflect his vision for a future generation, after his immediate children, that would be submissive to Allah and uphold Islam’s (i.e., the true, timeless religion of submission to the One True Creator) rituals and practices. He prayed for a messenger from among them who would guide them with divine verses and wisdom (2:129). This prayer was answered with the coming of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), as explained by the Qur’ān in 3:164 and 62:2, as well as by the Prophet himself: “I am the answer to the prayer of my father Ibrāhīm” (*Sīrat Ibn Hishām*, 1/166; *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī* 1/566).

Envisioning and Establishing a Legacy of Faith

Ibrāhīm and his son Ismā‘īl (Ishmael) established a firm foundation upon which their vision of a legacy of faith for multiple generations to come could be realized, both through their supplications and through their actions. They built the Ka‘ba in Mecca, thereby establishing a central sanctuary for the worship of Allah, near to where their children were settled. Ibrāhīm’s supplications, “My Lord, make this city secure, and save me and my children from worshipping idols” (14:35) and “So make the hearts of [believing] people incline toward them” (14:37), reveal his concern for his children’s spiritual well-being and protection from harmful influences. It is important to think of how to protect future generations from any form of idolatry and disbelief, and so to this end, he prayed to Allah to raise from among his descendants a messenger: “Our Lord! Raise from among them a messenger who will recite to them Your revelations, teach them the Book and wisdom, and purify them. Indeed, You are the Almighty, the All-Wise” (2:129).

In his plea to Allah, “My Lord, make me and my descendants keep up prayer (*muqīm al-ṣalāt*). Our Lord! Accept my supplications” (14:40), one learns the importance of instilling the love of *ṣalāt* in children, setting a good example, and encouraging a strong connection with Allah. While Prophet Ibrāhīm’s prayers emphasize seeking blessings and guidance for his offspring and their adherence to monotheism, Prophet Muhammad’s mission had a broader scope: establishing a global community of Muslims (*umma*). The Qur’ān emphasizes the universal nature of Muhammad’s (peace be upon him) message, and thus the concept of *umma* transcends tribal, ethnic, and geographical boundaries, uniting believers under the banner of Islam.

The Significance of the Shift

This transition from a familial focus to a universal one reflects the evolving needs and context of humanity’s spiritual journey. While Prophet Ibrāhīm’s prayers laid the groundwork for monotheism through a chosen lineage, Prophet Muhammad brought a message for all humanity, emphasizing the shared belief in Allah and promoting justice, equality, and compassion. The Qur’ān states that “He [Allah] gives wisdom to whom He wills, and whoever has been given wisdom has certainly been given much good” (2:269).

Based upon this verse, Ibn Kathīr (c. 1300–1373) explained that while prophets were blessed with a unique and profound level of wisdom—a wisdom which allows them to deeply understand and effectively spread the message they were entrusted with—Allah, in His mercy, has enabled other individuals to also cultivate and acquire wisdom through sincere striving, seeking knowledge, contemplating the Qur’ān, and reflecting on Allah’s signs in the universe (Ibn Kathīr 1999, 1:711). The Qur’ān provides countless examples of wise men and women who benefited the world, who are recognized for their wisdom, righteousness, and significant roles in human history.

What were their decisions, and why did the Qur’ān mention them? How can people implement a similar level of wisdom in their lives? What are the choices that should be made today?

V. A Practical Implementation of *Hikma*: Luqmān’s Advice

One of the figures of the Qur’ān who is most associated with wisdom is Luqmān, whose story is narrated within its own dedicated chapter. The chapter begins with a call to those seeking to inculcate wisdom: “Alif, Lām, Mīm. These are the verses of the Book, rich in wisdom. [It is] a guide and mercy for the good-doers...” (31:1–3).

Reading the Qur’ān as one structural unit—which involves not only studying Sūra Luqmān but also connecting it to the themes found in the surrounding *sūras*—enables us to understand an in-depth meaning of wisdom. By following Luqmān’s advice, believers learn how to live in accordance with divine guidance and cultivate the qualities essential for a righteous and purposeful life. Sūrat al-Rūm, which precedes Sūra Luqmān, focuses on Allah’s signs in the universe, preparing the reader to appreciate the universal nature of Islam’s message. Sūra Luqmān then demonstrates how to embody this message through personal and familial conduct. Thus, Sūrat al-Rūm provides the theological framework, emphasizing Allah’s Oneness and wisdom; then Sūra Luqmān provides a practical roadmap for implementing this message in one’s daily life, through embodying wisdom and righteous conduct. In this way, these consecutive *sūras* complement each other.

Luqmān’s advice to his son (31:12–19) is considered by Islamic scholars a timeless guide for nurturing responsible and wise individuals who are effective trustees on Earth.

Tawhīd

Luqmān’s first and most crucial piece of advice is to not associate partners with Allah (*shirk*), an act which is the highest form of injustice (31:13). Believing in and worshipping Allah alone is the ultimate act of justice, for it acknowledges Him as the sole Creator, Provider, and Sustainer—all of which is the Creator’s rightful due. This principle promotes and fosters a sense of accountability, encourages ethical conduct, strengthens trust in Allah, and reminds the individual that Allah knows and will judge all actions. Luqmān’s teachings connect the core belief in Allah’s Oneness with the virtue of gratitude (*shukr*) for His

blessings, fostering a positive and humble relationship with the Divine, cultivating resilience and a positive outlook, and helping individuals appreciate life's favors.

Gratitude

Luqmān's story is introduced by connecting wisdom with gratitude, with Allah telling us: "Indeed, We blessed Luqmān with wisdom, [saying,] 'Be grateful to Allah, for whoever is grateful, it is only for their own good. And [as for] whoever is ungrateful, then surely Allah is Self-Sufficient, Praiseworthy'" (31:12). Gratitude is to acknowledge the good in one's life by counting one's blessings and thanking whoever contributes to one's happiness in this life and the hereafter. In a ḥadīth, Prophet Muhammad said, "He who does not thank people does not thank Allah" (*Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, no. 1954; *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, no. 4811). Gratitude naturally leads to humility, which forms a foundation for acting justly and upholding what is right. By recognizing this, individuals are motivated to live a life aligned with Allah's guidance and to express their appreciation for His favors by seeking to please Him. As gratitude cures a multitude of toxic emotions, believing in Allah is the foundation of true justice. A grateful heart leads to a desire to act justly and compassionately toward others. Recognizing Allah's blessings motivates treating others with fairness and kindness, which reflects one's gratitude and justice.

The question is: Do you consider yourself to be in a state of gratitude? If so, how do you demonstrate this?

Honoring Parents

Parents, the direct cause of our existence, are a direct means of Allah's blessings and play a crucial role in our upbringing and well-being. The Qur'ān's emphasis on respecting and caring even for one's parents with different beliefs promotes harmonious family relationships and underscores the significance of family values. Acknowledging their sacrifices fosters humility and appreciation; honoring them sets a positive example for children and contributes to building respect and righteousness within society. Honoring parents is not just a societal norm, but also an act of worship, one intertwined with faith and gratitude to Allah. While the Qur'ān maintains treating them with kindness and gratitude, it does set a clear boundary when their beliefs contradict the *tawḥīdī* worldview: "If they strive to make you associate with Me anything about which you have no knowledge, then do not obey them. Yet keep their company in this life according to what is right, and follow the path of those who turn to Me. You will all return to Me in the end, and I will tell you everything that you have done" (31:15). Note that this respect has limits when it comes to compromising one's core beliefs, and the Qur'ān offers teachings that demonstrate this balance (29:8; 31:14–15).

The verses referenced above explicitly state that if parents pressure children to associate partners with Allah, they should not be obeyed. However, even when disagreeing with parents on matters of faith, the Qur'ān instructs Muslims to continue treating them with kindness, respect, and due consideration in worldly affairs. As upholding one's faith in Allah remains the primary obligation, no earthly relationship can override this fundamental principle. Muslims are encouraged to pray for their parents' well-being and

guidance to the right path. The Qur'ān exemplifies the relationship between believers and their non-believing parents through its account of Prophet Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him) (6:74; 9:114; 19:41–49; 26:69–89; 43:26–28; 60:4). Although his father rejected Ibrāhīm's message and even threatened to stone him, Ibrāhīm consistently addressed him with respect and affection ("O my dear father"), prayed for his forgiveness and guidance, and was concerned about the potential punishment he might face in the hereafter. Ibrāhīm only dissociated himself from his father when the latter insisted on rejecting the truth. This account reflects his admirable qualities: compassion and tender-heartedness, dedication to the truth, fulfillment of promises, and trust in Allah's mercy and guidance.

Murāqaba: Awareness of Allah's Knowledge

Luqmān reminds his son that Allah is aware of all actions, an echo of which appears in, "Even if it be anything equal to the weight of a grain of mustard seed... Allah will bring it forth. Verily, Allah is Subtle, Well-Aware" (31:16). This instills a sense of accountability and encourages individuals to act with integrity and make thoughtful decisions. He teaches this deep meaning of "Allah is with me everywhere" through the metaphor of the mustard seed: The tiny mustard seed serves as a powerful illustration of the scope of Allah's knowledge and mercy. This practical example of teaching children to have awareness of Allah's presence (*taqwā*) should be used to guide children in developing their relationship with the Creator and the creations around them. This approach helps them broaden their imagination by, for example, reflecting on rocks and what is living under or above them. When *taqwā* is cultivated, acts of worship, such as *ṣalāt*, transform from mere rituals into a profound connection with Allah. A *taqwā*-filled heart leads to sincere and focused prayer.

Establishing Prayer (Ṣalāt)

Ṣalāt, a fundamental practice that strengthens one's connection with Allah, nurtures oneself and others, provides a sense of discipline and purpose, and guides individuals and communities toward righteous actions. An act of justice and gratitude, it is considered Allah's right upon His creation, as well as the acknowledgment of His sovereignty and generosity, and is a fulfillment of the duty to worship Him, thereby affirming His Oneness. Establishing prayer cultivates self-mindfulness and purity; develops a sense of personal and communal justice, equity, and compassion; motivates individuals and communities to promote what is right and forbid what is wrong; and bridges the spiritual connection between one's relationship with the Creator and one's efforts toward justice and peace. The shift within Sūra Luqmān from Luqmān's wisdom and advice to highlighting the grandeur of Allah's creation is a powerful reminder of Allah's abundant blessings upon humanity (which should engender humility, gratitude, and prayer), as well as a powerful argument against those who deny or dispute about Him (31:20–34).

Promoting Good and Forbidding Evil

Luqmān advises his son to advocate for justice and righteousness and to oppose evil. This teaches responsibility toward society and highlights the importance of taking moral stances, even in the face of adversity. These "golden rules" encompass the core values of

righteousness, community service, and resilience, all of which form the foundation of an upright and steadfast individual (31:17).

Patience

Luqmān emphasizes active patience (*ṣabr*) when facing challenges and difficulties, for doing so brings great reward from Allah: “My dear son, establish *ṣalāt*, and bid the good and forbid the evil, and bear with patience what befalls you. Surely this is among the matters [requiring] determination” (31:17). However, patience does not mean to endure oppression and evil forever, as the Prophet’s (peace be upon him) life shows. By accepting the mission given to him by Allah, he began to struggle against the societal ills, paganism, and injustice afflicting his people. The profound and comprehensive concept of *‘azm al-umūr* can be translated as “steadfastness in matters,” “matters requiring resolution,” or “a resolution to aspire to,” based on its usage within the Qur’ān. It signifies a strong determination and firm resolve when confronting such situations, especially when doubts or weaknesses may arise. This phrase, often linked with patience and forgiveness (*ghufran*), suggests that true resolve lies in enduring hardship and maintaining a positive outlook even during adversity (3:186; 42:43). The Qur’ān emphasizes that believers will be tested in their wealth, lives, and through hurtful statements from others and it encourages them to seek Allah’s assistance through patience and prayer.

Ethical Conduct and Personal Development

Luqmān urges his son to walk modestly and speak gently, for these approaches foster mutual respect and strengthen community bonds: “Do not turn your nose up at people, nor walk about the place arrogantly, for Allah does not love arrogant or boastful people” (31:18). The Qur’ān’s narration of Luqmān’s interaction with his son is a stirring portrayal of parental mentorship. His words are laced with gentle guidance, nurturing not just obedience but also fostering understanding and respect. In short, mentorship, especially from a parent to a child, should be rooted in love, patience, and empathy.

Moderation

Luqmān advises moderate behavior and speech to promote dignity, self-control, and a balanced approach to life: “Be moderate in your pace. And lower your voice, for the ugliest of all voices is certainly the braying of donkeys” (31:19). The tone of voice plays a pivotal role in effective communication. A soft tone can convey empathy and understanding, thereby fostering a sense of closeness and trust. Conversely, a sarcastic tone can cause hurt and misunderstanding, creating distance. This explains and demonstrates the steps for enhancing healthy and harmonious relationships that may lead to building a just and peaceful family, community, and society.

Universally Relevant

The narrative of Luqmān presents a comprehensive and universal roadmap for people who strive to cultivate wisdom in their lives. Indeed, this and other lessons found in the Qur’ān’s

verses are presented as timeless and universally applicable to all individuals and societies, regardless of time, type of civilization, and location.

VI. Role Models in the Qur'ān Who Embody Wisdom

Beyond the examples of the prophets and of Luqmān, the Qur'ān provides other models of wisdom from which one can learn, some of which are mentioned below.

The Queen of Sheba, a lesson in wisdom in governance and justice: The Qur'ān illustrates, in Sūrat al-Naml's account of the Queen of Sheba, a wise leader who protected her nation and the world around her from a disastrous war. This queen was a powerful ruler, who recognized the truth and submitted to Allah during the time of Prophet Sulaymān. Her wisdom was reflected in her careful consultation with her advisors (27:32–33), her cautious and strategic decision-making (27:34–35), and her recognition of truth and subsequent submission to Allah (27:44).

Dhul Qarnayn: A believer and just ruler who was given great means to fulfill his mission, Dhul Qarnayn used his knowledge and power to serve people and spread justice and peace wherever he landed. His story was mentioned in Sūrat al-Kahf, in verses 83 to 98.

A believer from Pharaoh's people: The Qur'ān praises this believer for his courageous defense of Moses's true message, despite the risks involved. He approached Pharaoh and his advisors wisely, using different styles of arguments, tones, and even emotions to try to convince them of the truth (40:28–45).

Pharaoh's wife: She is revered as an example of strong faith, courage, and steadfastness in the face of oppression, despite being the wife of a tyrant (66:11). Her wisdom was revealed through her empathy in saving the infant Moses (28:9); she became his foster mother, raising the man who would one day become a prophet, and later accepted the truth of his message—in spite of her husband's opposition and oppression.

Moses's mother: The Qur'ān describes how the mother of Moses received divine inspiration to place her baby in a basket in the river, ultimately leading to his safety and later return to her care. Her story demonstrates her unwavering faith and trust in Allah during challenging times (28:7–13), something that is an essential aspect of true wisdom.

Moses's wife: Her keen observation and insightful assessment of Moses's character, and the resulting advice she gave to her father, reveals her wisdom in choosing the right spouse: “O my father, hire him. Verily, the best of men for you to hire is the strong, the trustworthy” (28:26; the full story is narrated in 28:23–28). Her suggestion demonstrates practical wisdom, in recognizing Moses's valuable qualities that would benefit her father and their household. This advice led to Moses being hired and subsequently marrying her, which played a crucial role in his journey prior to prophethood.

Maryam's mother: This woman, who had vowed to dedicate her unborn child to Allah's service, was wise when planning for the future of her children and the generations after her. She made *du'ā* for her unborn child, and Allah answered this *du'ā*, entrusting Maryam to the care of Prophet Zakariyyā (Zechariah) (3:37)—and leading Maryam down her path of righteousness, a righteousness revered by billions of people since then.

Maryam (Mary) al-Ṣiddīqa: Maryam, the mother of Prophet 'Īsā (Jesus), is referred to as al-Ṣiddīqa: “And his mother was one who never deviated from the truth,” and in

another translation, “the woman of truth” (5:75). This highlights a key aspect of her character. She is revered, across religions, as an exceptionally pious and virtuous woman who embodied deep wisdom through her devotion to Allah from a young age. Under Zakariyyā’s guardianship, Maryam was nurtured in an environment of faith and piety (3:35–45). Her story exemplifies steadfast faith and trust in Allah’s plan. She accepted Jesus’s miraculous conception and endured trials during childbirth with patience. Facing accusations, she put her full trust in Allah that He would save her from this hardship (19:16–36). Her life shows us that Allah rewards steadfastness and protects those who seek Him. The qualities which she embodied are all necessary characteristics for someone who wants to cultivate wisdom, and her narrative continues to inspire a life of purpose and devotion to Allah for those who read it.

The Mothers of the Believers: This is a title of honor given to Prophet Muhammad’s wives, due to their high status, their sacrifice, and the respect owed to them by believers. The Qur’ān highlights this high status and sets them apart as examples for all Muslims. Throughout their lives, they demonstrated extraordinary faith and sacrifice by choosing to stay with the Prophet (peace be upon him) despite difficult circumstances (33:28–29). Allah entrusted them with conveying the message and wisdom: “[Always] remember what is recited in your homes of Allah’s revelations and [Prophetic] wisdom. Surely Allah is Most Subtle, All-Aware” (33:34). To this end, these great women played a crucial role in preserving and transmitting the Prophet’s teachings, and they were frequently sought by other companions as well as early scholars of the next generation for advice; particularly ‘Ā’isha (may Allah be pleased with her), who was renowned for her knowledge and memory. Their actions demonstrate the importance of obeying Allah and His Messenger, seeking knowledge and wisdom, and serving the community.

Khawla bint Tha’laba: Renowned for her courage and wisdom in challenging an unjust marital practice (*ḡihār*) and seeking divine intervention, her case resulted in a positive resolution and a revelation stated in the Qur’ān. Her account highlights the importance of standing up for justice, seeking redress from the appropriate authorities, and trusting in Allah’s mercy and wisdom. Khawla not only rejected the practice of *ḡihār*, but she appealed directly to the Prophet for guidance. Allah responded by revealing Sūrat al-Mujādila verses 1 to 4, directly addressing her situation and providing a solution for her and for women in generations to come. These verses clarified that a man’s wife is not his mother and that a specific expiation is required to reconcile the spouses. This emphasizes that all human relationships are designed by Allah, not by the words of people. Another important lesson this incident illustrates is how the Prophet used wisdom to advise and guide Khawla and her husband, Aws ibn al-Ṣāmit, to rectify the situation. The verses mandated that Aws free a slave, or fast for two consecutive months, or feed sixty poor people. Sūrat al-Mujādila was revealed to document her experience, so that people could always derive valuable lessons from it.

PART TWO: THE MEANING AND IMPACT OF THE LACK OF WISDOM IN CHAPLAINCY

The liminal nature of Islamic chaplaincy makes it imperative that persons in this space exhibit wisdom. As Muslim chaplains often find themselves negotiating between conflicting paradigms, acting wisely in these encounters is of paramount importance. In this second part of the paper, the discussion on wisdom continues, with a focus on how to define the lack of wisdom, as well as the impact this lack of wisdom may have on the practice of chaplaincy.

The Qur'ān addresses various aspects related to the lack of wisdom or sound judgment, often using different terms to describe their underlying state or characteristics. Some of the key terms and concepts are listed below.

I. Defining the Lack of Wisdom

Jahala (ignorance) is the rejection of innate nature, an absence of common sense, a darkness of the heart, and the inability to distinguish right from wrong (33:72; 5:50; 2:273). It is often associated with arrogance, egoism, and following desires, as well as with someone who constantly ignores advice and acts impulsively: “The [true] servants of the Most Compassionate are those who walk on the earth humbly, and when the foolish (*al-jāhilūn*) address them [improperly], they only respond with peace” (25:63). This verse highlights that true believers respond to foolish behavior and ignorance only with gentleness and understanding, in an attempt to help them to reflect, realize, and correct their mistakes. The opposite of *hikma*, its root word (*j-h-l*) has the additional connotations of foolishness, ignorance, impulsiveness, a state of complete unawareness (6:54 and 111; 7:138; 11:29; 27:55), and a lack of knowledge and wisdom (46:23). This word occurs twenty-four times in the Qur'ān, in six forms. The Qur'ān warns people against remaining ignorant: “Be gracious, enjoin what is right, and turn away from those who act ignorantly” (7:199) and “Moses responded, ‘I seek refuge in Allah from acting foolishly’” (2:67).

Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī (d. 502/1108) defined *jahl* as foolishness or the comprehension of something in a manner contrary to its true reality (Al-Iṣfahānī 2014). This contrasts with the typical definition as being merely a lack of knowledge. He refers to simple ignorance as a lack of knowledge about a particular subject or topic, something that one can rectify through personal effort. However, the problematic form of ignorance entails considering a false belief or misunderstanding as the truth. The third category of ignorance is when one has knowledge but acts contrary to it: “O you who have believed, if there comes to you a disobedient one with information, investigate, lest you harm a people out of ignorance (*bijahāla*) and become, over what you have done, regretful” (49:6). The Qur'ānic framework encourages individuals to acquire knowledge and cultivate wisdom, in order to lead them to embodying *istiqāma* (steadfastness) (Ibn Taymiyya 2002).

Lā ya 'qilūn (those who do not understand or use their intellect): Wise individuals always seek to learn and accept counsel, while foolish individuals tend to resist guidance and to repeat mistakes. The Qur'ān frequently highlights the importance of using one's intellect (*'aql*) to comprehend and follow the truth. Those who fail to do so are described as lacking understanding (2:170–171; 5:103).

Safaha generally means foolishness, ignorance, or a lack of wisdom, particularly regarding matters of faith and divine guidance. Verses 2:12–13 describe how *safaha* can lead to *fasād* (corruption or mischief). Hypocrites are a prime example of this, for they prioritize worldly benefits and view fulfilling their duties to Allah and their acts of worship as burdens and unimportant. Verse 6:140 describes the killing of children, especially daughters, in such terms, identifying that those who do so do it out of *safahā* (foolishness) and *bighayri ʿilm* (without knowledge, i.e., out of ignorance). This thus shows the deleterious consequences of foolishness. Prophet Hūd’s people accused him of being a fool: “The disbelieving chiefs of his people responded, ‘We surely see you as a fool (*safāha*), and we certainly think you are a liar.’ Hūd replied, ‘O my people. I am no fool. But I am a messenger from the Lord of all worlds, conveying to you my Lord’s messages. And I am your sincere advisor’” (7:66–68).

In this context, *safaha* refers to a perceived lack of sound judgment that leads people to reject divine messages. Those who rejected Ibrāhīm’s faith are described as those who fool themselves: “And who would reject the faith of Ibrāhīm except a fool (*safīha*)! We certainly chose him in this life, and in the Hereafter he will surely be among the righteous” (2:130). While *safīh* describes foolishness or a lack of wisdom, *safah* can imply a deliberate lack of sense or indulgence. *Safīh* can also mean a weak or feeble-minded person: “But if the debtor is feeble-minded (*safīhan*), weak or unable to dictate, then let his guardian dictate justly” (2:282).

Ghafla (heedlessness): This term emphasizes being unmindful of Allah and one’s divine purpose. It implies a lack of vigilance and alertness due to a preoccupation with worldly matters and neglect of spiritual obligations (7:146, 179, 205; 10:7; 18:28; 46:5).

II. The Consequence of the Lack of Wisdom

The Qur’ān details the root causes of these negative consequences. This process begins with the inner self when the person cannot develop self-reflection, a reality that later manifests in his/her actions. Verses 4:116–121 explain Satan’s plan to draw people away from worshipping Allah, the Creator:

Surely Allah does not forgive associating [others] with Him [in worship], but forgives anything else of whomever He wills. Indeed, whoever associates [others] with Allah has clearly gone far astray. Instead of Allah, they only invoke female gods and they [actually] invoke none but a rebellious Satan, cursed by Allah—who said, “I will surely take hold of a certain number of Your servants. I will deceive them and incite vain desires in them, and I shall command them—and they will cut off the ears of cattle [in idolatrous sacrifice]; and I shall command them to alter Allah’s creation.” And whoever takes Satan as a guardian instead of Allah has certainly suffered a tremendous loss. (4:116–119)

Those individuals, who fall for Satan’s plan due to a lack of true self-reflection, will be guided by their desires and will create corruption and mischief on earth: “Have you considered the one who takes his own desires as a deity and whom, in His knowledge, Allah lets him go astray [i.e., leaves him to his own desires]” (45:23). As a result, one will

follow anything, anyone, and any path. Thus, Allah warns people against following Satan and their inner lower desires (24:21). He also proclaims:

And relate to them the story of the one to whom We gave Our signs, but he abandoned them, so Satan took hold of him, and he became a deviant. If it had been Our will, We could have used these signs to raise him high, but instead he clung to the earth and followed his own desires—he was like a dog that pants with a lolling tongue whether you drive it away or leave it alone. Such is the image of those who reject Our signs. Tell them the story so that they may reflect. (7:175–176)

It is important to note that had this person made the choice to heed the signs sent to him and to rectify his beliefs and character, Allah would have guided him further and raised him in status. However, because this person rejected the signs he was given, Allah then allowed him to go further astray. From this, we learn that in His infinite wisdom, Allah the All-Wise has given us the ability to make a choice between guidance or misguidance—between wisdom or foolishness—and He then responds to us accordingly.

The Qur’ān defines those who lack wisdom as misguided, astray (i.e., they do not consider the possible negative consequences), and without any clear end goal (i.e., they lead an aimless life and have no sense of accountability) (14:3). They allow themselves to be led by false leaders rather than take accountability for their own pursuit of the truth and their own decisions: “And they will say, ‘Our Lord! We obeyed our leaders and elite, but they led us astray from the [Right] Way’” (33:67) and “So that is Allah, Your Lord, the True—what is there, beyond the True Allah but falsehood?” (10:32). Furthermore, the Qur’ān details how some people lose their way and then encourage others to join them, thereby themselves becoming these leaders of falsehood: “And [so] Pharaoh led his people astray and did not guide [them rightly]” (20:79).

Regardless of what they have done, however, Allah the Most Merciful provides opportunities for people to change their ways and to recognize the truth: “Indeed, We afflicted Pharaoh’s people with famine and shortage of crops so [that] they might come back [to their senses]” (7:130). But if people insist on rejecting the truth, “their fate is that of the people of Pharaoh and those before them—they all disbelieved in Allah’s signs, so Allah seized them for their sins. Indeed, Allah is All-Powerful, severe in punishment” (8:52).

The Qur’ān also states: “[Remember] the tribes of ‘Ād and Thamūd: Their history is made clear to you by [what is left of] their dwelling places. Satan made their [evil] deeds appealing to them, hindering them from the [Right] Way, although they were capable of reasoning. [Remember] Qārūn and Pharaoh and Hāmān: Moses brought them clear signs, but they behaved arrogantly on Earth. They could not escape Us” (29:38–39). Foolish individuals tend to resist guidance, repeat the same mistakes, and not consider the potential consequences of their actions. **The Qur’ān reveals their final destination:** “And [beware of] the Day when the wrongdoer will bite his own hand [in regret] and say, ‘Oh! I wish I had followed the Way along with the Messenger! Oh, woe to me! I wish I had not taken that one as a friend. It was he who truly made me stray from the revelation after it had reached me’” (25:27–29). The Qur’ān affirms: **“Indeed, Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves.** And if it is Allah’s Will

to torment a people [due to their own evil deeds], it can never be averted, nor can they find a protector other than Him” (13:11).

From these verses, we learn that not only does a lack of wisdom lead to further ignorance (in its various forms) within the individual, but it also leads to the propagation of ignorance, injustice, and oppression within society, as well as punishment and regret in the Hereafter.

III. The Characteristics of Unwise People

Arrogance, the rejection of truth: Those who lack wisdom are characterized within the Qur’ān as choosing disbelief and mockery even after being presented with truth. Blinded by their own arrogance and rejecting clear evidence, they say, “We surely reject what you believe in” (7:76), thereby causing tremendous damage for themselves and for others: “And [so] Pharaoh led his people astray” (20:79). Various individuals and groups, often associated with their rejection of Allah’s guidance and their arrogance, are frequently presented as cautionary tales of the results of foolishness.

Pharaoh is a prominent example of someone who exhibited extreme arrogance and wickedness by refusing to acknowledge Allah and His messenger Moses, while claiming divinity for himself (79:24). Despite witnessing Allah’s powerful signs, Pharaoh denied and refused to believe, ultimately drowning in the waters that Allah enabled Moses to part as he led his people out of Egypt. This event reminds people of the consequences of pride and rebellion against Allah (8:54; 10:90–92).

Known for his immense wealth and arrogance (due to his pride and ignorance), **Qārūn** attributed his wealth to his own knowledge and competence. His refusal to give charity and his opulent displaying of wealth led to Allah’s punishment: The earth swallowed him and his dwelling place. Qārūn’s story warns against the dangers of arrogance, greed, and the misuse of Allah’s blessings (28:76–81).

Lack of consideration: Foolish decisions are often made without proper thought or considering the potential consequences. The Qur’ān highlights the foolishness of those who are easily swayed, especially when the offered opinions are based on falsehood or ignorance, for they cannot discern truth from falsehood (14:21; 34:31–32; 40:47).

Ignoring counsel: People may disregard even well-intentioned advice. The Qur’ān provides numerous examples of individuals and groups who opposed the prophets with foolish arguments and actions. These examples are warnings to future generations about the dangers of doing so (7:75–78, 88–92, 130–133; 10:75).

Emotional reactivity: Foolish decisions are often driven by strong emotions, which cause those who mock the believers and their practices to disrespect other people’s beliefs and perspectives. The Qur’ān always encourages disputants to follow the ethics of disagreement and to dialogue with others in a polite manner (2:256; 16:125; 40:28–45).

Hypocrisy: The Qur’ān often criticizes hypocrites, namely, those who seek to undermine the Muslim community via their foolish actions and words, based on deceit and self-deception. These men and women undermine trust, damage relationships, hinder personal and spiritual growth, and promote unethical behavior (e.g., 24:11–21). Sūrat al-Munāfiqūn (The Hypocrites) specifically addresses and exposes their characteristics,

among them: deceptive behavior, insincere claims, and attempts to undermine the Muslim community (63:1–11).

These examples illustrate the dangers of lacking wisdom, resulting in various forms of arrogance, ingratitude, and rejection of Allah's guidance.

IV. Why Wisdom is Important

Cultivating wisdom helps believers to develop a deeper sense of purpose and meaning, navigate life's challenges, and learn from their experiences. In Ṣuhayb ibn Sinān's famous narration, he states: "We were sitting with the Messenger of Allah. Suddenly, the Prophet (peace be upon him) started to laugh. We said to the Messenger: 'Why are you laughing?' The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said, 'How amazing it is to be a believer! There is good for him in everything and this applies only to a believer. If prosperity attends him, he expresses gratitude to Allah and that is good for him. And if adversity befalls him, he endures it patiently and that is better for him'" (*Riyāḍ al-Ṣāliḥīn*, no. 27; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 2999). This highlights the fact that believers express gratitude to Allah when they experience positive circumstances and demonstrate patience and resilience when faced with difficulties. This perspective helps them improve their decision-making by considering the potential consequences and long-term impact of their action(s). Wisdom allows people to adapt to new situations and challenges by leveraging their knowledge and experience gained from past events and the associated lessons learned.

Such abilities foster empathy, understanding, and trust-building with others, all of which lead to healthier and more fulfilling relationships. When individuals possess *ḥikma*, they are naturally inclined toward *iṣlāḥ*, defined here as striving to correct what is wrong, healing divisions, and working for positive change in their lives and in their communities. The Qur'ān encourages a long-term perspective because it considers the consequences of actions in this life and the afterlife. Regular prayer, reflection, and remembrance of Allah are encouraged in order to cultivate inner peace and connect with the Divine. Each Muslim's foundational framework begins with a *tawḥīdī* worldview: worshiping Allah, activating this belief in one's life by doing good deeds, and contributing positively to society.

V. How to Cultivate and Embody Wisdom

The Qur'ān presents humans as trustees of Allah on Earth, accountable for their actions and their impact on the planet and on society. Its framework for a purposeful life emphasizes a holistic approach that integrates spiritual, intellectual, moral, physical, social, and environmental development in the pursuit of both worldly success and eternal reward. The prophets and messengers served as role models who embodied the divine revelations and teachings, providing humanity with clear answers and instructions on the purpose of existence; moral, ethical, and spiritual laws; and how to live righteously. This framework, often referred to as *tarbiya* (nurturing), is a lifelong process of self-purification, character improvement, and moral excellence guided by faith and doing good deeds.

Therefore, wisdom can be cultivated and acquired through sincere striving, seeking knowledge, contemplating the Qur'ān, and reflecting on Allah's signs in the universe.

Tadabbur (deep reflection on the Qur'ān), is crucial for gaining spiritual insight and wisdom. It involves understanding the verses' contexts and meanings, asking thoughtful questions about applying them in one's life, and allowing the message to resonate deeply in one's heart and mind. The starting point of this journey of wisdom is the building of a relationship with the Qur'ān, which leads to cultivating *taqwā*—thereby softening the heart and strengthening self-reflection, awareness, and evaluation.

The steps to making a change include inculcating self-accountability, having an accountability ally (a *walī*),⁷ turning to Allah in repentance, and maintaining a sincere intention. All of these allow one to develop wisdom, following the Prophetic model in building a compassionate self, family, and community (Alwani 2019, 106–108).

Some additional ways to cultivate and embody wisdom include:

Building *ta'āraf*: “[O] People, We created you all from a single man and a single woman and made you into nations and tribes so that you should know one another (*ta'ārafū*) [and not to despise each other]. In the sight of Allah, the most honored of you are the ones most mindful of Him: Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware” (49:13).

Next, *ta'āluf*: “Hold fast to Allah's rope all together; do not split into factions. Remember Allah's favor to you: you were enemies and then He brought your hearts together (*fa'allafa bayna qulūbikum*) and you became brothers by His grace; you were about to fall into a pit of Fire and He saved you from it—in this way, Allah makes His revelations clear to you so that you may be rightly guided” (3:103).

***Tawāṣu*:** “By the [passage of] time! Surely humanity is in [grave] loss, except for those who believe, do good deeds, and join together (*tawāṣaw*) in the mutual teaching of truth, and of patience and constancy” (103: 1–3). The Qur'ān provides a comprehensive plan to build healthy relationships among believers, starting with self-accountability, then with the family, and then in society:

The believers, both men and women, are guardians of one another. They encourage good and forbid evil, establish prayer and give *zakāt*, and they obey Allah and His Messenger. It is they who will be shown Allah's mercy. Surely Allah is Almighty, All-Wise. Allah has promised the believers, both men and women, Gardens under which rivers flow, to stay there forever, and splendid homes in the Gardens of Eternity, and—above all—the pleasure of Allah. That is [truly] the ultimate triumph. (9:71–72)

Wisdom is essential when giving advice, especially to children, youth, new Muslims, and others who are developing faith. For example, Muslim chaplains must be aware that the West has large Muslim communities, many of whom originate from all over the Muslim world. Thus, what may have been appropriate in one place may not be so in another. In all cases, the Qur'ān emphasizes, “Invite [all] to the Way of your Lord with wisdom and kind advice, and only debate with them in the best manner. Surely your Lord [alone] knows best who has strayed from His Way and who is [rightly] guided” (16:125). It is important to

⁷ The concept of an “accountability ally” or a *walī* (pl. *awliyā'*) is one that is found in the Qur'ān (*al-mu'minūna wa-l-mu'minātu ba'dhum awliyā'u ba'd*). It focuses on the ideas of being a partner, guardian, and supporter in a shared journey (9:71–72).

address people in a compassionate way and resist the temptation to give into one's (perhaps unconscious) feelings of superiority, cultural biases, personal preferences, racial/gender attitudes, and opinions. Instead, be understanding, tolerant, compassionate, and patient toward others, just as the Prophet (peace be upon him) was with his companions. This will lead to healthy collaboration.

Ta'āwun (collaborating in doing good and establishing iṣlāḥ): “Cooperate with one another (*ta'āwanū*) in goodness and righteousness, and do not cooperate in sin and transgression. And be mindful of Allah” (5:2).⁸

VI. Identifying and Evaluating Significant Life Decisions and their Impact

Life is a tapestry woven from countless decisions, each one shaping the unique narrative of our existence. Some decisions, like choosing what to wear in the morning, have minimal impact, while others can profoundly alter our personal trajectories and even ripple outward to affect our families, communities, societies, and the world. Such decisions can range from pursuing higher education or changing careers, to marriage or divorce, to advocating for social change, to changing ideologies or beliefs, or to adopting sustainable practices. Significant life decisions profoundly affect our personal well-being, happiness, and sense of self. Therefore, a lack of wisdom can lead to lower life satisfaction at the personal, familial, and societal levels.

Familial impact: Personal choices can significantly influence family relationships and dynamics. For example, choosing a life partner, deciding to start a family, or even accepting a job offer has a ripple effect on the lives of those closest to oneself. **Family decision-making processes**, where all members feel valued and heard, can lead to healthier relationships and stronger family bonds. Conversely, unbalanced power dynamics in families can lead to conflict and emotional harm.

Communal impact: Individual choices can have a collective impact on communities. Engaging in acts of service, volunteering, or advocating for causes can drive positive social change.

Societal impact: Choices collectively shape society, influencing social norms, cultural values, and even economic systems. The impact of choices can vary, depending on socioeconomic status; for example, those in lower-income brackets may face greater constraints and potentially more pronounced consequences. For Muslims, one model of the societal impact of individual choices stands clear: The *Zakāt*-based system is a divine mechanism that should uplift individuals from dependency to self-sufficiency, turning *zakāt* recipients into future *zakāt* givers. This model warrants deep reflection. What could be the potential societal impact of this profound system?

Global impact: In an increasingly interconnected world, individual choices can even have global implications. This can be true as regards resource consumption, environmental sustainability, climate change, and international relations.

⁸ See more on the concepts of *ta'āruḥ*, *ta'āluf*, and *ta'āwun* in pp. 106–108 of Zainab Alwani, “Transformational Teaching: Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) as a Teacher and Murabbi,” *Journal of Islamic Faith and Practice* 2, no. 1 (2019): 91–119.

VII. Evaluating the Impact of Your Decisions: A Reflective Exercise

To aid readers, particularly Muslim chaplains, in identifying the significant decisions they may face and evaluating the impact of those decisions, consider the following questions:

Identifying Significant Decisions:

- What have been some of the most significant choices in your life so far?
- What different options were considered for each decision?
- What were the reasons for choosing the path taken?
- What major life decisions are anticipated in the future?

Evaluating Impact:

- *Personal:* How did each decision impact your overall well-being, happiness, and sense of self? Did it bring you closer to becoming the person you are striving to be? How did you cope with the consequences? What lessons have you learned from the experience?
- *Familial:* How did each decision impact relationships with family members? Did it create or resolve conflict? How did it influence family dynamics?
- *Communal:* How did your choices affect involvement in your community? Did you contribute to any positive or negative changes?
- *Societal:* Did your actions influence social norms or contribute to broader societal trends? Did you consider the ethical and social implications of your decisions?
- *Global:* Did any of your decisions have implications for environmental sustainability or international relations? Did any of your decisions affect the Muslim *umma* and other people in other parts of the world?

By reflecting on these questions, a deeper understanding of the power of choices and their potential to shape life and the world can be gained. It is through this self-reflection and self-accountability process—guided by sound knowledge and *tadabbur*—that one can develop wisdom. Remember: Decision-making (as well as wisdom) is a continuous process of learning and adaptation. Embrace the responsibility and potential that comes with making choices and use them to create a fulfilling and meaningful existence.

Conclusion

From the discussion and analysis presented in this article, one can see that the Qur'ān and its Prophetic application can be a rich seminal resource for recruitment, training, and in-service support of Muslims serving as chaplains in Islamic and non-Islamic spaces. This same methodology of Qur'ānic and Prophetic analysis can be used to explore other concepts of relevance to chaplains. It is important for Muslim chaplains who are building curriculums and standards based on the Qur'ānic-Prophetic model to understand that even other faith traditions can learn from the particular approach outlined in this paper. This is especially true given that the broader field of chaplaincy is still very much in flux when it comes to training and standards.

This article explored the concept of *ḥikma* (wisdom) within the Qur'ān and the Prophetic application for Muslim chaplains providing holistic spiritual care. The article argued that by re-centering chaplaincy on this Qur'ānic-Prophetic model of wisdom, chaplains can offer spiritual care and enhance pastoral counseling that is both authentically Islamic and profoundly relevant to the complex psycho-spiritual needs of Muslims today. It concluded by discussing the implications for chaplaincy training and practice, suggesting that integrating this wisdom-centric approach can foster greater spiritual resilience in individuals and communities, and can strengthen the overall development of the Muslim chaplaincy profession and beyond.

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