

## Prophet Muhammad's Observations and Guidance on the Construction of Buildings

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### Introduction

Islamic architecture is an architecture whose functions and, to a lesser extent, form, are inspired primarily by Islam. Islamic architecture is a framework for the implementation of Islam. It facilitates, fosters and stimulates Muslims' 'ibadah (worship) activities, which, in turn, account for every moment of their earthly lives. Central to Islamic architecture is function with all of its dimensions: corporeal, cerebral and spiritual. The form divorced from function is inconsequential. This, however, by no means implies that the form plays no role in Islamic architecture. The form is important, but in terms of value and substance it always comes second to function and its wide scope.<sup>1</sup>

The identity and vocabulary of Islamic architecture evolved as a means for the fulfillment of the concerns of Muslim societies. Islamic architecture was never an end in itself. It was the container of Islamic culture and civilization reflecting the cultural identity and the level of the creative and aesthetic consciousness of Muslims. Architecture, in general, should always be in service to people. It is never to be the other way round, that is to say that architecture should evolve into a hobby or an adventure in the process imposing itself on society while forsaking, or taking lightly, people's identities, cultures and the demands of their daily struggles. Architecture, first and foremost, should remain associated with functionality. It should not deviate from its authentic character and stray into the world of excessive invention and abstraction.

In this paper, I shall discuss the observations and guidance of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)<sup>2</sup> on the construction of buildings. Indeed, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) laid the foundation of what later came to be known as Islamic architecture by introducing the latter's conceptual and ideological aspects which were later given their different outward appearances dictated by different contexts. The aspects contributed by the Prophet (pbuh) to Islamic architecture signify both the quintessence of Islamic architecture and the vitality that is woven through its each and every facet and feature. Thus, the permanent and most consequential side of Islamic architecture is as old as the Islamic message and the Islamic community but which at the time of the Prophet (pbuh) could take no more than an austere and unsophisticated physical form.

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<sup>1</sup> Afif Bahnassi, *The Islamic Architecture and its Specificities in Teaching Curricula*, <http://www.isesco.org.ma/pub/Eng/Islarch/P2.htm>.

Titus Burckhardt, *Art of Islam*, (London: World of Islam Festival Publishing Company Ltd., 1976), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> "pbuh" stands for "peace be upon him" which Muslims are strongly recommended to utter whenever Prophet Muhammad is mentioned.

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

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

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

Islamic architecture likewise enlightens and inspires. Some of its facets can be inspired by a fine and purified vision, philosophy and thought approved by the Islamic consciousness which are then fully Islamized and made subservient to the same Islamic consciousness. However, there is no segment of Islamic architecture which can be inspired by such ideas and attitudes as stem from the sources that are contradictory to the source from which Islamic architecture originates, that is, revelation in the forms of the Qur'an and the *sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). Such would be a blasphemous act and an act of gross injustice towards the Muslim users of the concerned segments of architecture.<sup>3</sup>

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

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

1. The Qur'an and *sunnah* afford a perfect guidance on how Muslims are to perceive creating, using and possessing architecture. Such is an integral part of the total Islamic worldview. The two holy sources also educate on the importance of architecture and its purpose in life. The goals of

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<sup>3</sup> Spahic Omer, *Islamic Architecture: its Philosophy, Spiritual Significance and Some Early Developments*, (Kuala Lumpur: AS Noordeen, 2009), p. 1-7.

architecture are seen as closely linked to man's life purpose and goals, and are treated as such. The two in fact complement each other.

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and the enterprise of building**

Since architecture is indispensable to life and to man’s fulfillment of the vicegerency mission on earth, it occupies a remarkable place in Islam. It is a collective obligation. Islamic architecture is not an end in itself, it is a means by which another end embodied in a set of cosmic goals is to be achieved. Thus, when making use of and judging an architectural expression, our interactive experiences with it must take into consideration not only what can be seen and felt by the five senses but also an architecture’s intelligent and spiritual sides which are discernible only by a sixth sense. Architecture is not only to be looked at, it is also, and that is more important, to be experienced, felt and emotionally attached to.

Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) viewed architecture neither as a sheer religious ceremony nor a completely and solely secular business. In fact, it is a combination of both, in that Islam is a complete way of life and there is no human activity in Islam that is ever devoid of a spiritual connotation, as well as in that there is no religious ritual that is directly linked to any architectural activity. Hence, based on the Prophet’s legacy the following seems to be an appropriate assessment of how Islam looks at the subject of architecture.

In Islam, building activities, in principle, can be classified as permissible, warranting their executors no reward or penalty. However, no sooner does the same become misconstrued and mishandled, violating, in turn, some of the divinely prescribed norms and principles, then it becomes either recommended against (*makruh*) or prohibited (*haram*), depending on the severity of the contravention. In contrast, if observing the objectives of Islam and its message is meant

foremost to be realized through architecture, the whole thing then becomes highly commendable and thus rewarding. In other words, erecting buildings becomes an act of worship (*‘ibadah*) whereby one duly discharges some of the duties entrusted to him as a vicegerent on earth. It follows that architecture in Islam is valued based on its function, a vision and mission that it exemplifies and the impact that it makes on people.

Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) has said and done a lot of things that can be related to architecture, explicitly or implicitly. He did so in different contexts and under different circumstances. He did so at times as an educator and leader, at other times as an ordinary citizen and user, and yet at other times as an active protagonist and participant in the field. He sometimes wanted to advise a person, not the whole community, and at other times he wanted to establish a principle which was binding then and upon everyone without exception, and which will be binding forever. He often and in matters concerning religion and his duties as a prophet acted under the divine guidance of revelation, in which case he was unquestionably infallible and his actions and judgments perfectly flawless, but at times and in some sheer worldly matters he acted using his own discretion in isolation from the revealed word, in which case the Prophet’s infallibility and the flawlessness of his actions and judgments have not been absolute.

Thus, if one studies the Prophet’s, i.e., Islam’s, attitude towards architecture, one must be very careful taking into account and scrutinizing all the issues mentioned above. The plain spiritual is not same as the plain secular. An action of the Prophet (pbuh) in his capacity as the Messenger from God is not like an action in his capacity as an ordinary human and citizen minding his own business and the business of his household. A counsel for a person in a situation is not necessarily always a counsel for everyone in all situations. The temporary is not equal to the permanent, and the absolute is not equal to the relative. Indeed, anything short of a universal and systematic approach to studying the Prophet’s life, both his words and actions, would mean a recipe for failure that is bound to trigger a confusion and myriad misconceptions. This does not apply only to the theme of architecture but also to any other cultural and civilizational sector. Perhaps therein lies a secret of why there is such an amount of confusion and misunderstandings among so many people when it comes to understanding the life of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh).

The following features and experiences of the Prophet (pbuh) concerning the building pursuit typify his attitude towards architecture as explained earlier:

1. Building mosques for Allah,
2. Mosque decoration,
3. Building activities over graves,
4. Building houses,
5. Some of the Prophet’s disapproving traditions on building

### **1. Building mosques for Allah**

The Prophet (pbuh) has said: “He who built a mosque for Allah, Allah would build a house for him like it in Paradise.”<sup>4</sup> Based on this and many other traditions, plus the Prophet’s personal practices, building mosques, thus seeking the pleasure of Allah so that people’s collective worship is facilitated, is one of the most desirable and so rewarding activities. Mosques vary in size and function: from simple places meant for a small group of people to perform collectively their daily prayers to large and impressive masterpieces that function as both the catalysts and centers for the development of community.

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<sup>4</sup> Muslim, *Sahih Muslim*, Kitab al-Salah, Hadith No. 1084, 1085.

Building mosques out of societal needs falls within the category of *wajib* or obligation. It is an Islamic dictum that if an obligation (*wajib*) cannot be performed without something, the latter then becomes an obligation (*wajib*) as well. Undeniably, an obligation is providing Muslim communities with places for collective worship and other beneficial communal activities. Without them, Muslim communities would be unable to assert themselves and perform their expected roles.

Building mosques is also considered as an act of lasting charity (*sadaqah jariyah*), that is to say, he who builds or takes part in building a mosque will have his good deeds being recorded even after his demise, as long as the effects of his actions in the form of the mosque built and its functions are extant on earth. The Prophet (pbuh) spoke a lot about the concept of the lasting charity (*sadaqah jariyah*). In a tradition of his, he referred among other things to building mosques and houses for travelers as forms of the lasting charity.<sup>5</sup>

Since the dawn of Islamic civilization, Muslims hastened to build mosques whenever even slight needs arose. As a result, mosques with their minarets and domes emerged as the most dominant elements in the skyline of Muslim urban and rural settlements. The language of Mosque architecture likewise emerged as the most prevailing in the total organization of Islamic architecture. In fact, the language of mosque architecture came first into being as most complete, which then was modified and incorporated as much as possible into the rest of Islamic built environment's elements.

Certainly, due to this significance of the mosque institution, the first thing that the Prophet (pbuh) did upon migrating from Makkah to Madinah was building a mosque, the Prophet's mosque. Such was the first initiative in the Prophet's Madinah urbanization scheme. Everything else, such as building houses and providing a market for Muslim business activities, had to be put on hold till the completion of the Prophet's mosque which functioned as a community development center. No wonder then that while building his mosque in Madinah with his companions, the Prophet (pbuh) praised the involvement of every individual promising them a handsome reward for that. He, for example, even assured a companion 'Ammar b. Yasir a double reward for carrying in the process two bricks at one time: one for himself and the other one for the Prophet (pbuh), while others carried one.<sup>6</sup>

The Prophet (pbuh) directed his companions to create mosques in their quarters and to cleanse and odorize them on special religious occasions.<sup>7</sup> He even consented to the idea of his companions earmarking some spaces meant for worship in their houses. Such spaces served symbolically as private mosques, places of prayer and other forms of worship. The Prophet (pbuh) is said to have graced some of such places by personally praying in them.<sup>8</sup> Of the first instructions that the Prophet (pbuh) used to give to the visiting tribes that professed Islam was to build, liven up and maintain mosques in their respective communities.

The mosque institution is the nucleus of believers' existence. It is a reflection of their attachment to the ideals that the mosque exemplifies, which are the ideals of Islam. Throughout the history of mankind, the mosque constituted an epitome of the never-ending struggle for supremacy between good and evil. The notion of administering and preserving the position and mission of the mosque institution and who is best qualified for the task is comprehensively encapsulated in the following Qur'anic verses: "It is not for such as join gods with Allah, to

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<sup>5</sup> Ibn Majah, *Sunan ibn Majah*, al-Muqaddimah, Hadith No. 238.

<sup>6</sup> Al-Samhudi, *Wafa' al-Wafa*, (Beirut: Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, 1997), vol. 1 p. 331.

<sup>7</sup> Al-Tirmidhi, *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, Kitab al-Jumu'ah, Hadith No. 542.

<sup>8</sup> Ibn Majah, *Sunan Ibn Majah*, Kitab al-Masajid wa al-Jama'at, Hadith No. 146, 747, 748.

maintain the mosques of Allah while they witness against their own souls to infidelity. The works of such bear no fruit: in Fire shall they dwell. The mosques of Allah shall be visited and maintained by such as believe in Allah and the Last Day, establish regular prayers, and pay Zakat, and fear none (at all) except Allah. It is they who are expected to be on true guidance.” (al-Tawbah 17-18)

## 2. Mosque decoration

Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) has said that Allah is beautiful and that He loves beauty.<sup>9</sup> It is for this that the whole of Allah’s creation has been designed and created according to the highest heavenly standard of splendor, beauty and order impossible to be ever emulated by anyone. Man, the vicegerent on earth, is beautiful too. He has been created “in the best of moulds.” (*al-Tin* 4) Creating and appreciating beautiful objects and experiences is a passion instinctive to man. Given that Islam is a natural and logical religion, it opposes neither artistic creativity nor the enjoyment of beauty. On the contrary, it “blesses the beautiful and promotes it. It sees absolute beauty only in God and in His revealed will or words.”<sup>10</sup>

However, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) not only totally overlooked the subject of decoration in buildings during his life while building and overseeing others doing the same, but also he at a first glance denounced the matter of mosque decoration especially in several of his *hadiths* (traditions). Obviously, due to the mosque’s position in both society and every true believer’s life, the Prophet (pbuh) was concerned about the subject of mosque decoration more than about the other aspects of Islamic built environment. In one of such traditions, he is reported to have said that whenever a people’s performance (*‘amal*) weakens they then start decorating their mosques.<sup>11</sup>

In another tradition, the Prophet (pbuh) said that one of the signs of the Day of Judgment’s imminence would be when people start vying in boasting with one another with regard to mosques,<sup>12</sup> including planning, construction, decoration and everything else that can be related to it.

The Prophet (pbuh) also disclosed that he was not directed (*ma umirtu*) to erect (*tashyid*) monumental mosques. The narrator of this *hadith*, ‘Abdullah b. ‘Abbas, commented: “You shall certainly end up adorning your mosques as both the Jews and Christians did.”<sup>13</sup> Surely, ‘Abdullah b. ‘Abbas did not say this on his own; rather, he just paraphrased a *hadith* in which the Prophet (pbuh) is reported to have uttered the same.

Nonetheless, the Prophet (pbuh) in the mentioned traditions of his did not mean to prohibit mosque decoration altogether. The whole thing must be studied carefully taking into consideration a number of religious and socio-economic factors. No tradition of the Prophet (pbuh) or a verse in the Qur’an that clearly and utterly prohibits mosque decoration. And it is the nature of Islam that when it prohibits something it does so in such a way that no ambiguity or a room for any doubt is left.

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<sup>9</sup> Muslim, *Sahih Muslim*, Book 001, Hadith No. 164.

<sup>10</sup> Isma’il Raji al-Faruqi, *Al-Tawhid: its Implications for Thought and Life*, (Herndon: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1995), p. 201.

<sup>11</sup> Ibn Majah, *Sunan Ibn Majah*, Kitab al-Masajid wa al-Jama’at, Hadith No. 733.

<sup>12</sup> Abu Dawud, *Sunan Abi Dawud*, Kitab al-Salah, Hadith No. 379.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., Kitab al-Salah, Hadith No. 378.

Certainly, the Prophet's traditions (*hadiths*) in question have been uttered in the context of the status of the mosque institution in society and what kind of relationship between it and men ought to exist. The mosque is the nucleus of the believers' existence. Throughout the history of mankind it epitomized the never-ending struggle for supremacy between good and evil. For the mosque to play the role of a center for the development of communities is a paramount priority which must remain unchanged, despite the developments that societies constantly go through. Other valid societal roles could be attached to the authority of the mosque institution, but they all must remain second to the topmost role for which the mosque had been instituted, further promoting and enhancing it.

Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) apparently wished to warn his followers as to the consequences that will inevitably occur supposing they set out to neglect the real functions of mosques and become more interested in their physical appearance instead. Should that happen, the followers of Islam must not live under the illusion that they by some "innovative" means defend and advance God's religion. On the contrary, they must be aware that the phenomenon of excessive and meaningless mosque beautification and decoration is but a disease endemic only in places where a people's faith has drastically declined and total submission to the Almighty has no longer remained a priority. That means, furthermore, that the objectives of the Islamic *Shari'ah* (Law) have been forsaken and other alternatives have been pursued instead.

How serious the problem at hand can become illustrates the fact that some people, if left unimpeded and their erroneous perceptions about mosques not corrected on time, would reach the point where the actions of theirs will resemble those of the Jews and Christians, who have drawn on themselves the wrath of God with myriad acts of dishonesty, distortions and deception. About the latter the Prophet (pbuh) once said, after he had been told of the beauty of a church in Abyssinia (Ethiopia) and how wonderful its paintings are: "Those people, when a pious man among them dies, on his grave they construct a mosque (a place of worship) which they paint with those pictures. They are the worse creation before Allah."<sup>14</sup> Hence, the Prophet (pbuh) sternly warned Muslims of imitating the Jews and Christians in matters pertaining to decorating the places of worship.

Relinquishing and burying the true position and role of mosques also means relinquishing and burying the tasks that man has been assigned to carry out on earth. In that case, some of the first definitive steps towards abandoning the Islamic paradigm and welcoming those which are alien to the Islamic world-view instead, would be introduced. Thus, one of the Prophet's mentioned traditions suggest that of the signs of the Day of Judgment's nearness is when people start decorating their mosques without using them for the purposes for which they had been ordained by heavenly decrees. It is not by chance that this message of the Prophet (pbuh) came after his words on neglecting the injunction of enjoining good and forbidding evil (*al-amr bi al-ma'ruf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar*).<sup>15</sup> It looks as though the Prophet (pbuh) thus wanted to communicate that the relationship between the two phenomena is a causal one, the former being the cause and the latter the effect, and so the people must be watchful.

Ali b. Abi Talib is also reported to have said that of the signs of the Day of Judgment's nearness is: "decorating mosques, raising minarets and skipping congregational prayers".<sup>16</sup> Here too, like what has been mentioned earlier, by decorating mosques it is meant that people show more interest to the outer appearance of mosques while neglecting its spiritual dimension. For

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<sup>14</sup>Al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Kitab al-Jana'iz, Hadith No. 1255.

<sup>15</sup> Abu al-Hasan al-Subki, *Fatawa al-Subki*, <http://feqh.al-islam.com>.

<sup>16</sup> Ahmad b. Yahya, *Al-Bahr al-Zakhkhar*, <http://feqh.al-islam.com>.



this reason, certainly, did Ali b. Abi Talib cite mosques' decoration and lofty minarets alongside congregational prayers. Without the latter, which exemplifies the core of the projected position and function of mosques, the former not only becomes a worthless exercise but also generates God's displeasure and more than a few grave sins.

Without a doubt, Islam prohibits extravagant mosque beautification and decoration, more so when the same is done for advancing certain people's personal interests, or for any other reason that may cause even a slightest harm to the well-being of Muslims and their community. This verdict can easily be deduced from the Islamic strict and unequivocal prohibition of wastefulness, injustice, causing harm, wealth misappropriation, haughtiness, ostentation, and so on. Not only on private but also public property does this ruling apply, as both are from God who bestows His gifts of sustenance more freely on some of men than on others in order that He may test them as to which of them are best in conduct. (*Al-An'am* 165)

Although the Prophet (pbuh) did not prohibit meaningful and moderate mosque beautification and decoration altogether, yet he did not explicitly permit it either. Whether decorating mosques is permitted or prohibited is thus conditioned chiefly by people's intentions and goals, as well as by the roles both mosques and their decorative styles and elements play. Surely, decorating mosques is a sensitive and double-edged thing which must be handled cautiously and wisely. If mismanaged and the goals of beautification in Islam ignored or not realized, the same can easily be turned into an objectionable activity (*makruh*) and even in an outright transgression (*haram*).

### 3. Building activities over graves

The Prophet (pbuh) is reported to have forbidden that the graves should be plastered, or that they be used as sitting places (for the people), or that a building should be constructed over them.<sup>17</sup> However, a piece of stone or wood is allowed to be placed on the graves for the sake of sheer identification. In this regard, the Prophet (pbuh) is reported to have himself deposited a stone on the grave of a companion Uthman b. Maz'un, on the side where his head was, saying: "With it I shall know the grave of my brother, and the members of my family could be buried next to him."<sup>18</sup>

The Prophet (pbuh) once ordered that the elevated and elaborate graves, which had been built out of arrogance or for the purpose of glorifying someone and his status, should be leveled to the ground, as narrated by 'Ali b. Abi Talib.<sup>19</sup>

Taking graves and graveyards as places of worship and erecting mosques over them is strictly forbidden. The Prophet (pbuh) said: "Do not ever make graves mosques, I hereby forbid you to do that."<sup>20</sup>

Based on these and other similar traditions (*hadiths*) of the Prophet (pbuh), Islam proscribes building edifices over graves for whatever reasons, more so if the edifices built are meant to commemorate the dead or serve as places of worship (*masjid*). Even to mark graves with some discernible features in absence of a valid justification is deemed too detrimental to be admissible. Architecturally venerating the dead is much more strongly proscribed in public burial areas than in areas belonging to private individuals, because in doing so apart from squandering

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<sup>17</sup> Muslim, *Sahih Muslim*, Kitab al-Salah, Hadith No. 2116.

<sup>18</sup> Abu Dawud, *Sunan Abi Dawud*, Kitab al-Jana'iz, Hadith No. 2791.

<sup>19</sup> Muslim, *Sahih Muslim*, Kitab al-Jana'iz, Hadith No. 1608, 1609.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., Kitab al-Masajid wa Mawadi' al-Salah, Hadith No. 827.

time and depleting resources, the availability of space for other graves is trimmed down, and the free movement of such as come to visit graves can also be affected.

More than a few reasons for this unyielding Islamic position could be given, the most important of which, certainly, is the close relationship between exalting and architecturally glorifying graves and rearing the causes that lead to associating other deities with Almighty Allah (*shirk*). Other reasons are: wasting space, resources and efforts; promoting the notion of *bid'ah sayyi'ah* (harmful invention); reducing or even denying the graves and graveyards their original role, that is, to remind people of death and to remember the dead through legitimate ways; paving the way for superstitions and other misconceptions about Islam to flourish; paving the way for harming the Islamic notion of unity and brotherhood, or for promoting schism; weakening people's relationship with God.

#### **4. Building houses**

Islam pays so much attention to the issues of the house and housing. This is so because in Islam, the house is seen as an institution, not just a shelter. It is a place to rest, relax the body and mind and enjoy legitimate worldly delights. In the house we are to be surrounded with privacy, protection and security. Within the house realm we also worship, teach, learn and propagate the message of Islam. The house is one of the fundamental rights that must be enjoyed by every Muslim. Allah, be He exalted, says in the Qur'an: "It is Allah Who made your habitations homes of rest and quiet for you..." (*Al-Nahl*, 80)

Thus, there are four terms given in Arabic for the house. Firstly, the house is called *dar*, which is derived from an Arabic verb *dara* which means, among other things, to circulate, to take place, to go on, to be held, to center on or around, etc. The house is called *dar* because it is the physical locus of the family institution and its manifold activities which take place or circulate in the house. It is the family development center.

The house is also called *bayt*, which is derived from an Arabic verb *bata*, which means, among other things, to spend or pass the night, to stay overnight, etc. The house is called *bayt* because when the bustle of the day starts fading away with the arrival of the night, man, just like most of the terrestrial creatures, hasten to withdraw to his sanctuary (the house) so as to take rest, enjoy tranquility and seek refuge from the disadvantages, and even perils, associated with the night and its drawbacks. However, the significations of the word *bayt* (the house) must be viewed from a much wider perspective. *Bayt* does not imply just a place where one takes refuge overnight. Rather, it implies a place where one takes refuge whenever necessary from all the hazards of the outside world.

The house is also called *manzil*, which is derived from an Arabic verb *nazala* which means, among other things, to come down, to disembark, to make a stop at, to camp at, to stay at, to lodge at, to settle down in, to inhabit, and so on. The house is called *manzil* because it shows that one has started to, or has already settled down in a community, and in this worldly life taken as a whole. It symbolizes, furthermore, that one is perfectly clear as to his role, orientation and life goals. The house is a station, or a center, from which one ventures into life and to which one returns, having successfully dealt with the challenges of the outside world, or having just decided to take a break before finally prevailing over them.

And finally, the house is also called *maskan*, which is derived from an Arabic verb *sakana* which means, among other things, to calm down, to repose, to rest, to become quiet and tranquil, to feel at ease with. Hence, the words *sukun* and *sakinah* mean calmness, tranquility,

peacefulness, serenity, peace of mind, etc. The house is called *maskan* or *maskin* because it offers its inhabitants a chance to take a break from the demands and pressure of the outside world and concentrate on doing that which leads to a physical, mental and even spiritual recuperation. The Islamic house is a retreat, sanctuary and one's source of rest and leisure.

The Islamic house is a microcosm of Islamic culture and civilization in that individuals and families bred and nurtured therein constitute the fundamental units of the Islamic *Ummah*. The house institution, therefore, has a potential to take up the role of an educational and training center able to produce, in concert with other societal establishments, individuals capable of transforming the whole communities they belong to. Thence, the same persons would contribute, somehow or other, their decent share to making this earth a better place for living.

By the same token, if misconstrued and its role perverted, the house has a potential to become a breeding ground for virtually every social disease, which if left unchecked could one day paralyze entire communities and drug them to the bottommost. In this case, the only remedy for the predicament will be the restoration of the position and role of the house in society and with it the position and role of every individual as well as the family institution. On the word of Isma'il Raji al-Faruqi, the family is indispensable for the fulfillment of the divine purpose. "Regardless of which is cause and which effect, civilization and the family seem to be destined for rising together and falling together."<sup>21</sup>

The Prophet (pbuh) has said that of man's happiness are a good wife, a spacious house, a good neighbor, and a good mount.<sup>22</sup> He used to pray to God to forgive him, make his house more spacious and bless his sustenance.<sup>23</sup> Once a companion Khalid b. al-Walid complained to the Prophet (pbuh) that his house was too small to accommodate his family. At this, the Prophet (pbuh) asked him to build more rooms on the roof of the existing house and to ask God for abundance.<sup>24</sup>

When the Prophet's mosque in Madinah was completed – the mosque was the first building the Prophet (pbuh) and the Muslims had built in Madinah following the migration (*hijrah*) -- then private houses started clustering around it under the Prophet's supervision. Due to the possible long-term impact of housing on society, the Prophet (pbuh) himself was involved in allotting and marking out many dwellings. Quite a long list of such dwellings, both their locations and owners, is supplied by some historians.<sup>25</sup> Likewise, the Prophet (pbuh) might have been involved in some way in planning and building some houses as well.<sup>26</sup>

Not all Madinah houses during the Prophet's time were the same. By and large, most houses were characterized by several notable features, the most important one of which perhaps was their adequate spaciousness. As we are absolutely sure that loftiness was not their trademark, we are likewise in no doubt that spaciousness, as much as needed and in line with the standards of the day, was their underlying quality.

However, the Prophet (pbuh) and his household remained indifferent to the prospects of erecting and possessing more than that which was extremely rudimentary and really necessary. Such was the case throughout his life, even after the economic situation of the Muslims had notably improved. Some of the most often referred to furnishing elements in the Prophet's

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<sup>21</sup> Isma'il Raji al-Faruqi, *Al-Tawhid: its Implications for Thought and Life*, p. 130.

<sup>22</sup> Ahmad b. Hanbal, *Musnad Ahmad b. Hanbal*, Kitab Musnad al-Makkiyyin, Hadith No. 14830.

<sup>23</sup> Al-Tirmidhi, *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, Kitab al-Da'wat, Hadith No. 3422.

<sup>24</sup> Muhammad 'Uthman 'Abd al-Sattar, *al-Madinah al-Islamiyyah*, (Kuwait: 'Alam al-Ma'rifah, 1988), p. 333.

<sup>25</sup> Al-Samhudi, *Wafa' al-Wafa*, vol. 2 p. 717-734.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2 p. 489.

houses were: a bed, a mat, a blanket, and curtains of black-hair cloth. The Prophet's austere living was such that when Umar b. al-Khattab one day paid a visit to him he was moved to tears. The Prophet (pbuh) asked: "Ibn Khattab, what makes you weep?" Umar answered: "The Messenger of Allah, why should I not shed tears? This mat (which 'Umar found the Prophet (pbuh) lying on) has left its marks on your sides and I do not see in your store room (except these few things) that I have seen. Persian and Byzantine sovereigns are leading their lives in plenty whereas you are Allah's Messenger, His chosen one, and yet that is your store!" The Prophet (pbuh) said: "Ibn Khattab, aren't you satisfied that for us is the prosperity of the Hereafter and for them the prosperity of this world?"<sup>27</sup>

Nevertheless, the houses of the Prophet (pbuh) -- many of them, if not all -- were bigger and roomy than what appears to many people who erroneously perceive them as small huts or no more than mere tiny rooms rather than adequate houses, for most of such houses must have had - - at least and in accordance with the standards and norms of the day, of course -- a bathroom, a kitchen, a sleeping room, a room (place) for visitors, a storage, etc. All these are necessities not only desirable for normal and decent living, but also necessitated by some religious tenets, such as privacy protection, neatness and cleanliness. When Umar b. al-Khattab visited the Prophet (pbuh), as in the aforementioned *hadith*, though he was moved to tears by the simplicity of the Prophet's living, yet he reported that he found the Prophet (pbuh) in one of his houses in his attic to which one must climb by means of a ladder made of date-palm. At the end of the ladder the Prophet's servant, Rabah, through whom Umar had obtained beforehand the Prophet's permission to enter, was sitting. After the visit Umar climbed down with the Prophet (pbuh). While Umar had to do so catching hold of the wood of the palm-tree, the Prophet (pbuh) did the same with such ease that he seemed as though he was walking on the ground; he needed not hold anything for support.

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

A partial description of the Prophet's houses is given by Ibn Sa'd in his *al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, due to a narrator named 'Abd Allah b. Yazid, who saw them just before they were knocked down by the order of the caliph al-Walid b. 'Abd al-Malik from Syria in the year 707 AC /88 H who wanted to enlarge the Prophet's mosque. "There were four houses of mud brick, with apartments partitioned off by palm branches plastered with mud, and five houses made of palm branches plastered with mud and not divided into rooms. Over the doors were curtains of

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<sup>27</sup> Muslim, *Sahih Muslim*, Kitab al-Talaq, Hadith No. 2704, 2705.

black hair-cloth. Each curtain measured 3 by 3 cubits. One could touch the roof with the hand.”<sup>28</sup> Several other eyewitnesses have given similar accounts on the matter, which are recorded elsewhere.<sup>29</sup>

In his book “History of Madinah Munawwarah”, Muhammad Ilyas asserted that each of the Prophet’s houses had a residential part as well as a tiny backyard: “The backyard was enclosed by the branches of palm trees and unbaked bricks. Blankets of hair were thrown on them to ensure privacy in the yard. The door of each Hujrah (apartment) was not built from an expensive wood. Each door had a rough blanket hanging there for privacy. Hence each Hujrah reflected humbleness and modesty. The dimension of each Hujrah was approximately 5 meters by 4 meters and the backyard was 5 meters by 3 ½ meters. A person standing in a Hujrah could touch the ceiling with his hand. Hasan Basri said, ‘I had not yet come of age and I used to visit the Hujrah. I could touch the ceiling with my hand when I was standing in a Hujrah’.”<sup>30</sup>

Normally, Madinah houses during the Prophet’s time were divided into several sections, each section functioning differently. A typical house was big enough to have a bathroom, a kitchen, a bedroom, a room for visitors, a storage for food, weapons, firewood, and other necessary items, a stable for some domestic animals (horses, donkeys, or camels) serving as a mode of transportation as well as a source of sustenance. The houses that belonged to extremely poor families, or to such as were bent on out-and-out asceticism, had fewer rooms and, as such, had to be multi-functional.

The Prophet’s storage had to be big enough to accommodate as many dates as would cover the needs of his family for a whole year, in addition to other food articles which had to be stored therein sporadically, such as grain, meat, etc.<sup>31</sup> The Prophet (pbuh) used to order during hard times that the meat of sacrifices (*qurban*) be consumed by means of feeding others within the first three days of the ‘*Id* festival. However, if the situation of the Muslims was better, he would then ask them to eat of their meat, feed others of it, and store of it and eat later on, i.e., after the three days of the ‘*Id* festival.’<sup>32</sup>

Some households had their own wells, while others had to share bigger public ones. Even some businesses were conducted in certain houses.

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

In the main, roofs were made of palm-leaves. Mud must have been added in order to mitigate rain dripping onto the ground, something that could be a hazardous inconvenience during the cold rainy season. Some roofs might have been made even of timber or any other strong and permanent material, and were designed in such a way as to be utilized for other benefits, such as sleeping during hot nights, drying dates, etc. It seems as though towards this

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<sup>28</sup> Creswell K.A.C., *A Short Account of Early Muslim Architecture*, (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1989), p. 4.

<sup>29</sup> Al-Samhudi, *Wafa’ al-Wafa’*, vol. 1 p. 516 - 517.

<sup>30</sup> Muhammad Ilyas Abd al-Ghani, *History of Madinah Munawwarah*, (Madinah: al-Rasheed Printers, 2003), p. 93.

<sup>31</sup> Al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 7, Book 64, Hadith No. 270.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, Kitab al-Adahi, Hadith No. 475-477.

end is, in part, the Prophet's counsel against sleeping on an exposed and unsafe surface, alluding thereby to the significance of both privacy and safety.<sup>33</sup>

Before the advent of Islam, entrances in the whole region of Arabia often had no doors; there were only curtains. Yet, seeking permission prior to entering a house was nonexistent in the culture of the *Jahiliyyah* Arabs. Seldom was somebody seriously concerned about the subject of privacy, as a result of which anyone running into a husband and wife indulged in some intimate affairs was frequent. The most that one was expected to say upon entering was "I am in", or "Here I am", and the like.<sup>34</sup> This is nothing of peculiarity, though, if we bring to mind that some pilgrimage rituals of some Arab tribes, including the *Quraysh*, entailed circumambulating the Ka'bah in a state of nakedness whistling and clapping the hands.<sup>35</sup> However, following the arrival of the Islamic code of life, which lays special emphasis on honoring human privacy, appropriate entrance screenings were bound to be introduced shortly to Madinah houses. Securing not only doorways but also the rest of house openings against the acts of privacy invasion was further promoted by the commandment of seeking permission prior to entering anybody's house: "O ye who believe! Enter not houses other than your own, until ye have asked permission and saluted those in them: that is best for you, in order that ye may heed (what is seemly). If ye find no one in the house, enter not until permission is given to you: if ye are asked to go back, go back: that makes for greater purity for yourselves: and Allah knows well all that ye do." (*Al-Nur*, 27-28)

The most common furnishing components found in Madinah houses were: cupboards, leather dining sheets, leather mats, mats made of palm leaves, leather bags, pillows and cushions (made of leather or any other suitable material which on occasion was decorated), trays, plates, jugs, vessels, utensils, baskets, beds (some of which were very strong and raised of the ground), covering sheets or blankets, benches and sometimes even dining tables, lamps (even though many a house for quite sometime might have been illuminated by burning up fronds), cooking stoves, hooks on the walls for hanging different objects, etc. Having carpets could have been a normal thing in rich families, because when a companion Jabir b. Abdullah got married, the Prophet (pbuh) asked him whether he had gotten one. Jabir replied that he was so poor that he could not afford it. At this, the Prophet (pbuh) said: "You shall soon possess them."<sup>36</sup>

Although the emergence of the courtyard inspired by the Islamic vision of life and the reality needed some time to materialize, yet some instances of the courtyard in Madinah houses could be tracked down. In spite of some of the courtyards having been created much earlier prior to the advent of Islam, nevertheless, no sooner had the Islamic world-view illuminated the land of Madinah, and the minds and souls of its people, than the Islamization of the courtyard function got under way. The Prophet (pbuh) is not reported to have had a courtyard *per se*, but the house of his Egyptian slave-girl (*surriyyah*) Mariya, the mother of his son Ibrahim, is said to have been positioned in the midst of gardens on the eastern side of Madinah. Next to the house he had a loggia or terrace where he used to sit during summer.<sup>37</sup> The Prophet (pbuh) was very much fond of walking and relaxing in gardens, such as in that which belonged to the companion Abu Talhah called *Bairuha*. Once he visited the garden of one of his companions Jabir b.

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<sup>33</sup> Al-Thirmidhi, *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, Kitab al-Adab, Hadith No. 2781.

<sup>34</sup> *Mukhtasar Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, Ikhtasarahu al-Sabuni Muhammad 'Ali, (Beirut: Dar al-Qur'an al-Karim, 1981), vol. 2 p. 597.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2 p. 103.

<sup>36</sup> Muslim, *Sahih Muslim*, Kitab al-Libas wa al-Zinah, Hadith No. 5188.

<sup>37</sup> Al-Kattani, *al-Taratiib al-Idariyyah*, (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi, 1980), vol. 2 p. 84.

Abdullah where he ate of ripe fresh dates. Next, he asked for a bed to be spread out for him in a hut in the garden, whereupon he entered it and enjoyed a nap.<sup>38</sup>

## 5. Some of the Prophet's disapproving traditions concerning building

There are several traditions (*hadiths*) of the Prophet (pbuh) in which he appears to have demeaned and condemned the building enterprise. He did it in different situations and in no ambiguous terms. Although the authenticity of some of those traditions can be easily questioned, yet the sheer quantity of the Prophet's utterances and deeds concerning the subject matter and the variety of contexts in which they have been executed, plus a few traditions which are reasonably authentic and the Prophet's overall ascetic outlook on building and that of a majority of his companions, all this grant a sufficient credibility to the messages behind the traditions in questions, provided they are properly grasped and understood. The messages must be carefully dealt with and applied, and the circumstances in which they have been conveyed must be properly contextualized.

Those traditions are as follows:

1. "Every building is a misfortune for its owner, except what cannot, except what cannot, meaning except that which is essential." The Prophet (pbuh) uttered these words in the following situation. Narrated Anas ibn Malik: The Messenger of Allah (pbuh) came out, and on seeing a high-domed building, he said: "What is it?" His companions replied to him: "It belongs to so and so, one of the Ansar." The narrator said that the Prophet (pbuh) said nothing but kept the matter in mind. When its owner came and gave him a greeting among the people, he turned away from him. When he had done this several times, the man realized that he was the cause of the anger and the rebuff. So he complained about it to his companions, saying: "I swear by Allah that I cannot understand the Messenger of Allah (pbuh)." They said: "He went out and saw your domed building." So the man returned to it and demolished it, leveling it to the ground. One day the Prophet (pbuh) came out and did not see it. He asked: "What has happened to the domed building?" They replied: "Its owner complained to us about your rebuff, and when we informed him about it, he demolished it." Then the Prophet (pbuh) said: "Every building is a misfortune for its owner, except what cannot, except what cannot, meaning except that which is essential."<sup>39</sup>
2. "When God intends bad for a servant of His, He (as a mode of punishment) makes handling or molding bricks and the soil to be easy for him so that he could build."
3. "When God intends humiliation for a servant of His, He (as a mode of punishment) makes him spend his wealth on making buildings."
4. "He who builds more than what is sufficient for him, will be asked on the Day of Judgment to carry the extra of what he had built."
5. The Prophet's uncle al-'Abbas b. 'Abd al-Mutallib once built a compartment, however, the Prophet (pbuh) asked him to demolish it. When he asked if it is better for him to demolish it or to give it away as charity, the Prophet (pbuh) told him: "Demolish it."
6. "Every act of kindness is a form charity. Whatever a person spends on his family is written for him as charity. Whatever a person does to safeguard his honor is written for him as charity. Whatever a person spends, if he leaves it to (if he does it for) God, God is the Guarantor, except for building and wrongdoing."

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<sup>38</sup> Al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, vol. 7, Book 65, Hadith No. 354.

<sup>39</sup> Abu Dawud, *Sunan Abi Dawud*, Book 41 (Kitab al-Adab), Hadith No. 5218.

7. "All wealth that is spent is for the sake of God, except (wealth spent for) building. In it, there is no good."
8. "When a person raises a building more than seven cubits (3.5 m), he is called out: 'O the most immoral one, where to...?'"
9. 'Atiyyah b. Qays reported that the main building material in the houses of the Prophet's wives were date-palm branches. When once the Prophet (pbuh) went off for a military expedition, Umm Salamah, one of the Prophet's wives who was wealthy, replaced date-palm branches with bricks. When the Prophet (pbuh) returned, he asked: "What is this?" She replied: "I wanted to protect myself against the people peeping at me." At that, notably without asking Umm Salamah to pull down what she had built, the Prophet (pbuh) said: "O Umm Salamah, the worst thing for which the wealth of a believer could be spent is building."<sup>40</sup>
10. "...The Day of Judgment will not come to pass till people start competing in erecting high buildings..."<sup>41</sup>

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

This principle applies not only to all the types of building activities but also to all actions of men. It is for this, certainly, that people's actions are judged solely on the basis of their intentions, as said by the Prophet (pbuh).<sup>42</sup> A deed that stems from a wrong intention is always wrong no matter how it is presented or seemed on the exterior. In Islam, neither the end nor the means could vindicate a bad intention. For example, during the Prophet's time, the hypocrites of Madinah built a mosque in Quba', a suburb in Madinah, which the Qur'an refers to as the "*Mosque of Mischief*", pretending to advance Islam but in reality they intended to cause harm to the Muslim nascent society and to break it up. However, God instructed the Prophet (pbuh) to destroy the mosque before it started to malfunction, confuse and mislead the people. The mosque was destroyed and a garbage site was created on its ruins. The Qur'an reveals on this: "And there are those who put up a mosque by way of mischief and infidelity - to disunite the Believers - and in preparation for one who warred against Allah and his Messenger aforesaid. They will indeed swear that their intention is nothing but good; but Allah declares that they are certainly liars." (Al-Tawbah, 107-108)

The benefits of legitimately erected buildings are to be maximized by all means. They are not to be diminished or obstructed by associating with buildings some damaging perceptions and functions. One's wealth constitutes a major portion of what one has been assigned from this fleeting world, which is to be meticulously managed for the benefits of both worlds. Both wealth and built environment are to be perceived only as means; neither one represents an end in itself. If one possesses a positive perception about wealth and the notion of creating buildings, which, in fact, reflects one's positive total worldview, one is then able to recognize that whatever wealth

<sup>40</sup> Traditions (*hadiths*) from 2 to 9: Ahmad Sa'duddin, *Da'if al-Tarhib wa al-Tarhib li al-Mundhiri*, <http://vb.arabsgate.com/archive/index.php/t-410651.html>.

<sup>41</sup> Al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Kitab al-Fitan, Hadith No. 6588.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., Kitab al-Wahy, Hadith No. 1.



he has been granted is sufficient for him. He will, furthermore, easily understand how much and what type of built environment he needs so that the execution of his divinely inspired life engagements is supported and facilitated. Hence, a believer will always be content with unassuming buildings, above all if they are private ones, thus allowing him to make use of his wealth for some other wholesome purposes, both personal and communal. This way, restraining the tendencies towards the crimes of wastefulness, greed, jealousy, ill feeling, haughtiness, and so forth, in a person will become a much easier proposition. It goes without saying, therefore, that the biggest fault, as well loss, is that one exhausts all the resources and amenities that God has bestowed upon him for the momentary joy and pleasures of this world, while procuring nothing, or very little, for the Hereafter. Definitely, true believers are immune to this agonizing scenario.

Moreover, if superficially studied and wrongly understood, the implications of some of the mentioned traditions plainly contradict the mainstream practices of the Prophet (pbuh) and the practices of his companions and those who came afterwards. As they contradict the total body of the Islamic value system, which is unacceptable. This is an important thing because it is commonly accepted as an Islamic tenet that the Muslim community shall under no circumstances agree on an error. One of the Prophet's companions, 'Abdullah b. Mas'ud, is reported to have said: "What Muslims end up regarding as a propriety, God too regards it that way; likewise, what they end up regarding as a sin, God too regards it as such."<sup>43</sup>

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

In his book "*Deterrents from Committing Big Sins*", Abu al-'Abbas Ahmad b. Hajar al-Haythami categorized building beyond one's needs and in response to some other serious transgressions as the two hundred and eleventh (211<sup>th</sup>) big sin (*kabirah*). His argument is that although creating needed buildings is necessary and invited, the building activity can be adulterated with a number of major vices which renders it a big sin itself. The Prophet's well-recorded reactions to such acts unequivocally indicate that he viewed them on a par with the other big sins. As a support for his thesis, Abu al-'Abbas Ahmad b. Hajar al-Haythami quotes most of the Prophet's traditions mentioned above.<sup>44</sup>

## Conclusion

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<sup>43</sup> Ahmad ibn Hanbal, *Musnad Ahmad ibn Hanbal*, Kitab Musnad al-Mukaththirin min al-Sahabah, Hadith No. 3418.

<sup>44</sup> Abu al-'Abbas Ahmad b. Hajar al-Haythami, *Al-Zawajir 'an Iqtiraf al-Kaba'ir*, <http://www.al-islam.com>.

Islamic architecture exists because of the existence of Islam. Moreover, in so many ways it serves the noble goals of Islam. Islamic architecture serves Muslims too, in that it aids them to carry out successfully their vicegerency (*khilafah*) mission on earth. Islamic architecture aims to help rather than obstruct Muslims in fulfilling that which they have been created for. Islamic architecture is Islam manifested. Islamic architecture, Islam and Muslims are inseparable. Islamic architecture originated with the advent of Islam on the world scene. It never existed before, even though the peoples that became instrumental in molding and perpetuating its conspicuous identity lived where they were for centuries before embracing Islam and possessed the cultures and civilizations of their own.

Indeed, the fairly positive, flexible and, at the same time, principled and firm attitude of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) toward the enterprise of building serves as an excellent testimony to these truths – as explained earlier. Hence, studying Islamic architecture by no means can be separated from the total framework of Islam: its genesis, history, ethos, worldview, doctrines, laws and practices. Any approach by anybody and at any point of time to disconnect Islamic architecture from that which held sway over its conception and formation would result in failure and, worse yet, may lead to a distortion of the real picture of the entire subject matter and with it the picture of Islam. Studying Islamic architecture must always commence with studying the Holy Qur'an and the legacy of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) as they signify the foundation, source and essence not only of Islamic architecture, but also of the whole of Islamic culture and civilization.