

Introduction

On the morning of a sunny day in winter of Rajab 1416 A.H. (January 1995), the aircraft took off with me on board towards London, the capital of Britain.

When the aircraft moved from the east to the west, from the land of sunshine to the capital of fog, I could feel the warmth of the sun from the plane's windows, the warmth that I bade farewell to as I left my homeland.

When the plane leveled off at the centre of the sky and its flight become smooth and calm, as if it were firmly fixed on a central poll, I decided to use the time by reciting some chapters of the pocket-size holy Qur'an that was with me.

This has been my habit from my childhood since I set my eyes on my grandfather in our vast home in Najaf and heard him recite the Qur'an every morning, afternoon, and at night, during his travels and at other times. And I also have retained in my memory the fact that my father used to carry a copy of the Holy Qur'an in his pocket so that he is not far removed from it at home as well as away from home.

I opened the Holy Book and started reciting in a lowered voice the verses so as to purify my soul, to perfume my mouth from the dirt of matter and its temptation, and to seek the Almighty Allah's help in protecting this flying object from the calamities of time.

It was midday, the time for noon prayer came close. I got up from my seat, went to the toilet, renewed my wudhu (minor ablution), and then I took out a comb from my pocket and combed my hair after the wudhu. Then I took out a small perfume bottle that I always carry in my pocket so that I may use it, for it is related that it is mustahab to use perfume, in that the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) used to love it, and that a salat with perfume is equal to seventy salats.

After the wudhu, combing, and perfuming, I returned to my seat while I was still reciting some Qur'anic verses that I had memorized from childhood.

Then I started thinking: Where will I say the salat? How will I know the direction of the qiblah? Is it obligatory to say the salat in a standing position or can I do so while I am seated?

When these thoughts were going through my mind, I reclined on my religious knowledge and remembered that Islamic Jurists say: it is obligatory to say the salat in a standing position as long as I can do so; if I am unable to perform it thus, I should pray in a sitting position. The format of prayer would move from one level to a lesser level based on my ability and the given circumstances; but the obligation of salat would not be waived from a Muslim under any circumstance.

So when I reached this conclusion, I looked around the plane to find a place in which I could say the salat in a standing position. My eyes settled on a small area in one part of the plane that was sufficient for saying the salat. I said to myself that the problem of the place has been resolved but now I have to find the direction of the qiblah as long as the plane is flying in one direction. I decided to seek the help of the airline crew to determine the direction of qiblah.

An air steward passed for gathering the tea cups from the tables, I seized the opportunity and asked him in broken English as follows:

Can I ask you a question?

"Yes, go ahead."

Can you help me in showing me the direction of the qiblah?

"I am sorry, I didn't understand your question."

The direction of qiblah...the direction towards Holy Mecca?

"Are you a Muslim?"

Yes, and I would like to say my noon prayer.

"Let me ask in the cockpit and I will be back."

I realized that I should also have asked for something to put on the floor of the aircraft to pray on it.

When he came back with the answer on the qiblah, I requested him to bring me something like a blanket or a newspaper that I could place on the floor of the aircraft.

He brought a blanket which I spread on the floor and prayed noon and afternoon salat, two (rak'at) each as qasr, facing the qiblah. Then I recited the tasbih of az-Zahra' (a.s.) by saying "Allahu abkar" 34 times, "al-hamdu lil lah" 33 times, and "subhan Allah" 33 times. After the tasbih, I thanked Allah and returned to my seat while I was in a different and more content state of mind because I was afraid that saying the salat in the plane would be difficult and I might be drawing unnecessary attention from the other passengers.

But my fears were unfounded. It became clear to me that the salat earned me a special respect and

added esteem for me in the eyes of the non-Muslims, including the steward, who were on board the plane.

My thoughts were interrupted by the announcement that food will be served soon. The airhostesses started asking the passengers about their preference from the menu. One of them asked me if I would prefer fish or chicken. I asked for the fish not because fish is preferable to me than chicken but because I was not allowed to eat that chicken since I was not sure that it has been slaughtered in accordance with Islamic laws. This is a problem that I have faced many times in foreign countries.

Since I was born and brought up in a Muslim country, I have no lingering doubts regarding chicken, or fish bought in a Muslim market. But in a Western country, the situation is completely different. And that is because I am not allowed to eat any meat until I am sure that it was slaughtered according to the laws of Islam. This normally creates hardship.

The meal was served to us and the tray that was placed in front of me contained the following: fish fried in sunflower oil garnished with fried potatoes, a little bit of rice, salad, a couple of green olives, grapes, black fig, dessert, water in a small container, and small packets of salt, sugar, pepper, two pieces of bread, a fork, two spoons, a knife, and a napkin. I was really hungry.

I thanked Allah first, then picked the fork and knife, and cut the fish into small pieces that could be eaten easily. Then, I stopped and the following thought passed through my mind: It is true that if the fish is of the type that has scales, and that it has come out of the water alive or died after being caught in the net, then it is permissible for me to eat it irrespective of the fact that the fisherman is a Muslim or a non-Muslim, and no matter whether the name of Allah was invoked on it or not. This is correct. But the problem may be in the oil in which the fish was fried. Was that oil ritually pure (tahir). And was the cook a Muslim?

These were the disturbing thoughts passing through my mind at that moment. So I stopped eating that fried piece of the fish, despite the fact that I was hungry! I put down the fork on the side of the plate and tried to recall the rules of these issues that I had read about in the Manual of Islamic Laws of my marja' when I was getting ready for the journey.

First I asked myself about the sunflower oil: is it ritually pure? I immediately responded positively because the religious law says, "everything is pure for you until you come to know about its impurity." And since I did not know about the impurity of the sunflower oil, I assumed it was pure.

Now since the oil used in frying the fish was pure, the whole fish is pure, and thus I am allowed to eat it.

As for the cook who prepared the fish, was he a Muslim or from the Ahlul Kitab (so he would be considered as tahir) or was he a non-Muslim from the non-Ahlul Kitab? This question is not important as long as I do not know that the person who fried it has touched it with his hand. And again the general rule of the shari'a, "everything is pure for you until you come to know that it is impure", gave me a clear

decision: the fish is pure, and I am allowed to eat it.

When I reached this conclusion, I breathed a sigh of relief. Then I picked up the fork and ate the fish. I looked at the fries for the same reasons and concluded that they were pure and ate them.

I did the same with the bread, salad, fruit and the dessert. I ate them all since they were pure. Then I drank the water and also the tea because they are also pure. This is what the religious laws tell me.

The plane was flying at 30,000 feet from sea level, and we still had two and a half hours before we reach London Heathrow International airport.

Inside the plane, some passengers were busy reading the morning papers, while others were in deep sleep. I stretched my arm and picked up a paper and started browsing through it.

My memory went back to the question that kept lingering in my mind for the last few days: "How will I preserve my religious identity from being destroyed in the foreign country?"

This has worried me for a long time since I thought of travelling to Europe, and it intensified the day I made that decision; at times I think about it and at other times it comes without thinking, leaving me only when I go to sleep at night.

I decided to meet a friend of mine who had been to London. My friend pointed out certain issues to me, and also took me to the bookstore and showed me a book that contained various issues that gave me a general idea of what I should do.

Both, the friend and the book, pointed out that I should place great importance on the following issue: "The negative elements of migration are not limited to the fact that it would not be possible to fulfill the Islamic laws by the immigrants or that they will not study the religion. The reality is even worse than that in the sense that migration would significantly affect the outlook of the Muslim, his habits, traditions, and also the state of his intellectual, moral and social aspects of life."

The author of that book continues, "It is necessary for the Muslim who is compelled to migrate to a non-Muslim country to create by himself the religious climate that does not exist in those countries. Of course, he will not be able to create the general Islamic environment but he surely can bring about that atmosphere in a certain measure so that he may be able to arm himself with the religious spirit that is suitable for him.^{[1](#)}

"Creating a suitable Islamic atmosphere is to some extent like inoculating against a disease from whose clutches one cannot escape—so he tries to deal with its danger by building a safety net around himself.

"Although we do not claim that this task is easy by any means, at the same time we cannot underestimate the great danger faced by a Muslim in his commitment to the religion which is the main foundation of his identity. So it is important to safeguard it even at the cost of loss in other aspects of life.

Just as we emphasize the significance of these pitfalls, we must also emphasize safeguarding and protecting the Muslims from falling into them.

"A Muslim who struggles in those countries to secure his worldly future –in education or finance or other aspects– he is not supposed to lose his future in the Hereafter for the sake of this world. Just as a merchant is not allowed to lose his honour or life for the sake of material wealth, irrespective of its quantity, because it is worthless compared to his life and honour. Similarly, the sick person patiently bears the bitterness of medicine or the pain inflicted by the scalpel so that the disease may not spread and lead to death.

"So it is obligatory on a Muslim who resides in alien societies to protect himself against their adverse effects and dangers; and he must create an appropriate religious environment for himself that will compensate the loss of the environment that he had in his own country."²²

In this way, he, his wife and children, and even his brethren will be following the words of the Almighty:

"O you who believe! Save yourselves and your families from a fire whose fuel is men and stones; over it are angels stern and strong, they do not disobey Allah in what He commands them, and do as they are commanded." (66:6)

They would also be acting in accordance with the statement of the Most Praised Lord

"And the believing men and the believing women, they are helpers of one another: they enjoin the good and forbid the evil." (9:71)

And also in accordance with what the Prophet (s.a.w.) said, "All of you are 'shepherds' and all of you are answerable in regard to your 'flock'."

Thus would also be implementing the requirement of enjoining good and forbidding evil. The spiritual immunization mentioned above can be achieved by the following:

1. By committing to recitation of some chapters or noble verses of the Holy Qur'an on a daily basis or listening to its recitation with humility, reflection and contemplation because in them are

"Clear proofs from your Lord, a guidance and a mercy for a people who believe; and when the Qur'an is recited, then listen to it and remain silent so that mercy may be shown to you." (7:203-204).

2. In the words of Imam 'Ali (a.s.), "No one will sit besides the Qur'an but that when he rises he will achieve an increase or a diminution: an increase in his guidance or elimination of his (spiritual) blindness. You should also know that no one will need any thing after (guidance from) the Qur'an and no one will be free from want before (guidance from) the Qur'an.

Therefore, seek it as cure for your ailments and seek its assistance in your distresses. It contains a cure for the biggest diseases, namely unbelief, hypocrisy, revolt and misguidance. Pray to Allah through it and turn to Allah with its love. Do not ask the people through it. There is nothing like it through which the people could turn to Allah, the Sublime. Know that it is an interceder and its intercession will be accepted.

For whoever the Qur'an intercedes on the Day of Judgment, its intercession for him would be accepted..."³ It has also been said, "Whosoever recites the Qur'an at a tender age, the Qur'an will intertwine with his flesh and blood, and the Almighty Allah shall place him among the respected and virtuous messengers; and the Qur'an will be his protector on the Day of Judgment."⁴⁴

There are certain copies of the Holy Qur'an which contain brief commentaries that can be easily carried, and it will greatly benefit the Muslims in foreign countries.

3. Commitment to say the daily obligatory prayers on time, rather, even the recommended ones as much as possible.⁵ It has been narrated that the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) said to 'Abdullah bin Rawaha in an advice to him when the latter was leaving for the Battle of Mu'ta: "You are going to the city in which there are few prostrations; therefore increase the prostrations."

Zayd ash-Shahham narrates from Imam as-Sadiq (a.s.): "The most beloved of deeds with the Almighty Allah is salat; and that is the last advice of the prophets."⁶⁶

Imam 'Ali has also advised us concerning the salat:

"Pledge yourself with prayer as much as possible and seek nearness (of Allah) through it, because it is upon the believers a timed ordinance [4: 103].

Have you not heard the reply of the people of Hell when they were asked, 'What has brought you into Hell?' They shall say, 'We were not of those who offered the regular prayers.' [74:42-43]

Certainly, prayer sheds sins like the dropping of leaves (of trees), and removes them as ropes are removed from the necks of cattle. The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessing of Allah be with him and his progeny) likened it to a hot bath situated at the door of a person who bathes in it five times a day. Will then any dirt remain on him?"⁷

4. Reciting whatever is possible of supplication (du'a), whispered prayers (munajat) and remembrance of Allah, since they remind us of the sins, warn us to refrain from evil deeds, and encourage us to do good deeds.

For example, the supplications in As-Sahifah as-Sajjadiyya of Imam Zaynu 'l-'Abideen (a.s.), du'a of Kumayl bin Ziyad, and the du'as of the month of Ramadhan like the du'a of Abu Hamzah Ath-Thumali and the du'a of dawn, and the du'as of the weekdays, etc.⁸ This purification is needed for every Muslim, especially if he is in a non-Muslim country.

5. Frequently visiting the Islamic centers and organizations that observe the Eids, religious occasions, the birth anniversaries and death commemorations, as well as other religious programs like lectures and counselling – in the month of Ramadhan or Muharram or Safar or during other months, days, and times.

In cities that do not yet have any dedicated center and organization, Muslims should observe the religious occasions in their homes. [Actually this is how early immigrants started to gather, and gradually formed a communities that later on rented or purchased a centre for their religious programs.]

6. Attending and participating in the Islamic seminars and conferences that are held in foreign lands.

7. Reading Islamic books, magazines, and newspapers for they contain both useful as well as entertaining materials.

8. Listening to the various cassettes that contain Islamic talks that have been painstakingly prepared by the respected scholars and great speakers. In them you will find advice and counsel [for betterment of your faith].

9. Keeping away from the centers of entertainment and immorality including the viewing of immoral television programs and special channels that present movies which are not compatible with our beliefs, our religion, our values, our customs, our traditions, and our Islamic intellectual and civil heritage.

10. Establishing friendships with those who are good people for the sake of Allah: you guide them and they guide you, you strengthen them and they strengthen you so that you may spend your free time with them in a useful manner.

In this way, you will stay away from those who are immoral in their behaviour, and also protect yourself from loneliness and its negative consequences. Imam as-Sadiq (a.s.) narrates through his forefathers that the Prophet (a.s.) said, "No Muslim person has gained a benefit after Islam [itself] better than a brother from whom he derives benefit for the sake of Allah."[9](#)

Maysarah narrates that Imam al-Baqir (a.s.) said to him, "Do you have your own gatherings, talking and saying to one another whatever you like [i.e., without fear of government spies]?" I said, "Yes, by Allah, we indeed get together, and talk and say whatever we want." He said, "I surely love your fragrance and your souls; you all are on the religion of Allah and that of His angels. So help one another by piety and hardwork."[10](#)

11. A Muslim should evaluate his deeds on a daily or weekly basis; if there is good in it, then thank Allah and add onto it; and if there is evil in it, then ask for forgiveness, repent, and make a commitment of not repeating it. Our noble Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) advised Abu Dharr saying, "O Abu Dharr, evaluate yourself before you will be evaluated, this will be easier for your appraisal tomorrow [on the Day of Judgment]; weigh yourself before you will be weighed; prepare for the great Judgement, the day when you will be judged. No secret is hidden from Allah...

12. O Abu Dharr, no person can be counted among the pious ones unless he be more critical of himself than a business partner can evaluate his partner so that he may know the source of his drink and dress: has it been secured from a permissible or from a forbidden [source]."¹¹ Imam al-Kadhim (a.s.) said, "A person who does not evaluate himself every day is not one of us. If he has done good, he should ask Allah to increase that; and if he has done an evil act, then he should ask Allah's forgiveness and repent for it." ¹²

13. Attaching importance to the Arabic language, the language of the Holy Qur'an and the language of numerous sources of Islamic laws and ethics. For those immigrants who come from Arabic speaking countries, Arabic is also the language of their ancestors: so they should encourage their children to speak it. Since the students in these countries learn more than one foreign language, it is better that they learn the language of the Qur'an so that they do not loose touch with their religion, heritage, values, history and civilization.

14. Attaching due importance to the up-and-coming generation by bringing them –both males as well as females– up on the love for the Book of Allah and its recitation by way of competitions and other encouraging activities. They should be trained to perform the devotional prayers and acquire good morals like truthfulness, courage, fulfillment of promise, and love for others.

One should accompany them to the Islamic centers and organizations so that they get used to visiting those places. They should be made aware of the enemies of Islam, and the concept of Islamic brotherhood should be strengthened in them. They should be encouraged to participate in the observance of various Islamic occasions and celebrations. In short, everything should be done to help them in better understanding of Islam and adopting the best manner of conduct according to its values and principles in this life.

The thought of how I should behave in the foreign country and preserve my individuality without being absorbed into another culture, and also without isolating myself and adopting the "seashell" attitude, kept haunting me. Then I asked myself: How will the others (among whom I shall soon be living) judge me?

My hometown [Najaf] which is filled with pilgrims and visitors the year round had conditioned me to judge the behaviour of a society by the behaviour of its members, or to judge a religion by the actions of its followers. If a visitor from a city would demonstrate good attitude, I would say that the inhabitants of that city are good people; and if a visitor demonstrates negative attitude, I would say that the inhabitant of that city are not good people, etc.

So, it is natural that the people of the non-Muslim country where I shall reside will judge Islam through my behaviour as a Muslim and then generalize their judgement on all Muslims. So, if I am truthful in my words and deeds, fulfill the promise, honour the trust, abide by the general laws, help the needy, deal with my neighbours kindly, and follow the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) example and respect his teachings, in that he has emphasized that "the religion [of Islam] is positive interaction [with people]" – if I

do all this, then a non-Muslim who interacts with me will say: "Islam is the religion of the higher moral ground."

But if I lie, not fulfill my promise, be abrasive with others, disobey the law of the land, harass my neighbour, cheat in my dealings, violate the trust, etc, then those who deal with me will say: "Islam is a religion that does not teach its followers high morals."

The pilot interrupted my thoughts and announced that we are flying over Germany. I opened my briefcase and took out a book that I had acquired to help me [in the foreign land]. Five ahadith from Imam as-Sadiq (a.s.) in that book attracted my attention.

In the first one, addressing his followers, he said, "Be a source of pride for us, do not be disgrace to us. Make people love us and do not make them hate us [because of your behaviour]."

In the second hadith, he quotes his father, Imam al-Baqir (a.s.), "Be among those who are foremost in doing good; be thornless leaves. Those who have passed before you were as the example of thornless leaves, and I fear that you would become thorns with no leaves. Be those who call people to their Lord, bring them into the fold of Islam and do not make them abandon it. Those who were before you were recruiting others into Islam and were not making them abandon it."

In the third hadith, after conveying his greeting to the faithful among his followers, Imam as-Sadiq (a.s.) says, "I enjoin you to fear Almighty Allah, be pious, work hard for the sake of Allah, be truthful in speech, trustworthy in handling trusts, prolong the prostration (sajda) and be good neighbours. This is what Muhammad (s.a.w.) came with. Return things trusted to your custody, whether they belong to a pious person or a sinner because the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.) used to enjoin the returning of even [small items like] a thread and a needle. Maintain relationship with your kinfolk, participate in their funerals, visit their sick, and fulfill their rights.

"If a person from among you is pious, truthful in speech, honours the trust, behaves well with the people, it will then be said that 'This person is a Ja'fari,' that pleases me and delights my heart because it would be said, 'This is the character of Ja'far.' "But if a person is otherwise, then his bad behaviour and disgrace is attributed to me and it is said, 'This is the character of Ja'far.'"

"By Allah, my father (a.s.) has narrated that if there is a Shi'a of 'Ali in a tribe, then he should be its pride: he should be the most trustworthy, the most diligent in upholding the rights, the most truthful in speech, and should be one to whom people entrust their wills and trusts. When people inquire about him from his tribe, they would say, 'Who can be like him? He is the most trustworthy, and the most truthful of us in speech.'"

In the fourth hadith, he says, "I call upon you to say the prayer in the mosques, to have good neighbourly attitude towards the people, to be willing to testify [for the sake of truth], and to participate in funerals – because you need the people; no one's life is independent of the people; people need one another."

In the fifth hadith, the Imam (a.s.) answers the question of Mu'awiya bin Wahab who had asked, "What should be our attitude between ourselves and our fellow tribesmen and acquaintances from the people who are not of our persuasion (madhhab)?" He said, "You should look towards your Imams whom you follow and do what they used to do. By Allah, they used to visit their sick, participate in their funerals, testify for and against them, and honour the trusts." [13](#)

Once I finished reading these ahadith, a sense of relief overwhelmed me since they chartered for me the way I should act and outlined for me the code of conduct. At that moment, I made a resolution to compile in my notebook the most important problems that I shall face in the non-Muslim country and seek help from the books of jurisprudence that were in my briefcase. If I come across new problems that I cannot solve in the sources that are with me, then I shall write to the mujtahid so that he can answer my questions. With this I shall have solved my problems –related to ethics and jurisprudence– as well as those of the other immigrants.

This is how I started noting down my religious problems, one by one, and sought the expert opinion of the mujtahid on issues to which I have no answers in his Manual of Islamic Laws. Gradually this book came to existence.

This book is divided into two parts: Part One deals with Acts of Worship; and Part Two with Laws on the Mundane Aspects of Life. It also has three appendices.

Part One on the Acts of Worship consists of seven chapters that I think are more important to the immigrant Muslim than others. These chapters are as follows: Migration to non-Muslim Countries; Taqlid: Following a Jurist; Ritual Purity and Impurity; Salat: the Ritual Prayer; Sawm: Fasting; Hajj: the Pilgrimage to Mecca; and Death Related Issues. Each of these chapters begins with an introduction on the topic, followed by some rules that are relevant in non-Muslim countries, and ends with the most important question–answer [from the mujtahid] on that subject.

Part Two on Laws on the Mundane Aspects of Life consists of eleven chapters as follows: Eating and Drinking; Dress and Clothing; Dealing with Laws in Non-Muslim Countries; Work and Investment; Interaction in Social Life; Marriage; Women's Issues; Youths' Issues; Music, Singing and Dancing; and Miscellaneous. Again each of these chapters begins with an introduction on the topic, followed by some rules that are relevant in non-Muslim countries, and ends with the most important question–answer on that subject.

The book also contains three appendices. Appendix I contains a sample of questions sent to the Ayatullah as-Sistani and his answers to them. Appendix II contains a list of main ingredients that are used in food items and which are forbidden to the Muslims. This is followed by Appendix III which has the names and pictures of the fish that have scales and are permissible for consumption. At the end of the book, I have listed the references and a detailed table of contents.

[1.](#) Dalilu 'l-Muslim fi Biladi 'l-Ghurba, p. 27.

- [2.](#) Ibid, p. 36–37.
- [3.](#) Nahju 'l-Balagha (ed. Subhi Salih) p. 252 [sermon 176].
- [4.](#) Al-Kulayni, al-Usûl mina 'l-Kafi, vol. 2, p. 603.
- [5.](#) See al-Hurr al-'Amili, Tafsilu Wasa'ilu 'sh-Shi'a, vol. 4, p. 105.
- [6.](#) Ibid, vol. 4, p. 38.
- [7.](#) Nahju 'l-Balagha (ed. Subhi Salih) p. 317 [sermon 199].
- [8.](#) Translator's Note: English translations of all these du'as are easily available in most centres in Europe and North America.
- [9.](#) Wasa'ilu 'sh-Shi'a, vol. 12, p. 233.
- [10.](#) Al-Kulayni, al-Usûl mina 'l-Kafi, vol. 2, p. 187; and also see the chapters on "visiting the brethren" (vol. 2, p. 175) and "remembering the brethren" (vol. 2, p. 186).
- [11.](#) At-Tusi, Amali, vol. 2, section 19.
- [12.](#) An-Naraqî, Jami'u 's-Sa'adat, vol. 3, p. 94.
- [13.](#) Al-Hurr al-'Amili, Wasa'ilu 'sh-Shi'a, vol. 12, p. 6ff. Also see al-Kulayni, al-Usûl mina 'l-Kafi, vol. 2, p. 636.

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