The IDEAL MUSLIMAH
The True Islamic Personality of the Muslim Woman
as Defined in the Qur'an and Sunnah

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Translator's Foreword

Publisher's Note

Preface to third edition

Preface to first edition

CHAPTER 1: THE MUSLIM WOMAN AND HER RABB

CHAPTER 2: THE MUSLIM WOMAN AND HER OWN SELF

CHAPTER 3: THE MUSLIM WOMAN AND HER PARENTS

CHAPTER 4: THE MUSLIM WOMAN AND HER HUSBAND

CHAPTER 5: THE MUSLIM WOMAN AND HER CHILDREN

CHAPTER 6: THE MUSLIM WOMAN AND HER SONS- AND DAUGHTERS- IN LAW

CHAPTER 7: THE MUSLIM WOMAN AND HER RELATIVES

CHAPTER 8: THE MUSLIM WOMAN AND HER NEIGHBOURS

CHAPTER 9: THE MUSLIM WOMAN AND HER FRIENDS AND SISTERS IN ISLAM

CHAPTER 10: THE MUSLIM WOMAN AND HER COMMUNITY/SOCIETY

CONCLUSION

GLOSSARY

Dr. Muhammad Ali Al-Hashimi
Chapter (2)

The Muslim Woman and Her Own Self

Introduction

Islam encourages the Muslims to stand out among people, readily distinguishable by their dress, appearance and behaviour, so that they will be a good example, worthy of the great message that they bring to humanity. According to the hadith narrated by the great Sahabi Ibn al-Hanzaliyyah, the Prophet (PBUH) told his Companions, when they were travelling to meet some brothers in faith: "You are going to visit your brothers, so repair your saddles and make sure that you are dressed well, so that you will stand out among people like an adornment, for Allah (SWT) does not love ugliness."¹

The Prophet (PBUH) considered an unkempt and careless appearance, and scruffy clothes and furnishings, to be forms of ugliness, which is hated and forbidden by Islam.

Islam encourages the Muslims in general to stand out among the people; the Muslim woman, in particular, is encouraged to be distinct from other people in her appearance, because this reflects well on her, and on her husband, family and children.

The Muslim woman does not neglect her appearance, no matter how busy she is with her domestic chores and the duties of motherhood. She is keen to look good, without going to extremes, because a good appearance is an indication of how well she understands herself, her Islamic identity, and her mission in life. The outward appearance of a woman cannot be separated from her inner nature: a neat, tidy and clean exterior reflects a noble and decent inner character, both of which go to make up the character of the true Muslim woman.
The Ideal Muslimah

The smart Muslim woman is one who strikes a balance between her external appearance and internal nature. She understands that she is composed of a body, a mind and a soul, and gives each the attention it deserves, without exaggerating in one aspect to the detriment of others. In seeking to strike the right balance, she is following the wise guidance of Islam which encourages her to do so.

How can the Muslim woman achieve this balance between her body, mind and soul?

1 - HER BODY

Moderation in food and drink

The Muslim woman takes good care of her body, promoting its good health and strength. She is active, not flabby or overweight. So she does not eat to excess; she eats just enough to maintain her health and energy. This is in accordance with the guidance of Allah (SWT) in the Qur'an: . . . Eat and drink: but waste not by excess, for Allah loves not the wasters, (Qur'an 7:31)

The Prophet (PBUH) also advised moderation in food and drink: "There is no worse vessel for the son of Adam to fill than his stomach, but if he must fill it, the let him allow one-third for food, one-third for drink, and one-third for air."  

`Umar (RAA) said: "Beware of filling your stomachs with food and drink, for it is harmful to the body and causes sickness and laziness in performing prayers. Be moderate in both food and drink, for that is healthier for your bodies and furthest removed from extravagance. Allah (SWT) will hate the fat man (one who revels in a life of luxury), and a man will not be condemned until he favours his desires over his religion."  

The Muslim woman also steers clear of drugs and stimulants, especially those which are clearly known to be haram, and she avoids the bad habits that many women have fallen into in societies that have deviated from the guidance of Allah (SWT) and His Messenger, such as staying up late at night to waste time in idle pursuits. She goes to sleep early and gets up early to start the day's activities with energy and enthusiasm. She does not
The Ideal Muslimah

weaken her energy with late nights and bad habits; she is always active and efficient, so that her household chores do not exhaust her and she can meet her targets.

She understands that a strong believer is more loved by Allah (SWT) than a weak believer, as the Prophet (PBUH) taught, so she always seeks to strengthen her body by means of a healthy lifestyle.

She exercises regularly

The Muslim woman does not forget to maintain her physical fitness and energy by following the healthy practices recommended by Islam. But she is not content only with the natural, healthy diet referred to above: she also follows an organized exercise program, appropriate to her physical condition, weight, age and social status. These exercises give her body agility, beauty, good health, strength and immunity to disease; this will make her more able to carry out her duties, and more fit to fulfil her role in life, whether it be as a wife or mother, young girl or old woman.

Her body and clothes are clean

The Muslim woman who truly follows the teachings of Islam keeps her body and clothes very clean. She bathes frequently, in accordance with the teachings of the Prophet (PBUH), who advised Muslims to take baths, especially on Fridays: "Have a bath on Fridays and wash your heads, even if you are not in a state of janabah (impurity, e.g. following marital relations), and wear perfume."  

"Whoever attends Friday prayer, man or woman, should take a bath (ghusl)."  

The Prophet (PBUH) placed such a great emphasis on cleanliness and bathing that some of the Imams considered performing ghusl before Friday prayer to be obligatory (wajib).
Abu Hurayrah (RAA) reported that the Prophet (PBUH) said: "It is the duty of every Muslim to take a bath (at least) once every seven days, and to wash his head and body."\(^6\)

Cleanliness is one of the most essential requirements of people, especially women, and one of the clearest indicators of a sound and likeable character. Cleanliness makes a woman more likeable not only to her husband, but also to other women and her relatives.

Imam Ahmad and al-Nisa'i report that Jabir (RAA) said: "The Messenger of Allah (PBUH) came to visit us, and saw a man who was wearing dirty clothes. He said, `Could this person not find anything with which to wash his clothes?'"

The Prophet (PBUH) hated to see people come out in public wearing dirty clothes when they were able to clean them; he drew attention to the fact that the Muslim should always be clean, smart and pleasing to look at.

This teaching which is directed at men, is directed even more so at women, who are usually thought of as being more clean, the source of joy and tranquillity in the home. There is no doubt that the woman's deep sense of cleanliness reflects on her home, her husband and her children, because it is by virtue of her concern for cleanliness that they will be clean and tidy.

No researcher, of whatever era or country, can fail to notice that this teaching which encourages cleanliness and bathing, came fifteen hundred years ago, at a time when the world knew next to nothing of such hygienic habits. A thousand years later, the non-Muslim world had still not reached the level of cleanliness that the Muslims had reached.

In her book *Min al-riqq ila'l-sayadah*, Samihah A. Wirdi says: "There is no need for us to go back to the time of the Crusades in order to know the level of civilization in Europe at that time. We need go back no further than a few hundred years, to the days of the Ottoman Empire, and compare between the Ottomans and the Europeans to see what level the Ottoman civilization had reached."
"In 1624, Prince Brandeboug wrote the following on the invitations to a banquet that he sent to other princes and nobles: Guests are requested not to plunge their hands up to the elbow in the dishes; not to throw food behind them; not to lick their fingers; not to spit on their plates; and not to blow their noses on the edges of the tablecloths."

The author adds: "These words clearly indicate the level of civilization, culture, knowledge and manners among the Europeans. At the same time, in another part of Europe, the situation was not much different. In the palace of the King of England (George I), the ugly smell emanating from the persons of the King and his family overpowered the grandeur of their fine, lace-edged French clothes. This is what was happening in Europe. Meanwhile in Istanbul, the seat of the khilafah, it is well-known that the European ambassadors who were authorized by the Ottoman state be thrown into baths before they could approach the sultan. Sometime around 1730, during the reign of Sultan Ahmad III, when the Ottoman state entered its political and military decline, the wife of the English ambassador in Istanbul, Lady Montague, wrote many letters which were later published, in which she described the level of cleanliness, good manners and high standards among the Muslims. In one of her memoirs she wrote that the Ottoman princess Hafizah had given her a gift of a towel that had been hand-embroidered; she liked it so much that she could not even bear to wipe her mouth with it. The Europeans were particularly astounded by the fact that the Muslims used to wash their hands before and after every meal. It is enough to read the words of the famous English nurse Florence Nightingale, describing English hospitals in the mid-nineteenth century, where she describes how these hospitals were full of squalor, negligence and moral decay, and the wings of these hospitals were full of sick people who could not help answering the call of nature on their beds . . ."

What a great contrast there is between the refined civilization of Islam and other, human civilizations!
The Ideal Muslimah

She takes care of her mouth and teeth

The intelligent Muslim woman takes care of her mouth, for no-one should ever have to smell an unpleasant odour coming from it. She does this by cleaning her teeth with a *siwak*, toothbrush, toothpaste and mouthwash after every meal. She checks her teeth and visits the dentist at least once a year, even if she does not feel any pain, in order to keep her teeth healthy and strong. She consults otolaryngologists ("ear, nose and throat" doctors) if necessary, so that her breath will remain clean and fresh. This is undoubtedly more befitting for a woman. `A'ishah (May Allah be pleased with her) used to be very diligent in taking care of her teeth: she never neglected to clean them with a *siwak*, as Bukhari and Muslim reported from a number of the Sahabah (RAA).

Bukhari reported from `Urwah (May Allah be pleased with her) via `Ata': "We heard `A'ishah the Mother of the Believers cleaning her teeth in the room . . ."Muslim also reports from `Urwah (May Allah be pleased with her) via `Ata': "We heard her using the *siwak* . . ." `A'ishah (May Allah be pleased with her) said: "The Messenger of Allah (PBUH) never woke from sleeping at any time of day or night without cleaning his teeth with a *siwak* before performing wudu."
The Prophet's concern for oral hygiene was so great that he said: "If it were not for the fact that I did not want to overburden my *ummah*, I would have ordered them to use the *siwak* before every prayer." `A'ishah (May Allah be pleased with her) was asked what the Prophet (PBUH) used to do first when he came home. She said, "Use *siwak.*"

It is very strange to see that some Muslim women neglect these matters, which are among the most important elements of a woman's character, besides being at the very heart of Islam.

They are among the most important elements of a woman's gentle nature, and they reveal her feminine elegance and beauty. They are also at the heart of Islam because the Prophet (PBUH) urged cleanliness on many occasions, and he detested unpleasant odours and an ugly appearance. He said: "Whoever eats onions, garlic or leeks should not approach our mosque, because whatever offends the sons of Adam may offend the angels."
The Ideal Muslimah

The Prophet (PBUH) banned those who had eaten these pungent vegetables from coming anywhere near the mosque, lest the people and the angels be offended by their bad breath, but these smells pale into insignificance beside the stench of dirty clothes, filthy socks, unwashed bodies and unclean mouths that emanates from some careless and unkempt individuals who offend others in gatherings.

She takes care of her hair

The Prophet (PBUH) also taught Muslims to take care of their hair, and to make it look attractive and beautiful, within the limits of Islamic rulings.

This is reported in the hadith quoted by Abu Dawud from Abu Hurayrah (RAA), who said: "The Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said: 'Whoever has hair, let him look after it properly.'"¹⁴

Looking after one's hair, according to Islamic teaching, involves keeping it clean, combing it, perfuming it, and styling it nicely.

The Prophet (PBUH) did not like people to leave their hair uncombed and unkempt, so that they looked like wild monsters; he likened such ugliness to the appearance of the Shaytan. In *al-Muwatta*, Imam Malik reports a hadith with a *mursal isnad* from `Ata' ibn Yassar, who said: "The Messenger of Allah (PBUH) was in the mosque, when a man with unkempt hair and an untidy beard came in. The Prophet (PBUH) pointed to him, as if indicating to him that he should tidy up his hair and beard. The man went and did so, then returned. The Prophet (PBUH) said, 'Is this not better than that any one of you should come with unkempt hair, looking like the Shaytan?'"¹⁵

The Prophet's likening a man with untidy hair to the Shaytan clearly shows how concerned Islam is with a neat and pleasant appearance, and how opposed it is to scruffiness and ugliness.

The Prophet (PBUH) always took note of people's appearance, and he never saw a scruffily-dressed man with untidy hair but he criticized him for his self-neglect. Imam Ahmad and al-Nisa'i report that Jabir (RAA) said: "The
The Ideal Muslimah

Messenger of Allah (PBUH) came to visit us, and he saw an unkempt man whose hair was going in all directions, so he said, `Could he not find anything with which to calm his head?'"16

If this is how he Prophet (PBUH) taught men to take care of themselves, then how much more applicable are his teachings to women, for whom beauty and elegance are more befitting, as they are the ones to whom men draw close and seek comfort, tranquillity and happiness in their company! It is obvious to the sensitive Muslim woman that the hair is one of the most important features of a woman's beauty and attractiveness.

Good Appearance

It is no surprise that the Muslim woman is concerned with her clothes and appearance, without going to extremes or making a wanton display of herself. She presents a pleasing appearance to her husband, children, mahram relatives and other Muslim women, and people feel comfortable with her. She does not put them off with an ugly or untidy appearance and she always checks herself and takes care of herself, in accordance with the teachings of Islam, which asks its followers to look good in ways that are permitted.

In his commentary on the ayah: Say: Who has forbidden the beautiful [gifts] of Allah, which He has produced for His servants, and the things, cleans and pure, [which He has provided] for sustenance? . . . (Qur'an 7:32)

Al-Qurtubi said: "Makhul reported from `A'ishah (May Allah be pleased with her): `A group of the Companions of the Prophet (PBUH) were waiting at the door for him, so he prepared to go out to meet them. There was a vessel of water in the house, and he peered into it, smoothing his beard and his hair. (`A'ishah said) I asked him, "O Messenger of Allah, even you do this?" He said, "Yes, when a man goes out to meet his brothers, let him prepare himself properly, for Allah (SWT) is beautiful and loves beauty.'"17

The Muslim does all of this in accordance with the Islamic ideal of moderation, avoiding the extremes of either exaggeration or negligence: Those who, when they spend, are not extravagant and not niggardly, but hold a just [balance] between those [extremes], (Qur'an 25:67)

Dr. Muhammad Ali Al-Hashimi
Islam wants its followers, and especially its advocates (da`is), to stand out in gatherings in an attractive fashion, not to appear unsightly or unbearable. Neglecting one's appearance to the extent of being offensive to one's companions in the name of asceticism and humility is not part of Islam. The Prophet (PBUH), who was the epitome of asceticism and humility, used to dress in decent clothes and present a pleasant appearance to his family and companions. He regarded dressing well and looking good to be a demonstration of the Blessings of Allah (SWT): "Allah (SWT) loves to see the signs His gifts on His servant."  

Ibn Sa`d reports in *al-Tabaqat* (4/346) that Jundub ibn Makith (RAA) said: "Whenever a delegation came to meet the Messenger of Allah (PBUH), he would wear his best clothes and order his leading Companions to do likewise. I saw the Prophet (PBUH) on the day that the delegation of Kindah came to meet him; he was wearing a Yemeni garment, and Abu Bakr and `Umar were dressed similarly."

Ibn al-Mubarak, Tabarani, al-Hakim, al-Bayhaqi and others report that `Umar (RAA) said: "I saw the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) ask for a new garment. He put it on, and when it reached his knees he said, `Praise be to Allah (SWT), Who has given me clothes with which to cover myself and make myself look beautiful in this life.'" So long as this taking care of one's outward appearance does not go to extremes, then it is part of the beauty that Allah (SWT) has allowed for His servants and encouraged them to adopt: O children of Adam! Wear your beautiful apparel at every time and place of prayer: eat and drink: but waste not by excess, for Allah loves not the wasters. 

Say, Who has forbidden the beautiful [gifts] of Allah, which He has produced for His servants, and the things, clean and pure, [which He has provided] for sustenance? Say: They are, in the life of this world, for those who believe, [and] purely for them on the Day of Judgement. Thus do We explain the Signs in detail for those who understand. (Qur'an 7:31-32)

Muslim reports from Ibn Mas`ud (RAA) that the Prophet (PBUH) said: "No-one who has even an atom's-weight of pride in his heart will enter Paradise." A man asked him, "What if a man likes his clothes and shoes to look good?" (Meaning, is this counted as pride?) The Prophet (PBUH) said: "Allah (SWT) is beautiful and loves beauty. Pride means denying the truth and looking down on other people."

This is the understanding adopted by the Sahabah and those who followed them sincerely. Therefore Imam Abu Hanifah (RAA) always took care to dress well and to ensure that he smelled clean and fresh, and urged others to
do likewise. One day he met a man who used to attend his circle, who was dressed in scruffy clothes. He took him to one side and offered him a thousand dirhams with which to smarten himself up. The man told him, "I have money; I do not need this." Abu Hanifah admonished him: "Have you not heard the hadith, `Allah (SWT) loves to see the signs of His gifts on His servant'? So you have to change yourself, and not appear offensive to your friend."

Naturally, those who call people to Allah (SWT) should be better and smarter in appearance than others, so that they will be better able to attract people and make their message reach their hearts.

Indeed they, unlike others, are required to be like this even if they do not go out and meet people, because those who proclaim the word of Allah (SWT) should take care of their appearance and pay attention to the cleanliness of their bodies, clothes, nails and hair. They should do this even if they are in a state of isolation or retreat, in response to the call of the natural inclination of man (fitrah) which the Prophet (PBUH) told us about and outlined its requirements: "Five things are part of the fitrah: circumcision, removing the pubic hair, plucking hair from the armpits, cutting the nails, and trimming the moustache."21

Taking care of oneself in accordance with this fitrah is something encouraged by Islam and supported by every person of common sense and good taste.

**She does not go to extremes of beautification or make a wanton display of herself**

Paying attention to one's appearance should not make a Muslim woman fall into the trap of wanton display (tabarruj) and showing her beauty to anyone other than her husband and mahram relatives. She should not upset the balance which is the basis of all Islamic teaching, for the Muslim woman always aims at moderation in all things, and is on the alert to prevent any one aspect of her life from taking over at the expense of another.

She never forgets that Islam, which encourages her to look attractive within the permitted limits, is also the religion that warns her against going to such extremes that she becomes a slave to her appearance, as the hadith
The Ideal Muslimah

says: "Wretched is the slave of the dinar, dirham and fancy clothes of velvet and silk! If he is given, he is pleased, and if he is not given, he is displeased."22

Our women today, many of whom have been influenced by the international fashion houses to such an extent that a rich woman will not wear an outfit more than once, have fallen into that slavery of which the Prophet (PBUH) warned and, as a result, they are trapped in the misery of that senseless enslavement to excessively luxurious clothing and accessories. Such women have deviated from the purpose for which humanity was created in this world.

One of the worst excesses that many modern Muslim women have fallen into is the habit of showing off expensive outfits at wedding parties, which have become fashion shows where competition is rife and is taken to extremes far beyond the realms of common sense and moderation. This phenomenon becomes clearest when the bride herself wears all her outfits, which may number as many as ten, one after the other: each time she changes, she comes out and shows it off to the other women present, exactly like the fashion models in the West. It does not even occur to the women among whom this habit is common, that there may be women present who are financially unable to buy such outfits, and who may be feeling depressed and jealous, or even hostile towards the bride and her family, and other rich people. Nothing of this sort would happen if brides were more moderate, and just wore one or two outfits at their wedding parties. This is better than that extravagant showing-off which is contradictory to the balanced, moderate spirit of Islam.

No doubt the Muslim woman who has surrounded herself with the teachings of this great religion is spared and protected from such foolish errors, because she has adopted its principles of moderation.
2 - HER MIND

She takes care of her mind by pursuing knowledge

The sensitive Muslim woman takes care of her mind just as she takes care of her body, because the former is no less important than the latter. Long ago, the poet Zuhayr ibn Abi Sulma said: "A man's tongue is half of him, and the other half is his heart; What is left is nothing more than the image of flesh and blood."\(^\text{23}\)

This means that a person is essentially composed of his heart and his tongue, in other words what he thinks and what he says. Hence the importance of taking care of one's mind and supplying it with all kinds of beneficial knowledge is quite clear.

The Muslim woman is responsible just as a man is, so she is also required to seek knowledge, whether it is "religious" or "secular", that will be of benefit to her. When she recites the ayah, But say, `O my Lord! Advance me in knowledge.' (Qur'an 20:114) and hears the hadith, "Seeking knowledge is a duty on every Muslim,"\(^\text{24}\) she knows that the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah are directed at men and women equally, and that she is also obliged to seek the kinds of knowledge that have been made obligatory for individuals and communities (\textit{fard `ayn} and \textit{fard kifayah}) to pursue them from the time that this obligation was made known to the Muslim society.

The Muslim woman understands the high value that has been placed on knowledge since the earliest days of Islam. The women of the \textit{Ansar} asked the Prophet (PBUH): "Appoint a special day for us when we can learn from you, for the men have taken all your time and left nothing for us." He told them, "Your time is in the house of so-and-so [one of the women]." So he came to them at that place and taught them there.\(^\text{25}\)

The Muslim women had a keen desire for knowledge, and they never felt too shy to ask questions about the teachings (\textit{ahkam}) of Islam, because they were asking about the truth, and \textit{Allah is not ashamed [to tell you] the truth} (Qur'an 33:53). Many reports illustrate the confidence and maturity with which the early Muslim posed questions to the Prophet (PBUH), this great teacher, seeking to understand their religion more fully.
T he Ideal Muslimah

`A’ishah (May Allah be pleased with her) reported that Asma' bint Yazid ibn al-Sakan al-Ansariyyah asked the Prophet (PBUH) about performing ghusl after a period. He said, "Let one of you (who has finished her period) take her water and purify herself properly, then pour water over herself, then take a piece of cloth that has been perfumed with musk, and clean herself with it." Asma' (May Allah be pleased with her) asked, "How should she clean herself?" The Prophet (PBUH) said, "Subhan Allah! You clean yourself with it!" `A’ishah (May Allah be pleased with her) told her in a whisper, "Wipe away the traces of blood."

Asma' also asked him about performing ghusl when one is in a state of janabah. He said, "You should take your water and purify yourself with it properly, and clean yourself all over, then pour water on your head and rub it so that the water reaches the roots of the hair, then pour water all over yourself."26 `A’ishah (May Allah be pleased with her) said, "How good are the women of the Ansar! Shyness did not prevent them from understanding their religion properly."27

Umm Sulaym bint Milhan, the mother of Anas ibn Malik, came to the Prophet (PBUH) and said, "O Messenger of Allah, Allah (SWT) is not ashamed (to tell) the truth, so tell me, does a woman have to perform ghusl if she has an erotic dream?" The Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said, "Yes, if she sees water (i.e., a discharge)." Umm Salamah covered her face out of shyness, and said, "O Messenger of Allah, could a woman have such a dream?" He said, "Yes, may your right hand be covered with dust, otherwise how could her child resemble her?"28

Muslim reports that Umm Sulaym came to the Prophet (PBUH), when `A’ishah (May Allah be pleased with her) was with him, and when Umm Sulaym asked this question, `A’ishah said, "O Umm Sulaym, you have exposed women’s secret, may your right hand be rubbed with dust!" The Prophet (PBUH) said to `A’ishah, "Rather your hand should be rubbed with dust; O Umm Sulaym, let a woman perform ghusl if she saw such a dream."29

The women of that unique generation never hesitated to strive to understand their religion; they would put questions directly to the Prophet (PBUH) about whatever happened to them. If they doubted a person's opinion (fatwa), or were not convinced of it, they would enquire further until they were sure that they understood the
The Ideal Muslimah

matter properly. This is the attitude of the wise and intelligent woman. This was the attitude of Subay`ah bint al-Harith al-Aslamiyyah, the wife of Sa`d ibn Khawlah, who was from Banu `Amir ibn Lu`ayy and had been present at Badr. He died during the Farewell Pilgrimage; she was pregnant, and gave birth shortly after his death. When her *nifas* ended, she prepared herself to receive offers of marriage. Abu'l-Sanabil ibn Ba`kak (a man from Banu `Abd al-Dar) came to her and said, "Why do I see you preparing to receive offers of marriage? By Allah (SWT), you will never get married until four months and tens days have passed." Subay`ah (later) narrated: "When he said this to me, I got dressed and went to see the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) in the evening. I asked him about it, and he told me that my `iddah had ended when I gave birth to my child, and said that I could get married if I wished."30

Subay`ah's efforts to understand the shar`i ruling precisely represent a blessing and benefit not only for Subay`ah herself, but for all Muslim women until the Day of Judgement. Her hadith was accepted by the majority of earlier and later scholars, above all the four *Imams*, who said that the `iddah of a widowed woman, if she is pregnant, lasts until she gives birth, even if she were to give birth so soon after her husband's death that his body had not yet been washed and prepared for burial, and it becomes permissible for her to re-marry.31

What a great service Subay`ah did to the scholars of the Muslim *ummah* by seeking to understand the shar`i rulings precisely and to reach a level of certainty about this issue.

Islam has made the pursuit of knowledge obligatory on women and men alike, as the Prophet (PBUH) said: "Seeking knowledge is a duty on every Muslim."32 In other words, it is a duty on every person, man or woman, who utters the words of the *shahadah*, so it comes as no surprise to see Muslim women thirsting for knowledge, devoting themselves to its pursuit. Muslim women of all times and places have understood the importance of seeking beneficial knowledge, and the positive effects this has on their own characters and on their children, families and societies. So they seek knowledge enthusiastically, hoping to learn whatever will benefit them in this world and the next.
What the Muslim woman needs to know

The first thing that the Muslim woman needs to know is how to read the Qur'an properly (with *tajwid*), and to understand its meaning. Then she should learn something of the sciences of hadith, the *sirah* of the Prophet (PBUH), and the history of the women of the *Sahabah* and *Tabi`in*, who are prominent figures in Islam. She should acquire as much knowledge of *fiqh* as she needs to ensure that her worship and daily dealings are correct, and she should ensure that she has a sound grasp of the basic principles of her religion.

Then she should direct her attention to her primary specialty in life, which is to take proper care of her house, husband, family and children, for she is the one whom Allah (SWT) has created specially to be a mother and to give tranquility and happiness to the home. She is the one to whom Islam has given the immense responsibility of raising intelligent and courageous children. Hence there are many proverbs and sayings nowadays which reflect the woman's influence on the success of her husband and children in their working lives, such as, "Look for the woman," "Behind every great man is a woman," and "The one who rocks the cradle with her right hand rocks the world with her left," etc. No woman can do all of that unless she is open-minded and intelligent, strong of personality and pure of heart. So she is more in need of education, correction and guidance in forming her distinct Islamic personality.

It is unwise for women's education to be precisely the same as that of men. There are some matters that concern women only, that men cannot deal with; and there are matters that concern men only, that women cannot deal with. There are things for which women were created, and others for which men were created, and each person should do that for which he or she was created, as the Prophet (PBUH) taught. When the Muslim woman seeks to learn and specialize in some field, she should bear in mind the Islamic teaching regarding her intellectual, psychological and social make-up, so that she will prepare herself to fulfil the basic purpose for which she was created, and will become a productive and constructive member of her family, society and *ummah*, not an imitation of men, competing with them for work and taking up a position among men, as we see in those
The Ideal Muslimah

societies which do not differentiate between males and females in their educational curricula and employment laws.

Whatever a woman's academic specialty is, she tries to understand it thoroughly and do her work perfectly, in accordance with the teaching of the Prophet (PBUH): "Allah (SWT) loves for any of you, when he does something, to do it well."  

**Muslim women's achievements in the field of knowledge**

The gates of knowledge are open to the Muslim woman, and she may enter whichever of them she chooses, so long as this does not go against her feminine nature, but develops her mind and enhances her emotional growth and maturity. We find that history is full of prominent examples of remarkable women who sought knowledge and became highly proficient.

Foremost among them is the Mother of the Believers `A'ishah (May Allah be pleased with her), who was the primary source of hadith and knowledge of the sunnah, and was the first faqihah in Islam when she was still a young woman no more than nine years of age.

Imam al-Zuhri said: "If the knowledge of `A'ishah were to be gathered up and compared to the knowledge of all the other wives of the Prophet (PBUH) and all other women, `A'ishah's knowledge would be greater."

How often did the greatest of the Sahabah refer to her, to hear the final word on matters of the fundamentals of Islam and precise meanings of the Qur'an.

Her knowledge and deep understanding were not restricted only to matters of religion; she was equally distinguished in poetry, literature, history and medicine, and other branches of knowledge that were known at that time. The faqih of the Muslims, `Urwah ibn al-Zubayr, was quoted by his son Hisham as saying: "I have never seen anybody more knowledgeable in fiqh or medicine or poetry than `A'ishah."
The Ideal Muslimah

Imam Muslim reports that she heard her nephew al-Qasim ibn Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr (RAA) make a grammatical mistake, when he and his (paternal) cousin were talking in front of her, and she told him off for this mistake. Imam Muslim commented on this incident: "Ibn `Atiq said: `Al-Qasim and I were talking in front of `A'ishah (May Allah be pleased with her), and al-Qasim was one who made frequent mistakes in grammar, as his mother was not an Arab. `A'ishah said to him, "Why do you not speak like this son of my brother? I know where the problem comes from: he was brought up by his mother, and you were brought up by your mother . . ."

Among the reports in which the books of literature speak of the vast knowledge of `A'ishah is that which describes how `A'ishah bint Talhah was present in the circle of Hisham ibn `Abd al-Malik, where the shaykhs of Banu Umayyah were present. They did not mention any point of Arab history, wars and poetry but she did not contribute to the discussion, and no star appeared but she did not name it. Hisham said to her, "As for the first (i.e., knowledge of history etc.), I find nothing strange (in your knowing about it), but where did you get your knowledge about the stars?" She said, "I learnt it from my (maternal) aunt `A'ishah."

`A'ishah (May Allah be pleased with her) had a curious mind and was always eager to learn. Whenever she heard about something she did not know, she would ask about it until she understood it. Her closeness to the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) meant that she was like a vessel full of knowledge.

Imam Bukhari reports from Abu Mulaykah that `A'ishah, the wife of the Prophet (PBUH) never heard anything that she did not know, but she would keep going over it until she understood it. The Prophet (PBUH) said, "Whoever is brought to account will be punished." `A'ishah said: "I said, `But does Allah (SWT) not say `Soon his account will be taken by an easy reckoning', (Qur'an 84:8)" He said, "That refers to al-'ard (when everyone is brought before Allah (SWT) on the Day of Judgement); but whoever is examined in detail is doomed."

In addition to her great knowledge, `A'ishah (May Allah be pleased with her) was also very eloquent in her speech. When she spoke, she captured the attention of her audience and moved them deeply. This is what made al-Ahnaf ibn Qays say: "I heard the speeches of Abu Bakr, `Umar, `Uthman, `Ali and the khulafa' who came after them, but I never heard any speech more eloquent and beautiful than that of `A'ishah."

Musa ibn Talhah said: "I never saw anyone more eloquent and pure in speech than `A'ishah."
Another of these brilliant women were achieved a high level of knowledge was the daughter of Sa`id ibn al-Musayyab, the scholar of his age, who refused to marry his daughter to the khilifah, `Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan, and instead married her to one of his righteous students, `Abdullah ibn Wada`ah. `Abdullah went in to his wife, who was one of the most beautiful of people, and one of the most knowledgeable in Qur'an, Sunnah and the rights and duties of marriage. In the morning, `Abdullah got up and was preparing to go out. His wife asked him, "Where are you going?" He said, "To the circle of your father Sa`id ibn al-Musayyab, so that I may learn." She said, "Sit down; I will teach you what Sa`id knows." For one month, `Abdullah did not attend Sa`id's circle because the knowledge that this beautiful young girl had learned from her father (and was passing on to him) was sufficient.

Another of these prominent female scholars was Fatimah, the daughter of the author of Tuhfat al-fuqaha', `Ala' al-Din al-Samarqandi (d. 539 AH). She was a faqihah and scholar in her own right: she had learned fiqh from her father and had memorized his book al-Tuhfah. Her father married her to his student `Ala' al-Din al-Kasani, who was highly distinguished in the fields of al-usul and al-furu'. He wrote a commentary on Tuhfat al-fuqaha' entitled Bada`i` al-sana`i`, and showed it to his shaykh, who was delighted with it and accepted it as a mahr for his daughter, although he had refused offers of marriage for her from some of the kings of Byzantium. The fuqaha' of his time said, "He commentated on his Tuhfah and married his daughter." Before her marriage, Fatimah used to issue fatwas along with her father, and the fatwas would be written in her handwriting and that of her father. After she married the author of al-Bada`i`, the fatwas would appear in her handwriting and that of her father and her husband. Her husband would make mistakes, and she would correct them.40

`A`ishah, the other wives of the Prophet (PBUH), the daughter of Sa`id ibn al-Musayyab, Fatimah al-Samarqandi and other famous women scholars were not something unique or rare among Muslim women. There were innumerable learned women, who studied every branch of knowledge and became prominent in many fields. Ibn Sa`d devoted a chapter of al-Tabaqat to reports of Hadith transmitted by women, in which he mentioned more than seven hundred women who reported Hadith from the Prophet (PBUH), or from the trustworthy narrators among the sahabah; from these women in turn, many prominent scholars and imams also narrated Hadith.
The Ideal Muslimah

Al-Hafiz ibn `Asakir (d. 571 AH), one of the most reliable narrators of hadith, who was so trustworthy that he was known as *hafiz al-ummah*, counted eighty-odd women among his *shaykhs* and teachers.\(^{41}\) If we bear in mind that this scholar never left the eastern part of the Islamic world, and never visited Egypt, North Africa or Andalusia - which were even more crowded with women of knowledge - we will see that the number of learned women he never met was far greater than those from whom he did receive knowledge.

One of the phrases used by scholars in the books of hadith is: "*Al-shaykhah al-musnidah al-salihah* so-and-so the daughter of so-and-so told me . . ." Among the names mentioned by Imam Bukhari are: Sitt al-Wuzara' Wazirah bint Muhammad ibn `Umar ibn As`ad ibn al-Munajji al-Tunukhiyyah and Karimah bint Ahmad al-Maruziyyah. They are also mentioned by Ibn Hijr al-`Asqallani in the introduction to *Fath al-Bari*.\(^ {42}\)

The position of these great women is enhanced by the fact that they were sincere and truthful, far above any hint of suspicion or doubt - a status that many men could not reach. This was noted by Imam al-Hafiz al-Dhahabi in *Mizan al-i`tidal*, where he states that he found four thousand men about whose reports he had doubts, then follows that observation with the comment: "I have never known of any woman who was accused (of being untrustworthy) or whose hadith was rejected."\(^ {43}\)

The modern Muslim woman, looking at the magnificent heritage of women in Islamic history, is filled with the desire for knowledge, as these prominent women only became famous and renowned throughout history by virtue of their knowledge. Their minds can only be developed, and their characters can only grow in wisdom, maturity and insight, through the acquisition of useful, beneficial and correct knowledge.

**She is not Superstitious**

The knowledgeable Muslim woman avoids all the foolish superstitions and nonsensical myths that tend to fill the minds of ignorant and uneducated women. The Muslim woman who understands the teachings of her religion believes that consulting and accepting the words of fortune-tellers, soothsayers, magicians and other purveyors of superstition and myths is one of the major sins that annul the good deeds of the believer and spell doom for...
The Ideal Muslimah

him or her in the Hereafter. Muslim reports from some of the wives of the Prophet (PBUH) that he said: "Whoever goes to a fortune-teller and asks him about anything, his prayers will not be accepted for forty days."\(^44\)

Abu Dawud reports the hadith of Abu Hurayrah in which the Prophet (PBUH) said: "Whoever goes to a fortune-teller and believes in what he says, has disbelieved in that which was revealed to Muhammad."\(^45\)

She never stops reading and studying
The Muslim woman does not let her household duties and the burdens of motherhood prevent her from reading widely, because she understands that reading is the source which will supply her mind with nourishment and knowledge which it needs in order to flourish and grow.

The Muslim woman who understands that seeking knowledge is a duty required of her by her faith can never stop nourishing her mind with knowledge, no matter how busy she may be with housework or taking care of her children. She steals the odd moment, here and there, to sit down with a good book, or a useful magazine, so that she may broaden her horizons with some useful academic, social or literary knowledge, thus increasing her intellectual abilities.

3 - HER SOUL

The Muslim woman does not neglect to polish her soul through worship, dhikr, and reading Qur'an; she never neglects to perform acts of worship at the appointed times. Just as she takes care of her body and mind, she also takes care of her soul, as she understands that the human being is composed of a body, a mind and a soul, and that all three deserve appropriate attention. A person may be distinguished by the balance he or she strikes between body, mind and soul, so that none is cared for at the expense of another. Striking this balance guarantees the development of a sound, mature and moderate character.
She performs acts of worship regularly and purifies her soul

The Muslim woman pays due attention to her soul and polishes it through worship, doing so with a pure and calm approach that will allow the spiritual meanings to penetrate deep into her being. She removes herself from the hustle and bustle of life and concentrates on her worship as much as she is able to. When she prays, she does so with calmness of heart and clearness of mind, so that her soul may be refreshed by the meaning of the words of Qur'an, dhikr and tasbih that she is mentioning. Then she sits alone for a little while, praising and glorifying Allah, and reciting some ayat from His Book, and meditating upon the beautiful meanings of the words she is reciting. She checks her attitude and behaviour every now and then, correcting herself if she has done anything wrong or fallen short in some way. Thus her worship will bring about the desired results of purity of soul, cleansing her of her sins, and freeing her from the bonds of Shaytan whose constant whispering may destroy a person. If she makes a mistake or stumbles from the Straight Path, the true Muslim woman soon puts it right, seeks forgiveness from Allah (SWT), renounces her sin or error, and repents sincerely. This is the attitude of righteous, Allah-fearing Muslim women: **Those who fear Allah, when a thought of evil from Shaytan assaults them, bring Allah to remembrance, when lo! They see aright.** (Qur'an 7:201)

Therefore, the Prophet (PBUH) used to tell his Companions: "Renew your faith." He was asked, "O Messenger of Allah, how do we renew our faith?" He said, "By frequently repeating la ilaha ill-Allah."46

The Muslim woman always seeks the help of Allah (SWT) in strengthening and purifying her soul by constantly worshipping and remembering Allah (SWT), checking herself, and keeping in mind at all times what will please Allah (SWT). So whatever pleases Him, she does, and what angers Him, she refrains from. Thus she will remain on the Straight Path, never deviating from it or doing wrong.

She keeps company with righteous people and joins religious gatherings

In order to attain this high status, the Muslim woman chooses righteous, Allah-fearing friends, who will be true friends and offer sincere advice, and will not betray her in word or deed. Good friends have a great influence in
The Ideal Muslimah

keeping a Muslim woman on the Straight Path, and helping her to develop good habits and refined characteristics. A good friend - in most cases - mirrors one's behaviour and attitudes: "Do not ask about a man: ask about his friends, / for every friend follows his friends."[47]

Mixing with decent people is an indication of one's good lineage and noble aims in life: "By mixing with noble people you become one of them,/ so you should never regard anyone else as a friend."[48]

So it is as essential to choose good friends as it is to avoid doing evil: "If you mix with people, make friends with the best of them,/ do not make friends with the worst of them lest you become like them."[49]

The Muslim woman is keen to attend gatherings where there is discussion of Islam and the greatness of its teachings regarding the individual, family and society, and where those present think of the power of Almighty Allah (SWT) and His bountiful blessings to His creation, and encourage one another to obey His commandments, heed His prohibitions and seek refuge with Him. In such gatherings, hearts are softened, souls are purified, and a person's whole being is filled with the joy of faith.

So `Abdullah ibn Rawahah (RAA), whenever he met one of the Companions of the Prophet (PBUH), used to say, "Come, let us believe in our Lord for a while." When the Prophet (PBUH) heard about this, he said, "May Allah have mercy on Ibn Rawahah, for he loves the gatherings that the angels feel proud to attend."[50]

The rightly-guided khalifah `Umar al-Faruq (RAA) used to make the effort to take a regular break from his many duties and the burden of his position as ruler. He would take the hand of one or two men and say, "Come on, let us go and increase our faith," then they would remember Allah (SWT).[51]

Even `Umar (RAA), who was so righteous and performed so many acts of worship, felt the need to purify his soul from time to time. He would remove himself for a while from the cares and worries of life, to refresh his soul and cleanse his heart. Likewise, Mu`adh ibn Jabal (RAA) would often say to his companions, when they were walking, "Let us sit down and believe for a while."[52]
The Ideal Muslimah

The Muslim is responsible for strengthening his soul and purifying his heart. He must always push himself to attain a higher level, and guard against slipping down: By the Soul, and the proportion and order given to it; and by its enlightenment as to its wrong and its right - truly he succeeds that purifies it, and he fails that corrupts it! (Qur'an 91:7-10)

So the Muslim woman is required to choose with care the best friends and attend the best gatherings, so that she will be in an environment which will increase her faith and taqwa: And keep your soul content with those who call on their Lord morning and evening, seeking His Face; and let not your eyes pass beyond them, seeking the pomp and glitter of this Life; nor obey any whose heart We have permitted to neglect the remembrance of Us, one who follows his own desires, whose case has gone beyond all bounds, (Qur'an 18: 28)

She frequently repeats du`a’s and supplications described in Hadith

Another way in which the Muslim woman may strengthen her soul and connect her heart to Allah (SWT) is by repeating the supplications which it is reported that the Prophet (PBUH) used to say on various occasions. So there is a du`a’ for leaving the house, and others for entering the house, starting to eat, finishing a meal, wearing new clothes, lying down in bed, waking up from sleep, saying farewell to a traveller, welcoming a traveller back home, etc. There is hardly anything that the Prophet (PBUH) did that he did not have a du`a’ for, through which he asked Allah (SWT) to bless him in his endeavour, protect him from error, guide him to the truth, decree good for him and safeguard him from evil, as is explained in the books of hadith narrated from the Prophet (PBUH). He used to teach these du`a’s and adhkar to his Companions, and encouraged them to repeat them at the appropriate times.

The true Muslim woman is keen to learn these du`a’s and adhkar, following the example of the Prophet (PBUH) and his distinguished Companions, and she keeps repeating them at the appropriate times, as much as she is able. In this way, her heart will remain focused on Allah (SWT), her soul will be cleansed and purified, and her iman will increase.
The modern Muslim woman is in the utmost need of this spiritual nourishment, to polish her soul and keep her away from the temptations and unhealthy distractions of modern life, that could spell doom for women in societies which have deviated from the guidance of Allah (SWT) and sent groups of women to Hell, as the Prophet (PBUH) indicated: "I looked into Hell, and saw that the majority of its inhabitants were women."\(^{54}\) The Muslim woman who understands the teachings of her religion looks where she is going and strives to increase her good deeds, so that she may be saved from the terrifying trap into which the devils among mankind and jinn in all times and places try to make women fall.
Footnotes:

1. Reported by Abu Dawud, 4/83, in Kitab al-libas, bab ma ja'a fi isbal al-izar; its isnad is sahih.
3. Kanz al-ummal, 15/433. See also the valuable article on the harmful effects of over-filling the stomach on a person's body, mind and soul, by Muhammad Nazim Nasimi MD in Hadarah al-Islam, Nos. 5, 6, Vol. 15.
4. Fath al-Bari, 2/370, Kitab al-jumu'ah, bab al-dahn li'l-jumu'ah. Note: the command to wear perfume applies to men only; it is forbidden for women to wear perfume when they go out. [Translator]
5. A hadith narrated by 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar and recorded as sahih by Abu 'Awanah, Ibn Khazimah and Ibn Hibban. See also Fath al-Bari, 2/356, Kitab al-jumu'ah, bab fadl al-ghusl yawm al-jumu'ah.
7. See Samihah A. Wirdi, Min al-riqq il'al'sayadah, Damla Yayinevi No. 89, p. 28ff.
10. A hasan hadith, narrated by Ahmad (6/160) and Abu Dawud (1/46) in Kitab al-taharah, bab al-siwak.
15. al-Muwatta', 2/949, Kitab al-sha'r, bab islah al-sha'r.
16. A sahih hadith reported by Ahmad (3/357) and al-Nisa'i (8/183) in Kitab al-zinah, bab taskin al-sha'r.
17. See Tafsir al-Qurtubi, 7/197.
19. See Al-Targhib wa'l-Tarhib, 3/93, Kitab al-libas wa'l-zinah.
20. Sahih Muslim, 2/89, Kitab al-iman, bab tahrir al-kibr.
23. See Hashimi (ed.), Jumharah Ash'ar al-'Arab, 1/300, published by Dar al-Qalam, 1406 AH.
24. A hasan hadith narrated by Ibn Majah, 1/81, in al-Muqaddimah, bab fadl al-'ulama' wa'l-hath 'ala talab al-'ilm.
25. Fath al-Bari, 1/195, Kitab al-'ilm, bab hal yuj'al li'l-nisa' yawm 'ala hidah fi'l-'ilm.
27. See Fath al-Bari, 1/228, Kitab al-'ilm, bab al-haya' fi'l-'ilm; Sahih Muslim, 4/16, Kitab al-hayd, bab ghusl al-mustahadah wa salatiha.
28. Fath al-Bari, 1/228, Kitab al-'ilm, bab al-haya' fi'l-'ilm; Sahih Muslim, 3/223, 224, Kitab al-hayd, bab wujub al-ghusl 'ala'l-mar'ah bi khuruj al-maniy minha.
30. See Fath al-Bari, 7/310, Kitab al-maghazi, bab istifta' Subay'ah bint al-Harith al-Aslamiyyah; Sahih Muslim, 10/110, Kitab al-talaq, bab inqida' 'iddah al-mutawafa 'anha zawjuha wa ghayruha.
31. See Sharh al-Nawawi li Sahih Muslim, 10/109, Kitab al-talaq, bab inqida' 'iddah al-mutawafa 'anha zawjuha bi wad' al-haml.
32. A hasan hadith, narrated by Ibn Majah, 1/81, in al-Muqaddimah, bab fadl al-'ulama' wa'l-hathth 'ala talab al-'ilm.
33. A hasan hadith reported by al-Bayhaqi in Shu'ab al-iman, 4/334, from 'A'ishah ().
34. al-Isti'ab, 4/1883; al-Isabah, 8/140.
35. Tarikh al-Tabari: Hawadith 58; al-Samt al-Thamin, 82; al-Isti'ab, 4/1885.
36. Sahih Muslim, 5/47, Kitab al-masajid, bab karahah al-salat bi hadrat al-ta'am.
37. Al-Aghani, 10/57.
38. Fath al-Bari, 1/196, Kitab al-'ilm, bab man sami'a shay'an fa raji' hatta ya'rifuhu.
39. Reported by Tirmidhi, 5/364, in Kitab al-munaqib, bab min fadl 'A'ishah; he said that it is hasan sahih gharib.
40. Tuhfat al-fuqaha', 1/12.
42. Fath al-Bari, 1/7.
44. See Sahih Muslim, 14/227, Kitab al-salam, bab tahrim al-kahanah wa ityan al-kahan.
46. Reported by Ahmad (2/359) with a jayyid isnad.
47. See 'Adiyy ibn Zayd al-'Ibadi by the author, 172.
49. See 'Adiyy ibn Zayd al- 'Ibadi by the author, 172.
50. Reported by Ahmad (3/265) with a hasan isnad.
52. Ibid.
53. See, for example, al-Adhkar by al-Nawawi and al-Ma'thurat by Hasan al-Banna'. [Translator's note: English-speaking Muslims who wish to learn du'a's may consult Selected Prayers by Jamal Badawi, which is based largely on al-Ma'thurat and includes transliterations and translations of many du'a's.]

54. Sahih Muslim, 17/53, Kitab al-riqaq, bab akthar ahl al-jannah al-fuqara' wa akthar ahl al-nar al-nisa'.